

“THE END OF THE BEGINNING”
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, Philippians 2:5-11, Mark 11:1-11
Palm Sunday, March 28, 2021

In Daniel 7 we hear these words, *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed”* (7:13-14).

In this vision, Daniel saw the coming of Jesus Christ into His glory as the King of kings, and Lord of lords. God gave Daniel the vision to encourage him, and all those following him, that despite all the earthly rulers that will have dominion of the earth, this “Son of Man” will ultimately come into power and reign forever so that all the people of the earth will recognize Him and many will serve Him as the Lord. The vision that Daniel saw fits well into this last week of Lent, as this is Palm Sunday. But why is Palm Sunday such an important day for those of us who are Christians? What is the significance to the arrival of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem?

Jesus has spent three and a half years teaching His disciples and the people of Israel about the Lord God Almighty. He had performed great miracles to demonstrate His authority over this world. He had confronted inaccurate teaching coming out of the Temple and brought a correct understanding of the Scriptures with regard to treating one another. He taught great lessons about God, His Father in Heaven, helping the people come to know God in a personal way. And He had given many the hope they had been looking for in the middle of their tumultuous world so that they could begin new lives, having been transformed by the power of forgiveness and grace. They believed He was the Messiah of God.

At the end of those three and a half years, Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem in order to complete the purpose of His life here on earth. It was not just miracles, or teaching, or correction or training in righteousness that Jesus had come to the earth for, but for a much higher purpose - to bring eternal life to all who would seek it through Him.

Yet, Jerusalem was a hot-bed of contention for Jesus, because the Pharisees, Sadducees, teachers of the Law and the Scribes were not used to being corrected. They thought they were the ambassadors from God, and when Jesus had told them that they were more hypocrites than godly examples, they took great offence and exception to that. So Jesus knew what awaited Him in Jerusalem.

The Old Testament prophecies tell about the abuse the Savior would receive. They speak about the injustice He would receive from the authorities, as well as from the people. Jesus knew that the prophet Isaiah spoke of the Savior being rejected by all people, being horribly tortured, and then dying on a cross and being buried in a borrowed tomb (Isaiah 53). But Jesus also knew that it would be through His death, as the Messiah, that all the people of the world could find forgiveness for their sins through Him (Isaiah 53:10). His death would provide the perfect sacrifice necessary to finally pay the price for the sin debt that all humanity owed to God.

But Jesus also knew how much God the Father loves His people. So as difficult as His journey would have to be as He set out toward Jerusalem, Jesus knew that His sacrifice had to be made. There was no other way for forgiveness of sin to be paid for permanently. The animal sacrifices that the Jews were offering to God did not fully take away the sins of those bringing the sacrifice. The death of the animal and its blood sprinkled on the altar in the Temple was a stop-gap between the people seeking forgiveness and the Lord God of the Universe granting forgiveness.

However, the blood of the animal sprinkled on the altar was not enough to fully erase the sins of the people. It was only a sign of the desire of the people to come to God for reconciliation. Only a perfect sacrifice could satisfy the necessary price to reconcile a person back to God completely. It required one with no sin, stepping in to take the sins of all the others upon Himself, and dying the death caused by sin, letting His own blood be poured out as the atonement for that sin. That was the only way that people could come back into the presence of the Lord God – being completely forgiven. It is impossible for humans to do it for ourselves since we are sinful creatures. Only a perfect sacrifice could heal that chasm between God and us caused by sin.

Jesus had come to the earth for just that very reason. The perfect Son of God came into the world to bring eternal life to all those who would put their trust and faith in Him as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. And Jesus knew that His time had come to present Himself to the authorities so that they could fulfil their part of the prophecies and complete the work of Salvation. It was the appointed time in the history of the world for God to provide the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins for the whole world.

Today, our reading of Psalm 118 prepares us for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. The Righteous One, the Victorious Conqueror, the precious, yet Rejected Stone, was arriving in the city of peace, Jerusalem, to become a blessing to the people. He had come to bring honor and glory back to the Lord God. He was there to step in between the sin of humanity and the wrath of God toward that sin, to become the intercessor for all people as a means to escape the consequence of sin – eternal death

But this would not be the end of Jesus' life. It was the **end of the beginning** for the people of the world. All those who had lived before Jesus had shown the propensity for turning away from the Lord God Almighty and set up their own gods in a way to try to find eternal life. Many of the religions of the world today are direct descendants of those human attempts at finding redemption and sanctification from God. Yet, they are all flawed because they are human efforts to try to appease the consequence of sin in the lives of those who practice that religion. With His setting His face toward Jerusalem, Jesus had set the stage for all the remaining prophecies to be fulfilled about Him. And as this divine drama plays out, Jesus enters into the city to begin the **last scene of the first act** in God's plan of Salvation for the world. Listen to the account as Mark 11:1-11 tells it. (READ Mark 11:1-11)

The account sounds simple enough of an action, Jesus making His way into the city. Jesus instructs His disciples to go and get an animal that He could ride upon as a sign to everyone of what His intentions are. His prophetic words come to completion exactly as He instructed the disciples as they borrow the donkey and colt for the time. But one would expect a victorious conqueror to ride into town on a tall and powerful steed, decked out in full battle armor, ready to charge at the sight of an enemy.

The war horse was a great symbol of a true victor for a **military leader**. People would recognize him as a person of power and authority. They would respond to him with honor and glory due to his great conquest in battle. They would cheer his courage in battle and salute his valor in the conflict of war.

But Jesus did not arrive in Jerusalem riding a war horse; only the colt of a donkey - one that had never been ridden upon yet. It was hardly a sign of strength and power. It was hardly an indication of victory over lesser foes. The colt was barely old enough to walk straight, let alone be a menace to anyone. No one would have had anything to fear from him except maybe a bug on the roadway. There was no power there, no extensive experience in battle, no readiness to carry his passenger into the throws of war. The colt was as meek and humble as was the Passenger he was carrying. He was probably scared by all of the people around him cheering, dancing, and waving robes and palm branches before him. The disciple leading the young animal would probably have had his hands full keeping the colt walking straight down the road. But I'll bet that Jesus' presence there on his back brought peace to the youngster.

So the "Savior of the world" comes riding into town on the foal of a donkey! Not a majestic sight, but one that the people received even more readily, for it was the sign of a prophet arriving into town. It was the sign of quiet determination to fulfil the purpose of God. The Salvation for the world was on His way, and the beginning of a new hope sprung up in the hearts of those who received Him.

I often wonder what the disciples were doing in the midst of all of this parade. Did they encourage the people in singing their accolades to Jesus? Did they puff out their own chests because they were the close friends of Jesus? Did they relish the attention that their Master was receiving because they were among the 12? Did they begin to think, with all the people, that this would be the end of the Roman occupation of the country of Israel? Were their minds going quickly to what their new positions would be in the new kingdom that Jesus would establish when He became the new King of Israel? There was such expectancy of the Messiah that it would have pushed out the words of Jesus from their minds, that He would "*be handed over to the chief priest and the teachers of the Law... that*

...they will condemn Him to death and then hand Him over to the Gentiles, who will make fun of Him, spit on Him, whip Him, and kill Him; but three days later He will rise again” (10:33-34). All of their arguments of protest against Jesus’ prophecy at that time would have become realistic as the parade grows in size and intensity. Certainly this was Jesus’ time to become the new King of Israel! What could stop Him now? Heaven forbid that He fail to take the throne back for the new kingdom of King David! How could He even think of being killed?

However, **this was the beginning of the end** of Jesus’ earthly ministry. But it was the end of the beginning with regard to what would happen afterwards. Jesus was ushering in a totally new understanding of the work of the Messiah. While Old Testament prophecies had been **misconstrued** to make Him out to be a military leader chasing out the oppressive Roman Government, Jesus was going much deeper than just earthly governments. Jesus was a completely different Messiah, one that would touch the lives of people in every country, every race, every language, every skin color, and every clan. He would bring freedom into the hearts of countless people because He was NOT a military messiah, but a Salvation Messiah. Jesus’ role was to cleanse the world from the penalty of sin.

As we saw in our study of Daniel throughout this season of Lent, it was not about earthly leadership of countries and empires that was most important. It was about conforming our ways to the commands of the Lord God Almighty. It was about putting God first and foremost in our lives, seeking to follow all of His ways above any other demands or decrees from a governmental leader. It was putting aside obedience to the will of a human in power over a government, and it was conforming to and obeying the Laws and ways of God.

Jesus had come to the earth to establish a whole new heritage of faithful believers who seek to follow only God’s will and God’s ways. He wanted nothing more than to wipe away the filth of sin from the whole earth in order that we might be with Him in His Father’s house when this life is over and done. His desire was to free us from the bondage to sin and death, and to open to us all that is good and wholesome and righteous and true. Jesus knew what it would cost Him to give us all of that, and yet He

was still willing to enter the city where the end of the beginning would take place. He willingly went to Jerusalem, ready to suffer and die so that we could live. His thought was not on Himself, but on what we would gain as we put our trust and hope in Him as the Savior of the world.

The Apostle Paul says it best when he says in Philippians 2:7-8, “...of *His own free will [Jesus] gave up all He had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like man and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death – His death on the cross.*”

Why would Jesus do this for us? Because He knew our helpless condition, and the terrible consequences if He left us to ourselves. He loved us enough to establish a way for us to become saved from eternal death and find eternal life instead.

Let me explain it this way. There was “a man out walking with his wife and they got caught in a terrible hailstorm. This was a massive hailstorm. The hail was as large as baseballs. Under the deluge coming against them, the man realized that if he didn’t do something, his wife would be severely hurt. He quickly draped himself over his wife, covering her with his own body so that instead of the storm hitting his wife, it hit him.

“The hailstones seemed to get bigger as the man bent over his wife, protecting her. The large hail stone balls came down harder onto the man. They hurt him badly. After a couple of minutes, his ears started bleeding along with some spots on his head. The man tried to lead his wife to safety, but the stones were coming down faster and harder. The pounding stones took their toll. Weakened by the onslaught, the man finally collapsed over his wife, only able to shield her from the danger.

“After the storm was over, the man was left with scars from where the hailstone balls had battered away at him. The remnants of sores, cuts, and abrasions would forever be reminders to him of the day he saved his wife.

“This is a true story. On the local newscast, the man’s wife was asked how she felt about their experience. She said, ‘Every time I look at the scars on his head, on his neck, and on his ear, I love him

more. Every time I see the scars, I love him more, because he sacrificed himself, for me.’

“When you and I get to heaven, Jesus will be the only person in eternity with scars. He will have holes in His hands, holes in His feet, and a whole in His side. He will be your eternal reminder that the only reason you are there is because He stood in between the wrath of God and judgment headed your way. He covered you with His love and allowed none of the hail to damage you. He was disfigured for you. This is the love of Jesus Christ.”¹

As He entered Jerusalem, Jesus’ love was extended to all people. There were those who recognized Him for the work that He had done already. There may have been relatives in the crowd of the blind man that Jesus had touched, giving praise and glory to Jesus for giving sight to their loved one. The family of the boy Jesus had cast demons out of may have been there, too. They would certainly have given thanks to God for Jesus’ work of new life in their son. Surely there would have been the parents of the little children that Jesus had blessed. And how about the lame man that He had given strength to, or the leprous men that He had cured, or the family of the little girl He had raised from the dead? And maybe Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were among the crowd. Everyone was rejoicing that Jesus was coming to the city and they recognized Him as God’s Messiah. They loved Him because He had changed their lives. And many more could have joined in just because it was a parade. They heard the ones coming before Jesus, and those following Jesus, saying, “*Praise God! God bless Him who comes in the name of the Lord. God bless the coming kingdom of King David, our father! Praise be to God!*” (Mark 11:9-10). It would have sounded like an antiphonal praise, the ones in the front starting with “*Praise God!*” and those at the back responding, “*God bless Him who comes in the name of the Lord.*” Back to the front, “*God bless the coming kingdom of King David, our father!*” and the response from behind, “*Praise be to God!*” Back and forth it would go as they all make their way down the street into the city of Jerusalem. Who wouldn’t have gotten excited about that? People getting excited about the fulfillment of the Prophets about the arrival of the Messiah, King Jesus!

¹ Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 257-258, #778)

But sadly, Jesus knew that by the end of the week, there would be no one who would stand up for Him, not even His own disciples. It is easy to get caught up in excitement of a parade, but when things get tough, what will we do? How often does our excitement turn to fear when the authorities come after us? How quickly our cheers become jeers, even at the same person?

But His arrival into the city of Jerusalem was the closing of Jesus' public ministry here on the earth, and it was the beginning of a new era for those who would put their trust and faith in Jesus. They didn't know it at the time, but Jesus was preparing to pass the baton of His ministry over to the disciples. His work was almost completed, and it was time for the followers of Jesus to step up and continue God's plan of the Salvation of the world. Jesus began the movement, and it was time for Him to hand it off to those who would believe in Him and take Him to the whole world.

Palm Sunday is the point of transition where Jesus prepares to complete His work of paying the price for the sins of the world through His death, and the handing off of all that He had taught and done in those three and a half years to His disciples for them to continue the mission of freeing the whole world of sin and death.

And now it is our turn, to acknowledge who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us and to join along in the procession of those who throughout history has boldly proclaimed, "*Praise God! God bless Him who comes in the name of the Lord. God bless the coming kingdom of King David, our father! Praise be to God*" (Matthew 11:9-10)! It is our turn to boldly tell those around us of the work of Jesus for our world, and to invite others into the procession from death to life, from sin to sanctification, from condemnation to glorification, all through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Let's pray: Father, thank You for giving Jesus to us to show us who You are and tell us about Your great love for us. Thank You that He was willing to spend the time instructing us and preparing us for the work of ministry that You invite us all to have so that Your plan of Salvation for the world might become complete through Your work through us. Thank You that Jesus was ready to give of Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. Thank You for Your call in our lives to continue His work. Give us the courage to live like Jesus, to live for Jesus, and to tell everyone about Jesus for Your glory, all in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN.