

# Palm Sunday:

## Peter, Do You Love Me?

Sunday, April 14, 2019  
Matthew 21:1-7

Two things are definitely very important to the LORD; knowing him and loving Him. If you were asked “Do you know the LORD?” most of us would say “Yes” when we really mean “I know *about* Him.” And, on the matter of loving the LORD, I think we could all say “we need to love Him more than we do.” You see, when you know Him and when you love Him, you will follow Him.

Today’s Palm Sunday. And I’d like you to consider with me the importance of knowing the LORD and loving the LORD. So, I’ve titled today’s sermon “Palm Sunday: Peter Do You Love Me?” Shall we pray?

Palm Sunday was not always called Palm Sunday. Originally, it was first called “Pasach,” (pronounced “pay-zock” פֶּסַח) which means “Passover.” In the early Church, Pasach lasted a full seven days. And that was true under the Law as well. And here’s how it came to fall where it does in the calendar. Since it began on the Sunday before Passover in the days of Jesus, the Early Church chose to celebrate it on the Sunday before Good Friday and Easter. And they changed the name to Palm Sunday. So, every Sunday prior to Good Friday, since then, Christians have celebrated it with Palms and worship.

But what *did* happen that day? Here’s what it would have looked like. Multitudes from all over the world, converged on Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. The city nearly tripled in number during Passover (some say over 600,000). Lots of

people. And, as soon as the crowds saw Jesus riding into the city on the donkey, they turned to cutting down palm branches and began to lay them down in front of Jesus along with their coats; their tunics.

Imagine the smell of fresh cut branches. You could likely feel the atmosphere. It would have been filled with anticipation and exhilaration; the King is here. Also, it must have been noisy; people shouting and calling out to Jesus “Hosanna, Son of the Highest.” Hosanna means “Save now.” And singing. As the beautiful fronds were being laid down in front of the LORD, the crowds were singing “The King has arrived.” And, like the great kings of history, riding into his hometown after a huge victory on the battlefield; it must have been a parade.

And where do we find the disciples? Especially, where is Peter?

Please open your Bible with me to Mark chapter ten and let’s find out. Mark 10:46 “*And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaus, sat by the highway side begging.* [Jericho is called “the city of Palms” in Deuteronomy 34:5. The Hebrew word “Jericho” literally means “fragrant place” because it’s an oasis fed by a natural spring and there were lots of palm trees there].

(47) *And when he [Bartimaeus] heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to call out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.* (48) *And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

(49) *And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.* (50) *And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.* (51) *And Jesus answered and said unto him, what wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.* (52) *And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith*

*bath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.*

*(11:1) And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage [Bethphage mean “house of unripe figs”] and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, (2) And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. (3) And if any man say unto you, why do ye this? Say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. (4) And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. (5) And certain of them that stood there said unto them, what do ye, loosing the colt? (6) And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go.*

*(7) And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. (8) And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. (9) And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: (10) blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. (11) And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.”*

Jesus ends his time in Jericho and travels up to Jerusalem; from healing Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, to an area east of Jerusalem and located on two hills known by these two names; Bethphage and Bethany, again, located just two miles away on the east side of the Mount of Olives. He moves from a miracle to a parade.

And from the Mount of Olives, the LORD sends two of His disciples over to the hillside town of Bethphage on a mission. “As soon as you get there” says Jesus, “you will find a donkey tied near an out-building where two roads converge. Untie him

*and bring him to Me. And if anyone objects, tell him that the LORD needs him. And he’ll let you bring the donkey to Me.”*

So, when the men return with the donkey, Jesus rides down the Mount of Olives and then into the city proper. He’s on His way to the Temple. And as He enters, the parade begins.

And did you see where the disciples were? Mark 11:11 “And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.”

All twelve spend their Sunday evening in the nearby town of Bethany. Now, here’s what we see here. These men were with Jesus every day for three full years. But they were with Him especially that final week. They were always with Him.

But what they didn’t know that first Palm Sunday is what you and I know – that in just five days history’s greatest events would take place – the LORD’s arrest, trial, sentencing, execution, death, burial, and subsequent resurrection.

So, all in all, it must have been, not only a beautiful parade, but a very serious one as well because Jesus is now being hailed as the King and the Savior of Israel. And the thousands of Jews in Jerusalem were, at least outwardly and at least at this point, seeing Him as their Messiah.

My question, then, is this. What happened to Peter because, as you know, he would deny ever knowing the LORD? And soon you’ll hear Jesus asking him this question, “Peter, do you love Me?”

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to know and to love the LORD when everything is going well; when there’s a parade, so-to-speak; when things are bright and positive and quote “all seems right with the world”? But, what happens to your heart when things don’t go as you expect them to? Does the LORD begin to ask you the question “Do you love Me?”

Next, turn with me in your Bible to the fourth chapter of Matthew and verse eighteen. Matthew 4:18 “And Jesus, walking

*by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. (19) And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. (20) And they straightway left their nets, and followed him."*

Peter and Andrew were fishermen; men who regularly fished the Sea of Galilee and knew it very well. They, along with their father Zebedee, were in the business of catching and selling fish. Now, did you notice that Peter is the very first disciple? Doesn't that imply that he's with Jesus from the very beginning of His public ministry? So, Peter goes from fishing for tilapia to fishing for men. By the way, you can enjoy a meal of "St. Peter's fish" in any of the restaurants around Galilee today. St. Peter's fish is tilapia.

Look again with me at Matthew 4:20 "*And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. (21) And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. (22) And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*

*(23) And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (24) And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.*

*(25) And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan."*

Peter experiences all this. He listens as his LORD preaches to the multitudes. He hears Him teach in synagogues all over Israel. He watches Him heal every one of every ailment; verse 24; those who were sick, those with disease, those in torment, the demon-possessed Peter watched Jesus set free; the lunatics

and those with palsy were miraculously healed. And Peter see great multitudes following Jesus wherever He goes from Galilee over to Decapolis and back to Jerusalem and even across the Jordan River.

So, isn't Peter getting to know the LORD? Or, does he know *about* Him? What does it really mean to know the LORD? Do you know Him? Or, do you know about Him?

Next, go with me to the Gospel of John chapter thirteen. John 13:1 "*Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. (2) And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; (3) Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; (4) He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. (5) After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*

*(6) Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? (7) Jesus answered and said unto him, what I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. (8) Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. (9) Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."*

Peter knows Jesus as a Teacher (He's the Master and Peter, the disciple), as a Healer, as a Fisher of men. Now, he sees Him as an Example of service to others.

Next, watch Peter responding to Jesus. Turn with me to Matthew chapter twenty-six and verse thirty.

Matthew 26:30 "*And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives. (31) Then saith Jesus unto them, **all ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. (32) But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.***

(33) Peter answered and said unto him, though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. (34) Jesus said unto him, *Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.* (35) Peter said unto him, though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.”

Do you remember these words from another of the LORD’s disciples? “Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

It may turn out that your own words will one day come back to haunt you. Look at the Apostle Thomas. What comes to your mind when you hear about the disciple named Thomas? He’s defined by this “Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.” Here we are 2,000 years after he said it and he’s still being called “Doubting Thomas.”

Then there’s Peter. I’m sure he wishes he’d never said this. Here’s his response when Jesus came to wash his feet. Matthew 26:31 “Then saith Jesus unto them, *all ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.* (32) *But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.* (33) Peter answered and said unto him, though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.”

And what did he do before the rooster sang his morning anthem? He denied that he even knew the LORD.

Luke 22:61 says this “And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. (62) And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.”

The two main things that matter in your life are these. Do you know the LORD and do you love the LORD? Peter, it turns out, is a study in knowing God and loving God. But,

alongside knowing and loving the LORD, Peter didn’t know himself very well.

Peter knew Jesus as a Teacher. He knew Him as a Healer. He knew Him as a Fisher of men. He knew Him as an Example of service to others. Then, when Jesus predicted that He’d fail in the hour of testing, he went so far as to tell Jesus that he’d *never* forsake Him. So, what happened to Peter? And could this happen to you or me?

Go with me, last, to John 21 and listen as Jesus, again, reaches into Peter’s heart; John 21:14 “*This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.* (15) *So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?* He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, *Feed my lambs.*

(16) He saith to him again the second time, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, *Feed my sheep.*

(17) He saith unto him the third time, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, *Lovest thou me?* And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, *Feed my sheep.*”

Why, after all the time Peter had spent with the LORD; why, after Peter’s denial and repentance and weeping; why, after Peter comes back to the LORD in humility and with a soft heart; why does the LORD ask him if he loved Him? And why does He ask him this three times?

Here’s why. Peter, and you and I, need to know what our deepest motivation is as a Christian. There are lots of reasons why we serve the LORD.

Are you serving because you see yourself advancing the LORD’s kingdom in this world? That’s a great reason to serve. But, is that the best motivation for service? Some people serve the LORD because they want to receive rewards when they go to Heaven? But is that the best motivation for serving the

LORD? Do you serve because you want to help people with their problems and needs? Do you serve because it gives you a sense of satisfaction when you affect someone's life? Or, does it make you feel important to serve?

Did you know that these are all great reasons to serve the LORD and the people He brings into your life? They are. But there's a deeper reason. Do you love Him?

On the day Jesus rose from the dead, He made it a point to personally meet with Peter. Just after He met with the men on the Road to Emmaus, here's what we read. Luke 24:32 "*And they said one to another, did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?* (33) *And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,* (34) *Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, **and hath appeared to Simon.***"

And here's what the angel said to the women at the tomb on Easter morning. Mark 16:7 "*But go your way, tell his disciples **and Peter** that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*"

Everybody fails; some fail like Peter. But see what the Bible says and see what kind of heart the LORD Jesus has towards you and me. He's kind and He's so ready to forgive and restore and to send us out to serve Him.

The key to service to the LORD must be love. Do you love Him? Yes, you might know a lot about Jesus, like Peter. But, did all that knowledge help him when the LORD was being tried and condemned before Pilate? No. Rather, when confronted with knowing the LORD, Peter denied it.

The Apostle Paul puts it like this. I Corinthians 13:1 *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

*(3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."*

Janet and I have been married for just over forty-two years. And, yes, I know my wife. I think I know her well. And she knows me well. But, what makes our relationship work? Why do we serve each other? It's the same reason our relationship with the LORD works and the same reason we serve Him; because we love each other.

And yes, like Peter, you might think you've messed up. We've all messed up at some point. But, how does the LORD see you? Is He mad at you? No, if anything, He's mad about you. And the one thing over every other thing He's looking for in you and me, it's this: do you love Him?

You all know what it's like to play hockey, right? Well, you all know what it's like to play hockey and to hit someone with your hockey stick or, in some way, to break the rules. What happens to those who break the rules in hockey? They get put in the penalty box.

Have you ever felt as though you've in the LORD's penalty box? Some Christians see themselves as constantly in that penalty box.

But, consider this. What happens when that hockey player, sitting inside the penalty box, sees the second hand on that game clock moving towards the final second of his penalty time? He does one thing. He flies out of the box and back into the game.

Same thing must be true for us. A woman told me yesterday about something that happened and she quote "didn't act very Christ-like." She said some things to some people that were very not nice. So, I told her this illustration of the hockey player sitting in the penalty box.

Folks, this holds true for you and me. The very second you confess your sin to the LORD, He forgives, totally and

absolutely and you're free as free can be to get back into your place of service.

Why did the LORD ask Peter if he loved Him? For the same reason He's asking you today. If your reason for living for Him and serving Him and serving people has one solid reason that stands above every other reason, it's this. You serve Him because you love Him. That's it.

And, for those of you who don't feel you've got your love relationship clear between you and the LORD, do this. Pray. Ask Him to enable you to get such a love for Him that, no matter what and in every way and in every circumstance, you want Him to supply you with enough love for Him that you can and will to all you need to do.

I know this sounds so simple. But, think about it like this. This is what was most important to Jesus after He had died; after He was raised from the dead. It's simple. But, it's the most important thing ever. Do you love Him?

Here's a poem I learned a few years back. It might be a help to you.

*God, unto Whom all hearts be open, and unto Whom no secret thing is hid; I ask You to so cleanse the intent of my heart with the unspeakable gift of Your grace that I may perfectly love You and worthily praise You.*

So, for Palm Sunday this year, be honest enough to let the LORD search your heart with this question "Christian, do you love me?" Do you know Him? Do you love Him?

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 79 "My Jesus, I Love Thee"