

A Day of Triumph

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[0:00] Well, as I said, this is Palm Sunday. We don't have any palm fronds to wave, but it is Palm Sunday nonetheless.

And this is the first day of the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, what's often called Holy Week. And this is an important day. It's an important day because there has been everything leading up to it, leading up to this day, which leads to what happens this week.

In fact, even before the foundation of the world, things were plotted out and planned, and they're coming to pass. But it's also a bit of an odd day because as you'll see probably in your Bible, if you open up and look at it again, it says it's a triumphal entry, a triumphal entry.

It seems a bit ironic that it's called that given what happens by the end of the week. Jesus is nailed to a cross, crucified, and stuck in a tomb. But the label is primarily due because what goes on fulfills the prophecy.

[1:05] This day fulfills the prophecy of the coming messianic king from Zechariah chapter 9. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he. And that he was viewed as such is evident from the language and the actions of those, the crowds that are lining the way of his entrance to Jerusalem.

They take cloaks, they put them on the ground, an act of submission, an act of homage to a coming king. They have palm branches, again, not in this, but in others, and that's a sign of Jewish nationalism, of victory.

And of course, there is the adulation, the praise. Well, the label has always possessed some ironic irony to it because at the end of the week, he's rejected by these same people who are now cheering him on.

Perhaps you know the hymn, My Song is Love Unknown. It's a beautiful hymn by Samuel Crossan. The third stanza is this. Sometimes they strew his way, and his sweet praises sing, resounding all the day, hosannas to their king.

[2:17] Then crucify is all their breath, and for his death they thirst and cry. That is the strange final week of Jesus' earthly life.

So, given its outcome, the cross, how is it triumphant? Well, again, by any human calculus, as I've suggested, the events of this week would seem to undo any sense of triumph that these who are welcoming into Jerusalem might be feeling.

There's his betrayal, his arrest, his trial, his humiliating death by the Romans. I mean, they know what to do with a man who would be king, and then he ends up sealed in a tomb.

But again, we call it a triumphant day, a triumphant entrance, because of where all of it will lead. His death gives way to life, followed by the receiving of the reward for his obedience, being bestowed with a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, every tongue confess.

So despite appearances, Jesus did triumph over the plotting of those who succeeded to have him put to death. But there are four elements that I, in this Luke passage of this event, there are elements of his presence in Jerusalem that I think foreshadow or anticipate the ultimate triumph, the triumph of God, the God of history, the triumph of God's glory, justice, holiness, over life and death, when Jesus returns to judge the earth and all things are made new.

[3:57] Now, Luke's account of this is kind of compressed. He has the events compressed. If you were to look at Mark, for instance, it actually extends over more than just one day.

And with the exception of the report that Luke concludes of taught daily in the temple, all of it is packed into one day, shows up in the other Gospels, but packs into one day.

But what I believe Luke's apologetically minded editing of the information available to him does is to make things feel that they are moving quickly, deliberately.

Remember, back in Luke 9, we learn of Jesus that when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

That's chapter 9. We're now in chapter 19. And he comes to Jerusalem with a purpose and he's going to fulfill it. Now, let's consider this term triumph for just a minute.

[5:00] What does it mean? What does triumph mean? Well, good dictionary definition, achieving a victory over an opponent or being successful. The boxer. A boxer triumphs over his opponent when he lays him out on the canvas and he doesn't get up after the count of ten.

We triumph over our fears. Think of the guy who jumps out of a plane for the first time in a parachute jump. Had to overcome some serious fears. He triumphs over them. And then sometimes we talk about in terms of success.

Like a particular new film, it was a triumph. Narrative strength. Captivating cinematography.

Performances of subtle, emotional depth. A triumph.

Well, there are four triumphs, I believe, in this account that foreshadow the ultimate triumph of God over sin and death. A victory fully realized when all is made new. There's a triumph of adulation over denunciation.

A triumph of justice over idolatry. A triumph of the sacred over the profane and life over death. We'll take them each in turn. The triumph of adulation over denunciation.

[6:12] As he comes in, what are the crowds quoting? They're quoting Psalm 118, which we read. It's a call to worship. Verse 26. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Psalm 118 is a psalm of joyful praise, of celebrating God's deliverance, divine deliverance.

Some think it has something to do with the rebuilding of the temple and the receiving of worshipers and the signal of God's favor once again resting upon his people. Well, in our passage, there's something unique.

It says, Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. The original is blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, but here is blessed the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

And this is fitting because Jesus enters as he does in order to fulfill the prophecy from Zechariah. Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem.

Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous having salvation is he. Humble, mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. The donkey signals that he's coming as a king bringing peace.

[7:15] If he was a king coming to make war, he'd be on a horse, he'd be in a chariot, but no, he comes bearing peace, righteousness, and salvation. So the crowd is cheering Jesus as he comes.

Do they know the implications of his coming in this manner? Or are they just stirred by the things he's been doing, the mighty deeds that we read about, and projecting upon him messianic hopes? Whatever the thoughts, Jesus clearly intends to fulfill the role by the prophet, predicted by the prophet.

We get insight into this, I believe, if we go back to 1930 through 31. Jesus says, go into the village in front of you where you're entering and you'll find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat.

Untie it, bring it here. If anyone asks you why are you untying it, you shall say this, the Lord has need of it. I'm suggesting that Jesus prearranged that colt.

I mean, it could have been, of course, that he had divine prophetic insight, but he's coming with a purpose. He has set his face for Jerusalem. He knows, he wants to come in just as Zechariah said, so he made sure that there was a colt available to him to ride.

[8:22] He prearranged it, he sent men to it, and they find it, they bring it back to him, and he enters upon it. So whatever the crowds thought, Jesus clearly intends to fulfill that particular role.

So as he's entering in, the Pharisees tell him to rebuke the crowd for saying the things that they're saying, for attributing to him the title that they attribute to him. And what happens?

Jesus meets them back, returns them back, a rebuke. 39 and 40, some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, teacher, rebuke your disciples. He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

See, with that response, Jesus asserts the appropriateness of the crowd's adulation over the Pharisees' denunciation. He is totally self-aware of what is going on.

What is denunciation? It's public condemnation. Right? An evil politician does something wicked. Hopefully the press calls him out and it's a public condemnation with a big headline on the page.

[9:26] So-and-so caught with red-handed. It's a public denunciation. And these Pharisees, thinking that Jesus receiving this kind of praise is wicked, they denounce Jesus, publicly condemning him for allowing the crowd to praise as they are.

They shouldn't be talking like this. You know you're not the king. You shouldn't be allowing them to speak in this name. But Jesus says, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

The praise of the people, even of creation, is appropriate. I think this foreshadows Christ's return in glory. Having received the name that is above every name, upon his return, all who have publicly denounced Jesus will be forced to acknowledge that Jesus was indeed the promised Savior.

You know, there's one remarkable public denunciation that stands out to me. It was by a fellow named Bertrand Russell. You probably know him from the first part of the 20th century. He was a philosopher, social reformer.

In a lecture that he gave at the Battersea Town Hall in South London, held by the branch of the National Secular Society, and later put into a pamphlet, was called Why I Am Not a Christian.

[10:49] It outlines Russell's beliefs as to why he doesn't think Jesus deserves the kind of praise that he gets. And after deigning to acknowledge that Jesus had some good maxims, some good teachings, good sayings, he says this, having granted the excellence of these maxims, I come to certain points in which I do not believe that one can grant either superlative wisdom or the superlative goodness of Christ as depicted in the Gospels.

Taking the Gospel narrative as it stands, there one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise. You will find that in the Gospels Christ said, you serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?

That was said to people who didn't like his preaching. It's not really, to my mind, quite the best tone. And there are a great many other things that he said about hell. I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue, Christ stands quite as high as some of other people known to history.

I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above him in those respects. That kind of public denunciation is going to be met with the reality of who Jesus is upon his return.

And after his obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross, what does Paul say? God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[12:20] One New Testament scholar comments on this. The language, the language is that of triumph. The bending of the knee was a posture of submission as was confessing Jesus Christ as Lord.

The hymn that Paul has therefore speaks to Jesus as the conqueror of all. The hymn points out that everyone will acknowledge the position of Jesus in the universe. The reality is that Bertrand Russell will have to confess the reality of who Jesus is.

But, unless he repented, it won't be for his salvation but for his self-condemnation because he had the audacity to join the Pharisees in denouncing Christ.

Russell and all of his ilk, great and small, who have rebuked Christ, who have denounced him, will be bowing the knee upon his return in glory. Next, the triumph of justice over idolatry.

As Jerusalem comes into view, Luke records that Jesus weeps over it. 41 and 42.

[13:27] And when he drew near, he saw the city, he wept over it, saying, would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for your peace, but now they are hidden from your eyes.

What's the source of his grief? It's the impending judgment, the act of divine justice that's going to be meted out against Jerusalem. Jesus describes what will unfold.

For the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you.

And this happens. This happens in 70 AD after a siege of several years. Titus, the son of the emperor Vespasian, laid siege to Jerusalem and it was horrific, devastating defeat of the forces who were opposing Rome.

Decisive triumph for Titus. In fact, you can go to Rome and see his triumphal arch there standing today. This act of divine justice, its smacks of the harem, the kind of decree that God said was to happen when Israel went into the promised land.

[14:38] They were to utterly destroy its ungodly inhabitants. It has that same feel, doesn't it? That same divine just wrath being poured out on the enemies of God. And what was Jesus' provocation?

He says, because you did not know the time of your visitation. Again, Jesus' self-awareness is evident. He knows who he is. He knows what his coming signifies and what his rejection will result in.

Now, what's important to note that this not knowing is not innocent ignorance. This is not innocent ignorance.

This is willful ignorance. You did not know the time of your visitation. Willful ignorance. And we can understand this when we consider what Paul has to say in Romans chapter 1.

Briefly, Paul says that people are without excuse when it comes to the knowledge of God. For what can be known about God is plain to them, he says, because God has shown it to them for his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power, divine nature, had been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

[15:46] So they are without excuse. I don't know if you're familiar with R.C. Sproul's Holiness of God. If you're not, I commend it to you. But he has a wonderful chapter in there called Looking Beyond the Shadows. He begins by talking about Psalm 8, how the psalmist is struck by the grandeur of God's creation and what it reveals about God.

When I look to you at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him? Who am I, a mere creature, that attention will be given to me by such a being as you who can create such an incomprehensible universe?

Sproul goes on to explain what Paul is driving at in Romans 1. The force of Paul's assertion is that every person who has ever lived knows that there is a God and is aware of his transcendent majesty and holiness.

The medium God has selected to reveal himself universally is so clear, so potent, that it leaves no one with an excuse. And though all people receive this knowledge of God, they will not all readily acknowledge it.

After the apostle rests all excuses from the people's hands, he declares in Romans 1, 21 and 23, For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking.

[17:06] Their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals, and creeping things. Sproul continues, Paul is saying that the real person of God is really known through the real revelation that takes place in the real realm of nature.

But the problem is that in the case of God, we distort our knowledge of him by replacing him with an image that we create ourselves. This is the essence of idolatry.

Replacing the reality with a counterfeit. We distort the truth of God and reshape it, shape and reshape our understanding of him according to our own preferences, leaving us with a God who is anything but holy.

All idolatry, he said, is rooted in fundamental dishonesty. Paul describes this in terms of an exchange which is a dishonest exchange.

They exchange the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creator rather than the creator who is forever praised. Amen. This dishonest exchange that is in view is the substitution of the creature for the creator and exchange that is dishonest precisely because we know better. [18:21] See, Sproul's point is that this is a willful denial. People know the truth about God but they suppress the truth as Paul says and the result is God's righteous and just wrath.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Leon Morris, New Testament scholar, commenting on this passage in Luke, confers with this.

There is an ignorance that is innocent but there is also an ignorance that is culpable. These people had the revelation of God made known to them in the scriptures of the Old Testament.

They had the continuing evidence that God was active in the life and ministry of Jesus. They could see in him that God had not forgotten his people. There was every reason for them to have welcomed Jesus as his disciples did but they refused to accept all this evidence.

They rejected God's Messiah. They would now have to live with the consequences of their rejection. It is that that brought forth Jesus' tears. See, what have they done?

[19:26] They've taken the information received from Jesus of all he has said, all that he has done, all that he has fulfilled and suppressed it and turned him instead into some blasphemous, devil-worshiping, false prophet of God, one deserving of death and in so doing they exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

And there is a day coming when all those who did not see their day of visitation due to their willful ignorance and their substituting their own self-made Messiah for the true Messiah will be visited by God's wrath.

And it's no different today than it was for them. They had the information. They could hear it. They could see it with their eyes and we, we have it recorded here in God's scriptures.

He has preserved the testimony for us and in them Jesus is revealed. Bertrand Russell, someone of that mindset, he reads it, he rejects it, deciding that the kind of person to be revered is one who measures up not to the biblical idea, not God's ideal, but his ideal.

And that is idolatry. It's a substitution of his creation for the one through whom and for whom all things were created. We have the record before us.

[20:42] We need to read it and like the psalmist, we need to be humbled by it. What hangs in the balance is divine justice or divine mercy. Next, the triumph of the sacred over the profane.

In verses 45 and 46, it says, he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, it is written, my house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.

In Matthew's account, we get more details and they relate the violence of Jesus' actions, just how deliberate and how strong his actions were. And Jesus entered the temple, drove out all who sold and bought in the temple and he overturned the tables, the money changers, the seats of those who were sold, pitches, it was just chaos.

It was a tornado blowing through there. John adds that he first made a whip. Now, there's speculation about where these tables were set up. More than likely, it was the royal stoa or it was the court of the Gentiles.

But in them, there was these merchants who were selling animals and there was an exchange going on of regional currency with the kind of currency needed to pay your dues, as it were, to the temple. Well, those are necessary practices for the temple, right?

[21:57] There needs to be sacrifice, need to be able to purchase the animals. But Jesus' objection raises his questions. Does it need to be placed within the temple practice? Or was it unscrupulous businessmen taking a poor rate of exchange or charging too much for these animals?

Probably both, if not more. But it spurs Jesus to action. It is written, my house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers. This is the temple, a divinely chosen place where the people of God could carry out divinely sanctioned practices of worship and they were being mingled with this irreverent activities, this chaotic atmosphere.

When Jesus enters the temple and he cleanses it and he says, my house shall be a house of prayer, not a den of robbers. What's the contrast? He speaks of the temple, a sanctified, prescribed place for worship being profaned by the business that was being transacted.

I wonder, however, we don't gain some additional insight when we consider Jesus' ultimate concern was not with the business per se, but with the sacrilegious nature of what was going on, the profanation of the temple.

What if there's an additional meaning to temple when the Jesus himself speaks of? After John's account of Jesus cleansing the temple, Jesus is challenged by Jewish leaders and said, so the Jews came to him and said, what sign do you show us for doing these things?

[23:29] And Jesus answered them, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, it's taken 46 years to build this temple and you'll raise it up in three days? But John comments, but he was speaking about the temple of his body.

When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. So we've already spoken of what lay ahead for Jesus this week.

He will be arrested, tried, convicted, put to death and buried in a tomb. In that process, his body will be bound, it will be struck by an officer of the Jewish leaders, it will be scourged.

You know what scourge is? It's a multi-tongue whip that has metal and bones woven into it. So when you smack somebody with it and flogging and you dig into the flesh and you rip it away, you're tearing away the flesh, exposing the muscle structure underneath.

It's violent, cruel. He had a crown made of thorns that would be woven and was pressed down, biting into his scalp. His body will be draped with a purple robe mocking the claim of his kingship.

[24:36] His body will be demanded as a substitute for the body of a murderer. His body will be stripped naked, nailed to a cross to be mocked by all who pass by and while hanging there, a soldier will take a spear and pierce the side of his body.

Finally, that same lifeless, battered body will be taken and buried in a tomb. Jesus' resurrection is a triumph of the sacred over the sacrilegious when his profaned body in which he had just accomplished the once-for-all mediation between sinful human beings and a holy God is restored to life to be the ever-sufficient sacrifice for sinners.

What does John say in his revelation in his apocalypse about the one who in his vision he sees as a lamb standing as though it had been slain? Behold, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him and all the tribes of the earth will wail on his account even so. Amen. Jesus cleanses the temple, the profanation of that holy place and they profaned his body with a resurrection as an affirmation, a triumph over justice, over the righteousness and holiness over profanation.

Lastly, I'm suggesting there's a triumph of life over death and you might think we jump right to the resurrection but no, that's not what I'm alluding to. That does indeed happen at the end of the week but Luke reports that Jesus was teaching daily in the temple and while that was going on the chief priests and scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him but they did not find anything they could do.

[26:20] Why? For all the people were hanging on his words. Isn't that amazing? So here were guys plotting to kill him and they were powerful men.

Priests, scribes and principal men maybe those who lost a little business from his cleansing the temple but they couldn't get to him even though they wanted to get him so they could destroy him. Why couldn't they get there? Because there was a crowd around Jesus as he taught them. They were hanging on his words. John 1 says in the beginning was the word the word was with God and the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men and the word became flesh dwelt among us we've seen his glory glories of the only son from the father full of grace and truth.

That's what's happening. Following the triumphal entry he is daily bringing light and life to the people as he teaches them. Men are plotting to destroy him but they couldn't get to him because life

was triumphing over death.

[27:33] The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Now of course God's going to let all their evil plans go ahead. It was ordained that Jesus should die that they should be involved in the murder but this triumph of life over death is a kind of foreshadowing of the continued proclamation of the good news until the day of judgment until that day when God makes all things new.

They couldn't get to him because he was teaching them and they were hanging on his words. You know there's been just a relentless attempt to prevent people having the scriptures in their hands or to have the gospel preached.

You're probably familiar with open doors. It was begun during the cold during the the Iron Curtain days the Cold War and they had targeted the Soviet Union it was not allowing any Bibles to be had and they would find ways to smuggle them in.

They would get around guards get around roadblocks different ways so they would smuggle in so the people could have a Bible in their hands and you know what? The Bible's still in Russia the Soviet Union isn't.

Similarly there's always attempts to have silencing people to preach when they're preaching the gospel. We read about such efforts and at least in America it happens on college campuses.

[28:57] There was one student just a little while ago he was recently disciplined in his college because he stood outside in a supposed free speech zone. They had set up a free speech zone where you could stand and speak about whatever you felt like freely except the gospel.

He stood in a free speech zone preached the gospel and he was disciplined in his school. Such attempts will not prevail. What we see happening there in the temple courts is life triumphing over death.

Those men were trying and plotting to destroy Jesus and they can't get to him because people are hanging on his words. It was life and light to them. That's why we must persist in the face of all attempts to prevent the scriptures getting into people's hands or silencing the gospel.

The word as it goes out continues to bring light and life over death. Do you remember when Jesus taught about how people need to feed on his body and drink but it's a hard saying and a lot of those who were following him pardoned but he turns and he says well are you guys going to go to his closest ones?

And they say Lord you have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God. The word brings life and it triumphs over death.

[30:24] Paul reminds us how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed and how are they to believe in him in whom they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching and how are they to preach unless they are sent as it's written how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

Jesus life triumph of life over death comes by the word of God preaching the word of God sharing the light and life people hanging on his words.

So what are the results of this day? At every turn I'm suggesting there is a triumph. A triumph of adulation as Jesus receives praise in the face of those who would denounce him.

The triumph of God's just judgment over the idolatry of those who suppress the truth about Jesus. A triumph of the sacred over the sacrilegious not only when Jesus cleanses the temple but when his profane body is restored to life to be the ever sufficient sacrifice for sinners and the triumph of life over death as Jesus the living word shines the light of life in the face of death.

Indeed it was a day of triumph. It was a day of visitation and the day of visitation remains. Each time the church gathers it's a day of visitation.

[31:45] Jesus is present with his people. The good news of God's triumph over sin and death through Jesus is preached to welcome him as the king of kings and lord of lords is indeed to embrace eternal life.

May we pray that all gathered here all who we are able to speak the gospel to may join the psalmist in declaring blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Let's pray. Lord we thank you for this triumphal day a day a day in which God you showed yourself mighty and Lord we look at these things and we stand in awe God of just how gracious and merciful you are that you would send your son to undergo this horror to undergo such a such a suffering a pain and to be separated from you for those moments on the cross that you would do that so that sinners might be saved.

Lord we thank you that we can participate in that triumph by your grace that united to Christ we share in his resurrection and in Christ we have a hope of eternal life and inheritance reserved for us that will not fade away.

So God thank you for this triumphal day thank you Jesus for entering as you did fully aware fully understanding what you were doing and what lay ahead and we thank you Holy Spirit for taking all of that information and helping us to not suppress it but to embrace it to the glory of God in Jesus name Amen