

Palm Sunday

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- [0 : 0 0] Over the last two years, the church has been tested and largely failed the test of her loyalty to Christ, her King.
- Through the misinterpretation of Scripture, namely Romans 13, we were manipulated and coerced to bow the knee to Caesar while being told that we may not gather for worship to bow the knee to Christ.
- And sadly, most of the church quickly and quietly obeyed the mandate. Even after we were quote-unquote granted permission to reconvene for worship, many churches willingly followed Caesar's mandates, and that made it virtually impossible for their membership to attend because of restrictions such as masks on two-year-olds and limiting the number of households that could be in a building at once, effectively excluding the membership of the church.
- Some churches didn't survive this. Some are still trying to recover. Some have begun to worship again and still require masks and social distancing.
- Some have thrived and grown through it all. If you recall, Joe Boot, almost a year ago, speaking to us of the call that his ministry, along with some other pastors in their area, had put out to the many thousands of church in Canada, calling them to defy the tyrants of the land and to meet for worship.
- [1 : 3 1] He said, of the many thousands of churches invited, 70 agreed and responded, saying they would open for worship even though the government said they could not.
- We ourselves witnessed the hypocrisy of government officials who enforced the mandates while being caught on video more than once disobeying them.
- This has been our last couple of years. Maybe you have, like I, come across people in the grocery store who saw you without a mask and gave you that evil goat eye and just watched you as you passed like how could you be such an irresponsible jerk?
- But because Christ is king, because Christ is still in perfect control, good fruits have come out of the last couple of years.
- We know ourselves, we've experienced it, we've been awakened to the battle that we are in. We've seen who stands with Christ and who did not.
- [2 : 3 8] And we've learned that loyalty to Christ comes at a price. And we must obey God rather than men. Now most of us agree that there is more of this to come.
- We've been tested and failed. And our weakness has been exposed. The enemies of Christ are not going to forget that. And they will return to it to exploit it again at every opportunity.
- Today, being Palm Sunday, we turn to the story of the triumphal entry. And we see that loyalty to Christ does, in fact, come at a price.
- Stand with me, please, as I read for you our scripture text today. From John chapter 12, verses 12 through 26. Hear now the word of our Lord.

The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, and cried out, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel.

[3 : 52] Then Jesus, when he had found a young donkey, sat on it. As it was written, Fear not, daughter of Zion, behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.

His disciples did not understand these things at first. But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him.

Therefore, the people who were with him when he called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead bore witness. For this reason, the people also met him, because they heard that he had done this sign.

The Pharisees, therefore, said among themselves, You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after him. Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast.

Then they came to Philip, who was at Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

[4 : 54] But Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it. And he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

If anyone serves me, let him follow me. And where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, him my Father will honor.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord will stand forever. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that it is your all-powerful word that we come to again this morning as your people.

Lord, we desperately need your word. We need to see Jesus. We need to see our own weakness in light of him, and we need to know what it is he calls us to.

[5 : 58] Father, we ask for your grace, your spirit to work in our lives today through the preaching of your word. For our good and for your glory, we ask this in your precious son's name.

Amen. Please be seated. So it's Palm Sunday. It's a familiar Sunday. It's one of those been-there-done-that Sundays, especially for those of you who grew up in the church.

Maybe you're thinking, okay, yeah, the palms, Palm Sunday. Heard this story. Wonder which text he's going to go to. Maybe it'll be Zechariah. Maybe it'll be Psalm 118. Maybe it'll be Mark or Luke or John or Matthew.

Take your pick. They're all there. They've all been preached through many times, and you all have heard them. Now, because we're so comfortable with this, because we know what's going on, we've seen this and heard this, I want to take some time to fill in more of the context of the time, and I want to build out the scenery, if you will, of this drama that's taking place.

There's so much going on here that it is hard to keep up with, and what I'm going to give you now is fairly substantial, but I know that it's not everything. I know that there is more.

[7 : 18] So here we go. Jesus is entering Jerusalem as the king. So we could just stop there and recognize that and think about the significance of that.

Here he comes, finally, into Jerusalem as king, riding on the fold of a donkey. Both he and John the Baptist began their ministries, right? We read this in Matthew, saying the kingdom is at hand, the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus preaches all through the gospel of Matthew about life in the kingdom. Back in John chapter 1, when Nathanael sees him, Nathanael says, Rabbi, you are the son of God.

You are the king of Israel. Zechariah prophesied when the king came, he'd come on a donkey. And Jesus is doing just that.

Also at this time, it's the feast of the Passover. So people are coming from far away, from all over the empire. There are hundreds of thousands at least.

[8 : 26] Some say as many as millions, but I'm inclined to think probably more in the hundreds of thousands number, coming and arriving in a town that isn't meant to hold hundreds of thousands of people.

So it is a huge, it's a time of huge influx into the city of Jerusalem, into the whole area, into what in modern terms would amount to a little village.

We are seeing hundreds of thousands of people pour in from lands and cultures all around coming to celebrate the Passover. The crowd was also coming because Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead, which was obviously a really big deal.

And people were coming. We heard this. People were coming wanting to see Jesus as a result of this. Also as a result of all that had been going on, there was a plot stirring that had been brewing for some time to kill Jesus.

And there was another plot that was also just brewing to kill Lazarus because he was not helpful to the cause of the religious elite of that day.

[9 : 44] A lot is going on. The palm branches. The palm branches were huge in that day.

They were like a national flag being waved. And these palm branches were pulled out from somewhere, wherever the palms were. And they went and got them, knowing Jesus was coming.

And they waved them in the air and they put them on the street, along with clothes on the street, paving the way, as it were, for the king. Now 200 years earlier, when the Greeks had taken Jerusalem, the Maccabees twice had gone and retaken the city of Jerusalem from the Greeks.

And twice, as that happened, a new king came into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, and they put palm tree branches down on the ground before him.

This was a known thing. This was an understood thing that was being done. This signified the king is coming into the city. It would have been an obvious giveaway of what was going on.

[10 : 56] If you want to go back a few verses here in this chapter in John 12 and look for a little more, perhaps subtle significance.

You remember the gospel reading last week, I read the story of Mary pouring out that costly oil on Jesus. And Jesus, who was the king and was about to go ride in to the royal city, was anointed.

So he had just received an anointing and then he's going into the city as the king. So then the next day, having been Saturday, the next day today would be Sunday.

As he approached the city, they laid their palms down and the people understood what was going on. As we read earlier in Luke and as I've read for you here, they said the words, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel.

Now those last four words could have had any of them arrested. easily. By the nearest Roman guard, any of them who would have heard them say that could have very quickly wrapped their arms around them, put them in chains and taken them away.

[12 : 21] This was the very point that Pilate sought to determine in his trial. Are you the king of the Jews? It should be a hint to us of the level of nationalistic fervor, the flag waving, the excitement for their king finally coming to them.

It should have been clear. Anyone caught saying those words could have been quickly dragged away.

And here they are shouting in the streets, the king of Israel is here. Only five days later, a crowd would gather, but this time they would shout something very different.

I'm not suggesting that these are the same crowds. There's nothing in the text that tells us that they are the same crowds.

And there are, there is some evidence in the story that suggests that it could be separate crowds. Most likely was. There may have been some overlap, but that's not the point.

[13 : 30] I'm not suggesting that this is what we need to focus on. I'm suggesting that we need to ask ourselves the question, which crowd would we be in? Would you be in the crowd of those who, on that triumphal entry Sunday, welcomed the king and all that that meant?

Or would you be in the crowd that a few days later shouted, crucify him. Give us the criminal, crucify him. Would we be like John the Baptist who had a really good thing going?

Right? He had quite a following and it was growing. Yet when Jesus showed up, he said, he must increase. I must decrease.

Would that be you? Or would you possibly be put out jealous of all the attention Jesus received? Are your loyalties to your king or to yourself?

That's the question we have to answer. The church has largely failed in this in the last couple of years and we cannot stop asking ourselves this question.

[14 : 56] we cannot stop evaluating ourselves, holding ourselves accountable. Not all who should have welcomed Jesus openly into Jerusalem did so.

It's interesting, just a little further down in the narrative in verse 42, we read that although many did not believe him, many of the rulers did believe him.

But because the Pharisees did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

I'm going to let that sit for a minute.

Just let that hang in the air over us. those words have significant relevance and they need to pierce our hearts.

[16 : 29] They love the praise of men more than the praise of God. What an apt description of the church.

the broader church over the last couple of years. People have been called to choose between confessing their belief, their allegiance, their loyalty to Christ or to man and they have chosen man.

They feared man more than God. They loved the praise of man more than the praise of God. God as we gather here for worship we are in the safest place in Bristol to do this.

We publicly say and do things that would not be well received even by some in the church. It's the safest place for us to do and say things like our confession of sin, to actually kneel before the Lord in prayer and be thought Roman Catholic of course because only Roman Catholics kneel.

We haven't sung any psalms yet in our service but we'll sing three during the Lord's Supper. Also not a popular practice.

[17 : 58] I wear this robe and this collar. You keep your children here in corporate worship for the sakes of their souls. We confess our faith together. reciting a catechism question written and answer written 450 years ago.

Makes us weird. Makes us odd. And we do these things with great fervor and conviction. Again, we are in the safest place to do this.

But what about tomorrow? What about Tuesday? What does Christ mean to you on a discouraging Wednesday morning when you're surrounded by people who don't share your faith?

How real are these words then? How convincing is your faith then? Do you choose the praise of man or the praise of God? Would you take so fervent a stand if the tide of the crowd was turning against you or against him?

Or another way to ask that is how easily are you silenced? Is your Christian faith simply another way of being American?

[19 : 22] like it was for these Jews waving that national flag? When you receive a concerning report from the doctor or you feel some weird phantom pain, maybe it's a chest pain or something like that, I can relate to that, I get them all the time now, hopefully mostly because I'm working out, but I also know there's other possibilities.

When you get those, are you still confessing at that moment that you belong body and soul, in life and in death, not to yourself, but to your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ?

God and that he protects you so well that without the will of your Father in heaven, not a hair can fall from your head. I was reminded of those words yesterday morning before I went out.

I did as I sometimes do in the morning. I stuck my head down in the water and got it all wet so I could comb it. I came up a little bit. I looked at all that hair. Oh boy, I'm in trouble.

Oh, I thought of these words. I knew what I was going to be preaching. Not a hair can fall from my head. Not a hundred can fall from my head apart from his will.

[21 : 01] When you struggle to believe that God forgives you, that God isn't holding something over you, do you live by faith or by feelings? Do you recall that at the cost of his own blood, he has fully paid for your sins and completely freed you from the dominion of the devil?

Do you believe it? Do you embrace it with the same fervor that you would here on Sunday morning? Our worship is glorious.

We love it. We love to be here. We love to be here together. We love to say these things, to sing these songs, to pray these prayers as fervently as we do because we believe them with all our hearts.

At least that should be the reason. We heartily amen the words of the Psalms, our hymns, our prayers. But would that same fervor press you on on a Tuesday morning when the mundaneness of another load of laundry hits or another dirty diaper or another messy room or another problem at work sets in?

Would it press you on with the same fervor? If not, you are forgetting that over which Christ reigns and what matters to him. Everything.

[22 : 27] Everything. When your financial world feels the crunch of the latest decline in our economy, how do you respond in your heart? What's stirred in you?

Is it worry or is it worship? Do you remember the words you prayed about the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer for refugees, prisoners, and all who are in danger, that they may be relieved and protected?

Or is that all only for Sunday? When you're tempted to cheat, just slightly, on your taxes, do you remember praying that God would cause those in positions of public trust to serve justice?

And do you serve justice? is your loyalty to the king or to yourself? Parents, as you're teaching, discipling, your children, bringing them up throughout the week, are you thinking in terms of the knowledge of the Lord, filling the earth through them?

And does that spirit control your work with them? Or are you more controlled by your agenda, your goals for them? The words of the hymns that we stand and openly sing are words we confess together to be true.

[24 : 08] We confess that we believe them. Do you know what you've sung so far this morning? Have you paid any attention to it?

Do you remember what the hymns were? Do you remember what verse 3 said? Or were you just coasting on autopilot?

They're powerful words. And more importantly, do the words that you profess as you sing, as you show this loyalty to your king here, do they carry you pass this service and all through your week?

Are you willing to confess him when it's going to result in the criticism, anger, and retribution of men? Are you willing?

Will you do that? Or will you shrink back? will you be like those men who didn't want to be cast out of the synagogue? It wasn't even a matter of life and death for them.

[25 : 30] It was just a matter of position, of reputation. there is more more more more more opportunities.

So I think you should ask the question, all of these questions, will you do this? Where are your loyalties? things? This is the time for courageous faith to be fostered, to be grown and built up, and for us all to reaffirm the things that we believe.

faith. This is a time for us, for men, women, and children who do not waver to confess their fear of God.

This is a time to not lose faith in what the king is doing. His master plan is glorious, we know that, and we are included in that plan as well, and we know that.

We are his church, his bride, his own precious possession. He loves us with an everlasting love, which was proven by his actions at the end of the week.

[26 : 44] We mustn't lose heart when difficulty comes. We cannot take a step back when difficulty comes. We need to step forward when it comes.

We need to look it in the eye. We need to be able to think biblically at that moment, and not strategically. You can do both, but let's start with biblically, and let that be the guide post for us.

We mustn't lose heart when hardship comes. We are in the early years of a victorious church history that God is writing. There's much more.

to come. Doug Wilson said, Jesus set his face in order to go to Jerusalem. He did this because he set his mind on the joy that was before him.

His entry into Jerusalem was an early step, and we have not yet come close to completing the journey that he began. We are still in the shallows of that joy.

[27 : 50] as you come to this table today, pay careful attention to the words you say, the things you do, the bread and wine you take, because in them you have tokens of assurance that he will not turn away from you.

Will you turn away from him? What will it take? For you young people, will it simply be the lure of the world? For you young men, will it be some girl you're interested in?

Or for you young ladies, some guy who leads you away? Children, will it be your own rebellious hearts against your parents?

That wickedness that's bound up in the heart of a child? That causes you to be more loyal to yourself than you are to your Lord?

Who tells you to obey them and honor them, to respect them? For all of you grown men and women here, you know probably pretty well what your proclivities are, what your weaknesses are.

[29 : 26] Are you going to make any provision for the flesh? Are you going to give any quarter to the enemy? Or are you willing to do whatever it takes to not let go of that loyalty to Christ?

are you willing to stand when all others will fall away? Are you willing to press in further with the gospel of Jesus Christ when the world believes they should close the doors or be quiet or sit down?

Are you willing to stand up? Are you more concerned about the praise of men around you or more concerned about the praise of God?

Which crowd would you begin? When you come to this table you'll be reminded why you should choose to be loyal to him to love him to serve him and why your loyalties should only be there because it was he who first was loyal to you to love you to serve you to provide all of this for you that's why we do this we are responding to his initiative we are responding to his sacrifice his laying his life down inspires us to lay our lives down his loyalty to the father's mission given to him inspires our loyalty to him his willingness to be beaten before the beating to live 30 years in the hellish existence of a human body to be separated left heaven where he was seated by his father left all of that glory to come be among people like us some of us can't bear each other for an hour or two and then we want to retreat to our homes to our books to our quiet

Jesus left home for 33 years to serve this is why we will stand loyal because he first did this for us and so we come knowing our place and also knowing his grace for us let's pray