

Salvation on God's Terms

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Date: 14 April 2019

Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] The three big days of Easter are Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Those are the three big days of Easter.

And most people, if you talk with them, they know the meaning of Good Friday. It was the day that Jesus was crucified. And they know the meaning of Easter Sunday or Resurrection Sunday. It was the day that Jesus arose from the dead. But I think if you speak with the average person and ask them, what's the meaning of Palm Sunday?

What was that all about? I think for many people, beyond saying that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and people wave palm branches, few would be able to give some insight into what was really going on.

What was it about that event that Jesus was doing connected to the other days of Easter?

[1 : 07] On that first Palm Sunday, as Troy indicated, as he exalted us this morning, amidst all the waving of palms and the shouting of Hosanna, people were demanding from Jesus salvation on their terms.

They were demanding from Jesus the salvation that they wanted. And when it turned out that he did not heed their demands, that he did not fulfill their demands, the same voices that shouted Hosanna with the same voices, at least some of them, that shouted crucify him.

Because their expectations were dashed. And here's what I want us to see this morning as we consider this text. I want us to consider, and I want us to see, that from this passage, God offers salvation on his terms and not ours.

The world was demanding it on their terms, and God was offering it on his terms. The large crowd that was present at that first Palm Sunday, they were Jews largely who were under Roman oppression.

And all that they were reading about the coming Messiah, the Savior King, who God had promised to send to the world to deliver his people, they had their own preconceptions about what that would be and what that would look like, what his rule would look like, what his kingdom would look like.

[2 : 52] And that came to bear on that Palm Sunday. They were demanding from Jesus the salvation that was in accordance with the preconceptions they had about him and his kingdom.

Again, they were demanding salvation on their own terms. Palm Sunday is about how Jesus responded to that demand.

In our remaining time this morning, I want to consider John's account of the first Palm Sunday, and I've organized my thoughts around two simple points.

And the first one is this. The salvation the world demands. Now, although it seems like the people who were gathered on that first Palm Sunday were honoring Jesus by waving palms and shouting, Hosanna.

If you bear in mind the full context that we read, you'll see that they really were not. Instead, they were demanding that Jesus would free them from their enemies.

[4 : 10] They were demanding that Jesus would rid them of Roman oppression. That's not the reason that Jesus came into the world. So they were demanding a salvation that he didn't come to bring, that he did not come to offer.

And here's what the crowd knew at this particular time. Jesus had been ministering extensively among them for some three years. He had performed miracles, extensive miracles.

The most notable one was fresh on their minds, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. After he had been dead for three days and his body had started to decay. And it was this miracle that had the crowd abuzz.

And so in Jesus, this crowd had hope for deliverance, for deliverance from the bondage that they were under. And when you think about it, the setting was perfect. What better city to bring this deliverance in than in the city of Jerusalem?

And what better time to bring it at Passover, the time when God delivered his people from Egyptian bondage thousands of years prior.

[5 : 25] So notice what the people did in verse 13. John tells us, So they took palm branches, they took branches of palm trees, and went out to meet him, crying out, Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel. Now, why did they select palm branches of all the other kinds of trees that would have been present, or other things that they could have perhaps used?

This act of using palm branches was a very deliberate act, and a very organized act, when you consider the large number of people that would have been there.

And it shows that they were not approaching Jesus as a religious leader, but they were approaching him as a political leader, because the palm had come to be recognized in Israel as a symbol of the Jewish state.

It was on their coins. And even after fighting and being put down by the Romans, the palm still found its way back on Jewish coins.

[6 : 42] So for them, the palm was a political symbol. It was an indication of their nationalistic desires to be rid of Roman oppression.

And the palm symbolically communicated victory over one's enemies. And the crowd no doubt thought that Jesus was in agreement with them.

But what we see in verse 13 is they not only waved palm branches, they also shouted Hosanna.

They were singing Hosanna. And so if it was possible to miss the waving of the palm branches and what that meant, it certainly was not possible to miss what shouting Hosanna meant.

The word Hosanna, when we translate it, it means give salvation now. So in the Hebrew language, as they would have been shouting to Jesus, in Hebrew, it means give salvation now.

They use one word, we translate it, it becomes these three words. That's what they were demanding from Jesus. Give us salvation now. It is actually a direct quotation from Psalm 118, and verse 26, which says, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[8 : 16] And what we know is that Psalms 113 through 118 were called the halal, or halal, where we get hallelujah from.

And this group of six Psalms, they were sung by the choir during the feasts of Tabernacle and during the feasts of Passover. And Psalm 118 was the last one that they would sing.

Psalm 118, verse 25 reads, Save us, we pray, O Lord. O Lord, we pray, give us success.

So the choir would sing this, or they would sing the first part of it, Save us, we pray, O God, which is the equivalent of Hosanna. And the men would take these bunches of myrtle and willow tree branches tied together by palm leaves, which they called lulabs, and they would wave them.

They would wave them as a part of this shouting Hosanna and celebrating. And it was so closely connected to this act that these lulabs over time became known as Hosannas.

[9 : 36] They called them Hosannas to identify with this well-known practice. In verse 26 of Psalm 118, there's a blessing that is pronounced on the pilgrims who would make their journey up to Jerusalem.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. But over time, this became identified with the Messiah, the coming Messiah. And all Israel was looking to and longing for this Messiah to come.

Now, when we compare what we read in John 12 to Psalm 118, there's some words that are in John 12 that are not in Psalm 118.

The words that we find in the account that we read this morning from John 12 are, even the king of Israel.

That's not a part of Psalm 118. But the crowd shouted those words as well, even the king of Israel.

[10 : 47] And I think those words express what they expected of Jesus and how they saw Jesus. When we read the other accounts in Mark's gospel, in Matthew's gospel first, in verse 9 of chapter 21, Matthew records them saying, Hosanna to the son of David.

In Mark's account, he records them in chapter 11, verse 10, as saying, blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. And so, although the accounts are not depicted word for word, what is common between them is they all had this idea of Jesus as a king, the king of Israel, the Messiah,

the one who would come and conquer the enemies and who would bring them the respect that they felt that they deserved.

But here's what's clear. They didn't understand Psalm 118. Contained in Psalm 118 was God's promise of deliverance and salvation, but it was not the way the Jews thought it would come.

And so on that Palm Sunday, here they are, they are quoting the last Psalm, the last Hallel of Passover. And they totally missed that Jesus was the Lamb of Passover.

They totally missed that Jesus was the one that they'd been singing about for thousands of years. He was the Lamb who would take away the sin of the world. He was the Lamb who was the true Lamb, the ultimate Lamb that all the other lambs that they'd sacrificed over thousands of years were pointing to.

[12:38] And instead, they were demanding salvation on their own terms. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and for them, that was just a sign that he could do great things for them as a nation.

And they didn't recognize that Jesus did that to show that he is the resurrection and the life, that he is the only one who could give eternal life.

It was a sign miracle. It was a miracle to point them to something other than the miracle itself. But they stated the miracle and they missed the meaning of the sign.

Brothers and sisters, that crowd that flocked to Jesus on that first Palm Sunday is truly representative of the world. In verse 19, we read the Pharisees said among themselves, look, the whole world has gone after him.

The whole world has gone after him, they said. And you think about that. The whole world went after him and six days later he's crucified. Indeed, the whole world in some ways did go after him as far as they were concerned.

[13:56] But they related to Jesus in a very natural way. They related to Jesus in a very selfish and self-centered way. They related to Jesus in a way that is true for all of us except for divine revelation.

Without divine revelation of who Jesus is, we would all want Jesus to be king on our terms. We would all want salvation from him on our own terms.

The crowd that demanded it on that first Palm Sunday didn't recognize that the salvation that they needed could not come through the way they expected.

It would require a death on the cross. And that was the salvation that God offered them. Jesus could have said a word and the Romans would have been history.

That would have addressed what the Jews wanted, but it would not have addressed what they needed. And the reason for that is a miracle could not atone for sin.

[15:13] That was their real need and it's our real need this morning. And Scripture is very clear that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. And it's not just any blood because the blood of bulls and goats could not atone for sin.

The only blood that could atone for our sin is the blood of Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life and then offered himself as a perfect substitute on behalf of sinners.

And this morning I'm aware that for all of us, there are aspects of our lives that if we could change, we would change. I think every single one of us would wish that there's some aspect or at least some aspect but perhaps more than that that are not desirable that if we could change, we would. And that makes us very vulnerable to approach Jesus and to approach God in the same way that the Jews approached him on the first Palm Sunday.

And the reason for that is our temptation and our tendency is to see Jesus through the lens of what we believe we need and what we want as opposed to what we truly need.

[16:40] Brothers and sisters, what we truly need is the full orb salvation that God offers, that he offers to us on his terms that affects every aspect of our lives and our existence.

Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Savior of the world. He is God's chosen King. And through him, God offers to meet us beyond just delivering us from the needs that we perceive in our lives.

Jesus. And so I think as we consider how this crowd reacted to Jesus and related to Jesus, how they saw Jesus on that first Palm Sunday, I think it is worthy of all of us to consider how do we view Jesus?

Are we viewing him in a very personal and man-centered and self-centered way, believing that we know what we want and he needs to bring it to us or are we taking him as God's offer to us?

A sovereign, all-wise, and all-knowing God who offers us the salvation that we need. So many people, they see Jesus, they relate to Jesus in a very self-centered way.

[18:10] They want to be successful or more successful. They want a better marriage or they want marriage or a better job or find a job to be successful in school or to have more prosperous finances and all of those are seeking and looking to Jesus for salvation on their own terms.

And I pray that for us this morning that God would help us to see that he has offered Christ in all of his fullness for what we truly need and not what we want.

And everything else that Jesus does for us beyond bringing salvation, bringing forgiveness, reconciling us to God is really secondary. So that is what was behind the waving of the palms and the shouting of Hosanna on that first Palm Sunday.

put it simply, they were demanding the salvation they wanted. But again, the problem is that Jesus was offering, God was offering through Jesus the salvation that they needed.

And that brings me to my second and final point, the salvation that God offers. The salvation that God offers is seen in what Jesus did on that first Palm Sunday.

[19:42] Now again, to appreciate what Jesus did, you have to be aware that this crowd that gathered and was shouting Hosanna, this was not a small crowd.

This was a very large crowd. A little more than 30 years after Jesus would have rode through Jerusalem, there's a Jewish historian by the name of Josephus who says, he writes about a time when 2.7 million people attended Passover.

This would have been in his time, some 30 years after Jesus. 2.7 million people. So just imagine if, say, 30 years later, the crowd was just half that size, or even a quarter that size.

That's a massive crowd. It's a massive crowd. And it should give us some idea as to what Jesus had to have resisted on that day when all these people were saying, bring salvation now, deal with the Romans, make us a great nation.

He resisted it. And the reason Jesus was able to resist it was he was never impressed with crowds. If you follow the ministry of Jesus, every time there was a large crowd following Jesus without fail, he would say something difficult.

[21:06] And many would have a problem and many would leave. The crowd would just thin out. Because that's the world. The Pharisees said the whole world has gone after him.

And Jesus knew it was a fickle crowd, fickle support. Six days later, they would say, crucify him. Jesus was not impressed by crowds and brothers and sisters, neither should we be.

So how did Jesus respond? Well, John records the response of Jesus in a single verse in verse 14. In verse 14, John tells us, and Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it.

That was his response to the crowd. That was his response to all the shouting of Hosanna and waving of the palm branches.

He found a donkey. And notice the language leads us to believe that this was a very intentional act on the part of Jesus. As intentional as they were to gather up all those palm branches and to wave Hosanna, sing Hosanna and wave those branches, Jesus was just as intentional to find a donkey.

[22:35] And he sat on it. And Jesus, because he was aware that he was God's Messiah, and that he was entering into Jerusalem to lay his life down as a ransom for many, he intentionally took this donkey to ride in Jerusalem, as God's king, who would fulfill Zechariah's prophecy.

Here's what it says in Zechariah 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, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The whole implication is your king is different. Your king is coming to you this way. And everybody knows from then to now, worldly kings don't come in this way.

They come in a very different way. And here the God of the universe sends his king into the world, and this is the way he says my king is going to come. He's going to come on that animal that is considered the lowest of the animals of burden.

The animal that even today we use to tell jokes about people. He says that's the animal that he's going to come on. And so Jesus intentionally gets this donkey and he rides into Jerusalem.

[24:11] But there's a part of this prophecy that is not repeated in the Gospels. By taking it into context, we're able to see the fuller picture of what was happening on that day.

Verses 10 and 11 are not quoted, but here's what those verses say. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battled bow shall be cut off, and he shall

speaking peace to the nations, his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Notice in verse 10, this promise of peace.

Through the prophet, God is telling his people to rejoice that their king was coming differently from the worldly kings. He is righteous, he brings salvation, he is humble, he is on a young donkey, and he will not use brute strength, he will not use military might to conquer.

The chariot and the war horse will be cut off from Jerusalem. But notice that this king was not just a national king, he was an international king, he was the king of the nations, because he would speak peace to the nations, and his rule would be from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth.

[25 : 41] peace. And that is still true today, that is true even now, that Jesus Christ is seated at God's right hand, even now waiting for his enemies to be made his footstool, and he speaks peace to the nations through the gospel of peace, whereby men can be reconciled to God, and also reconciled to one another.

It's the peace that Jesus brings. One of the most beautiful sights to see is Jews who have come to know Christ, and Palestinians who have come to know Christ, and we see them at peace with God, but also at peace with one another.

That is the peace to the nations that Jesus offers. Notice in verse 11, God promises a blood covenant through which the prisoners will be set free.

And this no doubt speaks to the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ, which he would establish that new covenant by. And notice this depiction of sin is referred to as being in prison in a waterless pit.

And again, we don't have an appreciation for this because we just don't know what desert life and that part of the world is like.

[27 : 13] But even if you were not in a pit in the Middle East, water was a very vital thing to have. But when you were in a pit and without water, you were in a hopeless and a very desperate situation.

and the promise is that through this covenant, this blood covenant, that God will set the prisoners free who are in pit, in the waterless pit.

And this promise of freedom was fulfilled in the cross of Christ as he hung in the place of sinners who deserved themselves to die.

so that's how Jesus responded. To the crowd's urgent shout was utter silence. So Jesus did not speak.

He didn't speak any audible words, but he certainly spoke in sign language. He spoke in deed. And so it's left to us to interpret his actions.

[28 : 26] And again, by finding this donkey, Jesus was saying to them and he's saying to us that while he is the Messiah who is promised, he was bringing salvation and a kingdom that were different from the salvation and the kingdom that they were expecting.

And again, pointing to Isaiah's, to Zechariah's prophecy, sorry, he tells them to notice that as a king, he was coming differently. not the pomp and pageantry of worldly kings and kingdoms, but instead he would come with humility.

He would come on a clumsy colt. He would come to communicate not war, but peace. He would come to remind them that his kingdom is not of this world.

if it were, he would compete with this world, and he could with the best of what creation offers. But Jesus was doing on that Palm Sunday what he would do a few days later as he would stand before Pilate, and Pilate would say to him, don't you have anything to say?

Are you not going to answer? And Jesus would say to Pilate, my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my disciples would fight. And so Jesus is dramatically reminding them, and he's dramatically reminding us that his kingdom is a different kingdom.

[30 : 03] On that first Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that donkey, God was in essence saying to the shouting crowd, the salvation that you really need will not come from a political leader.

The salvation that you really need must come from a savior king. A savior king being lifted up on a wooden cross, not exalted on a golden throne. A savior king crowned with a crown of thorns, not with a crown of jewels.

A savior king who would give his life for his people. Unlike many of the worldly kings, who literally suck the life from their people so that they may actually live.

I think when we consider what happened to the Jews as they read their Bibles, it should sober us as we read our own Bibles.

You can wonder, how is it that these Jews who were so dedicated to reading their Bibles, reading their Bibles that are filled with messianic prophecies that identify Jesus or the Messiah at least as a suffering servant, as a gentle shepherd, as a humble king, and then come away believing the Messiah would be some great political military king who's going to lead an earthly political kingdom?

[31 : 44] How do you read those prophecies and come away with that understanding? Well, the reason is that they read their Bibles in a very mind-centered way.

They read their Bibles looking for themselves. they read their Bibles demanding a salvation that God never promised. And brothers and sisters, we can do the same.

The same way they could read Isaiah 53, for example, Isaiah 42, for example, and miss this suffering servant, and think that it's all about them and getting them out of their miseries and giving them respect before the world.

We can do the same. We can read the precious word of God and we can make the whole thing me-centered and man-centered and we can extract from it a salvation that God never offered us. It's a forged kind of salvation. We go in and we take out a forgery that God never gave us in his word. Because the scripture scripture then and the scripture now is about Jesus.

[33 : 00] We'll see that in Luke's account of the resurrection when Jesus met the two men on the road to Emmaus, the Bible says that he opened the scriptures and beginning with Moses, he explained to them all the things pertaining to himself.

The scriptures are about him, not about us. we don't go into, we don't look in there trying to find something about us. We go in there looking to see what God has revealed to us about his salvation through his son.

In verse 16, John tells us, his disciples did not understand these things at first. But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been told to him.

John says they didn't understand it. They're probably confused. Why is Jesus doing this? Because remember, they had the same ideas as the crowd. A few days later, they would be arguing who was the greatest.

When Jesus told Peter that he was going to be crucified, Peter said, let it not be. I rebuke you, don't say that. Because in Peter's mind, the kingdom that he was expecting from Jesus couldn't come by somebody dying.

[34 : 39] They didn't understand it. and the whole thing, quite frankly, may have been an embarrassment to them considering what they thought that Jesus would be doing.

And it almost seems like Jesus was at the height of the moment. I don't know if you've ever heard people say you need to seize the moment. If you study the entire ministry of Jesus, this was the moment.

This was it. Even if you look further in verse 20 of chapter 12, it says, now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. Even the Greeks were coming to Jesus.

When the Greeks were asking to see you, you really arrived. You really had some clout. But Jesus was not impressed by it all. And undoubtedly, the disciples were confused.

But thankfully, John qualifies it in the latter part of verse 16 when he says, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him.

[35 : 57] And notice the other part, and had been done to him. written about him and now fulfilled.

And so this morning as we consider the events of Palm Sunday, as we consider them and prepare our hearts to commemorate again the Lord's crucifixion on Good Friday, the Lord's resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Let us remember how easy it is like the Jews to be demanding from God what he never offered, how we can let our own preconceptions cause us to do that.

God offers us salvation, but he offers it on his terms. And it's not going to come through some human effort, it's not going to come through some worldly display, it's going to come through a wooden cross and a crown of thorns, but it's the salvation that we really need.

sometimes it's not the salvation in our fallen humanity that we desire, but it, brothers and sisters, is a salvation that we need.
More than that, it is the only one that God offers. Let's pray. pray.