



**WESTLAKE HILLS**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## ***“The Ride of a Lifetime”*** ***Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”***

*Mark 11:1-19*

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*March 28, 2010 – Palm Sunday*

**Mark 11:1-19** (New International Version)

### ***The Triumphal Entry***

<sup>1</sup>As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup>If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "

<sup>4</sup>They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup>some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" <sup>6</sup>They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. <sup>7</sup>When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!<sup>[a]</sup>"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>10</sup>"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest!"

<sup>11</sup>Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

### ***Jesus Clears the Temple***

<sup>12</sup>The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup>Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup>Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

<sup>15</sup>On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, <sup>16</sup>and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. <sup>17</sup>And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written:

" 'My house will be called

a house of prayer for all nations'<sup>[c]</sup>? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'<sup>[d]</sup>"

<sup>18</sup>The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

<sup>19</sup>When evening came, they<sup>[e]</sup> went out of the city.

### **Footnotes:**

- a. [Mark 11:9](#) A Hebrew expression meaning "Save!" which became an exclamation of praise; also in verse 10
- b. [Mark 11:9](#) Psalm 118:25,26
- c. [Mark 11:17](#) Isaiah 56:7
- d. [Mark 11:17](#) Jer. 7:11
- e. [Mark 11:19](#) Some early manuscripts he

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### **Introduction.**

Many years ago just after our family moved from Dallas to Colorado, a friend in our church made it possible for us to go to the Latigo Dude Ranch near Kremling, Colorado. Here's a picture of our family at the ranch. It was perhaps the best vacation we ever had together as a family.



One of the most memorable moments of that trip was a ride I took on my horse, named Strider – I just loved that name! – the last day we were there. Over the course of the week, we had taken many rides with other guests who had various levels of riding ability, and every once in a while someone would ask the head wrangler named Duke if we could go on a more challenging ride. We wanted to experience an adventurous ride, rather than the little “clop-alongs” we took most days.

The last day of the week, Duke announced at breakfast there would be a special ride available for experienced riders only. If anyone wanted to go, they should meet him at the barn at 9:00 a.m. sharp. I couldn't wait.

A number of us showed up and mounted our horses. Duke arrived, and he surveyed the group of riders that had assembled. Then he looked at two of the people who were there, on their horses, ready to go, and said in a solemn voice, “Trust me, you don't want to go on this ride!” He didn't think they could handle the challenge that lay before us. This solemn warning caused me to feel both nervous and excited all at the same time. This was going to be one incredible adventure.

And what a ride it was! At one point we rode in a full gallop up a logging road for over a mile. During another part of the ride, we were swishing between pine trees in a dense forest. I brushed up against the trunk of a tree, and it tore my jeans at the knee. I wore it as a badge of courage! Then we ended the wild journey descending a hill on what felt like a 90 degree angle. I experienced a rush of excitement that vacillated between joy and sheer terror. It was the ride of a lifetime!

Today, as we celebrate Palm Sunday, we read of another ride of a lifetime, but it was a very different than the one I had. It was in the city of Jerusalem instead of at a dude ranch, and Jesus rode on a donkey instead of a horse named Strider. But I suspect the Lord experienced a rush of excitement, too, that vacillated between joy and sheer terror at all that lay before Him.

As we consider this very familiar passage today, there are 3 things I want you to notice in particular about the Triumphal Entry: the plan of Jesus; the reaction of the crowd; and the cleansing of the Temple.

### **I. The Plan of Jesus.**

It was the time of Passover, and the whole city of Jerusalem was filled with people. They were pilgrims who had traveled from all over the world to celebrate one of the most sacred feasts in the Jewish year. Jesus could not have chosen a more dramatic moment to tell the world who He really was. He came into a city that was surging with people who were keyed up with religious expectations.

We are told that Jesus instructed two of His disciples to go to the villages of Bethphage and Bethany and that they would find the colt of a donkey tied there. The disciples were to untie the animal and bring it to Jesus. If anyone asked them, the disciples were simply to reply, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.” It would be a password of sorts to the owner of the donkey. The disciples did as they were told, and they found the animal just as Jesus said.

I wonder if the disciples had any doubts about the task Christ gave them. I wonder if they thought, “We could get in trouble if someone thinks we're stealing this donkey.” I know I have questions at times as to what God is up to in my life. I wonder if He knows what He's doing when He asks me to do something. But like these disciples I have to trust God has a good plan, and, as odd as I may think the task is and as uncomfortable as I may be with the assignment, I've got to believe God will bring good out of what He's asked me to do. These disciples did as Jesus requested, and it set the stage for an amazing event.

Have you ever noticed how Jesus always sent His disciples out in twos, never alone, whenever He sent them to do something? Followers of Jesus are to double-up in their work, because God knows how much we need each other in the Body of Christ. We may think we can be effective on our own, but we are fooling ourselves. As Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 4, *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!”* (4:9,10).



If you are trying to go it alone in the Christian life, let me encourage you to seek out someone else to whom you can be accountable and with whom you can share the burdens of your life. I believe it will make a great difference.

One of the wonderful gifts I've been given since coming to Austin is the deepening friendship I have with Larry Coulter and Rick Murray. They are Presbyterian pastors here in town, and they both took part in my installation service a year ago. Rick and Larry have become a lifeline to me as I carry out my ministry in Austin. We meet every month for a two-hour lunch, and we share with one another our joys, our fears, our challenges, and a whole lot of laughter. I can't imagine trying to do this ministry without their friendship and support. Who might God want you to lean on as you follow Christ together?

It is obvious that the plan of Jesus was not a sudden decision made on the spur of the moment. He made arrangements and preparations in advance for this day, and as the story unfolds, we see Christ orchestrating the events with resolve and a purpose. Jesus had a plan. Far from being a victim during the last days of his life, He was the one in charge. Christ sent His disciples on a task, and He set into motion a series of events that would culminate in His death, but not before His identity as the Messiah was clearly revealed.

Our Lord had a plan back then, and He has a plan for every single one of us today. Jesus wants to involve us in His plan of love for the world, and He knows that life is best lived in the center of His will. Are you seeking to live your life according to God's plan, or are you off doing your own thing, making a mess of your life? Turn to Jesus. He has a better plan.

## **II. The Reaction of the People.**

In our passage we read of the way in which the disciples placed their long quadrangle robes on the colt so as to provide a comfortable seat on the donkey for Jesus, and they mounted the Lord on the animal. By this time a large crowd accompanied Jesus from Bethphage and Bethany, the towns just east of Jerusalem up over the Mount of Olives, and they began to carpet the road with their robes as well.

A caravan of pilgrims had already arrived in Jerusalem, and, perhaps having heard that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead just a few days before and was now on His way to the city, these people came pouring out of the eastern gate to meet Him. It is estimated that the population in Jerusalem at the time of Passover swelled as much as 250,000 people.

The people cut fronds from palm trees, and they went forth to welcome Jesus. In Scripture the palm tree was a symbol of righteousness and spiritual vigor (Ps. 92:1,2) because of its perpetual leaves and longevity. In addition, according to Leviticus 23:40 holding the palm branch in one's hand was a way of expressing joy.

As the crowd descended the Mount of Olives toward the city, they were praising God with loud voices and they shouted, "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!*" (Mark 11:9,10). This quotation is from Psalm 118, and all 4 Gospels include this line in their account of the Triumphal Entry. It is a quotation from one of the Hallel psalms sung during Passover, and it is also one of the psalms most often referred to in the New Testament. It is a distinctly Messianic psalm, which speaks about the stone which the builders rejected that became the capstone of God's work in the world.

Our Lord showed His true colors that day, and He capitalized on the Messianic hopes of the people. However, as we said last week in our study of Mark 8, Jesus would be a different kind of Messiah than the one they were hoping for. He came riding not on a white stallion as a conquering king, but on a donkey as the suffering servant. He came not to overthrow the Roman government, but to overthrow the power of sin, death, and self. He came not to take His seat on David's throne, but to take His place on a Roman cross. And He came to set us free not from the rule of men but from all the ways we are in bondage to things that will never last.

No, Jesus was not the kind of Messiah the people were looking for. In the end He would disappoint them all, and the people would call for His death by the end of the week. Leading the way in this rejection of Jesus as the Messiah would be the Jewish leaders. They saw Christ as a threat, and rightly so, for He would not only upend the tables of the Temple, He would also turn the world, *their* world, upside down.



How does our disappointment with God keep us from seeing things with eyes of faith, like these Jewish leaders? In what ways do we allow our disappointment with Jesus to keep us from experiencing God's grace? I've found that for many people there is a gap between what they expect from God and what they actually experience with Him. Disappointment occurs when our experience falls short of what we anticipate, but I've also found the healthiest corrective to this is to allow Jesus to break out of the boxes into which we try to put Him, accept Christ on His own terms, and trust that He will take even the disappointing things of our lives and cause them to work together for our good.

How has God disappointed you in recent days? How have other people let you down? Can you trust that Jesus has a good plan for you and that He will bring good out of it?

### **III. The Cleansing of the Temple.**

Last week I mentioned the scene in C.S. Lewis' book *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* in which there is a conversation the children have with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan, the Lion, who is the Christ-figure. They ask if Aslan is safe, to which Mr. Beaver replies, "Safe? ...Who said anything about being safe? 'Course he isn't safe. He's the lion of the wood, I tell you!"<sup>i</sup>

Jesus wasn't safe, and we see an example of that here in our text. The passage tells us that when the Lord entered the Temple area that day, a sorry spectacle greeted His eyes and ears. The Temple was being desecrated. It looked like a middle-eastern market place as people were buying and selling, and business was booming. Passover was close at hand, and people were crowding into the Temple courts from everywhere.

Money changers were also in the Temple precincts, and they would sit cross-legged behind their little coin-covered tables. In the Temple area foreign money was not accepted as payment, and everything had to be paid in Jewish coin, including the Temple tax of half a shekel that every Jewish man had to pay every year to the Temple treasury. The money changers did this for a fee, and it is estimated that the annual revenue to the money changers just from the Temple tax alone was close to \$6 million in today's money!

Outraged by what He saw, Jesus directed His holy anger both in words and actions against those who were exploiting people in the name of religion. Christ's actions expressed His deep indignation at the flagrant violation of God's intended purpose for the Temple, that it was to be a house of prayer and worship, but they had made it into a den of robbers. This is the only act of violence ever recorded of our Lord, and it is understandable as a public demonstration of His zeal for God's honor. Remember, Jesus had a plan. Everything He did the final week of His life was thought out and enacted with a purpose.

There is a time for righteous anger in the Christian life. Whenever people are exploited in the name of religion, we should be angry. Whenever someone twists their faith in God to feed their own desire and greed, we should be upset. Whenever an individual spiritualizes their personal preferences or their own agenda and makes it out to be God's calling, we should be deeply troubled. And whenever the littlest and most vulnerable ones of our human family are not protected by the church, we should be outraged.

I don't know what specifically should be done regarding the failure of the Roman Catholic Church to deal effectively with priests who abused children back in the 1980s, but I do know we should be angry. A church should be a safe haven, and there is no room for cover up or compromise when it comes to naming sin in the church. Jesus made that clear in the cleansing of the Temple.

However, I should be quick to say it's easy to point fingers and criticize others for the ways in which they have failed to honor God and do the right thing. Judgment begins with me, and each of us should take a hard look in our own lives lest we be condemned before the Lord ourselves. In what ways have I failed to honor God myself? How have I spiritualized my own prejudice or preferences and assigned them to a call from God? If Jesus were to visit my house today, what would he overturn in my life and cast out of my house because these things have not been in keeping with His will and purpose?

The plan of Jesus. The reaction of the people. And the cleansing of the Temple.



## Conclusion.

Several years ago, a book was written by Gene Smith, a noted American historian, and the title of it was *When The Cheering Stopped*.<sup>ii</sup> It is the story of President Woodrow Wilson and the events leading up to and following WWI. When that war was over, Wilson was an international hero. There was a great spirit of optimism abroad, and people actually believed that the last war had been fought and the world had been made safe for democracy.

On his first visit to Paris after the war Wilson was greeted by cheering mobs, and he was actually more popular than their own national heroes. The same thing was true in England and Italy. In a Vienna hospital, a Red Cross worker had to tell the children that there would be no Christmas presents because of the war and the hard times, but the children didn't believe her. They said that President Wilson was coming, and they knew everything would be all right.

The cheering lasted about a year, and then it gradually began to stop. It turned out that the political leaders in Europe were more concerned with their own agendas than they were a lasting peace. At home, Wilson ran into opposition in the United States Senate, and his League of Nations was not ratified. Under the strain of it all, the President's health began to break, and in the next election his party was defeated. So it was that Woodrow Wilson, a man who barely a year or two earlier had been heralded as the new world Messiah, came to the end of his days a broken and defeated man. He died in 1924, just four years after leaving office.

It happened that way to Jesus, too. On Palm Sunday, leafy branches were spread before Him, and there were shouts of Hosanna, which means "Save us now!" Great crowds came to hear Jesus preach, and a wave of expectation swept the country. But the cheering did not last for long. There came a point when the tide began to turn against Him, and before it was all over, a tidal wave welled up that brought Jesus to his knees under the weight of a wooden cross.

Why did the masses turn so quickly against Jesus? How did the shouts of Hosanna on Sunday transform into the shouts of "Crucify Him" on Friday? Why did the cheering stop? It was all tied to the reason He came to this earth. Jesus came to redeem the world. His death would pay the penalty for our sin, and in the end the purpose of His coming was to provide for our salvation through His suffering.

One day all of us will take our last ride. It will be a ride to the cemetery. And the question that stands for all to answer is will we ride alone to meet God, or will we ride with Jesus? Thanks be to God for Jesus' ride of a lifetime. It was a ride that set in motion the turning point of human history, and it can be the turning point of your life, if you let it, my friend. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, pp.75,76.

<sup>ii</sup> This illustration is adapted from eSermons.com.

