

Setting Our Face To Go To Jerusalem Week 6

It's Palm Sunday as we enter this final week leading to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. My thanks to Pastor Brian for the wonderful message last Sunday morning. He told you then we were skipping ahead to the garden and then back to the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem for Palm Sunday.

We've been using Mark's gospel as the basis for our study during this Lenten series. Turn with me to Mark 11 as we look at what is referred to as the triumphal entry of Christ and the events following. **Mark 11:1-11.**

Jesus had been staying on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives in the area of Bethany and Bethphage. He had friends here, followers and supporters who helped him. This explains the willingness of the owners to allow Jesus to borrow the donkey's colt. All they needed to hear was "the Lord needs it". What a great attitude – a sign of willing and surrendered hearts.

Jesus has spent most of Mark's gospel trying to avoid the acclamation of the crowds and maintaining secrecy as to who he really was but that all ends with this entry into Jerusalem. There was no mistaking the message being sent, the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah. The people were familiar with the words of the prophet found in Zechariah 9. **"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."** **Zechariah 9:9** The people lined the road shouting, "Hosanna!" which means, "the Lord saves" or "save us." It was a clear response to their belief or at least their hope and desire that Jesus would be the promised Messiah.

When Jesus climbed upon that colt and began that journey into the city, he knew the crowds would respond, he knew they would misunderstand his coming and politicize it, he knew it would push the chief priests and elders forward in their plans to have him arrested and executed, but most of all, he knew it would fulfill the word of God spoken about him and would bring him to the very reason for which he had come, to give himself as the sacrifice for our sin.

I can't help but wonder if the disciples were misunderstanding or misreading the events of this day as well. Jesus had been telling them what would happen when he came to Jerusalem: arrest, beating and mocking and then crucifixion. They were expecting the worst, but things were looking up! The crowd was shouting its praise and with such greetings, how could all of

these terrible things possibly happen to Jesus? Maybe he had been wrong this time. Maybe he had misread the signs. But Jesus knew what was just ahead and without fear, he confronted the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of a religious system that had lost sight of God and his eternal purposes.

As I studied this past week, I kept thinking about the things Mark's gospel mentions as Jesus rode toward the city. The view from the Mount of Olives, looking down upon Jerusalem and the Eastern Gate, gazing down upon the temple mount, the holy of holies rising high upon that mount, it is a breathtaking, inspiring view. People were coming from everywhere to celebrate Passover, but beyond that, people would come to see this incredible temple that Herod had built. People are still coming from all over the world to look from that hillside. We will be there in just a few weeks. Although the temple is gone but that mount is still one of the most recognizable pieces of real estate on earth.

I wonder if Jesus was thinking about the business of the temple and the busyness of Passover week for the people. I wonder if he was thinking about how these folks had substituted religion for relationship. How outward appearance had become more important than inward fellowship and heart surrendered holiness. I wonder if he was thinking about their willingness to accept the shadow and their eagerness to reject the reality. He had to be thinking of how all of this really pointed to him but few of these folks would choose to see it or realize it. How sadly overwhelming that would be. How heartbreaking it would be. It wasn't really a triumphant entry, it was a sorrowful arrival. And three things stood out to me in Mark's gospel that I want to mention this morning.

1. A Special Welcome For All the Wrong Reasons. It seems the people welcomed Jesus because they thought he might be the Messiah that would lead them to political and national freedom. He would be the Son of David, the great king that would overthrow the Romans, run the foreigners out and restore Jewish control to the land. They welcomed him with appropriate messianic references and responses, but they welcomed him for all the wrong reasons. They were focused on themselves, on their physical, national, ethnic, political, economic well being. They really didn't care much about their spiritual condition. They sure weren't thinking of Jesus being the Savior that would take away their sins and give them eternal life. They were just looking for a better life, a better deal for the here and now. Who really cares about the then and

there when we can focus on our best life here and now? Who can promise me something right now?

They misunderstood the whole thing. It was about national pride, about economic prosperity. John's gospel says the disciples didn't realize what all of this meant until after Jesus was glorified and then they understood. Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus stopped as he approached the city and wept because the people didn't recognize the time of their visitation. God had come to them, had visited in their midst and they would not and could not see him. They welcomed Jesus, the teacher, the miracle worker, the iconoclast, the rabbi, and perhaps he was the Messiah, the deliverer, but they didn't see the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. They welcomed him for what they could get right now. They welcomed him for all the wrong reasons.

2. All Leaves But No Fruit. Mark says Jesus entered the city, looked around at everything at the Temple and then went out to Bethany to spend the night. On the way back to town the next day, Jesus saw a fig tree, full of leaves, but without any fruit. Pastor Brian shared a great message about Jesus and the fig tree on March 20. You can purchase a copy of his message so I won't try to explain all of the significance again, but suffice it to say Jesus had something to say about the lack of fruit. And not just here – it came up more than once in his teachings. The importance of bearing fruit. He was concerned because a lack of fruit on the outside meant something was wrong on the inside of the tree. Something was wrong with the health and life of this tree, so Jesus cursed it and told it to never bear fruit again. The next day they found it had withered from the roots. I think it was already dying and Jesus just exposed it's true condition.

It was a powerful lesson for the disciples, not only about having faith and believing when you speak, but more importantly, it was a lesson, an illustration of what was wrong in Jerusalem at the temple. It was what was wrong with the people. It was all leaves but no fruit. It was all hat but no cattle. It had all the appearance of health and life and vigor except for one thing - the most important thing - it wasn't bearing the fruit of righteousness and life.

Jesus looks at the temple from the Mount of Olives and then arrives and walks around, watching as they sell the animals for sacrifice and as they exchange money in order to buy the sacrifices. He sees the concern for the ritual, but he doesn't see surrendered hearts coming to God for cleansing, he doesn't see acts of obedience to God, he sees performance and tradition.

He sees people willing to lay palm branches down on the ground before him, but he doesn't see people willing to lay their lives down for him. He looks around and sees a lot of leaves, a lot of business and busyness, but he can't find any fruit. It makes you wonder, what's the point?

3. False Security. Look with me at Mark 11:15. **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, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" Mark 11:15-17**

What was going on with Jesus running the money changers out of the temple courts? There are a host of reasons that can be offered. You understand the priests offered this as a convenience, to exchange money so the people coming from other areas could easily buy animals for sacrifice. And the animals were right there so they didn't have to bring them from far away. It was a service for the people and it didn't hurt that it brought a little profit into everyone's pockets. The fact that merchandise was being carried through the temple courts suggests that people were using it as a short cut to get from north to south in the city, but it wasn't like people were praying in those outer courts. People were talking and teaching and debating. He wasn't telling them to be quiet and reverent so people could pray. He was no doubt upset that the leaders, the elders and priests, were defrauding people, taking advantage of the poor in the name of God. But I think there was something else disturbing him. I think it had to do with the fact they were leaning on what would prove to be a false sense of security.

Look at this phrase he used. "You have made it a den of robbers." I've always made the point that Jesus was upset because these people were in essence robbing the people, charging higher prices and a higher rate of exchange – taking advantage of widows and needy people (see Mark 12:40) (and that is all true) but consider this: a den of robbers implies not so much where they commit their crimes but where they run to hide and be safe. Jesus says, "You have made the temple of the Lord a hiding place for thieves – a place where you think you are safe from God's judgement regardless of how you live or what you do. 'We are safe here to do whatever we want, live anyway we want, just as long as we make sure we come back to our hiding place.'"

Turn with me to **Jeremiah 7:1-11** and let me show you a passage that perhaps Jesus had

in mind when he spoke these words to the crowd that day. (Read passage)

“Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’ – safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.”

Jesus was watching. He had come the day before and walked around and watched the scene at the temple. He saw what was happening. He saw the false security that boasted – “It doesn’t matter how you live or how you act or how you treat others or whether you obey God, just show up and fulfill the traditions. It doesn’t matter that you bear no fruit, just show some leaves and you’ll be all right.” It was a false security that would destroy them, that kept them from seeing Jesus, that kept them from true repentance and salvation. A false security that would result in the destruction of the temple. (Look at Jeremiah 7:12-15.)

Jesus wept over the city, over the people. He overturned the tables and chased away the money changers, not in an attempt to reform the system, but to dramatically illustrate that the system was broken, that all this was like the fig tree, all leaves but no fruit. It was religious busyness without spiritual life. It was time to turn away from a false security and turn to the living God. It was time to embrace the salvation that he alone would provide through the sacrifice of his son.

What’s the lesson for us? Jesus has come to town. He arrives in your life, he comes to your house. How will you receive him? **Do we welcome him for all the wrong reasons?** Do we receive him as just another thing to try to help us find success, health, happiness, wealth? We embrace him and lay the palm branches before him because we think he offers us the best life now, but we don’t care much about salvation, about forgiveness of sins and we sure don’t intend to take up a cross and follow him. “Welcome Jesus. I’ll take all you have to give me, but don’t expect me to allow you to change how I live my life.” Welcome him because you need a Savior, you need forgiveness, you need eternal life, you need a redeemer. Welcome him for the right reasons.

Jesus has come to town and as he examines our life, what will he find? **Are we all leaves and no fruit?** Are we all show and no go? We are busy like the money changers and the

folks selling the sacrifices in the temple area. We are involved in the church, but we have no fruit to show. We've been coming to church for years, but we are still the same angry, frustrated, bitter, proud, lustful, fearful, hateful person we were when we arrived. Jesus said we would be known by our fruit. What kind of fruit are you bearing? Is it clear to everyone around you that your relationship with God is more than just busyness but there has been a real change in your heart and life, the kind of change that comes with truly having been born again and saved by his grace? What kind of fruit are you bearing?

It's Palm Sunday and Jesus has come to us. **Are we deceiving ourselves by living with a false security?** Most of us grew up with what we've called a feeling of eternal insecurity. We had a hard time trusting in God's grace to save us, feeling uncertain as to whether we were really saved or not. I understand that and thank God for his saving grace – that we are saved not by works or our own righteousness but by his alone. However, I have to ask and we all need to examine our hearts today – have we deceived ourselves and are we living with a false sense of security? We steal and lie, we commit adultery, we are sleeping around, we aren't serving God at school or on the job, we talk and act and live just like everyone else, we are abusing our spouse, we are abusing our children, we are taking advantage of others, we ignore God's words and refuse to obey him, but then we come to church or to youth group or to our place or to life group or wherever and act like everything is fine. We say, "I'm safe. I'm good. Yeah I'm living with this person and not married, but I'm good. Yes I'm doing some stuff that I know the bible says is a sin, but I still go to church. God understands. God knows me and my family."

We are trusting in our church membership or attendance or the fact that our family goes to church and knows God, or that God will overlook our sin. We are saying like those folks Jeremiah was talking to, like those folks at the temple when Jesus came to town, "We have this temple. We have this history with God. We are safe to do these detestable things." It's a false sense of security because God does not excuse sin. He will forgive sin when we ask but he cannot ignore it.

We've turned his house into a den of thieves, a place to come and hide, hoping we are safe. Hear me, you can't keep living in sin, refusing to allow his grace to touch you and change you, without it destroying you.

So what's the answer? It's time to get real with God. It's time to stop trusting in

anything but Christ alone and his saving grace. It's time to not only repent of your sins, but by his grace it's time to turn away from your sins. Leave the false security of living a lie and find the true security that comes with truly being born again and making Christ the savior and lord of your life.

It's time to start living a life that bears fruit. It's time to welcome him into your life for all the right reasons. To welcome him as Savior and Lord. Today is the day. Palm Sunday, the day for his triumphant entrance into your heart and life.