

“THE GOSPEL FOR HARD TIMES.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

April 14, 2019, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: John 12:12-19

Introduction.

What a strange day Palm Sunday is. Here we are at the beginning of Holy Week enjoying our children as they wave palm branches and sing loud hosannas. And we have joined our voices with theirs.

And yet we are like Jesus, we know what's ahead, we know how quickly the hosannas will turn to crucify Him, crucify Him. How fickle is the human heart. How fickle is life.

Everything can be going so well, and then suddenly something happens, some bad news, some accident, some change of events, and the darkness and fear move in.

As we have been learning how to preach the Gospel to ourselves it became evident to me that the Gospel according to Palm Sunday is a great help and encouragement to us especially when life is unsettling or fickle or just plain hard.

Let's consider seven lessons from Palm Sunday, seven truths of the Gospel from this day.

The Gospel of Palm Sunday reminds us God is a sovereign God. He truly does rule and overrule all things.

Riding into Jerusalem might not seem like a big deal until you consider that Jesus did so in fulfillment of a prophecy given five hundred years before by the prophet Zechariah.

John 12:15 “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!”

Jesus told His disciples to go into Jerusalem and at such and such a spot they would find a donkey tied up and everything was just as Jesus said.

The OT didn't just predict that a Savior would come someday, but it gave the smallest of details. Who really cares He rode on a donkey? God does. God cares about all the details of all His creation and especially all the details of His children's lives.

This is still going on. God is doing everything exactly according to His perfect plan. You can take God at His Word, because He always keeps it. God is in control over every situation in our lives. Nothing happens that is not just as He planned.

Preach the sovereignty of God to yourself in every circumstance and event, which leads to the second great truth.

The Gospel of Palm Sunday reminds us God is very purposeful and meaningful in all He does.

Even when we don't understand what is going on or why, God does. The disciples didn't understand at all, they were very confused by the events of the last week.

For three years the disciples followed Jesus and were apart of many amazing things. Yet they didn't understand the true meaning and depths. Sometimes they were completely off base.

Arguing about who would sit where.

Suggesting they call down fire from heaven.

Disagreeing with Jesus about what would happen to Him in Jerusalem.

Even saying things that made Jesus say, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

The apostle John who is writing this text is confessing his own ignorance and cluelessness while these things were going on. For them the hindsight came after Jesus was glorified and the Holy Spirit came to teach and remind them of all things Jesus had said and done.

We are greatly benefited by being on this side of the cross. But there are many things we will only understand on the other side, in heaven. Now we see dimly, then we will see fully.

Think about how many of the events in your life make sense with time, how many of the connected dots start to fill in the picture, then imagine what a glory heaven will be, what cause for worship and rejoicing and genuine gratitude when we see the whole big picture in all its perfect and glorious detail.

We can spend a good bit of our lives on earth without much thought or understanding to why we are here, what our eternal purpose is, and how God is using us and working through us for His glory and His redemptive plans.

Some day we will be awakened to some of the most amazing and astounding realities that we were totally unconscious of. Everything has a redemptive purpose and is meaningful moving toward a redemptive outcome. Live aware that only in Him do we live and move and have our being (before God, coram deo).

The Gospel of Palm Sunday reminds us suffering, affliction and trial are not interruptions or detours, but part of the purposeful, redemptive plan.

There is no Gospel without enduring hardship, without suffering and sacrifice.

What would have happened if Jesus rode in to Jerusalem on that royal donkey to the praises of the people shouting “Blessed in the king who comes in the name of the Lord” and He took His throne then? Suppose He took the easy way and set up His kingdom at that time?

If Jesus had taken His rightful throne on Palm Sunday, we would not be waving palm branches today, we would not be singing hosanna today, we would not be preaching the Gospel to ourselves, because there would be no Gospel to preach.

There is no Gospel without the cross, there is no Easter without suffering and sacrifice. The Gospel of Palm Sunday reminds us that our Lord’s kingdom is nothing like the world’s kingdoms and Jesus is nothing like our earthly rulers.

Romans 5:3-5 We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

James 1:2-4, 12 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

“God’s grace abounds to me even through trials. Because I am a justified one, He subjugates every trial and forces it to do good unto me” (Milton Vincent, p. 63).

God apportions every circumstance, He carefully measures it out, this much and no more. God causes all things to work together for our good, for His God-glorifying redemptive purposes.

Even the very worst affliction and trial is nothing compared to what I deserve in hell, and it is nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory that awaits me in heaven.

The Gospel of Palm Sunday reminds us if we follow the path Jesus followed it will lead to a crucifixion, a dying to ourselves.

The path to glory leads through death. To have eternal life we must die to ourselves.

“When my flesh yearns for some prohibited thing, I must die. When called to do something I don’t want to do, I must die. When I wish to be selfish and serve no one, I must die. When shattered by hardships that I despise, I must die. When wanting to cling to wrongs done against me, I must die. When enticed by allurements of the world, I must die. When wishing to keep besetting sins secret, I must die. When wants that are borderline needs are left unmet, I must die. When dreams that are good seem shoved aside, I must die” (Milton Vincent, p. 41).

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The Gospel of Palm Sunday reminds us of the importance of humility.

God puts a very high premium or value on humility. The Gospel deliberately strips away all pride and grounds for boasting.

Jesus humbled Himself and came to earth and as a man. From the very beginning to the very end, Jesus’ life was marked by humility. Jesus humbled Himself to ride on a donkey and later to submit to death.

Hard times are humbling, they show us our dependence on God and others. We don’t know the Gospel and are not living by it if we are not being humbled by it.

The spiritual life is filled with paradoxes.

The proud will be humbled, the humble will be exalted.

Those who seek their life will lose it, those who lose their life will gain it.

Those who would be great must serve.

When we are weak then we are strong. “Power is perfected in weakness” (II Cor. 12:9).

We are reminded that God strips away our pride, there is nothing for us to boast or brag about. All I contribute is hell-deserving sin.

The more we cultivate humility the more we will see God’s grace all around us.

Give God the glory for everything in your life.

In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)

Apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5)

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away (Job 1:21)

What do we have that we have not received (I Cor 4:7)

“A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven” (John 3:27)

“It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13)

I Corinthians 1:28-29 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Make it a habit to give God all the glory, all the credit, all the praise. It is all by grace alone.

The Gospel of Palm Sunday reminds us love expresses itself in sacrifice.

The people were looking for salvation and success.

They wanted salvation from Roman rule and earthly tyranny.

They wanted someone to fight their earthly battles and enemies.

Jesus came to give salvation and suffering/sacrifice.

He came to give them salvation from the tyranny of sin.

Jesus came to fight our much more deadly spiritual battles and enemies.

He set His face on Jerusalem for this very purpose. Jesus willingly sacrifices Himself.

John 10:17-18 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

This is a remarkable thing. Jesus was a willing sufferer. He was willing to suffer the worst pain and torture for the sake of our souls, to rescue and redeem lost and ruined souls. He died the worst death that we might be spared the worst death and life forever.

We have a willing and loving Savior who delighted to do the Father's will. He loved us and He embraced the cross for us. This is why there is joy in heaven when one sinner repents. It was for that joy and love that Jesus laid down His life.

We show the Gospel every day when we make some sort of sacrifice.

When we return kindness for evil.

When we are tired but play with the kids anyway.

When we give up our place in line, or our turn to do something.

When we let go of the best for the something less.

When we do something good for someone who doesn't deserve it.

"To show any sort of care for others at all, some sort of sacrifice is necessary every day - to be magnanimous instead of vindictive, to stand back and let someone else share the limelight, to absorb the anger of a teenager in order to show firm guidance, to be patient with a parent who has Alzheimer's, to refrain from undermining a colleague, to give away money one would like to spend on luxuries, to give up smoking, to bear with someone who can't give up smoking - all such things, large and small, require sacrifice. What would life be without it?" (Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, p. 275).

(Moms and dads; elders and deacons).

The Gospel helps us make sacrifices, to actually want to be more like Christ.

The Gospel of Palm Sunday enables us to do hard things and endure hard things.

The Gospel is meant to strengthen us and for that reason we will never outgrow our need for it and our need to preach it every day and practice it every day.

Preach the Gospel of Palm Sunday to yourself, reminding those voices in your head, that God is sovereign over every detail, He is in control, and His plans are purposeful and good, from before the foundations of the earth. Even suffering and sacrifice are from Him and Christ endured for us so we can endure in Him. He endured the humility of death, that we could humble ourselves and die to ourselves.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

I Corinthians 15:58 Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Hebrews 12:1-2 ... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.