

Palm Sunday – Crown Him or Crucify Him?

4/14/19 – Pastor Randy

Mark 11:1-10

As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. "Go into that village over there," he told them. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'What are you doing?' just say, 'The Lord needs it and will return it soon.'"

The two disciples left and found the colt standing in the street, tied outside the front door. As they were untying it, some bystanders demanded, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They said what Jesus had told them to say, and they were permitted to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it, and he sat on it.

Many in the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others spread leafy branches they had cut in the fields. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, "Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David! Praise God in highest heaven!"

Today is Palm Sunday. The day on the Christian calendar commemorating the day Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem, hailed by a crowd of Jews as the Messiah, the promised King. Jesus was celebrated. He was honored. Five days later He was crucified. This Sunday began the final week in the life of Jesus prior to His resurrection.

The amount of space that the Gospel authors gave to the last week of Jesus' life is striking! Approx. one-third of the material in Matthew and Mark's gospels, one-quarter of the material in Luke, and almost half of the material in John focuses on what took place during the last week of Jesus' life.

One German theologian (Martin Kahler) described Mark's Gospel as essentially "a passion narrative with an extended introduction."

The reason for this stark, detailed focus on Jesus' last week is simple. The reason Jesus came, the reason for the incarnation -the grand miracle by

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which God the Son, the co-sovereign, co-eternal, co-creator of the universe became a man; identifying with us in our humanity - was this:

Jesus became one of us so that as one of us He could defeat the power of sin by living a sinless life, bearing the penalty for our sin by dying as our sinless substitute, and rising again in victory over both the power and penalty of sin.

This does not mean that there was no meaning or significance to the other approx. 150 weeks of His ministry. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He taught in word and demonstrated by his action what the kingdom of God ought to look like over against the present condition of the fallen, corrupt world that he entered. By healing the sick, raising the dead, delivering people from demonic powers, and teaching people that true love is comprised of both mercy and justice, He began to paint a picture of God's future kingdom; one without sin, sickness, death, or demonic forces. A kingdom Peter describes as the, "new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells".

No less importantly, the other approx. 1700 weeks of Jesus life were lived in victory over sin, qualifying Him to be our sinless substitutionary sacrifice and to be the "last Adam" who undid the curse of sin brought into the world by the first Adam (See Romans 5 & 1 Corinthians 15).

So we must not dismiss or marginalize the life of Jesus between the incarnation and crucifixion but we also must not forget that the ultimate goal of Jesus' life was His crucifixion and resurrection.

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. – John 12:23, 24

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. – John 12:27

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. – Mark 8:31

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"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." - Mark 10:45

We know the answer to the question, "Why was Jesus crucified?". We know that He came to be crucified. We know that it was an act of evil on the part of those who killed him, but also a necessary act of righteousness on Jesus' part; necessary in order for us to experience victory over sin, death, and eternal judgment. That is the answer from God's side of the equation. I want to take the remainder of our time this morning to answer the question from the human side. In doing so, I want to rephrase the question this way:

Why was Jesus hailed as King on Sunday and crucified on Friday? Why were they cheering him on Sunday, and jeering him five days later? Why was Jesus on the red carpet with the flashing lights of the paparazzi in His eyes one day, and then treated as the worst of criminals the next? At the beginning of the week the Pharisees said "see the whole world has gone after him!" Before the end of the week Jesus words to his disciples were fulfilled when He said, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.'"(Matt. 26:31)

How do you go from "Crown Him" to "Crucify Him" in such a short period of time? Let's go back to "Crown Him" Sunday to see how we get to "Crucify Him" Friday.

Jerusalem was beginning to swell with Jewish pilgrims who were gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Passover was a time to reflect and celebrate Israel's historic deliverance from Egypt but it also generated anticipation and expectation of a future deliverance from Roman rule and oppression and a final deliverance from all foreign rule and oppression. This was the Jews messianic expectation: their expectation of a new King who would sit on David's throne and usher in a forever kingdom of freedom, peace, prosperity and justice. The crowds and inhabitants of Jerusalem, already filled with messianic expectation, rightly interpreted Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on a colt as a clear intentional symbolic act, declaring himself to be the promised Messiah in fulfillment of Zech. 9:9 (see Matt. 21:4). The response of the people

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was to affirm the messianic role that Jesus was assuming and to celebrate him with shouts of praise and acts of honor fitting for a king. Andreas Kostenberger writes,

“As Jesus makes his westward descent down the Mount of Olives and toward the Holy City, the crowds rightly interpret his actions with expectant joy and respond in kind by spreading robes and leafy palm branches in his pathway to create a royal red carpet (see 2 Kings 9:13) and by acclaiming him their Davidic king: Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:10; see also Isa. 9:7) The crowds are openly acclaiming Jesus instead of Caesar as king.”

Not everyone was acclaiming Jesus as the coming King of Israel. Luke tells us that there were Pharisees among the crowd who responded to what was happening by calling on Jesus to stop the crowd from hailing him as king. Jesus response was, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!”

We have talked a bit about these Pharisees over the past several weeks. For those who don't know, they were a sect of Jewish religious leaders in Jesus day. Much of the gospels details their growing hostility towards Jesus during his public ministry. Their hostility towards Jesus was like a powder keg and what Jesus said and did over the next few days was going to provide the spark that would trigger its violent explosion.

Jesus' actions beginning on Monday when he returned to Jerusalem didn't align with the expectations of the crowd. The Jews were anticipating that their Messiah would free them from Roman rule but Jesus didn't do or say anything about Rome. He didn't confront the imperial powers; he didn't plan an insurrection. His words and actions were directed at the Jewish people. He directed his judgement against the temple, not Caesar's palace or Pilate's.

When Jesus went to the temple he acted in a manner that appears uncharacteristic and extreme. He “drove out” those who were buying and selling animals for sacrifice. He literally turned over the tables of those who were engaged in exchanging currency. Everything that was going on was considered totally appropriate, and even conducive to the worship in the

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temple being conducted according to the law. Those who came to Jerusalem from other parts of the Roman empire would have needed to exchange their currency in order to purchase the animals to be sacrificed using the currency required by Jewish law. So what was Jesus so angry about?!?

The only explanation we have is one brief statement from Jesus which combines two OT texts; Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Jesus said, *“My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.”*

Based on Jesus’ words, it has been suggested that Jesus’ outrage was either targeted at economic exploitation, ethnic discrimination (the specific space allowed by law for non-Jews to pray was the very space that had been turned into a marketplace), their lack of spiritual discernment concerning Jesus, the corruption of the temple worship (they turned a place of prayer into a place for crass business), or some combination of those offenses.

Jesus judgment on the activity in the temple provoked the ire of the religious leaders who were in charge of the temple but it was also an indictment on the spiritual state of the people in general. Mark tells us that “the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.” Their astonishment expresses their respect for Jesus teaching as authoritative. The religious leaders were afraid of Jesus growing influence and authority among the people. Jesus authority was a threat to their authority.

After Jesus’ show of protest against the activities in the temple, He began to teach in the temple; demonstrating that Jesus was not simply interested in pointing out what was wrong but also leading people to do right.

The religious leaders who are now actively seeking an opportunity to destroy Jesus, confront Him and challenge Him saying, “What gives you the authority to come into the temple and tell people what they can and can’t do?”

Jesus replied with his own question putting them on the spot by asking them to take a position for or against John the Baptist. Unable to respond to Jesus’ question, they sent some Pharisees and Herodians with a question about whether or not the Jews should pay taxes to Rome. The question was clearly

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intended to trap Jesus by placing Him in a position where no matter how He answered, his answer could be used against him. A “yes” answer would undermine his authority among the Jews and a “no” answer would give them a cause to accuse him of inciting a rebellion against the Roman gov’t.

Jesus answer was brilliant: “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” Jesus didn’t undermine Caesar’s authority but He established God’s authority as greater!! They were speechless.

The religious leaders threw two more “gotcha” questions at Jesus which he handled with grace and wisdom. After the second, no one dared to ask any more questions. Jesus then went on the counteroffensive with a question of his own, testing their OT knowledge and suggesting that, as the Messiah, He was not just a descendant of King David but superior to King David.

The powder keg I mentioned earlier in this message had now been lit. The religious leaders decided to meet and plot to arrest and kill Jesus. When people find themselves in a losing battle against well-reasoned truth, they turn to the only thing they have left: brute power and violence.

This was Wednesday. Two days later Jesus would be tortured and crucified.

On Sunday Jesus was surrounded by a crowd cheering Him, honoring Him, celebrating Him, hailing Him as King; but not just any king; the promised king, the Messiah: The one who was going to at long last deliver the Jewish people from foreign oppressors and establish a kingdom of peace, justice, and prosperity.

Five days later, Jesus stands before another crowd. It was crowd that was incited by the Jewish religious leaders. This crowd probably contained some of the same people who cheered him at the beginning of the week. I can’t say for sure, but there must have been some who became disenchanted that Jesus didn’t teach against Rome and didn’t show any interest in overthrowing the Roman gov’t. He even supported paying taxes to Caesar.

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This crowd, the only crowd forming, did not embrace Jesus as their king, but as a criminal. There is no one on Jesus side anymore. Even the disciples who had followed Him, had now fled from Him, just like Jesus predicted.

Why?!?! Because they didn't want a Messiah to be their King, but to be their servant. There is one word that sums up the reason for the cry "crucify him": That word is "authority". They didn't want a King to rule FOR them. Jesus Kingship is a threat to all authorities and powers; those which are over us but our own as well. Jesus was killed, not because Pilate thought he was a threat to Rome, but because Jesus was a threat to the authority of the Jewish leaders. Pilate asked the Jews if they wanted Him to release Jesus or a murderer by the name of Barabbas. They said release Barabbas. Pilate said, "Then what should I do with Jesus?" They said, "Crucify Him!" Pilate: "But for what!?" Crowd: (Even louder) Crucify Him!!!

Crown him or Crucify him? Which will it be?

The question of the hour for the Church and our world is this, "Who will we choose as our King? Who will be your authority? If our answer is, "God, you don't get to determine what I do with MY body, MY money, MY time. It's mine, mine, mine!!! Then our cry is essentially, "Crucify Him!"

Crown Him is the cry that says, "it's all yours, Lord! I am all your Lord, We can cry, "Lord, stop the racism in Rome, stop the greed in Rome, stop the baby-killers in Rome." But Jesus says to us, "My priority is to cleanse my temple before I deal with the palace in Rome. I will deal with Rome, be sure of that!! But I have come to save you from YOUR sins before I save you from the sins of others!

The expectation of the crowd on Palm Sunday was similar to our expectations of God today. We want King Jesus to use his authority and power to change our circumstances; to change our status in the world; to deliver us from other people's sins, to bring us justice when other's have sinned against us. Jesus isn't a King who works for any special interest group or any particular individual. He serves His own interests because only His interests are perfectly just and righteous.

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Is Jesus a tool that is useful for you, or a Savior that is beautiful to you?
Those who view him as a tool that is useful end up crying “Crucify!”

There is a difference between celebrating Jesus and worshipping Jesus. The crowd on Palm Sunday was celebrating Jesus when they ought to have been worshipping Jesus. Celebrate is what fickle fans do. Worship is what faithful followers do! We celebrate what serves us, We worship who we serve!!!

Dear God, may the sincere cry of our heart be, “Jesus, we crown you our King and our Lord”!