



# Palm Sunday

## Kicking It Off

If you could have been an eyewitness to any event in the Bible, which one would you choose and why?

## Read

Luke 19:28-44

## Summary

Every year we hear about the crowds waving branches and shouting as Jesus rides into Jerusalem. But here is the thing most people miss, everybody in that story was looking at the same person and seeing something completely different. And the reason comes down to what was already going on in their lives.

The Jewish people were living under Roman rule. They had no political power, their culture was being pushed aside, and they were waiting for God to send someone to fix it. So when they heard about this guy from a small town who was healing people and doing these incredible things, they connected the dots in the way that made the most sense to them. They thought, this is the one who is going to overthrow Rome and give us our country back. Their excitement was real. Their worship was real. But what they expected to see shaped what they actually saw.

Then you had the people who just flat out refused to see anything at all. The religious leaders, the people who knew Scripture better than anyone, looked at Jesus and basically said, nope, does not fit. He is from the wrong town, the wrong background, the wrong everything. They had already decided what God's plan was supposed to look like, and Jesus did not match it. So they rejected him.

And then there is what Jesus himself saw. He was not caught up in the crowds or the politics. He saw people's hearts. He saw what was coming, the betrayal, the cross, all of it. And he kept walking into Jerusalem anyway, because that is what God asked him to do.

The way you see things shapes everything. The real question this week is, what are you actually seeing when you look at Jesus, and is it him, or just what you expected to find?

## Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. The way we interpret what is happening around us is often shaped by the circumstances we are already in. When has a difficult season in your life caused you to misread what God was actually doing?
3. The crowds who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem offered genuine worship, but their expectations of who he would be were shaped by their desire for political freedom. What expectations do you place on God that might be limiting the way you receive him?
4. Some people had more knowledge of Scripture than anyone else and still refused to accept what was right in front of them. Is there an area of your life where you might be holding onto an assumption that keeps you from seeing something true?
5. Jesus chose to minister on the fringes rather than in the centers of power and influence. How does this challenge the way you think about where God shows up and who he prioritizes?
6. Obedience, not popularity or circumstance, shaped the way Jesus moved through that week. What would it look like for obedience to be the primary thing driving your decisions right now?

## Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Many times, the narrative regarding what is seen impacts what we see. The context of the situation you are in causes you to make connections and to put things together."

"The Jewish people were not necessarily afraid of the Romans in the sense that they were feeling like they had to run away. They were going to stay in Jerusalem. They understood, because of the Abrahamic covenants with God, this was their land, and so they were going to do everything in their power to maintain it."

"Jesus, in the Gospels, was not doing ministry in Jerusalem. He wasn't doing it in the center of the city. He was going to the fringes. And so the people of Jerusalem were only hearing these reports of who this Jesus was and who this Jesus is."

"I want to frame this whole week as, again, it's not even for you, it is unto the Lord. Find time during this week to dedicate unto God and really show him your obedience."

**Sermon Notes****Luke 19:28–44**

*28 And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” 32 So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. 33 And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” 35 And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. 37 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, 38 saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” 39 And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” 41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For 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 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”*

## Outline

Context: The Jewish people under Roman oppression, awaiting a Messiah

1. The Roman Empire governed over Israel, imposing culture, infrastructure, and Greek philosophy across the land
  2. Jewish identity was inseparable from Yahweh, the temple, and the Abrahamic covenants; they were staying in Jerusalem because it was their promised land
  3. Rome did not want to displace the Jews, only govern over them through Pontius Pilate
  4. Jesus had been ministering on the fringes, not in Jerusalem; the people only heard reports of a miracle-working carpenter from Nazareth in Galilee
  5. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, many believed this was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy, the one who would free them from Rome
1. **Those Who Serve**
    - a. The crowd welcomed Jesus with palm branches and shouts of Hosanna, offering genuine worship and devotion
    - b. Their service was shaped by the context of their suffering; they expected a political and military deliverer in the mold of King David
    - c. They were not wrong to worship, but their expectations filtered what they actually saw
    - d. The narrative of oppression caused them to see a liberator rather than the full picture of who Jesus was
  2. **Those Who Refuse to See**
    - a. Some in Jerusalem, especially the religious leaders, could not reconcile Jesus with their expectations of Messiah
    - b. A carpenter from Nazareth, from obscure Galilee, did not fit their framework
    - c. Refusing to see is not the absence of evidence but an active rejection of what the evidence reveals
    - d. Those with the most theological training were often the most blinded by their own assumptions and self-interest
  3. **What Jesus Sees**
    - a. While the crowd saw a liberator and the skeptics saw a threat, Jesus saw the hearts of the people and the cross ahead
    - b. His perspective was not shaped by circumstances but entirely by obedience to the Father
    - c. Jesus entered Jerusalem not because of popular demand but because the Father called him to it
    - d. The question for us: what do you see when you look at Jesus, and are you willing to let go of your own narrative to receive him for who he truly is?

## Notes

There is something worth paying attention to in the way we see things, and I do not just mean what our eyes take in. I mean the framework, the narrative, the context through which we interpret what stands before us. The story of Palm Sunday is, at its core, a story about perspective. It is a story about people who looked at the same person, Jesus of Nazareth, and came away with wildly different conclusions about who he was and what he came to do. And the reason for those different conclusions had everything to do with what they expected to see before they ever laid eyes on him.

To understand Palm Sunday, you have to understand the world the Jewish people were living in. They were not a powerful nation enjoying the fruits of self governance. They were a minority group, an oppressed people living under the heavy thumb of the Roman Empire. And when we say the Roman Empire, we need to appreciate what that actually meant. This was not a small regional government. This was one of the most expansive, logistically advanced empires the world had ever seen. The Romans were masterful builders. They constructed roads, infrastructure, and systems of governance that stretched across the known world. And alongside Roman infrastructure came Greek philosophy and thought, which spread through those same channels. Roman culture, Roman gods, Roman ways of doing things were being layered onto every community the empire touched.

For the Jewish people, this was more than a political inconvenience. It was a spiritual crisis. Jewish identity was inseparable from the worship of Yahweh, from the temple, from the covenants God had made with Abraham and their ancestors. The way they lived, the way they worshiped, the way they understood themselves as a people was rooted in their relationship with God. And here were the Romans, bringing their own gods, their own philosophies, their own systems of belief, and imposing a new order on the land. It is worth noting that in this time, there were no atheists. Everyone in the ancient world believed in some form of deity or higher power. The conflict was not between belief and unbelief. It was between whose God, whose story, whose way of life would define the land.

But the Jewish people were not running. They understood, through the Abrahamic covenants, that Jerusalem was their land. This was the city of King David. This was the location of the temple, the physical place of God's presence on earth. They were going to hold their ground. And to be fair, the Romans were not trying to remove them. Rome had no interest in displacing the Jews. They simply wanted to govern over them, to install a Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and to keep the peace on Rome's terms.

This is the world into which Jesus arrives. And this is where perspective becomes everything.

The Jewish people in Jerusalem had been hearing reports about a carpenter from Nazareth, a man from the relatively obscure region of Galilee. The rumors said he was a miracle worker, a healer, a man who could multiply food and perform great wonders. Whether or not every person believed every report, the buzz was undeniable. Something was happening out on the fringes. And that is an important detail: Jesus had not been doing his ministry in Jerusalem. He was not in the center of power, not in the shadow of the temple. He was on the margins, in the suburbs, among the people on the edges.

So when Jesus finally approached Jerusalem, the anticipation was electric. Many people saw this as the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. This was the moment God was going to act. This was the Messiah, the one who would deliver them from Roman oppression. The crowds that welcomed him, waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna, were offering genuine worship. They were serving in the only way they knew how, with the expectation that God was about to do something decisive through this man.

But here is where perspective shapes everything. Their service, their devotion, their shouts of praise were filtered through the lens of their suffering. They had been waiting for a king in the mold of David, a political and military deliverer who would overthrow Rome and restore Israel to its former glory. The context of their oppression caused them to see Jesus as the answer to their specific, earthly problem. They were not wrong to worship. They were not wrong to serve. But what they expected to see shaped what they actually saw.

Not everyone in Jerusalem that day was ready to receive Jesus. There were those who looked at this carpenter from Galilee and simply could not reconcile what they saw with what they believed should be true. A Messiah from Nazareth? From Galilee? That did not fit the narrative. That did not match the expectation. And so rather than adjusting their understanding, they rejected what was right in front of them.

This is a particular kind of blindness, not the absence of information, but the refusal to accept what the information reveals. The religious leaders, the power structures within Jerusalem, had their own framework for how God was supposed to work. And Jesus did not fit that framework. He was too ordinary in his origins, too radical in his message, too disruptive to the systems they had built. Refusing to see is not a passive act. It is an active decision to protect one's existing worldview at the cost of truth.

The tragedy of those who refused to see is that they had more access to Scripture, more knowledge of the prophets, and more theological training than almost anyone in the crowd. And yet it was precisely that knowledge, filtered through their own

expectations and self interest, that blinded them. They could not see Jesus for who he was because they had already decided who he was not.

And then there is the perspective of Jesus himself. While the crowd saw a liberator and the skeptics saw a threat, Jesus saw something far deeper. He saw the hearts of the people. He saw a city that would, within the week, turn from shouts of Hosanna to cries of crucify him. He saw the cross that awaited him. He saw the cost of what he came to do.

What makes Jesus' perspective so striking is that it was not shaped by circumstances. The crowd's perspective was shaped by their oppression. The religious leaders' perspective was shaped by their power. But Jesus' perspective was shaped entirely by obedience to the Father. He did not enter Jerusalem because the crowd demanded it or because the moment felt right. He entered Jerusalem because that is what the Father called him to do. His vision was unclouded by self interest, unclouded by political calculation, unclouded by fear.

This is the invitation embedded in the story of Palm Sunday. It is not simply a historical event to commemorate once a year. It is a mirror held up to each of us, asking a straightforward question: what do you see when you look at Jesus? Are you seeing him through the lens of your own needs, your own expectations, your own suffering? Are you refusing to see him because he does not fit the narrative you have already written for your life? Or are you willing to set aside your perspective and receive him for who he actually is?

The people of Jerusalem were not bad people. They were not stupid people. They were people whose context shaped their vision. And in the most important moment of their history, many of them missed what was right in front of them. The carpenter from Nazareth was not a political revolutionary. He was not a military king. He was something far greater, and far more costly, than any of them imagined.

This week, as we move through the events of Holy Week, the challenge is to examine our own sight. To ask where our context might be distorting our vision. And to approach Jesus not with a list of expectations, but with a posture of obedience, willing to see what he wants to show us rather than what we have already decided must be true.

## Blog

Three groups of people stand on the same hillside, watching the same man ride the same donkey toward the same city. One group responds in worship. Another demands silence. The third doesn't notice at all. The difference between them is their perspective on the situation.

Luke's account of Palm Sunday is familiar territory for most of us, and the scene is one in which I preach yearly. Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a colt. Crowds cheer. Palms wave (though Luke, interestingly, never mentions palms). But Luke tells it differently than the other Gospel writers. Only Luke records the Pharisees demanding that Jesus shut His disciples up. Only Luke records Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. Only Luke gives us the devastating prophecy of the city's destruction. Luke doesn't give us a only the triumphal entry. He gives us a triumphal entry that collapses into a funeral.

To understand what's happening, we need to see what each group sees, and what they miss.

The disciples have been with Jesus for the long road from Galilee to Jerusalem. They've watched Him heal, cast out demons, and teach with an authority that left entire crowds speechless. Luke says they began to praise God "for all the mighty works that they had seen" (v. 37). Their worship is grounded in experience. They've been paying attention, and what they've seen has brought them to the conclusion that Christ is the King.

Their shout confirms it. They take the words of Psalm 118, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD," a line from the Passover hymn, and they add a word that no other Gospel records. Luke alone tells us they said, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord" (v. 38). That's not a welcome for a pilgrim. That's a coronation. They throw their cloaks on the road, the same gesture Israel used centuries earlier when they crowned Jehu king (2 Kings 9:13). They are saying, "We see who you are, and we worship you for it. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" It sound familiar to the nativity scene when Jesus was born. At the nativity, the angels declared peace on earth. Now the disciples can only locate peace in heaven. What happened to peace on earth? Jesus' tears, just a few verses later, will answer that question. Peace was offered to earth. Earth refused it.

The disciples don't understand everything. They'll scatter before the week is out. But the direction of their sight is right. They are looking at Jesus, and they see someone worthy of worship. That's the starting point for all of us. Not perfect theology. Not flawless consistency. Just eyes pointed at Jesus, recognizing that He is who He claims to be.

Then come the Pharisees. They're embedded in the same crowd, watching the same scene. And their response could not be more different. "Teacher, rebuke your disciples" (v. 39). Notice what they call Him. Not Lord. Not King. Teacher. They reduce Jesus to a category they can manage. A teacher can be corrected. A teacher can be told to keep his students in line. The Pharisees don't deny the disciples' claims outright. They just want them quieted. Calvin saw this clearly: it's more dangerous than open opposition, because it wraps unbelief in the language of prudence.

We're more susceptible to this than we think. The Pharisees' instinct wasn't to reject Jesus altogether. It was to keep Him within respectable boundaries. Let Him teach. Let Him do some good. Just don't let things get out of hand. Don't let the claims get too loud or the worship too extravagant. This is the perennial temptation of religious people, to welcome Jesus as long as He stays manageable. The moment He demands to be King rather than merely Teacher, we get uncomfortable. And we start looking for a way to turn down the volume.

Jesus' answer is blunt: "If these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (v. 40). This is a statement about the nature of this moment in history. The truth of who Jesus is cannot be suppressed. The only variable is who declares it. If human voices won't, creation will. The Pharisees are trying to mute a reality that the entire cosmos is straining to announce.

And then the scene shifts. Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives, and the full panorama of Jerusalem opens before Him, the temple gleaming in the afternoon sun, the massive Herodian stones of the retaining walls, the pilgrim crowds streaming through the gates for Passover. He can see the entire Holy City.

Luke uses the Greek word *eklausen*, which doesn't mean quiet tears rolling down the cheek. It means loud, convulsive weeping, the kind reserved for mourning the dead. In the entire Gospel tradition, this is one of only two times Jesus weeps. The other is at the tomb of Lazarus, and John uses a gentler word there. Luke's word is stronger. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem the way you weep at a funeral, because He sees a death the city cannot yet see.

"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (v. 42). The doubled pronoun is devastating. "If only you, yes even you, of all cities." Jerusalem means "city of peace." It's the city of the temple, of David, of the prophets. If any place on earth should have recognized its God when He showed up, it was Jerusalem. And Jerusalem looked the other way.

The phrase "the things that make for peace" carries the full weight of the Old Testament concept of *shalom*, not just the absence of conflict but the total flourishing of life lived in right relationship with God. That's what Jerusalem missed. The very presence

of the One every Passover lamb had been pointing toward. He was walking through their gates, and they were too busy with Passover preparations to notice that Passover itself had arrived.

What follows is a prophecy of destruction (vv. 43–44), fulfilled in horrifying detail in AD 70 when the Roman legions under Titus besieged the city, built a circumvallation wall, and razed the temple until not one stone stood on another. The reason Jesus gives is not military failure or bad politics. It's a single, shattering verdict: "because you did not know the time of your visitation." That word, *episkopē* (visitation), has been building across Luke's entire Gospel. Zechariah prophesied that God had "visited and redeemed His people" (Luke 1:68). The crowd at Nain celebrated it: "God has visited His people!" (Luke 7:16). Every prior use of this word in Luke is joyful. Here, at the climax, it becomes a lament. The visitation came. The city didn't recognize it.

Jerusalem is the most tragic figure in this passage. The Pharisees at least see enough to be threatened. Jerusalem sees nothing. The city isn't hostile. It's oblivious. And that, Luke seems to suggest, is the most dangerous condition of all, not active resistance to God but passive unawareness that He's standing in front of you.

But the passage doesn't end with judgment. Jesus knows all of this. He knows Jerusalem won't receive Him. He knows the cross is five days away. He knows the disciples will scatter. He knows the city will burn. And He still rides in. On a colt. In peace. Weeping. He doesn't turn around. He doesn't call down fire (though His disciples had once suggested exactly that in a Samaritan village, Luke 9:54). He enters the city that will kill Him, and He enters it crying.

This is the character of God. He doesn't come in power first and mercy second. He comes in mercy first, offering Himself to a city and a people that He already knows will refuse Him. Judgment is real in this passage, terrifyingly real. But it is not the first word. The first word is tears. The One with the authority to pronounce destruction first weeps over the people who will experience it. The King who could command the stones to testify instead lets His own heart break.

This sequence tells us something essential about the God we worship. His judgment is never gleeful. It is never His first resort. It is what happens when mercy has been offered and refused, when the things that make for peace have been pushed aside until they are hidden from view. The tears come before the verdict, because the God who judges is the same God who wept.

Palm Sunday puts a single question before every one of us: What do you see when you look at Jesus? The disciples saw a King and worshipped. The Pharisees saw a threat and demanded silence. Jerusalem saw nothing at all. We stand on the same hillside, watching the same Jesus. The King is riding toward us, coming in peace, coming with

tears. He is not naive about who we are. He sees us fully, knows us completely, and comes anyway. The only thing left to decide is whether we'll see Him back.