

No One Takes My Life From Me

PART 1 - HOSANNA

TEXT: LUKE 19:28-44 (ESV)



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August 31, 2008

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5 Days in Judea

Today we begin a new study which will take us through most of autumn. We'll focus specifically on the five days Jesus spent in Jerusalem prior to His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. We're going to follow Jesus from His triumphal entry into Jerusalem to His last supper in the upper room, listening in as He tells His last parables, performs His last miracles and engages in His final debates with the religious leaders. We're going to follow the real Jesus as presented in the Bible in real time so that we might know how the central event of our faith actually came to pass—the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For those of us who grew up with Bible stories, when we come to the more familiar ones—like the Good Samaritan or Noah and the flood, we're faced with the challenge to read them again with fresh eyes and see truth among the familiar. Everyone knows Jesus died on the cross. It is one of those facts essential to the story, like how we know the Titanic sank or Lincoln was shot in the balcony at Ford's Theater. But the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is drenched in details of remarkably significant interpretive insight which affect not only what we understand about the story, but also about Jesus Himself.

How clear are you on the basic story of Jesus' death and resurrection? If you are a Christian, your confession is that Jesus died in your place and paid for your sins with that death. But why did He die? Was He a martyr? Did He secure your salvation just barely? Was it the accidental outcome of being in the wrong place at the wrong time? Prior to His arrest, Jesus said, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." (Jn 10:18) I contend this was not simply a passing statement, but a promise which shook the foundations of creation and dictated the course of the rest of all history. The aim of this series is to see the evidence of the truth of this declaration.

My hope for this series really comes down to three primary objectives for this church—1) that we'd know Christ better through the careful study of His word, 2) that we'd understand that His death and resurrection was not something perpetrated against Him, but was something He meant to endure for our salvation and 3) that we'd live free from fear to serve Him with vigor in this life secure in the salvation He has accomplished.

When He set his face like a flint toward Jerusalem near the end of His earthly ministry, He didn't alter His course even though He knew Jerusalem would be the site of His arrest, trial and eventual death. In the days leading up to His arrest, He laid His life down by bringing the conflict to His accusers, exacerbating the tension between them at every turn. As His crucifixion drew near, He put Himself directly in the path those who wanted Him dead, those who didn't know their plot to kill Him was, in fact, part of God's plan to glorify His Son by raising Him from the dead. (Rom 6:4) We begin today with an episode we often celebrate on the Sunday prior to Easter, the Triumphal Entry.

Luke 19:28-44

²⁸When he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, "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." ³¹If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" you shall say this: "The Lord has need of it." ³²So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴And they said, "The Lord has need of it." ³⁵And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷As 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, ³⁸saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

⁴¹And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴²saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³For 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 ⁴⁴and 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."

The Return of the King

Before we expound this text, let's remember why everyone is so excited and/or upset by Jesus' presence in Jerusalem. As we pick up the story, one thing is plain—Jesus' reputation precedes Him wherever He goes. He'd been traveling around the regions of Judea and Galilee as a teacher for nearly three years now, and in many places He had performed miracles. He was not a typical traveling teacher. Traveling rabbis had disciples who were more or less students of their teaching. But Jesus' disciples were cut from a different cloth. For many, it wasn't just that they believed in His teaching. They believed in Him.

Our text opens with Jesus about 17 miles east of Jerusalem in Jericho in a kind of political exile. He wore out His welcome in Jerusalem the last time He was there when He raised Lazarus from the dead. We must not underestimate the impact of this miracle. The public response to Lazarus' resurrection was that people began to believe Jesus was the One God had sent to deliver the people of God from their Roman oppressors—a King. These are the thoughts you have of one who undisputedly raises a man dead four days in the grave. This wasn't the first miracle He'd performed in Jerusalem, (Jn. 9:1-7) but Lazarus' rising had captured the attention of the people in that region.

The religious leaders in Jerusalem knew if their Roman occupiers caught wind of the people of Israel regarding anyone other than Caesar as a king, that could spell the end of life in Jerusalem as they knew it. So they began to plan to make sure Jesus did not upset the delicate balance they'd struck with Rome—whatever that took. Jesus was on notice that His return to Jerusalem wouldn't be without consequence. This is why Luke says as the time drew near for Jesus to be "taken up," He set His face to go to Jerusalem.^(Lk 9:51) He knew Jerusalem would be where He'd fulfill the reason He had come in the first place.

So unflinching was His pursuit of His destiny that when Jesus returned to the area as the major holiday, Passover, came on, the first place He went was to the home of His old friend, Lazarus. The Apostle John writes ^(Jn 12:1-11) that six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived in Bethany, and Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha gave a dinner celebrating His return. These were not the actions of a man trying to fly under the radar. In fact, as the word spread that Jesus was at Lazarus' house, crowds began to gather to see these two men together.

To His followers, He'd come back to the site of one of the greatest displays of power ever witnessed. To His opponents, He'd returned to the scene of the crime—Bethany. Many more who heard of this reunion began to believe in Jesus, creating such a pressing problem that the chief priests, John writes, "made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many Jews were going away and believing in Jesus."^(Jn 11:10-11)

What Stones Plainly See

All of that brings us to where we find Jesus in our text. From Lazarus' home outside Bethany, Jesus sets out for Jerusalem. He sends a couple disciples ahead to bring Him a colt to ride. The Old Testament prophet said to Israel, "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."^(Zech 9:9) When Jesus retrieves a colt not yet ridden for His entry into Jerusalem, He knows this will call to mind Zechariah's prophecy. He knows He is assuming the posture of a king. He knows the zeal of the people, and how they'll delight to receive Him as King. He is choreographing His return to Jerusalem.

As I write, America is between two major political conventions where each party names their candidate for the next president of the United States. Powerful politicians and celebrities weigh in throughout the week and the convention ends with an acceptance speech by the candidate himself. There, he does his best to persuade the nation that his administration will have an answer for every burden the people bear. The crowds go wild.

This is not unlike the atmosphere surrounding Jesus as He heads into Jerusalem. The people have gathered in support of the One they believe will solve the problems they face. They're hoping to catch a glimpse of Him, elevating His authority and power by throwing down their cloaks (and the other Gospel writers add palms) to create a road to dignify the arrival of their candidate who will bring the change they so desperately want.

They're thinking about their Roman occupiers and Zechariah's call to rise up and behold their King coming on a colt. And they're abandoning caution for this glorious moment of hope. They cry out so all can hear, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"^(vs. 38) Everyone knows they mean Jesus. Some of the Pharisees present, knowing the fallout of such a display, appeal to Jesus to silence these people. From one rabbi to another, they suggest, "Don't you know how this could upset the system we've got here?"

Israel had struck a sort of compromise with Rome. They could continue their worship practices so long as they obeyed Roman rule, paid their taxes and kept the peace. But any hint of insurgency would be dealt with swiftly, without mercy. For Rome, it was brilliant. They had persuaded Israel that their right to worship the God their national identity was built upon was a privilege granted to them by Caesar, dividing the temple court's loyalty between God and the ruler of their occupying force. When the Pharisees ask Jesus to rebuke His followers, they're assuming Jesus appreciates the delicacy of their position.

To this Jesus says, "If these were silent, the very stones would cry out." In Scripture, whenever voiceless parts of creation speak, (Abel's blood, Balaam's ass) it's because man misunderstands. Here we see a sobering truth—the world was blind to what Christ had come to do. They were full of half-truths. He was King, but Rome as not the empire He'd come to conquer. He was the One Zechariah spoke of having salvation, but the peace they clamored for was not the peace He came to bring.

Still, He accepted the praise of the people because though mankind didn't recognize the King He was meant to be, the rest of creation did. And if the people wouldn't praise Him on this journey into the city of His coronation, the stones within her walls and upon her roads would testify that the One who rides on this colt is "the King, righteous and having salvation."

Heaven's Glory in Miniature

As He approached Jerusalem from the East, He crested the rim of the Kidron Valley and there in full view stood the City of David glistening in the sun. In His ears echoed the calls for peace, and He broke down; "Would that you had known... the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from you. The day will come... when not one stone will be left upon another in you because you did not know the time of your visitation."^(vs. 42-44)

He wept because what the people wanted and needed were so far from one another. The image of Him looking across the valley was Heaven's glory in miniature. He was King, yes, but He wore no crown. There'd be two in His immediate future—the crown of Glory, but not before the crown of thorns. He'd ride on the clouds soon, but now sat on a colt. The streets of His Kingdom would be paved with gold, but for now only with cloaks and palm branches. His capital would be everlasting, though what lay before Him was a city that was easy to conquer but near impossible to hold. It too would be ruined.

He knew the salvation the people needed and what it cost. He knew the punishment that would bring them peace was about to be laid upon Him.^(Isa 53:5) And He knew that part of the engine that would drive this fulfillment of His reason for coming would be that the religious leaders would fear Rome more than God to the extent that they'd put to death any of their own who might upset the privilege of worship Caesar had granted.

The people didn't know the Messiah was in their midst. They didn't know the time of their visitation. We, on the other hand, are not so blind. We have the rest of the story. As we unpack it in these coming weeks, may we understand Jesus is the King who came in the name of the Lord, and that the glory He inhabits is greater than any kingdom that ever was or shall be. May we come to know Him as our Savior and King, righteous and having salvation. No one took His life from Him, but He did lay it down of His own accord. He had authority to lay it down and to take it up again, which He did. And now He lives seated at the right hand of God in Glory. He knows what you truly need. And He has provided it fully. Do you believe this?