

A Big Crowd Meets A King

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church here in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, please check us out at FCCGreensburg.com for more information, or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But listen, our heart is simply this. We want to get into the Word of God, but most of all, we want the Word of God to get into us and transform these hearts more and more into the image of our Savior, Jesus.

Now, back in 2013 and 2014, my family lived in Rushville doing ministry there. But we were very aware of what was going on here in my hometown of Greensburg with the boys' basketball team. I actually came down quite a bit and went to the basketball games with our youth pastor here at the church, Mitch, and it was fun to watch the basketball team. So as they had another magical year culminating in their second straight 3A state championship, I couldn't help but join with my hometown and celebrate such a wonderful accomplishment.

In fact, as I was watching one of the highlight videos, it showed the team going down a street here in Greensburg as the players were hanging out the windows of the bus, thousands of fans lined up, everyone just celebrating this powerful moment.

[1 : 22] What a special time that was for those kids and for our community. There was just a buzz and an excitement that permeated everything. Now, let's take this celebration a step further and look back a few centuries to the days when kings and queens truly had power over their countries.

Today, they're often seen more as a spokesperson with all kinds of influence. However, there was a day where we saw true monarchies. And when these kings and queens said something, that was going to be how it was.

And when it was time for a new king or a new queen to be crowned, they would be dressed in the most expensive robes and jewels. They'd be driven through the capital city in a fancy carriage drawn by the most beautiful horses.

Accompanying the king or queen would be high-ranking officials and foreign dignitaries. And then, following behind them would be the nation's finest soldiers.

At the climax of the event, the king would be presented with a scepter that signified the transfer of power and authority into his hands. Musicians would play and sing.

[2 : 35] The crowds would break into spontaneous choruses of praise to their leader. Every single part of the ceremony was designed to highlight the majesty, glory, and power of their king or queen.

Actually, the Queen Victoria of England, she wore a crown of expensive gems surrounded by a 309-carat diamond. Ladies, can you imagine a 309-carat diamond?

Wow. But even more impressive, her scepter on Coronation Day featured an even bigger diamond over 500 carats. But I tell you that so you can just get a picture of how amazing the celebration and the parade was when a new king or queen came into power.

And now that you have this picture in your mind, let me show you a parade and a celebration that makes that look like nothing. I'm talking about the triumphal entry of Jesus on this day almost 2,000 years ago.

This day that we often call Palm Sunday. Now in the book of Zechariah, chapter 9, verse 9, which was written over 500 years before Jesus came into this world, this prophet of God prophesies about this particular Sunday where Jesus made his way into Jerusalem.

[3 : 57] He says, You know, one thing I like to do on Palm Sunday is just kind of explain the magnitude of this day.

Even the celebration that went on to praise the Savior of the world. I think we often can so easily have in our minds this picture of Jesus' disciples and maybe a couple hundred people waving their

palm leaves, shouting, Hosanna!

Hosanna! As Jesus makes his way on this meager little donkey. Maybe we picture this wimpy little celebration that lasted about five minutes and then, okay, everybody's back to business.

Uh-uh. That's not how it went down. That's not the picture that God's Word paints. The Bible tells us the last few days before Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, they were spent preaching, healing, and changing lives.

He even brought Lazarus back to life after he had been dead for days. He took time to convert the wee little guy Zacchaeus. We know that Jesus always had crowds of people following him everywhere that he went.

[5 : 18] They were amazed at what he could do. They were astounded at how he loved them despite their flaws. He even spoke with an authority that they had never heard a religious leader have when they spoke.

Now, I think we're being pretty conservative to say that he probably brought with him at least 10, 15, or 20,000 people to Jerusalem.

And then in that city alone, historians tell us there would have been 2 to 3 million people already there to celebrate one of the biggest events on the Jewish calendar. We're talking about the Passover.

And they too would have most likely heard about Jesus, the miracles, and his claim to be the Messiah. That would have been the hot-button topic of their day.

And some people truly believed he was the Messiah. There was a group there that believed this. Others adamantly opposed it as heresy, and still others were still kind of up in the air about it all.

[6 : 17] So, let's just say if only 10% of the people came to this celebration, 10% that were in the city, if only 10% came to this celebration for Jesus, we're talking a crowd of 2 to 300,000 people.

Honestly, it could have been a whole lot more than that. It could have been closer to a million or more. We don't really know for sure, but that's the picture that I want you to have in your head of Palm Sunday.

And as I was trying to wrap my head around this, just how many people there would have been in that one place, the best example I could come up with was the top college football stadiums.

Now, not as many as I said, but they still give you a decent picture of it, okay? Did you know that there are eight college football stadiums that seat over 100,000 people at once?

Here they are. Texas, Alabama, Tennessee, LSU, Texas A&M;, Ohio State, Penn State, and then number one at 107,601 people seating capacity is Michigan.

[7 : 26] Now, since I am a Tennessee Vol fan and they have a seating capacity of 101,915, here's where I'm going to focus. So, I've been to three games to watch Tennessee at Neyland Stadium in my life.

So, let's imagine the excitement that happens when UT beats Alabama on a last-second touchdown. Imagine that many fans celebrating. If you've ever been in an environment like that, I'll tell you, it's crazy.

It's exciting. It's loud. It's intense. And now, multiply that by at least three, maybe up to ten. Make that celebration about something so much bigger than sports.

Make it about life. Make it about death. Make it about their Savior that they've been waiting on now for thousands of years. And that's the kind of atmosphere there would have been that day for Jesus.

Now, I hope this is starting to make sense. Just how big and amazing this celebration was for their king. The Bible tells us that Jesus came riding in on a lowly donkey.

[8 : 29] And then we look at Matthew chapter 21. Starting in verse 8, it says, A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven.

So what a cool picture of praise to God. That many people spreading their garments on the road before him out of deep respect. Others were laying palm leaves down in front of him, which was a sign of salvation and joy.

So it's not hard to see this as but a glimpse or even a foretaste of what heaven will someday be like. What an incredible picture of worship and praise to the coming Messiah.

And now that you have that picture in your head, I want you to put yourself in that crowd. A warm day, a dusty road, an energized crowd, praising with everything they have, and a king.

[9 : 35] No, the king. And if you have your outlines, and by the way, you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app if you'd like to see that. When you go to YouVersion, Y-O-U version, it's a free download for that app.

But as you go there, go to events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana, and you'll see that. But grab that outline if you'd like to follow along. And let's start off by talking about those who would have been around you on that day.

The first one, so let's talk about the people of Palm Sunday. In that crowd were two basic types of people. You have the obedient and faithful, and the obscene and faithless.

There were those that day that came for no other reason than to praise Jesus. They weren't there to make an appearance. They weren't there to show off their newest Easter outfit. They weren't there to show how religious they were.

They weren't there because Grandma told them, you better be or you're out of the will. They were there to praise their coming Messiah. Now, some may have been confused about His role, okay?

[10 : 39] But nonetheless, they were there in that moment with their cloaks, their garments, their palm branches, honoring and praising Jesus with everything they had. Now, that's a powerful picture of praise.

Now, let me ask you this. Have you ever been so caught up in worshiping God and praising God that there was nothing else on your mind? Maybe the tears started to flow as you just encountered your God on a deep level.

All your troubles and the things you needed to get done faded away. You were totally oblivious to everything else that was going on around you because you were praising Jesus with your whole heart.

That's what some of the crowd there that day were doing. They were praising their Messiah wholeheartedly. And I hope every Sunday when we come together as a church family, just like God's Word teaches us how important this is as a part of you growing in your walk with Jesus, I hope as we come together during those worship services, I hope that that's what we're here to do. Not to bring a critical spirit to judge every part of the service and point out every little thing we don't like to the preacher, not to see what everyone else is doing, but simply to worship Jesus Christ with every ounce of who we are because he is awesome.

[11 : 57] But there was another group that came for another purpose. This is what we're calling the obscene and the faithless. The sad thing is that there were religious leaders there who were this group, okay?

This is who this group was. They were the ones that everybody looked up to and saw as the untouchable spiritual leaders, or at least they thought they were. If anybody would recognize the Savior, if anybody would recognize someone fulfilling all the scriptures, you would think it'd be these guys, the theologians of the day.

But sadly, their hearts were the farthest from praising God. See, they were the sin-sick, ultra-religious, rule-making, we're in charge, all about me, our way or the highway type of leaders. So look with me here at what Luke says about these men, starting here in verse 37 of Luke chapter 19.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.

[13 : 13] Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, rebuke your disciples. I tell you, he replied, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.

See, any time we make worship or church or the kingdom of God about us and our preferences, man, we're in danger of looking a lot like the Pharisees.

And I'll be transparent with you. I have found myself there before. It's so easy to do. Maybe you have too. And each time I find myself maybe going in that direction, I have to ask God to forgive me and make me more like one of the faithful and the obedient.

God, make me one of those people that makes life all about you and magnify in your name.

Because listen, I don't want to hear any stones praising Jesus because that's my job.

That's your job. It's our choice. And I like how the famous author Randy Alcorn put this in his book called *The Grace and Truth Paradox*. He says, if we see God as he really is and ourselves as we really are, there's only one appropriate response, to worship him.

[14 : 29] There was a famous conductor taking his choir and orchestra through their final rehearsal of the inspiring Handel's *Messiah*. When the soprano soloist came in with the refrain, I know that my Redeemer liveth, she sang it with flawless technique, perfect breathing, clear enunciation.

And after she completed her part, everyone looked at the conductor expecting to see this response of overwhelming approval. With the motion from his baton for silence, he walked over to this soloist and he said, almost sadly, my daughter, you don't really know that your Redeemer lives, do you? And as you can imagine, she was embarrassed and she said, well, yes, I think I do. He said, then sing it, tell it to me, so all know that you have experienced the joy and power of Christ.

And then he motioned for the orchestra to begin. And she sang that truth, this time with a passion that testified of her personal knowledge of the risen Lord.

And I'll tell you, those who listened, wept, the old master's eyes wet with tears, then said to her, he said, you do know, and this time you told me.

[15 : 46] Now, as a believer, my life, your life, everything that we are has to cry out that we've encountered our risen Savior. Now, look with me here at our next talking point.

Let's talk about the person of Palm Sunday. We talked about who was in the crowd. Now, who is this all about? Who's the person of Palm Sunday? And if you got a note there, you can go ahead and jot out to the side, Jesus.

It's all about Jesus. He was their long-awaited Savior who had come to save and set them free. But unfortunately, some of the ones who were praising Jesus on Sunday were the same ones shouting, crucify Him on Friday.

See, they wanted a Savior who would ride in on a white horse and be a military hero. They wanted, in the words of John MacArthur, a conquering, reigning Messiah who would come in great military power to throw off the brutal yoke of Rome and establish a kingdom of justice and righteousness where God's chosen people would have special favor.

But Jesus did not come, John MacArthur says, to conquer Rome, but to conquer sin and death. He did not come to make war with Rome, but to make peace with God for men.

[17 : 05] And you know, I think sometimes we say to ourselves, how in the world could they praise Him on Friday and then turn around and crucify Him on Friday? How could they do that? But don't we do the same thing when we praise Him here on a Sunday at church and then we go out during the week and we mistreat somebody made in the image of God?

Or we just purposely disobey God in what His Word teaches? Or we put our trust in an addiction or in someone else? See, that's the reason why He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and went to the cross because He knew every one of us would sin against Him and be separated from God the Father.

That's what sin does. So Jesus came into Jerusalem in peace, went to the cross to make peace for you and for me. That's the person we celebrate and we honor this Palm Sunday.

Now Romans 8, verse 2 puts it like this, and because you belong to Him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

See, Jesus is the one who deserves all our praise. So let's praise Him on Monday morning when you're tempted to get a little down, looking at everything this week is going to have to get accomplished, right?

[18 : 23] Everything has got to get done. But let's also praise Him on Wednesday, on hump day, when things are getting a little, kind of probably, you're in the thick of it, so it's getting a little real, right?

And then let's praise Him on Friday night, just like we would on a Sunday. See, the purpose of Palm Sunday is what I want to talk about last, and I've purposely saved this for last.

So let's talk about that. You know, being a person who worries and frets too much about things that I have to get accomplished, I'm just amazed at how Jesus kept His composure at that Palm Sunday celebration.

He rode, He waved, He blessed. Nothing was going to rob the Lord of His joy, but listen, Friday was coming and we're talking about the cross. The cross was coming and Jesus knew it.

So let me give you just a little bit of a rundown of Jesus' last week, okay? And stick with me because we're going to walk through pretty much every detail of His last week. So here it is, bullet points.

[19 : 22] He led the parade into Jerusalem. He performed a miracle with a fig tree. He cleansed the temple for a second time and He explained what happened with the fig tree. And then He taught three parables, answered four questions, rebuked religious officials, praised a poor widow for giving two coins, preached on life and death.

He predicted the fall of Jerusalem and the second coming, taught two more parables, taught about final judgment, and He made the fifth prediction of His death. Next, He presided at the Passover meal, revealed Judas as the traitor, washed the feet of His disciples, warned disciples about their betraying Him, instituted the Lord's Supper, taught that heaven is only through Him, presented the role of the Holy Spirit, and taught about love and obedience.

Next, He taught another parable. He commanded us to love one another again. He assured the disciples the world would hate us. He had another heart-to-heart with His followers, and He promised the Holy Spirit.

Next, He prayed for unity and glory of the church. He agonized with God in the Garden of Gethsemane, was arrested, was slandered, was denied by His friends, was severely beaten and intensely tortured, carried the cross to Golgotha, was nailed to the cross, taught, prayed, and encouraged, and ministered on the cross, and then He died on that same cross.

See, not only did Jesus have a crazy week, but He knew where this week was going to lead. He knew He had to carry the burden of sin that fell upon His shoulders, but you know what?

[20 : 56] He didn't let it zap His joy. He still celebrated. It was Sunday, but Friday was coming. Maybe that's a little different than you've often heard it.

It was Friday, but Sunday was coming. But thinking about it from Palm Sunday's perspective, it was Sunday, but Friday was coming. The cross was coming. So let me ask you this. What's your Friday?

And I don't mean to downplay the cross or compare our struggles to the cross at all because there's no comparison. But what is your Friday? We all have at least one. Are you trying to manage work and family and not go crazy in the meantime?

Is it taking care of a loved one or juggling everything else you have to do? Are you unemployed with the same bills you had when you had a job? Have you lost a family member and you're struggling without them there by your side?

Do you have a child that's causing you a lot of stress? Is your marriage spiraling out of control and you just don't know how to fix it? You know, every one of us has a Friday, but Jesus shows us that we can have hope and we can celebrate even when a Friday is on the way because the good news is that Sunday isn't too far away.

[22 : 09] He shows us that we can be faithful in the midst of our struggles. Now, look at me here and I want to kind of end with this passage today at Hebrews chapter 12 starting here in verse 1.

Love this passage. It says, Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer or the author and perfecter of faith.

For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Friday's coming, but we can still celebrate our Savior and we can have joy because in the end we know that Sunday, Easter Sunday is on the way, that victory is on the way.

So I want to challenge you with that. Whatever you have going on in your life right now, whatever is just wearing you down and stressing you out, I want you to know that Jesus is your answer, that he is there to meet you in this moment and be your comfort and be your strength.

[23 : 36] He wants to be your peace that passes all understanding. Friday's coming, but we can still celebrate, we can still walk in joy because we know in the end that victory is on the way.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for just the amazing love that you have shown to each of us, that you went to the cross and you gave your perfect sinless life for me and for each person listening to this broadcast.

Father, I just pray that you will just help us to understand the depths of your love the best that we possibly can, that we will understand that you died, you gave your life for us and then you rose again three days later to conquer death and to offer us life on this earth and life eternal.

So Father, we just praise you for your word today. We thank you for this understanding of Palm Sunday and that we can see how big of a celebration that was but we don't want to be like the Pharisees.

We don't want to be like a lot of people in that crowd. We don't want to be fickle where we only praise you when things go our way or when you do what we want you to do. We want to be faithful to you 24-7, 366 in this leap year.

[25 : 05] So Father, I just pray that you will have your way in our hearts and you will help us to follow you faithfully each passing day.

Thank you for your word today. Thank you for how you've ministered to our hearts and we pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen and amen. Hey, I want to just share this quick invitation with you today.

As we're getting closer to Easter, next Sunday will be Easter Sunday and I'm so excited for that day. We'd love to welcome you if you'd like to come and visit the church.

If you live in the Greensburg area or close to Greensburg, 425 North Broadway Street, come and see us. We'd love to just worship alongside you.

Let me know that you listen on the radio and we'd love to connect with you in that way. But we would love to have you at 8 o'clock, 9.30, or 11 o'clock.

[26 : 05] Just so you know, parking's probably going to be pretty tight. You can park in the parking lot if there's room available, if not along the streets, but we also usually park in the Gillen Howe Funeral Home parking lot as well.

So just want to offer you this invitation today that if you would like to talk about giving your life to Jesus, maybe you have questions about your faith, we're here.

My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor here at First Christian. Won't you reach out to us? Here's a couple different ways you can. 812-663-8488. That's 812-663-8488.

You can ask for me, for Ray, or you can email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com. Hey, we are so thankful, especially for those of you who listen every single week, but I believe God has brought you to this broadcast for a reason.

So thank you so much for listening today, and we pray God's richest blessings over you. Thank you.