

The sermon

Intro

What's Palm Sunday all about?

Maybe as a kid you remember Sunday school classes where you made branches. Or maybe it was skits with branches laid while Jesus went by.

This morning we'll look at what was going on and what it means for us.

Body

Point 1: Will Jesus show up? (11:55-57)

READ 11:55-57

Estimates suggest the Jerusalem population was 100,000 and one million were present for Passover.

Those in Jerusalem were wondering about Jesus. *"What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?"* Jesus was known. People wanted to see him. People were afraid he might no-show.

The chief priests and the Pharisees had joined together. Giving orders to reveal Jesus' whereabouts. This is fascinating because of the parties that were working together. Opponents who didn't see eye to eye. Kind of like the Democrats and the Republicans joining together to oppose a threatening Independent candidate.

Lazarus

Because Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, many Jews believed (11:45). Because of fears that Jesus' popularity would keep increasing and Rome would *"come and take away both our place and our nation,"* the chief priests and Pharisees *"made plans to put [Jesus] to death"* (11:48, 53). **11:54** tells us Jesus was in hiding:

Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

By going to Jerusalem, Jesus is intentionally walking into danger.

Application

Are you curious? Do you want to know who he is? Christian, do you want to know him better? Will you accept what you find? Curiosity and anticipation are a good thing!

Point 2: Is this the right use of expensive ointment? (12:1-8)

READ 12:1-8

"Six days before Passover" means Jesus arrives on Friday evening. The "dinner" takes place on Saturday.

This was a little shocking because this was servant's work, you didn't do this at dinner, she used her hair instead of a towel, and women didn't unbind their hair in public.

Ordinarily this was a waste of money. The amount of ointment (11.5 ounces) dumped out was *"three hundred denarii"* = 300 days wages = a year's salary. But this was to prepare Jesus for burial. So there was no waste involved at all.

Judas

Judas' motives sound good. But he's being deceptive. He didn't want the ointment "wasted" because he wanted it sold so he could steal from the moneybag.

So you see at this point Judas was already corrupt. And he had been for some time. Judas wasn't a good guy who was confused and mistakenly betrayed Jesus. Judas was already a liar and a thief before the betrayal. Patterns of sin led Judas down a path where he became a willing tool of Satan, selling out Jesus for "*thirty pieces of silver*" (Matt 26:15).

"*the poor you always have with you*" indicates that, in this age, our world will never be a perfect utopia. Because of sin, our world will always be less than ideal. Rulers will oppress their people. Greedy corporate executives will fail to look out for the good of their employees. Lazy individuals, what the Proverbs calls sluggards, will bring self-inflicted consequences upon themselves.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't be merciful when opportunity arrives. It's just reality in a world where sin exists.

Application

What does this episode say to us? Beware of portraying bad motives as good motives. Judas masked greed with concern for the poor. Am I serving for the applause of men? Or like Mary, am I serving because I adore Jesus? Ask yourself why you're doing what you're doing!

Point 3: Lazarus, the wanted man (12:9-11)

READ 12:9-11

Word got out that Jesus was in Bethany.

Not everyone was excited. The chief priests wanted Lazarus dead. Their logic? If we kill Lazarus, we'll slow down the increase in believers.

Unbelief

Here I want to highlight the nature of the chief priest's unbelief. It wasn't absence of facts. They had good reason to believe in Jesus. Lazarus' resurrection for one.

But the evidence didn't lead them to reconsider their opinion of Jesus. No, the evidence pushed them further down into darkness. What should have caused them to reconsider and believe only caused them to oppose Jesus more. Unbelief pressed them into more sin: wanting to kill an innocent man (Lazarus).

No evidence could break through their unbelief. They were blind and hardened (John 11:40). Every bit of proof only pushed them further from faith.

Application

Unbelief isn't necessarily because of a lack of proof. Sometimes unbelief is closing our eyes so we can't see the evidence.

There's evidence today:

1. The creation of the world witnesses to "God's invisible attributes...his eternal power and divine nature" (Rom 1:19-20).
2. Old Testament prophecies in Daniel detailing what would happen in human kingdoms hundreds of years before these events occurred.

3. Jesus raised from the dead.

Jesus' opponents could never produce the dead body and kill the movement because Jesus is alive!

4. Changed lives today.

Gospel promises are confirmed when humans are made new by the Holy Spirit. The addicted set free. The selfish become servants. The hateful become loving. The prideful become humble.

The evidence is there if we don't close our eyes.

Point 4: Curious crowds and discouraged Pharisees (12:12-19)

READ 12:12-19

This happens on Sunday.

It's the crowd in Jerusalem that's awaiting Jesus' arrival who spreads the branches and cries "Hosanna." Even calling Jesus "*King of Israel.*"

Cloaks and branches?

- 1) When Jehu was anointed king men spread their garments on the ground (2 Kgs 9:13).
- 2) Branches were connected with celebrating military victories.
- 3) Kind of like rolling out the red carpet.
- 4) It's acknowledging Jesus as triumphant king.

Hosanna?

- 1) Literally means "help, I pray" or "save, I pray."
- 2) Came to be a standard formula for praise, which fits well with the celebratory nature of the cloaks and branches.

Donkey?

John sees direct fulfillment of prophecy here. John cites Zechariah 9:9, which the Rabbis frequently understood to be Messianic. Meaning Jesus is the Messiah you're expecting.

A donkey = non-military animal. Humble in the sense of the animal used by common people, not the animal a conquering king would be riding on. Like a war horse.

At the time the disciples didn't quite understand. Later on they got it.

Palm Sunday

Other gospel accounts add details like an entourage was traveling into the city with Jesus (Matt 21:9). People were asking, "*Who is this?*" (Matt 21:10). Some responded, "*This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee*" (Matt 21:11). Disciples of Jesus were present (Luke 19:37-38). The Pharisees were saying, "*Teacher, rebuke your disciples!*" (Luke 19:39).

So there's true disciples. There's curious crowds. There's praise. There's Pharisee opposition. There's indecision. The city's in an uproar. Some minds are already made up. Some minds are undecided. There's confusion. One way or another, there's lots of interest in Jesus of Nazareth.

Pharisees

The Pharisees are discouraged by this turn of events. They're afraid it's a lost cause. Jesus has won their hearts. It's too late. We've lost. Rome will remove our freedoms because of the uproar (John 11:48).

Application

It forces us to ask the question, who is Jesus?

Who is Jesus to you? A guru with some helpful teachings? A man no different than you and me? A curse word? An irrelevant, outdated historical figure? God the Son in human flesh? Your Lord and Savior?

Point 5: Jesus' time has come (12:20-26)

READ 12:20-26

The curious crowds included some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus.

Who were these Greeks? Gentiles, not Jews. Not necessarily people who lived in Greece or descended from Greece. But people who spoke the Greek language and participated in Greek culture.

Likely they're God-fearers. Gentiles who believed in Israel's God but hadn't converted to Judaism. Note they had come to worship. Evidently they're curious about this Jesus everyone is talking about.

Jesus turns the request into opportunity for instruction.

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

In John's gospel, Jesus said things like *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work...For I have not come down from heaven to do my own will but the will of him who sent me"* (John 4:34; 6:38). Jesus had come to lay down his life. This was God's predetermined plan (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). The time had come.

12:24-26

12:24 talks about the positive effects of Jesus death. 12:25-26 discusses different responses to Jesus.

Jesus is the grain of wheat that dies and bears much fruit. Like a wheat kernel in the ground produces a harvest, Jesus' death will bear fruit. Fruit follows Jesus' death.

In 12:25, Jesus divides humanity into two categories. Those who love their life and those who hate their life. Those who lose their life and those who receive eternal life.

12:26 spells out the meaning of 12:25. To serve Jesus is to follow Jesus. Embracing Jesus as Lord. Placing our lives under his authority. Devoting our lives to obeying his instruction. Whether how we use our money or how we use our mouth. If we place our life at his disposal (servant), we will be honored by the Father. Honor corresponds to eternal life.

So to lose our life is to serve/follow Jesus and receive eternal life. On the other hand, to love our life is to refuse to serve Jesus. To maintain independence and refuse to place ourselves under Jesus' rule. Those who reject Jesus' lordship will be dishonored and excluded from the future kingdom of God. They'll lose their life by experiencing the 2nd death. Revelation 21:8 says, *"their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death"*

Application

The faith that saves serves Jesus. The faith that saves places their life at Jesus' disposal (servant).

Jesus promises forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who believe. If we believe what the Bible says about sin and hell, we'll have a different attitude towards sin. If we believe what the Bible says about Jesus dying on the cross in our place, taking the punishment in our place so we don't have to suffer, so that we can be blessed when all we deserve is punishment, we'll have a different attitude towards Jesus. If we view Jesus as patient and merciful, we'll joyfully place ourselves under his rule.

The faith that saves follows! This should affect how we assess our loved ones. If they're not following we need to evangelize and encourage repentance.

Point 6: Judgment and rescue at the cross (12:27-36)

READ 12:27-36

The impending agony of the cross is weighing on Jesus.

He could say, "*Father, save me from this hour,*" but he knows he came to earth to die on the cross. "*Father, glorify your name*" is Jesus submitting to the Father's will.

Note Jesus calls us to do what he did himself. Like Jesus submitted to the Father's rule, we submit to Jesus' rule. Like Jesus gave up his physical life for our sins, we hate our life by placing it at Jesus' disposal.

A voice

God's audible voice ("*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.*") sparks confusion. It is thunder? Is it an angel? The Father has glorified himself through Jesus' works. The Father will glorify himself in Jesus' resurrection.

This voice is for the crowd's sake. The Father's saying I'm for Jesus. Listen to him.

Judgment

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. – 12:31

In what sense is the cross God passing judgment on the world?

The world = the evil world system where righteousness is odd and sin is normalized.

The cross judges the world in that some who've already rejected Jesus become hardened by the crucifixion. The cross also sets sinners free from the sway of the evil world system.

In what sense does the cross cast Satan out?

2 Corinthians 4:4 speaks of "*the god of this world*" who is Satan. The cross strips Satan of his rule.

And they [the church] have conquered him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. – **Revelation 12:11**

On the cross, Jesus secured the salvation of sinners, resulting in rebellion against Satan's rule.

Rescue

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." – 12:32

Note 12:33 equates Jesus being lifted up with crucifixion.

Note the timing. This drawing of all people takes place when Jesus is lifted up. In other words, this drawing is future. It doesn't happen until the crucifixion takes place.

But John 6:44 indicates drawing was already taking place during Jesus' ministry.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. – **John 6:44**

People were coming to Jesus at that time. So people were being drawn. Note also the drawing is effective. The person can't come. They're drawn. They're raised up on the last day. The one drawn comes. The next verse confirms the drawing is effective.

It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me- – **John 6:45**

"heard and learned from the Father" substitutes for drawn by the Father. The one who hears and learns, the one who is drawn, assuredly comes to Jesus without fail. When God draws, the person comes.

What's going on here? The cross marks a major shift in salvation history. The *"all people"* who are drawn after the cross are the Gentiles. The Old Testament spoke of the salvation of the Gentiles as future (Isa 49:6). That day has dawned.

12:32 restates 12:24: ***"if it dies, it bears much fruit."*** Jesus' death will produce. *"all people"* doesn't mean every person ever born. Rather, it means Gentiles will soon be drawn, not just the Jews. The gospel will go to all nations and that gospel will not fail. Jesus' death will bear fruit.

Confusion

Confusion remains. Jesus will die, but the Christ *"remains forever."* How then could Jesus be the Christ? Jesus cuts to the chase. Now is the time for decision.

"The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." – **12:35-36**