

**Palm Sunday: A Day of Critical Contrast**  
 Luke 19:28-44

*And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*  
 Hebrews 5:9

**Introduction:** There are many tools to teach a principle or illustrate a point: some play *devils advocate* to try to force someone to think through and prove their point, some tell anecdotal stories or rely on metaphors to capture the idea or meaning of a particular detail. Comparing and contrasting two different items helps improving comprehension by highlighting important details making abstract ideas more concrete and reducing confusion between related concepts. (These happen all the time: online school/church/work vs. in person; capitalism vs. marxism/socialism, etc; gasoline/oil based energy vs. ones that don't work... ;) In the medical field, a doctor will perform an MRI *with Contrast* in order enhance an internal picture and giving a detailed view of inflammation, a potential tumor or to analyze blood flow and supply. Contrast helps show critical pieces of information that can be life-saving. As we think about Palm Sunday, Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem for the last week of His earthly ministry, the contrasts we see are no less life saving.

We come this morning to the end of a 3 1/2 year public ministry of Jesus culminating in the last week of His life on earth before His resurrection. We refer to it as the *Passion Week*, most likely coming from an KJV translation of Acts 1:3, "*He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering* (passion in KJV). This week takes up nearly 40% of the NT narrative and to understand this week is to understand the reason, purpose, and work of Jesus in His life, death, and resurrection. In some ways, the **triumphal entry** is a high point, where Jesus acted like a KING more than at any point of His earthly life, accepting shouts of messianic praise that He had shunned before and clearly fulfilling Zechariah 9:9 where Jerusalem is promised a king coming to her riding on a donkey. The praise was spontaneous, continuous, and unanimous. You see the people knew that Jesus was a wanted man (whether they had WANTED posters around I don't know, but it would have been known), and they had already wondered if He'd come to the Passover feast at all (John 11:56), knowing that He'd be arrested on sight. They wanted to see **Lazarus** (John 12:9), whom He'd raised from the dead weeks before, knowing that if they were going to war with Rome, it would be nice to have a king to bring you back after being killed. They **shouted a Messianic Psalm** in 118:25-26, recognizing the rejoicing that comes when Messiah enters. On the surface, this was a singularly awesome day of celebration, sticking it to the Romans and religious leaders, and waiting the culmination of an earthly kingdom. However, if we look a bit under the surface, we instead see a day of **contrasts**, what was seen only signaled something deeper or different below the surface.

**Critical Contrast #1: The Divine King took on Humble Humanity**

*"When He drew near Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a cold tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here.'"*

Luke 19:29-30

To understand Jesus, to believe in Him for forgiveness of sin and salvation, we must understand who He is completely. Jesus is both fully, completely God (Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3) while embracing real, full, and complete humanity (Phil. 2:5-8). If He were any less than completely God and man, He could not be a perfect sacrifice for sin, but would rather be another in a long line of tragic stories of a good man sacrificing Himself for loved ones, but that is all. The triumphal entry actually shows us the personal union of Jesus' two natures.

John 10 is really where one should start if you want to understand the triumphal entry. About 3 1/2 months before Passion Week, Jesus was at the **Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem**, which would have been in December that year. Right before He made this feast He stated:

*"No one takes it (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I received from my Father." (John 10:18)*

This statement did two things: 1) Declared His loving intention as a good shepherd who lays down His life for His own and who also would take it up again. Remember, in all of the greedy, underhanded, illegal arrests, trials, and death sentences, Jesus was ultimately in control of it all. No one tricked Him. No one got one over on Him. He had HIS OWN in view when He went as a lamb before the slaughter. 2) The Jews were pretty ticked by the fact that He was calling God His Father. They thought He was either insane or demon possessed. It did not sit well.

Finally they asked Him, *"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly"*

*"I give them (my sheep) eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*

***I and the Father are ONE.*" (John 10:28-30)**

Jesus claimed oneness with the Father, one in nature, the exact imprint of divine nature. This was the last straw for the Jewish leaders. They picked up stones to stone Him and tried to arrest Him. Jesus was a fugitive for the next 3 1/2 months and had to be strategic to get back into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He would flee across the Jordan River, outside of the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin, He would return to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead, which signed His death warrant from the leadership. He then went North to Ephraim (John 11:54; Luke 17:11), moving North to Galilee, travelling down the Jordan Rift valley with the Passover Pilgrims who would have travelled in a large group. Along the way He taught parables, about His kingdom, and did miracles. As the crowd entered Jerusalem on Friday for preparations, Jesus stayed in Bethany, a Sabbath day journey outside the city and outside of arrest, and waited for His appearance on Sunday. It was the crowd that flowed into the city that answered the questions: ***Is He coming? When?*** HE IS COMING, and it will be Sunday....get ready with your branches.

Two natures in one personal unity in Jesus. Why is the contrast of a divine king taking on humble humanity so life altering?

1) Jesus was fully man, meaning He lived with all the limitations of humanity that we face, so the life He lived in the flesh was like us in every way. Wait, but He was God and did miracles, right? Remember this, Jesus did not play the PART of a human, He was human. ***He voluntarily surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes.*** Yes He did miracles to validate His claims as Messiah, yes He had knowledge of men's hearts and situations, but He exercised those sparingly through the leading of the Spirit and Father. When He fasted and faced temptation, He did it as a human through the truth of Scripture. When He had to get back into Jerusalem and evade arrest, He was shrewd and understood politics, jurisdictions, and crowd dynamics. When Jesus gave Himself as our **Good Shepherd**, **He did so as a man who lived our life, yet did so perfectly.**

2) Jesus was fully God, since only God could satisfy the requirements of God. Jesus was put forward as a propitiation by His blood (Rom. 3:25)...to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might

be **just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**. (Ro. 3:26). In other words, no mere man could have satisfied the wrath of God for sin, so Jesus had to be wholly both, perfect humanity and completely divine. Next week we are going to look at 2 Cor. 5:21, 15 words that changed the world, where Jesus lived the life we could never live so God would look on us and see His life, and seeing our sin and pouring His wrath out of Jesus, so that we could be made righteous. **The triumphal entry** was a contrast of divine Kingship veiled in frail humanity, and that was exactly what was needed to offer us forgiveness.

**Critical Contrast #2: The Welcomed King rejected by Waffling Worshipers**

*"And as He rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. 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**, saying, '**Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!**' And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.'"*

Luke 19:36-40

A second contrast is seen back in Luke 19. The people were ecstatic to see Jesus ride into Jerusalem riding a donkey. **Passover** was a feast that commemorated a time when God brought His people out of a Gentile overlord, and did so in dramatic fashion (can we say "Red Sea collapsing on Pharaoh!"), and this had all the makings of a better sequel. The people saw the **mighty works of Jesus**, especially Lazarus, and were hyped by the potential. But all of us should quickly recognize that this did not last, but their **faith was as thin as the veneer on particle board** (or the candy shell on M & M's). We see this contrast of welcoming Jesus but then waffling on that commitment within days, where shouts of "Hosanna!" were replaced with "Crucify Him", shouts of "Blessed is the King" with "Give us Barabbas!". Why did the crowd miss Jesus? The same reason we miss Him today:

**1. The crowds who welcomed Jesus as king on Palm Sunday**

**John 12:37** *Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,*

A mass of humanity threw down their garments and branches five days before they called for Jesus to be crucified. They were amassed in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover and they wanted to see Jesus but they wanted to see a man named Lazarus, a man who Jesus raised from the dead a few weeks earlier (John 12:9). They were buzzing because Jesus was who they had hoped for, a messiah that would give them what they wanted, a way to get rid of Roman occupation. When Jesus did not turn out to be what they thought and hoped, they called for Him to be crucified.

**What they loved:** They loved Jesus' miracles. They loved that Jesus could raise people from the dead. They loved what they got from Jesus. They loved the fact that this man could be the one to save them from being servants of the Romans, which is why they shouted "Hosanna", which means "save us" (John 12:13; Psalm 118:25-26).

**What they feared:** This group feared the repercussions of following Jesus. Jesus made it clear that to follow Him would mean they could not follow the current religious leadership who taught someone can get to God by keeping the Law, the rules, by sheer determination of one's will (Matt. 5:20; Matt. 23). If they followed Jesus completely, they ran the risk of being put out of the Synagogue, which would have meant exclusion from family, applying their trade, and being a social outcast:

**John 9:22** His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. (*This was the story of the man born blind healed by Jesus*)

The truth was it was easier to yell "crucify Him" than to yield their lives to Jesus. Jesus offered Himself to the crowds to forgive their sin and gather them as a mother hen (Matt. 23:37) in protection and comfort. Jesus wanted the people to follow Him, **but it would cost them everything**, including reputation, family, and comfort. They did not want to give up the comfort of their life and yield it to a life of following Christ. Some still fear this today and it hinders them from following Jesus.

## 2. The religious leaders of the day

**John 12:42** Nevertheless, many even of the **authorities** believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue;

A second group was really messed up by Jesus. Jesus exposed the religious leaders of the day for their greed, their abusing the people, and leading the people astray. They hated Jesus for it. John tells exactly what they loved:

### What they loved:

**John 12:43** for they **loved the glory that comes from man** more than the glory that comes from God.

They loved their position of reverence from the people, from the common man. It was a nice gig. They had **power and authority**, two things that do not come easily. They had **position**, and Jesus threatened what they treasured most.

### What they feared:

**John 11:47** So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.<sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and **the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.**"

This group wanted Jesus dead because He was going to expose them to the people. In order to keep the status quo of their life, they devised an illegal, insidious, underhanded, and wicked plan to kill an innocent man (John 11:49-50). Jesus exposes our true intentions and pleasures. Some people think they are happier and content without Jesus. They are ok with Jesus as long as He does not call them to change. Jesus told the religious leaders of the day to repent and turn from their wickedness to follow Him, but they would have to leave everything. It was easier to kill Jesus, to make Him go away and **live out a lie** than to come to grips with the reality of their sin.

The message of the gospel is never about **adding Jesus to your life**, it is about **yielding your life to His**. Jesus was abundantly clear in His message heading to the cross, "If anyone would come after me, let Him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Luke 9:23-24) "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62), and "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take His cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Matt. 10:37-38). **Jesus wants to change everything in you, transforming your mind, heart, desires, affections, conscience, goals, and imaginations. He will accept nothing less than whole-hearted devotion and yielding of our will to His,**

**His life for ours, and surrendering all to Him.** When we miss this, we miss the gospel. When we miss this, we are like the crowds who wanted something FROM Jesus rather than giving their life TO Jesus.

**Critical Contrast #3: The Triumphant King shed Troubled Tears**

*And when he drew near and saw the city, **He wept over it**, 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. 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 and tear you down to 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.*

Luke 19:41-44

In all the seeming triumph of Palm Sunday, it truly was a day of sorrow. Jesus knew that the faith of the crowd was thin, the shouts of praise were self driven, and the one they were exalting was one they propped up in their own image and imagination. So as He drew near to the city, **He wept over it**. Why did Jesus weep?

- **He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief** - Jesus knew what it was like to be despised, rejected, one from whom men hide their faces. (Isa. 53:3). He knew the sting of betrayal from Judas and the sorrow of rejection from Peter. Jesus is our great High Priest who can sympathize with our weakness (Heb. 4:15), who felt our emotions and expressed our affections. This is why He wept at the funeral of Lazarus (John 11:35), because He was sorrowful at the prospect of death and how those He loved had to face it.
- **He Sorrowed over the unwillingness of His people to embrace Him** - "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, he city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have **gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!***" (Luke 13:34) Consistently in His ministry, Jesus gave a clarion call for His chosen people, Israel, to follow Him. And consistently, like the nation in the OT, they refused to turn from their own sin, life, and propped up religion to do so. On Tuesday of Passion week, Jesus uttered the same phrase, and said He would not return until they proclaimed "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:37-39).
- **He wept for the reality that rejection would lead to destruction** - What is absolutely clear out of Palm Sunday: **Jesus desperately desires a relationship with people and open His arms wide to all who would come to Him.** In **Hebrews 5:7-9** it says, '*In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who is able to save Him from death, and he was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a son, he learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*' Jesus went joyfully to the cross (Heb. 12:2), but it filled Him with dread. He became a curse as God satisfied His wrath, pouring it out on His Son, and was **judiciously disfellowshipped by the Father** as a veil of darkness covered the scene and in gloriously intimate, terrible, glorious moments, Jesus became sin for us.

So why did He weep over Jerusalem? Why did He burst through in tears like we do when we find out a loved one has died or diagnosed? Rejection of His open armed offer will be met with fury. He prophesied that Jerusalem itself would be surrounded, toppled, and destroyed. In 70 A.D, Rome had finally had enough and did surround the city, razed it to the ground, and those they did not slaughter they carried off. There is a cost to rejection. **Jesus offers salvation to all, but He offers it on His terms, not ours.** He is not calling for people to like Him, to merely accept that He's real, or add Him to life. He's calling people to repent, to turn from their sin, to follow and obey Him with the entirety of life.

The **amazing hopefulness** of Palm Sunday is that the glorious, divine, sovereign King of the universe willingly went to the cross, to die in our place, to become sin, and to love those who were once enemies of Him. **The call is simple.** Have you yielded your life to Jesus, or have you simply been playing a dangerous game of liking Him? Do you like the benefits of Jesus in your life, but not the cost? Have you turned from your selfish pursuit and purpose in life to yield yourself to joyful surrender to Him?