



PALM SUNDAY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 19:28-40

To understand more about Palm Sunday.

Read the Text:

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" 32 So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. 33 And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 And they said, "The Lord has need of it." 35 And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. 37 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, 38 saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." 40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." (Luke 19:28-40, ESV)

Study the Text:

A Triumphant Entry

This passage continues the track Jesus began all the way back in Luke 9:51: "When the days drew near for Him to be taken up, He set His face to go to Jerusalem." Now, in verse 28: "And when He had said these things, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem." Jesus had just come from Jericho (Lk. 19:1) and had taken the popular road through "Bethphage and Bethany" and would eventually come to the "mount that is called Olivet" (Lk. 19:29), details of which demonstrate Luke's commitment to reporting with accuracy Jesus'

journey. As He arrived, He “sent two of the disciples” ahead to do a few things to prepare for His momentous arrival. Below is a breakdown of key details and keywords.

MOUNT OF OLIVES

The city of “Bethphage” is named in all three synoptic Gospels (“house of unripe figs”), and it was located near the summit of the Mount of Olives or *Olivet*. Olivet was on the eastern side of Jerusalem and roughly 300 feet higher.¹ Olivet appears in the Old Testament, albeit not always by name, in several places. David went to the summit of Olivet to worship in 2 Samuel 15:32. Ezekiel’s vision included the glory of the Lord leaving His people in Jerusalem and settling on Olivet in Ezekiel 11:23. More explicitly, Zechariah prophesied about “the Day of the Lord” and exclaimed: “On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east” (Zech. 14:4). Olivet was a well-established place in Jewish history and in the canon of Scripture, and thus Jesus’ arrival to this place should be noted.

THE COLT

Perhaps one of the least obvious and yet most important details of the triumphal entry is the presence of a colt. The Lord’s command to the two disciples who were unnamed by Luke is given in verses 30 and 31: “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” This marks the first of many instances in which Jesus will predict what will happen. Julius Wellhausen reminds us: “We must not rationalize here. Jesus has not already ordered the colt, nor made an arrangement with its owners, but He knows beforehand what will happen, because God, who directs what is to happen, is with Him.”² Jesus’ exact knowledge of where the colt would be, and of His disciples being questioned about it (Lk. 19:32-34), is evidence of His divine mind at work as He drew nearer to the cross.

The colt has further significance, as the Old Testament imagines the Messianic king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. In Genesis 49:10-11, during Jacob’s blessing to his sons, he says of Judah (Jesus’ line): “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes.” The blessing to Judah is that the king would come out of his line, and he would come riding a donkey. In Zechariah 9:9-10, the prophet says: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” Again, the king comes with salvation in hand to bring peace to the nations and rule to the ends of the earth, and He will ride into Jerusalem on a colt.

THE BLESSED KING

As Jesus arrived on the donkey, “they spread their cloaks on the road” (Lk. 19:36). This, again, is an element of royalty in Jesus’ arrival. In 2 Kings, after the death of “Ahab, son of Omri” (1 Kg. 16:29), Elijah selects Jehu to lead a coup to free the people from the evil Omri dynasty. Upon his arrival, “every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps” (2 Kg. 9:13). Shortly after as Jesus was “already on the way down the Mount of Olives,” the disciples began to “rejoice and praise God with a loud voice” (Lk. 19:37), crying out: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, 544.

² J. Wellhausen, *Evangelium Marci*, 87 (quoted from Fitzmyer, Luke [X-XXIV], 1249).

highest!” (Lk. 19:38). This is a direct quote from Psalm 118:26, but it is ironic; it doesn’t come from the “house of the Lord,” but rather from the people in the streets. The coming Messiah has not been recognized by the religious leaders of His day. As the hostility increases in the following days and Jesus is ultimately crucified, Jesus’ lamentation in Luke 13:34-35 concerning Jerusalem’s propensity to kill her own prophets will be fulfilled. This prophetic announcement comes to the dismay of the Pharisees in crowd and they say to Him: “Teacher, rebuke your disciples” (Lk. 19:39). Jesus responds: “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Lk. 19:40), which is yet another allusion to the Old Testament, this time to Habakkuk 2:11.

A Notable Missing Detail

One detail you may have noticed curiously absent is the palm trees! In Matthew 21:8, Matthew includes non-specific “branches” in his account: “Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.” John explicitly references them in his account in John 12:13: “So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, ‘Hosanna! ’ ” Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” The inclusion of palm trees no doubt had to do with the fact that Jesus had just traveled from Jericho, “the City of Palms.” Luke’s absence makes sense given the details he highlights in his story. The people in the crowds do not understand what “peace in heaven” really means. They did not understand that their hunger to overthrow Rome would be their eventual undoing. Palms are fun and celebratory, and Luke’s point is that this is not a fun and celebratory moment. In fact, as Jesus “drew near and saw the city, He wept over it” (Lk. 19:41).

What About Now?

One major takeaway is to just capture the beauty of Jesus’ divine fulfillment of so many Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Everything that Jesus did (and that Luke recorded) was intended to draw the reader to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the Messiah sent from God. Another takeaway is how fickle people really are. How seemingly excited the people were for Jesus’ arrival, only to be quickly swayed in about a week to have Him put to death. Another takeaway is the importance of understanding that the Gospels’ differing details are powerful examples of how each human author highlights a specific aspect of the story. They are all telling the same story, but for slightly different reasons and to different groups of people.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 19:28-29. Where was Jesus going? What places does Luke specifically mention? What is the significance of these places? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read Luke 19:30. What does Jesus command His two disciples to do?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 19:31. What detail does Jesus include in this commandment?

- 2. Read Luke 19:32-34. What happened when the disciples did what Jesus commanded?

Day Three

- 1. Read Luke 19:35-36. What is the significance of the colt and cloaks? (Hint: See above notes)

- 2. Read Luke 19:37. What did the disciples begin to do as Jesus came down the Mount of Olives?

Day Four

- 1. Read Luke 19:38. What were the disciples saying? What were they quoting?

- 2. Read Luke 19:39-40. How did the Pharisees respond to this? What did Jesus say in response to them?

Palm Sunday Discussion: Empty Worship

One of the major (and unfortunate) human traits observable in this passage is how empty seemingly authentic worship can be. The people praised God and quoted Scripture as Jesus approached, and yet they really didn't know Him. As well-intentioned as they were, they didn't really understand what they were saying. This speaks to our need to ground worship with theology. You cannot rightly worship God without truly knowing who He is first. Talk as a group about how your theology informs your worship.

- 1. Icebreaker: Do you think worship depends on theology? Why or why not?
- 2. As you've grown in your understanding of Scripture, has the depth of your worship also grown?
- 3. Is worship devoid of a theological foundation dangerous? Why or why not?
- 4. Why do some people want to worship more and study the Bible less? What do you think drives this?
- 5. How can the church better link worship to theology in practical ways?

Takeaways:

- 1. Jesus enters Jerusalem in a manner that fulfills many Old Testament prophecies.
- 2. Jesus' entry is not a celebratory moment for Him, but one of lamentation.