“Palm Sunday: I Believe”

John 12:12-19

April 9, 2017

Please open your Bible with me to the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

Given what you’ve learned over the years about the Sunday we call Palm Sunday and what do you imagine it was like?

According to one historian, “Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30 … One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east, Jesus, from the peasant village of Nazareth, rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers, also from the peasant class. His message was an offer to be their King.

On the same day, on the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea and Samaria, was also entering Jerusalem. Pilate arrived at the head of a column of centurions and soldiers.

A visual panoply of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. It was easy to hear the sounds of the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums.

And, as the dust swirled into the eyes of the silent onlookers, some were curious, some awed, some resentful. Pilate’s procession displayed not only imperial power, but also Roman imperial theology. And while Jesus’s procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate’s proclaimed the power of the Roman Empire.

According to this theology, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome, but the Son of God … For Rome’s Jewish subjects, Pilate’s procession embodied not only a rival social order, but also a rival theology.” [www.found on <http://jezuiti.sk/blog/kamnatftu/files/palm-sunday-procession-with-palms-gospel.pdf>]

[Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus’s Final Week in Jerusalem. Harper San Francisco, 2006, pp. 2-5].

This comes from a 2006 book titled “The Last Week: A Day By Day Account of Jesus’ Final Week.” So, it must have been a very interesting Sunday if indeed Pilate entered Jerusalem on the same day as Jesus the true Son of God.

Imagine the responses of the people to either of these processions. Imagine being the common, ordinary Jew while Pilate strode in on his high horse. Do you really think the common man was blessed by his arrival? Then consider those who watched and followed as Jesus rode into town on a donkey.

I want to wish all of you a Blessed Palm Sunday. And I want to say something today about the importance of that day.

Please follow with me at Matthew 21:1 *“And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage [meaning “house of unripe figs], unto the Mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, (2) Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.*

*(3) And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. (4) All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, (5) Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*

*(6) And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, (7) and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. (8) And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.*

*(9) And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.”*

From my reading of the Gospel accounts of this final week of the LORD Jesus, I’ve discovered this. Ten events occurred between today, Palm Sunday and Friday which was Passover. Jesus performed a lot of miracles. He taught at least three major parables. And He preached four major prophecies.

Yet, when it comes to Palm Sunday, the one thing that might stand out above every other thing is what’s on my heart today. I’ve titled today’s sermon “Palm Sunday; I Believe.” Shall we pray?

Palm Sunday is one of the few specific Sundays predicted in the OT.

Please turn back with me to another Gospel where this same story is found; John chapter twelve.

John 12:1 *“Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany [meaning “house of the humble”], where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.”*

Haven’t you sometimes wondered why the LORD sent Jesus into Jerusalem on the Sunday before that final Passover especially when just a few days later He’d be nailed to a Cross?

The Holy Spirit, through John, tells us that it was six days before the Passover that Jesus arrived in the town of Bethany. It was at Bethany where He’d just recently raised Lazarus from the dead. Now, Bethany was just two miles east Jerusalem. It sits on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives.

And, if you count your days correctly, six days before the coming Friday Passover gets you to Saturday. So, from John 12:1, we see that Jesus arrives in Bethany on Saturday. And the very next day would be Palm Sunday. And on that Sunday Jesus would ride a donkey into Jerusalem and be received as the Promised Messiah and King of Israel.

Now, notice what we find in verse twelve. John 12:12 *“On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, (13) Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.”*

Do you see what is occurring here? You see two groups of people involved in the first Palm Sunday. First, you’ll find a group of Believers. Look back just one verse to verse eleven. John 12:11 “*Because that by reason of him [Lazarus] many of the Jews went away, and* ***believed on Jesus****.”*

First and foremost, there are a number of people here who believed Jesus was the Promised Messiah. But look back just one more verse, verse ten. John 12:10 *“But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death;…”*

I think this might be one of the most astonishing things in the entire Bible. A man, Lazarus, has just risen from the dead. Jesus spoke. And he returned to life. And the chief priests of Israel are convening a meeting to find a way to put Lazarus back to death.

So, can you see with me two groups? We see Believers and we see Unbelievers. These two groups have existed throughout history and are present right this very moment. And it sounds a bit like the LORD’s parable about the wheat growing in among the tares, doesn’t it?

This is the key that unlocks, not only the story of Palm Sunday, but the entire story of the Bible. There appears to be one element that makes an individual into a satisfied, joy-filled child of God, destined for Heaven and another individual, a person of this world with no hope of eternity and no personal relationship with their Creator.

The key is faith. Verse eleven again. John 12:11 *“Because that by reason of him [Lazarus] many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.”*

Now, look back with me at John 11:45 *“Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did,* ***believed on him****. (46) But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.*

*(47) Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, what do we? For this man doeth many miracles. (48) If we let him thus alone, all men will* ***believe on him****: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.”*

It’s still that way with people today. When it comes to the Son of God, He a polarizing Person. It always comes down to this crucial matter. Am I a Believer or an Unbeliever?

Now go with me to Palm Sunday. Let’s see what Jesus teaches this day. John 12:35 *“Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. (36) While ye have light,* ***believe*** *in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.*

*(37) But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they* ***believed not*** *on him: (38) that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath* ***believed*** *our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? (39) Therefore they could* ***not believe****, because that Esaias said again,*

*(40) He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. (41) These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.*

*(42) Nevertheless among the chief rulers also* ***many believed*** *on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: (43) for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

*(44) Jesus cried and said, He that* ***believeth*** *on me,* ***believeth*** *not on me, but on him that sent me. (45) And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. (46) I am come a light into the world, that* ***whosoever believeth on me*** *should not abide in darkness.”*

Now did you notice that even among the chief rulers there were some who believed on Jesus? Look again at verse forty-two. *(42) Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many* ***believed*** *on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:…”*

Isn’t this always God’s way? The characteristic that distinguishes between those who know the LORD and those who don’t know Him is this matter of faith. Here’s the question. “Have you believed on Christ or not?” With God the main issue is simple faith, trust, confidence in Him; because without faith it’s impossible to please Him.

Actually the entire Book of John presents a contrast between people who believe and those who don’t believe. Do you remember the wedding at Cana when the LORD turned the water into wine? Here’s John 2:11 *“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples* ***believed*** *on him.”*

And do you remember the story of Jesus asking for a cup of water from a Samaritan women? Here’s John 4:39 *“And* ***many of the Samaritans*** *of that city* ***believed*** *on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.”* The testimony of this believing woman affected the entire town of Sychar, which came to trust in the LORD Jesus.

And then there’s the Feast of Tabernacles. On the final day of that feast, Jesus stood in the street and announced that if anyone would come to Him and drink, he would find the Water of Life. Here’s John 7:37 *“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. (38 He that* ***believeth*** *on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”*

You see, the message of that first Palm Sunday is the same message you’ll find time after time and on page after page of the Bible. Are you a Believer? Do you believe on the LORD Jesus Christ?

How many are there who attend Church; who read and study the life of Christ; who know a lot of Bible stories; many who call themselves Christians (Christ-followers). Yet, according to the Bible, the distinguishing factor between those who know the LORD and those who don’t Him is this matter of believing.

So, my conclusion regarding the LORD’s reason for Palm Sunday is rooted in this word “believe.” So many have attended Church services on Palm Sunday and they enjoy the music and they sing hymns and they listen to a sermon. But what is the LORD’s reason for this particular day? It’s this: that people might believe on His Son and in believing, they find salvation.

So, the best question for Palm Sunday is this “What does it mean to believe on Christ?” Let me bring this to apply to your heart by just three things. Here they are.

You’ve seen this many times and you’ve heard me say that repentance and believing are two sides of the same coin. What that means is this. When you repent, you change your mind about what you believe.

* To “repent” means “to change your mind about God, Christ, your sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.”
* To “believe” means “to simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for your sins.”

What does it mean to believe?

First, to believe means to have a knowledge of the facts.

You see, the LORD has spoken. He’s shown us His heart. He’s given us His Words. And why? He wants us to believe what He says.

And included in what God says is the Good News. And when it comes to the matter of believing, the facts are extremely important. Here’s what we find as far as the facts are concerned.

This is what we read in Mark chapter one. Mark 1:14 *“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, (15) And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and* ***believe the gospel****.”*

At the outset of the LORD’s earthly ministry, He said this. *“Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”* When it comes to believing, you’ve got to have something to believe. And that something is the Gospel. The Gospel is “God’s Good News.”

And here’s the Apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians. I Corinthians 15:3 *“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; (4) And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (5) And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:…”*

This is the *knowledge* of the Gospel. And, it’s surprisingly simple. From a little child to an elderly person, everyone can *know* the Gospel. Christ died for our sins. He was buried. And He rose from the dead.

And today you may call yourself a Believer. But if you don’t *know* the Gospel, then it’s impossible. You see, the first step in believing is to *know* the blessed facts of the Gospel. You don’t have to be a theologian with a great knowledge of God. You don’t have to have a full understanding of the teachings of the Bible to believe. All you need is a basic knowledge of the Gospel that Jesus died for your sins. He was buried. And He rose from the dead the third day.

How many are there who profess to be Believers because they simply “believe in God.” But is that what the Bible teaches? Is that what Jesus taught? What did He preach? *“Believe the Gospel.”*

First, to believe means to have a knowledge of the Gospel.

Second, to believe means that you personally agree with the facts of the Gospel. It’s not enough to *know* what the Gospel is. It’s not even enough to *like* the facts of the Gospel. There are many people who hear the words of the Gospel every Sunday in Churches all across the globe. They hear it on radio and on television. They listen to it on the internet. They see it in books and magazines. Yet, if you asked them if they agree that they are sinners and deserving of God’s Judgment God upon their sins, they might just prefer to change the subject. Folks, believing includes knowing the Gospel and then agreeing with it personally.

Let me take a minute to show you the difference between knowing and agreeing with the Gospel. What is the difference between these two phrases? “Jesus Christ died for sins.” “Jesus Christ died for my sins.”

Isn’t the difference obvious? There’s one word here that makes that takes you from the world of unbelief to the world of belief. It’s the word “my.” Isn’t that a huge difference? When I say that I believe Christ died for sins or when I say that He died for my sins. You see, in order to be a Believer, you will have to *agree* in your heart and mind that you are a sinner and in need of His saving work.

First, to believe means to have a knowledge of the Gospel.

Second, to believe means to agree with the facts of the Gospel.

Third, to believe means to trust the Person of Christ. And to trust Him completely as the only way of eternal salvation. The One Who died on the Cross two thousand years ago was God, the Son. He had not one sin and yet He carried upon His back the sins of the world. And at the Cross, He died as the payment for *your* sins. Then, He rose from the dead.

Folks, can you see what it means to believe? When someone believes the Gospel, you’ve committed the eternal saving of your soul to One Person and One Person alone, to the LORD Jesus Christ. And the moment someone commits himself to Christ alone, He becomes a Believer. He becomes a man or woman of Faith.

Here’s what one wise man of God said about this matter. *“Faith is chosen by God to be the receiver of salvation, because it does not pretend to create salvation, nor to help in it, but it is content humbly to receive it. Faith is the tongue that begs pardon, the hand which receives it, and the eye which sees it; but it is not the price which buys it.*

*Faith never makes herself her own plea, she rests all her argument upon the blood of Christ. She becomes a good servant to bring the riches of the Lord Jesus to the soul, because she acknowledges whence she drew them, and owns that grace alone entrusted her with them.”* (C. H. Spurgeon, from Spurgeon’s “All of Grace”).

Now here’s today’s conclusion. It’s a word from the Apostle Paul. In it, he uses the illustration of one the greatest Jews in history for an example of believing. The man’s name is Abraham. Abraham, as you know, is the Father of the Jewish nation.

Here’s what we read in Romans chapter four and verse three. Romans 4:3 *“For what saith the scripture?* ***Abraham believed God****, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. (4) Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. (5) But to him that worketh not, but* ***believeth on him*** *that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

Paul’s words are simple and powerful. Abraham, the Father of the Jewish nation, entered into a saving relation-ship with God one way, by believing. The moment he believed, God counted his faith for righteousness. He had a knowledge of the Gospel. He agreed with it. And he put his trust in the LORD Himself. And notice the emphasis of the Apostle. He had absolutely no confidence in his own good works as a means to eternal salvation.

Romans 4:5 *“But to him that worketh not, but* ***believeth on him*** *that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”*

So, whether it’s Palm Sunday, 30 A.D., or it’s Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017, God’s reason for this day is that men and women and children will *“believe on the LORD Jesus Christ and be saved for eternity.”*

The question then that must be asked is this. Are you a Believer?

1. To “believe” means to have a knowledge of the facts.
2. To “believe” means to personally agree with the facts of the Gospel.
3. To “believe” means to trust the Person of Christ completely as the only way of eternal salvation.

Today, if you will admit you are a sinner and not deserving of His Love. If you will admit you are a sinner and deserving of His Judgment. Then, tell God that you believe He sent His Son to die as your Substitute and that you want to be forgiven of all your sins.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* If you’d like, you can pray a pray just like this one: *“LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and in need of your grace. I believe that You sent Your Son to the Cross to die for me. Please forgive me of all my sins and make me Your child. Thank you.”*

Today is the Day of Salvation. Today you can repent (change your mind) about God, Christ, Sin, and Salvation and find eternal life. Today you can become a Believer. Today, at the moment you repent and believe, you are a Believer.

So, are you a Believer? Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone for your eternal salvation? That’s this year’s Palm Sunday message.

Shall we pray? Hymn # \_\_\_\_\_ “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”