

## ***The Scripture's Testimony About Christ***

John 12:12-33

The Gospel of John Sermon Series

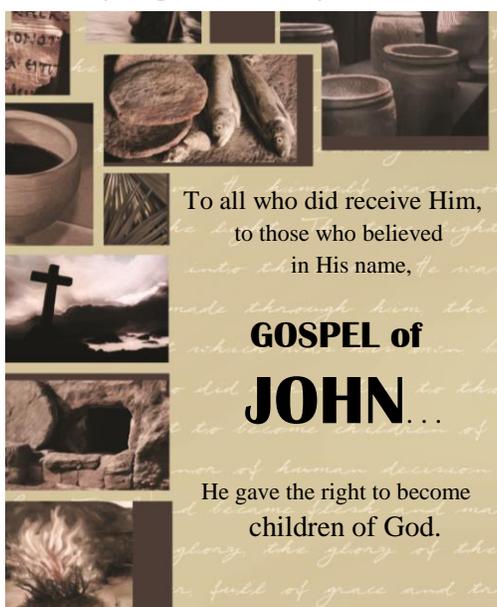
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

April 13, 2014 (Palm Sunday)

**TEXT:** John 12:12-33

It is Palm Sunday this morning, marking the beginning of Holy Week. We have been on a quest this spring in the Gospel of John following a set of testimonies about Jesus: testimonies from



John the Baptist, that He would increase and I must decrease; testimonies from Mary, that we are to do whatever He tells you. We've heard testimonies from God the Father, and last Sunday, the Holy Spirit. This morning, we turn our attention to listen to the testimony of the Scripture itself about our Lord Jesus. Palm Sunday is a particularly special day for us as Christians for it marks the most holy week of the year.

As we turn our attention to the Scripture's testimony about Jesus, we remember that Jesus enters Jerusalem deliberately, with great intention, on Palm Sunday, riding on a chosen mount designed to call our attention to the Word of God. Jesus' entrance into the city, though, does

not end with the waving of the palms, but it proceeds to the place where King Jesus ascends His throne. This is not a throne of gilded gold or silver, but a throne fashioned out of two crossbeams nailed to each other. Our King achieves His glory, His great victory, not by piercing the heads of His enemies, but by allowing His enemies to pierce Him. Jesus says in John 5:39:

*"These are the Scriptures that testify about Me."*

So, we look at the scene of Jesus' coming in on Palm Sunday. In John 12:12 we read:

*"The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem."*

To herald His arrival, the crowd took palm branches and rushed out to meet Him.

John 12:13 tells us:

*“They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!’”*

*Hosanna* is an acclamation of praise, and this language itself is a quote from Psalm 118, a Psalm of pilgrimage sung in route to celebrate the festival of God, The waving of palms is a sign in antiquity to herald the advent or the arrival of a King. In this way, the crowds celebrate Jesus’ arrival. It’s a very public scene in contrast to John 7:3-5, where His brothers had told Jesus:

*“You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that Your disciples may see the miracles You do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since You are doing these things, show Yourself to the world.”*

Jesus did not keep their counsel at that time, but He does here. On Palm Sunday, Jesus’s identity is out in the open for all to see and praise, and to be heralded as the King of glory.

John tells us that as Jesus approached the city, He deliberately chose to ride in on a donkey, a detail that all four Gospel writers include. The donkey is the Mercedes-Benz of the ancient world. The person who rides on a donkey signals that he is a royal figure, the leader of a city. Judges 10:1-4 tells us:

*“After the time of Abimelech a man of Issachar, Tola son of Puah, the son of Dodo, rose to save Israel. . . . He led Israel twenty-three years; then he died, and was buried in Shamir. He was followed by Jair of Gilead, who led Israel twenty-two years. Jair had thirty sons, who rode thirty donkeys.”*

Judges 12:12-14 tells us about a man named Abdon, son of Hillel who led Israel:

*“He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys.”*

To ride on a donkey is to signal leadership of the city. It is also to signal the type of king that Jesus is. There is a great difference between approaching the city mounted on a donkey and approaching the city riding on a warhorse. Jesus comes into Jerusalem not riding on a horse of war, for He need not contest for His kingship. He is the true King: He comes to the city mounted upon a donkey, not upon a horse of war. A horse of war is a vain hope in Scripture, linked with Israel’s idolatry and failure trust in God. Deuteronomy 17:16 says:

*“The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them.”*

He told them that the proliferation of horses is an expression of the king’s failure trust God.

Psalm 33:16-18 tells us:

*“A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The*

*war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love.” (RSV)*

Jesus comes to the city as the true and legitimate King. We are to recognize Him by His chosen mount. As all of these events were happening, John tells us that His disciples did not fully grasp what was happening in the moment, and there is hope for you and for me in this. Sometimes God is acting and working in our lives, and we don't fully grasp it in the moment. Isn't it true that God sometimes acts in a way that takes our breath away? It's beyond our ability to fully grasp in the moment, and yet we realize later that's what God was doing. So it is with the disciples here. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about Jesus beforehand, and that the testimony of Scripture from of old speaks of Jesus' coming in this way so that we might recognize Him. John tells us in John 12:15 the meaning of these events. He says that Jesus came in this way, as it is written:

*“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; See, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.”*

John has actually joined two quotations of Scripture. Listen to these stunning passages. The first line is from Zephaniah 3:14-15 when God announces to His people an occasion of great and tremendous joy:

*“Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment, He has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.”*

Zephaniah 3:16-17 continues:

*“On that day they will say to Jerusalem, ‘Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save.’”*

Our God is mighty to deliver and save, and it is this fact alone that can quiet our fears. We have many circumstances that generate fear, and yet God says the Lord is with you, mighty and powerful to save. This is the reason, above all reasons, that our fears vanish.

John continues in the second part of this quotation from Zechariah 9:1. It's a statement, an oracle of God, that He will triumph over His enemies, that He will rescue and protect His people. In Zechariah 9:9, we hear again the summons to rejoice:

*“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

The real King has arrived, and the consequences of His arrival are immense, with implications for everyone on the planet. This real King arrives, and in Zechariah 9:10 we read:

*“I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken.”*

This King, the real King of glory, will then proclaim His peace to the nations, His rule to the ends of the earth, from sea to sea, from the great River to the uttermost limits of the earth. This King, the real King sent forth from God, will be the King of glory. He comes in humility and His Kingship is for all peoples of the earth, the prophets declare. So, Jesus comes to us on Palm Sunday as none other than this King of glory. He comes to the heralding acclamation of the crowds: “Hosanna! Blessed is the King!”

Then John tells us a very precious detail. In John 12:20, we read:

*“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast.”*

In that great pilgrimage throng, within the midst of these people gathered to celebrate, there were some foreigners in the midst of the celebration. John tells us specifically their ethnicity, that they were Greeks. They were Greeks who had grown up with a pagan idolatry, worshiping many gods, but who were drawn to the one true and living God. These Greeks press themselves up in that assembly gathered on this festival, and they see Jesus. They approach Philip with the request in John 12:21 that all should make:

*“Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”*

Is it possible for us to have an audience with Jesus? People who had come from a great distance were drawn to the true and living God. It is so precious that the nations are edging in at the margins of the scene. John tells us that they are there, and it is at this moment, at this arrival of the nations, at this beginning of Holy Week, that Jesus then announces in John 12:23:

*“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”*

This is the moment when King Jesus arrives on the field to take up His throne, to bring salvation to His people. How will He do this? How will King Jesus achieve success? How will He bring salvation to the nations? Jesus tells us very explicitly in John 12:24:

*“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

The Welshman C.H. Dodd says:

*“Without the ‘death’ of the seed, no crop;  
Without the death of Christ, no world-wide gathering of humanity.”*

Death is the precondition for life. What looks like the grain of wheat's demise is, in fact, its harvest. So with Jesus' cross: What looks like the proof against Jesus' authenticity, actually proves to be the supreme argument for it, for this King will come and draw people to Himself.

He will come to die, to give His life as a ransom for us.

Jesus says a second line in John 12:25:

*“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”*

King Jesus has come not just to be heralded and acclaimed by the crowds, but He has come on Palm Sunday to come to Good Friday to die for us. Augustine says:

*“If you want to keep your soul safe forever, you have to hate it for a time.”*

Jesus is teaching us directly the nature of His Kingship is to come. The cross is not a mistake, an accident, but it is the very intention of God. Whoever loves his life will lose it, but the giving away of the life keeps it forever. The Bible is translated often; it's translated in English often as English changes, as knowledge of ancient languages increases. I love the Wycliffe Bible translation. Wycliffe's mission is to translate the Bible into the languages of the world. One translation that was done recently, and published in 2000, was a translation done into Hawaiian Street Pidgin English, so that the people of Hawaii who walk the streets could read the Scripture and understand it. This New Testament is called *Da Jesus Book*. I like to check other translations, and I found *Da Jesus Book* translation of John 12:25 just fantastic. This is the translation of the statement of our Lord in this version. I'll do my best, though I don't speak Hawaiian Pidgin that well. It reads:

*“Whoeva like hang on to dea life, dey going lose um. But whoeva give up dea life in dis world goin hang on to um and stay live to da max foeva.”*

Doesn't that capture part of what our Lord is saying? Interestingly, that translation was done by Joseph Grimes, linguistics professor at Cornell University. He worked on that translation for 12 years, with 27 native Pidgin speakers. Isn't that great? To be alive *to da max foeva*, that's the promise of Jesus, and the way of Jesus to get to that is the cross. Jesus says in John 12:26:

*“Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves Me.”*

According to Jesus, If you want to follow Him, you pick up your cross and follow Him. Jesus says in John 12:27:

*“Now My heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'?”*

No way, for it was for this very reason that Jesus came, and He says in John 12:28:

*“Father, glorify Your name!”*

The Father thunders from heaven for the third time in the Gospel narratives. The Father thunders from heaven when Jesus is baptized: "This is My beloved Son"; He thunders from heaven again at the Transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him"; and now, at the beginning of Holy Week, God the Father thunders from heaven again: "This is My Son; this is My mission to save the world." Jesus prays for God to be glorified, and the Father says in John 12:28:

*"I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."*

Do you have the faith this morning to believe that the greatest manifestation of the glory of God and the love of God for the world is the dying of Christ?

Leslie Newbigin, a missionary in India says:

*"That the crucifixion of a man should be the ultimate manifestation of the glory of God is as scandalous to Jewish religious messianism as it is absurd to Greek philosophy. But it is true, for the glory of God is the outpouring of love which is supremely revealed in the obedience of Jesus to death and in the action of the Father who gives His only Son for the life of the world."*

It is a scandal; it is absurd to our philosophical way, but it is true. Jesus says in John 12:31:

*"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out."*

The prince of this world is banished. This King, King Jesus, comes to the acclamation of the crowds, but He heads straight for the cross of Good Friday. This King does not pierce His enemies, but allows His enemies to pierce Him. He achieves His victory, the defeat of sin and death and hell, with this as His instrument. The cross of Christ is the devil's defeat, the ransom for sinners. Jesus says in John 12:32:

*"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."*

This is the promise of the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. This cross has immense power. This cross has a magnetic attraction for lost and sinful people like us, for it is this cross of Jesus Christ whereby our sins are atoned for, whereby our Savior bleeds and dies, whereby His offering for sin is accepted and the gates of hell and the power of death are broken.

Next Sunday, Easter Sunday, it might just be that the praise will be thunderously loud, for the power of death is broken forever by this King and His rule. Jesus says in John 3:14-16:

*"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Are you fearful this morning of perishing? The testimony of the Scriptures is to not fear. Do not fear, for your true King has come in humility, bearing salvation, to die for you and for me.

This is Holy Week, brothers and sisters and friends, and I want to challenge you from the Word of God to slow down. Slow down because this is the high point of the Christian year. Enter the story and relive it; keep your eyes fixed on Jesus; receive the testimony of the Scripture that these things were written about Christ; and allow the Scripture to make sense of reality for you. If you are a parent or grandparent, reread the story of Christ's coming and impress these truths on your children and grandchildren. Quiet your soul this week. I want you to say "no" to a couple of things this week, and then explain why. Say "no" so you can clear out space for your schedule on Good Friday and explain why. Say: "I have a commitment on Friday. I have to attend a family funeral for the most important member of our family and the service is Friday. I'm sorry, I'm committed." Let the full weight of Good Friday sink down upon your soul. Tell someone that you have plans for next Sunday. "Would you believe that I received an invitation to the inauguration ceremony of the King? I can't wait to go. There's no place in this world I would rather be than at this inauguration." It will feel that way here next Sunday. Say "no" to a few commitments and make room in your soul for the testimony of the Scripture, and sink these truths deep into your hearts. There is a coherence to our lives and to all of reality when we read the Scriptures, when we receive their testimony about Jesus.

I remember when this became vivid to me in an eight-floor descent of an elevator in California. I was in California preparing to go overseas to teach in China, and I found myself stepping into the elevator with the president of the company, a man named Danny Yu, a very bright man. We were in the elevator alone and I thought: "I have 90 seconds alone with Danny Yu. What question will I ask him?" I waited patiently until the doors closed, and I said: "Dr. Yu, how did you become a Christian?" I knew I had only 90 seconds to go down the eight stories, but he told me: "You know, if you accept the Scripture as the Word of God, then the Scripture will take you to the Person of Christ. That's all you really need to do, believe that the Scripture is the Word of God, and it will take you to faith in Jesus Christ." I thought that was a profound answer. The Scriptures' testimony. We reached the lobby floor, and I knew my time with him was over. The doors opened, and off ran Danny Yu to his next round of important meetings. I never got to talk with him alone again, but I knew from him, and many others, that the Scriptures testify about Jesus Christ, and if you receive them, they will take you to His throne of glory.

This is the joy and the celebration of Palm Sunday: that Jesus comes to the acclamation of the crowds, seated upon a donkey; that we would recognize His identity, the nature of His Kingship, and the fulfillment of the prophetic Word; and that upon His arrival, the nations of the world crowd in at the margins for an audience with the King. Having our full attention, what does this

King do but head straight to the cross to die for you and for me. These are the great truths of Christianity. Would you receive them?

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we praise You this morning. We honor You. We thank You that You chose to be high and lifted up on a cross. We praise You that the cross of Jesus Christ has great power to overcome our unbelief; power to bring the Person of Jesus uniquely into focus. Father, there is none like You. There is none like Your Son. We ask, Holy Spirit, that You would reveal Christ to us even right now, and that the doors of our hearts might be open to Him. We praise You for this Holy Week and ask that You would help us to say "no," that we might say "yes" to Jesus. We give You praise. We thank You for this place.

We ask in Jesus' Name, Amen.