

A Humble Mind and Joyful Heart

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

24 March, 2024

Children's Talk: Happy to Serve

Today is Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is called that because it was the day when the people in the city of Jerusalem used palm branches to make a path for the Lord to travel along. They did this as a way to let everyone know that Jesus was their king.

In a moment, we are going to do the same thing: we will lay down the palm branches we have brought as a way of showing that we think the Lord is our king too. As we do this, I want you to think about how the people would have done this: would they have been happy or sad? Would they have been excited or bored? So think about that, and let's have all of the children gather at the back of the church with their palm branches (and even if they don't have any they can gather and walk with us.

Now the Lord is at the front of the church, and we are going to come close to Him and put our palm branches in front of Him. So let's go. Now you can all have a seat over here and we will talk about this event.

First I am going to read the story from the Lord's word, and again I want you to be thinking about what they people would have felt: happiness and excitement or sadness and boredom?

Read Mark 11:1-11

So the Lord came and the people welcomed Him as their king. What is it that a king does? He tells people what to do, and they have to obey. Do you like it when people tell you what to do? A lot of the time probably not, especially when they tell you to do something hard. But were the people happy or sad about having a king? They were happy! They yelled,

Hosanna!

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the kingdom of our father David
That comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest! (Mark 11:9-10)

They were very excited to have a king! They were excited to have someone who would tell them what to do because He would also save them from their problems.

This is a good message to us. When someone tells us what to do we might be miserable about it. Have you ever been told to clean something up and you didn't want to and you did it slowly and it was so boring? That would be like if the Lord came to Jerusalem and people said, "Oh great. A new king. Oh well. I guess we'll make a path for Him. I hope He doesn't ask too much of us."

But they didn't do that. They rejoiced to have the Lord! And we can do the same thing. When we know we have to do something helpful, we have a choice: we can do it and be unhappy, or we can do it and be cheerful. We can do it poorly or we can do it well. So next time you are asked to do something helpful, try to see if you can be cheerful about it. Try to see if you can have fun doing it. That's the best way to welcome the Lord into our lives: don't just halfheartedly do the right thing: do the right thing with joy, happiness, and a full heart.

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Palm Sunday was not an isolated event in Jesus' Ministry. It was the culmination of years of preparation and initiated the events that led directly to His death and eventual resurrection. As such Palm Sunday, although in itself not the most significant event of the Easter narrative, is a crucial turning point in the Gospel story. From here forward the Lord would no longer be preaching and healing in the backwater of Galilee, but would confront the religious authorities of the day on their home turf, the center of the Jewish capital. These events symbolize a turning point in our spiritual lives as well: our personal Palm Sunday comes when we prepare a way for the Lord to enter deeply and fully into our hearts, ushering in new heights of insight and affection as well as new lows of temptation, despair, failure, and eventual rebirth through regeneration. Today we will explore what it takes to prepare for and embrace the Lord's ever deeper presence with us.

Jesus and His disciples began their journey in Galilee, in the north of the Land of Israel. From there they travelled south, teaching and performing miracles along the way. Eventually they reached Jerusalem; but before they could enter the city Jesus requested that two of His disciples enter a nearby village for a very specific purpose. They were to find a young donkey, which no one had ever ridden, and untie it. If anyone confronted them, they were to say, "The Lord has need of it" and they would be allowed to go on their way with the donkey. Now if we were not so familiar with this story the Lord's instructions would sound strange. Why specifically a young donkey? In other Gospels He even mentions the mother of the donkey as well. And why one that has never been ridden?

These details that sound strange to the modern ear were and are important because they draw on ancient wisdom. A donkey was an ancient symbol for a judge and a king. There was even an ancient prophecy that said,

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

In part then the Lord wanted to indicate that He was entering Jerusalem as the true king and judge. This connection between kings and judges and donkeys runs deeper than just an ancient symbol: it also reflects a spiritual truth. As with all animals in the Word, donkeys have a spiritual meaning that reflects something about people. In this case a young donkey represents the rational part of our mind: the part that stores facts and basic ideas, the part that uses logic, the part that makes us crave being right over being kind. It should be no surprise that a stubborn, wild animal represents the part of us that stubbornly sticks to facts and refuses to look deeper.

Given that fact, what is the Lord asking for when He indicates that He will need a young, unriden donkey before He can enter the city? In short He is asking that we take our rational mind, our mind that needs things to make sense, that needs to figure things out on our own, and offer it to Him for His use. The old and tired ideas that we have already figured out are of no use to Him: He needs us to be willing to listen at His feet like little children and accept what He has to offer apart from certainty, apart from proof. The thought for example that we can do or even think anything good on our own must be replaced with the realization that only the Lord does good through us. Or as another example, the notion that pursuit of pleasure is the greatest motivator must be replaced with the realization that true pleasure can only be found in selflessness (*Secrets of Heaven* §2657). To put it

simply, ideas that seem practical and born-out by experience must be replaced with spiritual ideas that at first glance seem naïve. This is what is represented in the young donkey, unriden and freely given. (Cf. *Secrets of Heaven* §2781:7-9).

With the donkey as a symbol of His kingship the Lord was then able to enter the city. It would give the people the sign that they needed in order to know that He was in charge, and they responded in kind: The disciples placed their clothes to make a comfortable seat for the Lord and in the path to create a way for Him to travel along. The people laid down their own clothes and tore down branches from nearby trees to add to the path for their king. It's as if once the signal of kingship had been given everyone now followed suit with their own acknowledgment of Jesus as King.

We experience something similar: once we have freely given our rational, logical, analytical mind over to the Lord, all of our ideas are laid before Him in service. All facts, all ideas, all truths, from the mundane to the sublime, can be submitted before the Lord for His use. This is important because truth has no use unless it is put in service to the Lord (*Secrets of Heaven* §1486). Pride in our own intelligence only boosts our ego; it does not actually help anyone in itself. Think of the skills and knowledge that you have that you take pride in. Those were given to you for the purpose of serving the Lord (Cf. *Doctrine of Life* §39, 71, 83). The accountant who is skilled in figures and numbers lays that knowledge before the Lord when he acts faithfully in his occupation and contributes to the wellbeing of his company and its employees. The judge who is skilled in law lays this skill before the Lord when he passes judgments not in the interest of himself but in the interest of justice. An experienced worker lays his skill before the Lord when he uses his knowledge not to lord it over his fellow employees but when he strives to support and

improve their work as well, freely passing on to them what he has learned. Above all, each and every one of us has some knowledge of what is good and true from the Word. If the Lord is to enter our lives we must not take pride in this knowledge, but use what we know to serve them and to improve the lives of our people and our society.

The realization that all our knowledge and skill is intended to serve the Lord cannot remain an intellectual realization. The heart must be engaged as well. We see this in the reaction of the people as Jesus went along the path they had prepared for Him:

Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:
"Hosanna!
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the kingdom of our father David
That comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9-10)

The people rejoiced in the coming of this new King and His Kingdom. They were overjoyed that they could be part of preparing His way. They anticipated with gladness the hope of salvation. From all this they blessed the Lord as He entered Jerusalem. In the Word, to bless the Lord has a special meaning. This meaning speaks directly to the heart:

Here it is evident that "to bless the Lord" is to sing to Him, to proclaim the good tidings of His salvation, to preach His wisdom and power, and thus to confess and acknowledge the Lord from the heart. They who do this cannot but be blessed by the Lord, that is, be gifted with those things which belong to blessing, namely, with heavenly, spiritual, natural, worldly, and bodily good; these, when they follow each other in this order, are the goods in which there is happiness. (*Secrets of Heaven* §1422)

To bless the Lord is to sing and speak of all the good things He provides and to acknowledge Him from the heart. This is how we engage our heart alongside of our mind: we rejoice that we get to submit our skills to His purposes. Not sadness that we are losing ourselves but joy that we are finding Him. Not resentment that our

skills were given to us for the sake of others, but gratitude in the gift that has been shared. Not bitterness that we can never be great on our own account but gladness that He is so much greater.

When we joyfully welcome the Lord this way we are ourselves blessed with all kinds of good things. As we *willingly* submit all of our worldly things to the Lord's spiritual use He comes and dwells deeply within us, just as the path on Palm Sunday led Him to enter into the heart of Jerusalem, into the Holy Temple. Nor do we just feel an abstract heavenly blessing but natural, worldly, even bodily pleasure and happiness. When we have our priorities right all things, even the most seemingly superficial, can be part of the Lord's Kingdom.

That's not the end of the story: in some ways it's only the beginning. Having come into the city, the Lord looked at all things and then withdrew to the town of Bethany. The following week could not match the expectations set by the triumphal entry. As He taught in the temple itself the chief priests and scribes accosted Him with verbal traps and plotted His death. He fought back with powerful teachings and parables. At last, on Thursday evening, He was arrested and subjected to a mock trial. Friday evening He was crucified and died on the Cross. It was not until all these horrors had past that at last on Sunday morning He rose from the grave and completed His conquest over hell and death.

This too is the path that we take. Submitting ourselves to the Lord, first with our minds, then with our hearts, is only the preparation that lets the Lord in. Once we have started down that path the hells rise up against us in desperation and the real work of life begins: powerful teachings against utter falsities, worldly desire clashing against heavenly aspirations, a battle to stay the course through all temptations and struggles. What at first feels like a triumphant moment of turning our lives over to the

Lord is only the beginning. Only by fighting to remain true to the Lord can we come through to Easter morning and discover the promised fulfillment of all of our hopes: regeneration into a new person and a new world, one of heavenly joy and happiness.

This then is the message of Palm Sunday: the Lord needed a young donkey to ride, a path to be prepared, and a crowd to rejoice in Him. In the spiritual meaning a donkey to ride means our rational mind, humbly submitting to Him. The path prepared with clothes and palm branches means taking all our external knowledge and skill, whether it be from worldly experience or the Word itself, and putting them to use for His sake, not our own. The crowd that joyfully blessed Him means to act not just out of obligation but from deep-seated willingness in the heart. With these three things, a humble mind, a wealth of useful ideas, and a heart that gives its all to the Lord, His way is prepared and He can enter into our lives. We must then be prepared to face the new challenges that come with spiritual growth and allow the Lord, through hardship and temptation, to create us anew. *Amen.*