

Palm Sunday

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[0 : 00] I am going to preach on Mark 11 for the main reason being that it is Palm Sunday. And the James passage is great. All the Bible's good. We all know that.

But I think actually there's something that Dave just said that has been resonating all week in preparation. It's that God really wants to speak in his season. And if you start hearing something again and again and again, it's probably something you need to listen to.

So as Dave started, he did half of my preach. And then as Michelle prayed, she did the other half. So I'm going to do it again. This time probably better. And then we'll... I'm only joking. Obviously I'm only joking.

But we're going to look at narrative. And I'm going to start with a story about my week. Last week I had an appointment at the doctor's. I booked in.

The week before I managed to get an early appointment so I could just get this over with. The night before I struggled to sleep, thinking of the white room, the medical equipment, the professionals who were the only ones who could perform the task ahead.

[1 : 09] It was going to affect my entire day. You can imagine the fear and multiple scenarios that were running through my mind. Blood everywhere. Intense pain that I couldn't bear.

The day came. I dropped my son into school. Gave him an extra tight cuddle. It was going to be hard for me to cuddle him later that day. I'd be all achy.

I went to the surgery. Sat in the waiting room. I was shaking. And then my name came up. Jay Niblett. Treatment Room C. I had to be brave, I thought to myself.

I walked into the seriously somber face of the nurse. Have a seat, she said to me. How could she be so cold? How could she be so uncaring?

She grabbed the equipment, tightened the strap of doom around my arm, pulled out the sharp blood drain in a tube. I couldn't take it. It was too much to bear. And then she took my blood.

[2 : 13] Gave me a little Miss Kitty plaster and said, off you go. It's a terrible story. But I wonder where you thought I was going. Did you expect such an anti-climax?

No. So our passage today, Mark 11, the Palm Gospel, is a reading and a great example of a story that catches you out. Palm Study is the day we remember Jesus starting his mission in Jerusalem, leading up to the climax of God's redemptive plan.

The writer Mark is a great storyteller. The whole Gospel is dramatic and possibly shaped for the crowd rather than the individual. Everything he writes is purposed and visual.

Our passage follows the healing of blind Bartimaeus, though he cannot see with his eyes, could see who Jesus is. And shouts out, Son of David, for healing.

The story of the blind man who can see who Jesus is gives us a hint that things may not be quite what they seem in what follows. The message may not be quite what we expect.

[3 : 24] Picture the scene. We're going to run through the passage. Picture the scene. Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem and the eastern side of the Temple Mount, the other side to which Julius Caesar came in, surrounded by single families, pilgrims on their way to celebrate the Passover.

And this is the feast where Israel's salvation is remembered. And hope is placed in their salvation coming again in the arrival of the Lord's anointed. Jesus standing on the Mount is the first of the Old Testament imagery that we see in this story.

This particular image is from a passage in Zechariah 14, where the Lord God comes as a warrior, standing on the Mount of Olives at the great battle when he becomes king over all the earth.

This anointed one, the Messiah, whom Israel was waiting for, some would believe would come and defeat the Romans, claim back the Holy Land for his people, and all would be right like the days of

their father David.

Mark leads us to ask, could Jesus be that one? And then we get the donkey story. Jesus sends two of his disciples on a faith test to get his ride.

[4 : 39] Some see this as Mark pointing to Jesus' foreknowledge, some sort of prophecy, some sort of preordained power. Others see it as Jesus just being organized.

It's funny when you read the commentaries, the breadth of opinions out there. You've got to be careful what you read. I read another one that even thought that actually this was basically Jesus booking an Uber, if you know what an Uber is.

It's like it's common. People who could afford it would just get a donkey because they were lazy. It's like, not quite sure that's what Mark was getting at, but I respect you for getting lots of money, putting that in the commentary.

The disciples, they find everything, as Jesus said it would be, funny enough. Jesus will enter Jerusalem, among the pilgrims, but not as one of them.

Pilgrims walk. Luke, the king, will enter on a colt. Another Old Testament prophecy fulfilled. And Matthew and Luke really stress this. They quote Zechariah 9.9, this idea of, rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion.

[5 : 48] Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you. Triumphant and victorious is he. Humble and riding on a donkey. On a colt, the foal of a donkey. Mark and Luke stress that.

I'm sorry, Luke and Matthew stress that. Mark leaves it out. Now there's loads of reasons people think that the donkey story's in there. It could be about him being a king.

It could be about humility. But what we get from this story is there's something significant about Jesus. We need to pay attention to him. And then we get to the crowd.

The crowds give their coats to this worthy one. The people cut and wave branches from the trees. Historically, no one else deserves this honour, for it is a kingly welcome.

The scene is reminiscent of Israel's last great victory before the Romans came. It hints to something called the Maccabeus uprising. A guy called Judas and another one called Simeon.

[6 : 48] And what happens is they defeat the king of Syria. And they enter Jerusalem and cleanse the temple. And the people praise. And they get the waving going on with the branches.

And it's all very exciting. And they start a hundred-year dynasty of Israel until the Romans come. And they get owned. But there's this reminiscent in this story of that time.

It wasn't that long ago in Israel's story when God cleaned the temple out again. When God came in his people and rebuilt Israel's name. Is that what's going to happen?

Is that what Jesus is going to do? This is the backdrop to which Palm Sunday declares the time of redemption has come. The similarities in the prophecies.

Is it it? Well, we know it is it. We know that when Palm Sunday happened, we know that it started something that ends at Easter that changed the world forever.

[7 : 46] We know that in hindsight. But we have to think about Mark's listeners, hearers. Why is he doing it so differently to the other two? And the story continues.

The people shout Hosanna. And again, the Old Testament is signposted. These shouts of Hosanna come from our psalm. Psalm 118. The last of the praise psalms.

In fact, it's a royal psalm. It's about David. What has been made clear in the passage is Jesus is the king. He is the Messiah Israel has been waiting for.

Can you imagine the anticipation? They're hearing this story for the first time when they're retelling it. When Mark's written this down for those who weren't there. The anticipation. Maybe Jesus will be that one.

Maybe Jesus will finally defeat the Romans. They lasted quite a while. But here's Mark's version of the story, how it ends. You ready? Jesus comes down the mount, surrounded by pilgrims celebrating, and enters Jerusalem.

[8 : 49] Shouts of Hosanna as he enters and the crowds join in the song. They're joining to the disciples' hype. This is the moment. This is the moment. Well, where does Mark take us?

Nowhere. Nowhere. The story just goes, we're up. According to Mark, nothing significant happens on this visit. No teachers or Pharisees come and meet him at the temple.

And the crowd, in less than a week, will change their tune from Hosanna to Crucify. Jesus just goes on a little walk around the temple. And he leaves and heads to Bethany, probably Mary and

Martha's house.

Has a coffee. That's a bit of ad-libbing. Don't trust that bit. It's pretty anticlimactic, right? Where is the revolution? Where is the battle with the religious leaders as Matthew and Luke jump into?

In Luke, Jesus enters the temple, all guns blazing, takes on the teachers of the law, speaks prophecy, and cleanses the temple. Sounds a bit like Judas. In Matthew, Jesus again comes into the temple, cleanses it, and again we have a clear challenge to the establishment.

[9 : 59] Less peace, more whips, tables turned, and verbal battle. See, Mark does get there eventually, but his storytelling is really important for us.

For some reason, he's just veered off. He's gone off-piste. According to Mark, this great triumphant moment isn't what it seems. This king, his kingdom, the revolution, the restoration of the temple, it's coming, but it's not as they expected it to be.

Actually, Jesus isn't the king they're looking for at that time, but he's the king they need. There will be a battle, but it will be fought on the cross.

He is the only one who can bring about their salvation, but not by simply reclaiming a little kingdom, but establishing an everlasting one. And this kingdom will draw in all nations.

What Jesus came to do was much greater than they could imagine. Palm Sunday isn't the main event. Easter is.

[11 : 08] Mark paints this very powerful picture in his version of the story, but what are we to take away from it? Jesus enters with a crowd, but he leaves alone.

Later, he will enter Jerusalem again, yet he will exit alone, carrying a cross, betrayed and abandoned by those who came to save.

even those who have been with him the longest. They will fall away, leaving Jesus the king alone to bring about their salvation and forgiveness.

He gives us an example of what his kingdom looks like. He gives us an example of how much he is not what they expect. I wonder where you are in this story.

See, for Mark, when he writes the gospel, he expects you to live in it. Where am I in this story? A book I was reading recently says often we like to put ourselves in the hero's position.

[12 : 16] I don't know about you when you relive a story or you think about it, you put yourself on the winning side. Actually, Mark doesn't want us there. The story begins with the crowds walking down the mount with Jesus, celebrating, dedicated to the cause.

But when it matters, Jesus is abandoned. And he will climb the harder mountain on his own. I want you to visualize that. He came down with the crowds, but he went up the other side, that side that Julius Caesar came through.

He went up that side alone. Golgotha was that side. If you were there with Jesus, would you have been any different? Even Bartimaeus, who saw who Jesus was, who Jesus is, was nowhere to be seen when the passion begins.

He's not mentioned either. Jesus was alone. Pretty heavy. So where's the good news other than the good news?

Though the disciples didn't fully understand it, they were right about who Jesus is. Though the crowds didn't realize they were singing the right song.

[13 : 29] He is the Messiah. He is the King. He is the hope and salvation for all created things. And though they fell away, as we fall away, Jesus climbed that hill alone for them, for us, to make us right with God and bring about a new kind of humanity shaped by his love and continues to shape us as we perpetuate that love to others.

So wherever you are in this message, for you the message is the same. Jesus knows you and his journey to the cross was for us all.

Whether you are Bartimaeus, or a crowd pleaser, a Pharisee, or a disciple, maybe you feel like Judas sometimes. Jesus on Good Friday carried the cross to bring about the forgiveness of sin and God's kingdom.

And the invitation to you is to take your place in this new kingdom and be willing to carry your cross too. So later you're going to come and grab a palm cross.

And I want you to think about this. Come as you are. You're welcome. You're loved. Come in faith and in grace.

[15 : 01] and then take it with you to remind you that yes, Palm Sunday is when we remember Jesus is the king and we welcome him. He is the anointed one Israel has been waiting for.

His kingdom is come but it is built on the cross carrying Christ. and it will keep growing through you his cross carrying people.
Amen.