

The King Is Celebrated
March-April Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
(Palm Sunday) March 28, 2021

TEXT: Luke 19:28-48



This morning we start Holy Week, as the Gospel writers start it for us. It's my favorite time of the year in our worshiping life. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all devote considerable attention to the moment of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. All four Gospel writers, in fact, give half of their space to Jesus' final week. This Holy Week, receives more literary attention than any other week in the Bible, much more than the creation of the world, for example. This week, that we remember starting this Sunday, creates a new world. It opens the gate of everlasting life. It reveals the identity and character of God and His saving purpose from of old. This morning we look at Luke's narrative. Luke is the only Gentile writer of the New Testament documents, the only one who makes a journey to Jerusalem in order to take the Word of God out from Jerusalem, which is where we will go after Easter. We will follow Luke's second great journey away from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, which reaches even unto us. Luke loved to travel. He describes extended travel in the book of Acts, but he also frames his Gospel in light of a great travel journey. That great journey starts in Luke 9. Can you imagine? Even in Luke 9:51, we read:

"When the days drew near for Him to be taken up, He set His face to go to Jerusalem."

The Gospel is built around this note of tension in Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, and that note of tension builds from Luke 9 to our text today, when Jesus arrives in the city. In verse 28, we read that He went on ahead. Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. In the Bible you always go up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is physically higher. When you go up from Jericho, it's about a six-hour walk and it is up the whole time. Jerusalem is physically higher, but Jerusalem is also theologically higher. So whether you come from the North, the South, the East or the West,

whatever your background, whatever your context, however much you have been exposed to Jesus, you always go up to where He is, because you approach the King.

It's the climax of the narrative of Jesus' saving mission for the world. It's Palm Sunday. We call it Palm Sunday for this acclamation of the crowds. It's the other gospel writers that give us this detail. This morning I want to help you remember the significance of Palm Sunday with an acronym – four things I want you to see about Jesus on Palm Sunday and Luke's narrative. If it helps you to keep track of the greatness of Christ, you can write these down. If it distracts you, then forget about it. Tim Keller once said, "I can really tell when people are hearing from God in the sermon, because they stop taking notes." Sometimes it helps us to take notes; sometimes it doesn't. I leave that to you and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Processes as the Promised King

Palm Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week, and, as we begin, I want you to note that "P" for Palm Sunday signifies for us that ***Jesus processes as the promised King***. The narrative signals for us that Jesus enters into the city, not as a pilgrim. Jesus enters into the city as the promised King, and He acts with intentionality to make this self-disclosure. When He drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the mount that is called Olivet, the Mount of Olives, He sent two disciples ahead. They went to the village to find a colt on which no one had ever sat. Jesus asked them to untie the donkey and bring it to Him. Remember, the donkey is like the Mercedes-Benz of the ancient world. Usually, if you go to someone's house, and you start leaving with their car, there's got to be some kind of dialogue. Usually they would ask why you are taking their car. Jesus knows this and tells the disciples what to say in Luke 4:31:

"If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'"

The answer is, simply and profoundly, "The Lord needs it." So if Jesus shows up at your house and says, "I need your car," just give Him your car. If Jesus shows up and says, "I need your house," let Him use your house. If Jesus shows up and says, "I need your time," give Him your time.

The disciples go, they untie this donkey, they bring it to Jesus, and then they seem to recognize what's happening. It's a huge public moment. This is not a private conversation. This is in the midst of the pilgrimage crowds processing to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. Josephus tells us that the population of Jerusalem went up tenfold, as two million people came from all over the Mediterranean world, fulfilling the requirements of Scripture to be present at those major festivals. A massive crowd is there, and Jesus is in the midst of it, and all of a sudden His disciples arrive with the donkey and start to act. They bring the donkey to Jesus, place their cloaks upon it, and then they set Jesus on the donkey. As Jesus begins to approach the city, they

spread their cloaks on the road. They go further, though. In Luke 4:37, we read:

“As He was drawing near – already on the way down the Mount of Olives – the whole multitude of His disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen.”

I love the detail that Luke records for us – that it was on the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, coming across the Kidron Valley. With this breathtaking panoramic view of Jerusalem before them, the whole multitude of the disciples couldn't hold it in. They began to praise God. They began to praise God with a loud voice. It was a loud voice – it wasn't quiet; it wasn't hidden; it was public; and they praise God for all the mighty works they had seen. They had seen remarkable things, and now they're seeing something extraordinary being enacted, embodied before their eyes, and they signal to us the meaning of it. This is an intentional self-disclosure of Jesus, and they say in Luke 4:38:

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Jesus' entrance to the city, mounted on a donkey, is a signal of the return of the King, the arrival of the Lord. The crowds echo back to heaven the angels' chorus from Christmas. Remember that? It seems like a long time ago, doesn't it? Remember the shepherds when they first saw the heavenly army break into song? The heavenly army and choir just burst forth and said, *“Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth.”* Now, as Jesus approaches the city of Jerusalem, that Christmas anthem receives its earthly reply: *“Glory to God in the highest,”* we say from earth, and *“Peace in heaven.”* Heaven and earth come together at Christmas and Easter. Some people think these events are so significant that it's the only time of the year that they come to church. That's okay, because those are the two most important moments in the year, but the other 50 Sundays are awesome, too. This is the moment when earth, if you will, replies back to that angelic choir. *“Blessed is the King who comes.”*

D.A. Carson writes that Jesus' action “was a planned event, a deliberate act of self-disclosure.” What is He revealing? He is revealing to us that He is the promised King. Jesus invokes intentionally the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. He enacts and embodies the storyline, the narrative of scripture. Remember the storyline that we have traced together since last fall. It's a storyline that begins with our ancestors, our first parents placed in a garden to reflect God's glory and His righteous ways, who sinned against Him and were driven into exile outside of His presence. All of us, ever since, have longed to return to this, our ancestral home, to the place of God's presence. Our ancestors were taken out of the land of slavery. They were rescued and redeemed and brought to a good and flourishing land, the land promised to Abraham. Yet they, too, were exiled, driven out of the land from disobedience. We saw this together. In 722 the Assyrians take the northern tribes. In 586 the Babylonians take the

southern tribes. There is a partial return under the Persians and a hope that God Himself would come back and rebuild and restore. God's presence had left. The city was torn down, and no Davidic king had sat on the throne ever since. It's the narrative of exile and return.

The prophets saw beyond these dark days and proclaimed hope. They said God would one day come back. God Himself would return in person. He would remove our idols. He would save us from our sins. He would install our King and bring salvation and blessing to the nations. Isaiah says, "I couldn't hold silent about it. I couldn't keep that to myself." That's the good news for the world that is promised, predicted, hoped for, and Jesus is taking that promise and saying, "This is happening right now before your eyes." Isaiah says, "*I couldn't hold it in.*" Jeremiah says, "*It was like fire in my bones.*" Isaiah says, "*Go through the gates of the city; build up the highway; remove the stones; lift up the standard. The Lord has proclaimed to the ends of the earth that He is coming, He is returning.*" Zechariah promises in Zechariah 2:10-11:

"Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. And many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst."

When God returns, the nations of the world will join in to receive the bounty of His forgiveness and salvation. The gospel is for all peoples. Easter is for everyone. Later, in Zechariah 9:9, this hope is expressed in a very concrete reality:

"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."

Why? Why such rejoicing? "*Your King is coming and you will know Him and you will recognize Him,*" Zechariah says, "*because He's coming with righteousness and bearing salvation, and He's coming in humility and nonaggression and riding on a donkey and that's how you will see Him.*" So Jesus tells the disciples, "*Go get the donkey,*" and He rides in on it, because it's Palm Sunday, and He is the promised King.

Jesus Arrives as Almighty God

Jesus' procession to the city as promised King also signals for us that Jesus arrives. This is the "A" of Palm Sunday. **He arrives as Almighty God.** Jesus comes not as an ordinary Passover pilgrim. He arrives as the return of God's very own presence. He arrives as Almighty God, and this is why the narrative takes a sudden turn, if you will. It's somewhat surprising. It's a loud celebratory atmosphere, and all of a sudden, in the midst of that celebration, Israel's religious leaders say, in Luke 4:39:

"Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."

That is, "Tell these people to stop." It's not that they are against music. It's not that they are against the celebration of Passover. Something is being signaled that they recognize would be blasphemous unless it were true. Their statement, "Rebuke the disciples," addressed Jesus as teacher, which He surely is. But He is much more than a teacher. Their response seeks to place Jesus back into this role alone, when, in fact, Jesus is embodying and acting and signaling the return of God Himself. Jesus' actions signal the return of God to the city, to the world. In Luke 4:40, Jesus answers:

"I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

If my disciples tried to hold in and hold back what's happening, then even the stones would begin to speak. Creation would thunder His praise if we held it in.

I love to travel. I'm looking forward to traveling again. I love to travel by ship. I love to travel by car. I love to travel by plane, and I do love to travel by train. The longest train ride I've ever taken was 86 hours. That's a train ride that you can settle into. You don't have to worry, "Am I going to miss my stop?" You settle in and get comfortable. I took an 86-hour train ride from Urumuqi to Beijing. It was a memorable trip. It was exciting when some of the passengers in the car realized that my teaching partner and I spoke a little Mandarin, and so a line formed, just to come and talk with us. We had moving conversation after conversation. From the time I lived in China, I will always remember the questions that came. The top three were, first, "How old are you?" I was fairly young to be teaching in a graduate school, so I grew a beard to look older. I would answer. The second question was, "How much money do you make?" Feeling a little awkward, I would answer, "Enough." It was the third question that was the most compelling: "Do you believe in God?" "Yes, I do." And they would say, "You have a college degree, and you believe in God? We've been taught our whole life that the only people who believe in God are old women and peasants." I said, "I have a God. I do have a college degree, and I had professors who believe in God." "Oh, amazing!"

I do believe in God because God came to this world. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem, and He signaled the return of God's own presence as He approached the city of Jerusalem. If we keep that to ourselves, then the rocks themselves would cry out. We cannot be contained. Jesus' image of the stones not only personifies creation, but it invokes this feature of the prophets that I love and I want you to treasure. Remember Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream? Nebuchadnezzar saw a statue of the kingdoms of this world and their decreasing glory. Then he looked and saw a stone cut without human hands – divine agency. You and I cannot be saved by any human being. It's a stone cut without human hands, you see. It's a stone that's hurled without human agency that lands and hits the statute at its base, and the kingdoms of this world topple. They are broken into pieces and shattered. They become like chaff on the

summer threshing floor, and the wind blows them away. This stone rises up like a mountain and fills the earth. When God acts and sends forth the stone, I wonder – I'm not sure, but I love to wonder – if this is what Jesus has in mind. For most of my Christian life, I've thought of the stones' crying out as just personifying creation. It may just be that. But this imagery of the stone is so significant in the prophets, that when Jesus says to the crowd – and everyone can hear Him – that the stones would cry out, what's He talking about? Is He talking about Daniel 2 and the stone that demolishes earthly kingdoms and rises as the kingdom of God, where there's room for all nations? Or maybe it's Isaiah 28:16, when the Lord says:

"Behold, I am the One who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be [put to shame].'"

Peter quotes this passage in an early Christian sermon. Maybe it's Psalm 118:22-23, when the pilgrimage crowd celebrate the stone that the builders rejected:

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

Jesus arrives in the city on Palm Sunday, not only as the promised King but as Almighty God, the One who comes to inaugurate the kingdom of God, the One who comes to topple the kingdoms of this world, the One who comes to be rejected in order to be placed as the cornerstone. It's a great atmosphere. It's celebratory. The people are singing. The religious leaders are saying, "Tell your folks to be quiet," and Jesus says that even the rocks will cry out, the stones will cry out, and it's so joyful. Do you feel the joy of Palm Sunday? It's so joyful, as Jesus approaches the city, and then Luke uniquely takes us up close to see Jesus. The other gospel writers don't tell us about this. Luke, the one who notices details and moments, whose Gospel is built around these intimate views of people, takes us up close to Jesus. In the midst of this celebratory crowd, the focus comes in on Jesus' face, and we see Him weeping. We see tears coming down the face of Jesus in the midst of this pilgrimage throng.

Jesus Weeps as Lamenting Lord

Jesus comes on Palm Sunday, not only as promised King, not only as the arrival of Almighty God, but He enters the city **as lamenting Lord**. This is the "L" of Palm Sunday. There are tears in Christianity. There are tears at the proximal heart of our faith. As we look at Jesus coming up to the city, as our eyes are fixed upon Him in celebration and joy and acclamation, we see that He is crying. He is crying, and He looks at the city and says in Luke 4:42:

"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Jesus looks at the city and begins to weep and lament. As you descend the Mount of Olives, even today the city of Jerusalem stretches out before you and fills your vision. The spot of



Jesus' weeping is marked on the descending slope, the western slope of the Mount of Olives. A small chapel, designed by the Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi, was constructed there. This chapel, in its uniqueness, is built to look like a tear dropping. The name of the chapel is *Dominus Flevit*, which translates from Latin as "the Lord wept." On this spot He wept. The teardrop shape of the chapel has four

large vessels that surround the cupola that were used in antiquity to collect tears. Inside this small chapel there is a striking window that opens and gives you the view of the city. It's a church that faces west. All other churches faced east except this one. If you look through this breathtaking window, you can see the Temple Mount, and you can see behind the Dome of the Rock today, the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was outside the city walls. You see Jesus approaching the city. You see the place where He will go to teach, and you see the place where He will be crucified. It's a moving scene, and many weep today when they visit this chapel.



Jesus looks out at the city, and He begins to cry. He weeps because He can see what's coming. He can see His own death. He can see the consequence of sin run rampant in the city. It's a sin that will manifest within a generation. Jesus laments over the city like the prophets of old and says in Luke 19:43-44:

"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."

They will not leave one stone upon another, because you did not know, you did not recognize the time of your divine visitation. God came. God returned, and you missed it. You missed it, because on the one side, Jerusalem became intoxicated with an ethnocentrism, with a religious nationalism that sparked into violence and clashed dramatically with Roman imperial ambition on the other side. Within a generation there would be a conflagration and a war that would destroy God's house and that would destroy the city. Jesus warned His followers that when they see Jerusalem surrounded, they should leave the city. In Luke 21:20-21, we read:

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it.”

The early historian Eusebius tells us that the Christian community left Jerusalem just before the noose of the Roman siege was tightened, because the kingdom of God proclaimed a different gospel than imperial ambition or religious nationalism. The kingdom of God is a rising mountain that fills the earth. Jesus lamented over the city, and He saw its imminent destruction, but He also saw that He would step out in front of it. Without His saving work, you and I will perish in that same dynamic. We will choose a cause. We will define ourselves by our own cause and seek salvation from it, and it will destroy us, or we will seek to draft onto a foreign power with other gods, promising prosperity, success and fame, and it will destroy us. Jesus goes out in front. He goes out in front to be betrayed by Israel's own religious leaders and to be condemned by imperial Rome. He goes out in front to face this battle for us. He goes out in front to take the wrath of God against the sin of the world in every variety, and He continues His relentless march to the city. He is the promised King. He returns as Almighty God. He is the lamenting Lord. He reaches the city, enters through the pilgrimage gates, and arrives at the Temple Mount. He enters the Temple Mount area, the largest public square in the ancient world, a dramatic esplanade set on top of monumental walls and stones. It could accommodate 200,000 people on it.

Jesus Enters as Master of the House

Jesus entered **as the Master of His house**. This is the “M” of Palm Sunday. When He arrived at the Temple Mount, He began to drive out those who were selling. The other Gospel writers fill out this picture. He overturned the tables of the money changers. He drove out those who were selling doves. Remember that the dove is the offering that's given by the poor. Joseph and Mary offer doves. Jesus was born into a poor family in this world. Jesus drives them out. He shuts down the sacrificial system. In Luke 4:46, Jesus is quoted as saying:



“My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.”

He speaks from Isaiah and Jeremiah. In Isaiah 56:7, He says:

“These I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

The ending phrase is understood as a house of prayer for all nations. The ESV translates it as “a

den of robbers.” The text is more literally translated is “a cave of rebels.” My house is supposed to be a place that's open and accessible, and you've made it closed, difficult to get to. My house is supposed to be a place of hospitality for the nations who stream to it, seeking to know God and walk in His ways, and you've made it inhospitable. My house is supposed to be a place where God's good news is shared with all who need it, and you've made it a place where God's goodness is hoarded like a solitary possession. What a contrast between a house of prayer for all people and the cave of rebels: one open and one closed, one welcoming and one hostile, one drawing all near and one excluding and taking up arms to defend it. Jesus' action in the temple is public and contends for the heart of the nation.

There's really no turning back from this point. Jesus is acclaimed as promised King. He is heralded as the arrival of Almighty God. His tears are visible, as the Lord who laments. He laments the imminent destruction of the city, as does Jeremiah. He then comes into the temple courts and says this is what My house and My Kingdom are supposed to be all about, and you have twisted it. There's no going back. The reaction to Jesus is opposite then and today. There's really no neutral ground here. We read that when the chief priests and scribes, the leading men of the city, heard Him, they thought this man has to go. “This is preaching we can't handle. We cannot tolerate this assessment of us.” Luke says that they were seeking to destroy Him. This reaction is contrasted with the reaction of the people who were hanging on His every Word. You see, when Jesus comes on Palm Sunday, there's really no other option than these two. If He is Promised King, if He is Almighty God, if He is the lamenting Lord who is going out in front of us to take the judgment, if He is the master of the house, then you either have to get rid of Him, or you have to hang on His every Word. As we start this week, Palm Sunday, my prayer for us is that we would be those people who hang on His every word.

Let me apply these very briefly, because each of these aspects of Palm Sunday calls forth a response from us, and it also requires us to turn away from something.

Palm Sunday, “P” for the promised King – what does this mean for us? It means we have to receive Him. He is coming as the promised King, and we receive Him. Consider the parable that Jesus told just before the scene. Some refused His rule. They rejected His reign: “We don't want you to reign over us.” This is what it means to receive Christ. It means to receive Him as your King. If you've never done that, you can do that now. You could say, simply, “Lord, I've made a mess of my life, and I need You to reign over it.” If you've lived a perfect life and done everything right, you don't need a Savior. But as I look out, I don't see anyone like that. As I look inside, I don't see anyone like that. Receive the King. This also means that we must reject any other who would claim to save us. Stay far back from any other saviors. There's just one King.

“A” for Almighty God – this means we must confess Him as God. That means we acknowledge Him publicly. We speak of Him and declare Him. Just as Jesus said that the disciples could not remain silent, we, too, must not remain silent. Holy Week is a great week to talk about Jesus – it just is. I know that Americans, in general, like to keep things on the surface, but one of the great blessings of this past year is that it's cracked our souls open a bit, so we are willing. People are willing, and it's okay to talk about the events of Holy Week. You can say: “This week is really significant.” You can even use it as a catchphrase: “What were you doing last Easter?” “What happened for you between last Easter and this Easter?” That's a great icebreaker. I want to challenge you to invite people to join you, as we retrace this journey this week. It's a great week. People are open and hungry. We need this King. We need God's presence in our lives, so don't remain silent. Invite someone to join you this Holy Week.

“L” for the lamenting Lord means there is space for sorrow in the Christian life. There is space and room to lament, to weep. There's a big space for this. We have the space in Jesus Christ to lament our own sin that necessitates the cross. We have space in Jesus Christ that gives us room to grieve over societal sin that manifests the fallen nature of humanity. It's easy to see. The way we treat one another, what we say, and what we do are powerful evidence weekly and gives us room to grieve. It gives us space to identify with those who are suffering and to lament the consequence of sin, whether it's individual, family, society, national or international. Sometimes, if we approach the sad parts of this world apart from Christ, then our knees buckle, and we run from it, and we wonder when Disneyland will open again. But if we come to it in Christ, then we can walk with Him who weeps over the city. He weeps over the city. Some of you have been touched by sin, sin that is not your own. You are grieving, and in Jesus Christ there is space. There space for those fears. In her significant work, *The Crucifixion*, Fleming Rutledge writes that “the Christian faith is empty at its heart if congregations skip over Good Friday.” I want to urge you to be here Friday night. It's a place where we have space for our tears and to weep with Jesus over the reality of sin. Sin is real, and Jesus addresses it and rescues us from it.

Finally, “M” is for the Master of the house. If Jesus is the Master of the house, what does this mean for us today? It means that we take His Word seriously, that this temple structure, this building, is about to be destroyed, and He says, “*In three days I will raise it up.*” It means that the place of God's presence now is in Jesus Christ, and it means that we must rise in Him. It means that we must build in Him. It means we must rise up like that stone becoming the mountain for all nations. It means that we must remove or reject any other foundation or plan than what Jesus is building. What Jesus is building is enduring, it's everlasting, it's good, and it's accessible for all who believe. This is the good news that is sounded for us on Palm Sunday: Jesus Christ, the Promised King, Jesus Christ, the return of Almighty God, Jesus Christ, the

lamenting Lord, and Jesus Christ, the Master of the house, calls to you and desires to reign over you, over me, over us as a people, over us as a city, over us as the first fruits of His new creation. Let's go through Holy Week together, with our eyes fixed on Him, rejoicing and weeping and celebrating His resurrection. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we magnify You and we praise You this morning. We thank You, Lord, that You are the Promised King of the world, the One who is to come and that we need not look for another. We praise You, Lord Jesus, that You are fully God and fully man, and that Your return to this world signals that God Himself has returned in You. We worship You, Lord Jesus, and we grieve with You over the sin of the world in every source or direction that it comes. We grieve with those who have experienced the reality of sin in their own lives, in the profound gap between what we want to do and what we actually do, and the profound disappointment that we find in ourselves in what we say and what we hope we would say, and the discouragement we have in what we thought we should do and when we refrain and are silent. Lord, we grieve with those who have experienced violence, persecution, accusation or slander. We stand with You, Lord. We come, Lord, to You and see You, the Master of the house, and we invite You here to reign over us as King and build us up in You. Tear down anything in us that is not of You. We give You our worship and we give You our praise. We declare You as King.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.