

THE MAN WHO IS GOD: *SEE? HE CAME TO DIE*

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April 9, 2017

How great to see everyone on Palm Sunday. These days on the Christian calendar that have names, like Palm Sunday, are on the calendar to remind us of events in history. Jesus actually lived and his life had decisions and actions and teachings and happenings. Palm Sunday marks his arrival in Jerusalem where he died. Amid the popular fanfare that erupted with his arrival, there was a resolve that preceded the entry, orchestrated the entry, continued during the entry, and endured after the entry. We're going to look at that resolve and what it means for you and for me today – it is the essence of this holy week.

Pray.

Last week we climbed with Jesus the mountain of transfiguration. As lofty as Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ, it had to come up another level -- that the Christ was not a prophet, but the one to whom the prophets came. With the Shekinah glory emanating from him and the Shekinah cloud enveloping them and the Shekinah voice filling their ears, this mount of transfiguration was a spiritual mountain that makes Everest look small.

You know there is a mountain bigger than Everest. It is Mauna Loa off Hawaii. It rises off the ocean floor and extends the height of Everest plus three quarters of a mile more. Just as the transfiguration mount was an Everest, there is another New Testament mount taller, one like Mauna Loa. It rises off the seabed of God's grace and through the waters of our sin and

extends higher than all of it. It is called Calvary. And from the moment of the transfiguration, everything in Jesus and in the gospels has been a traverse to *that* even higher place. Jesus from that pivot point of transfiguration has been teaching with a different and peculiar focus. It reveals his resolve. The text we come to today is the sixth on this topic in Luke, the fifth since the transfiguration experience. It accounts for why he arrives in Jerusalem for a Palm Sunday in the first place. Hear the word of the Lord. Luke 18:31ff.

³¹Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³²He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. ³³On the third day he will rise again." ³⁴The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. ³⁵As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. ³⁷They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." ³⁸He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ³⁹Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁰Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, ⁴¹"What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. ⁴²Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." ⁴³Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Once our family had two soccer games for two sons at the same time in two different places. So I'd take one son one way and mom would take the other one the other way. My wife explained to me that one game was by the public library and the other was by the elementary school. Somehow I got it in my head that I

was going to the elementary school. Even as she explained to me about this *by the library*, I thought she was just going through things in her own mind for her trip there. But when I arrived at the elementary school and couldn't find our team, and especially when I saw her pulling into the parking area five minutes behind me, it dawned on me that I had totally misunderstood our conversation. She said one thing and I heard a completely different thing.

Something like this seems to be going on for the disciples. Jesus keeps saying Calvary and death and they keep hearing enthronement and hosanna. He says one thing and they hear another. They can't see what Jesus is telling them. Interestingly, the next incident to follow this teaching of Jesus has to do with a blind man. He cannot see physically, but he can see something about Jesus that the disciples cannot. But even the healed man must see more. He and the disciples must see what Jesus wants them to see, that his death is deliberate, sacrificial, and immense. Deliberate. Sacrificial. Immense.

Deliberate. Jesus speaks of the prophecies being fulfilled. He speaks of being handed over and mocked and flogged and killed. He draws on passages from the prophet Isaiah, passages like, "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard." (50:6) What is clear is that this death did not take him by surprise. He said, "No one takes my life from me, but rather I lay it down." (Jn 10:18)

There's a cute story about a boy alone with a baseball bat and ball. He'd toss the ball up in the air and as it came down he'd swing at it. He missed and muttered, "Strike one." He did it a second time and this

time he missed again. "Strike two." You could see the frustration and concentration on his brow. He threw it a third time and missed. "Strike three." His shoulders slumped. Then suddenly they became square, his face brightened, he threw his arms up in victory and yelled, "What a great pitcher I am!" Now, that's an ingenious revision. Jesus did not make the best of a bad situation that he found himself in like that little boy. This was the situation he made. From when he first put Isaiah's prophecy onto his ministry with "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" until now, this was a death he had purposed.

His deliberateness about it was not just in purposing it, but in scheduling it as well. Paul says in Galatians 4 that Jesus came in the fullness of time. In terms of world history, he did come in an unprecedented time. Never before had an empire been so expansive as the Roman empire. It's *Pax Romana* meant that people could travel throughout it in relative safety. The system of Roman roads was new and especially made that travel possible. Greek was the international language and Latin the back up. Never before could a message travel so far, so quickly. In this time, *at the land bridge between Europe, Asia, and Africa*, Jesus came.

But his planning was not just in terms of imperial eras and crossroads. It was also more specific on the annual calendar. In our family, six of eight birthdays fell in a nine week period that also included Thanksgiving and then Christmas. Some of the Jewish holidays are like that. Jesus comes to Jerusalem in a fullness of time when the Jewish holidays stack up on top of each other. There is the Feast of Passover, of the Unleavened Bread, and of the First Fruits.

Passover commemorates the angel of death passing over the people in Egypt and only those that relied on a slain lamb in the place of their firstborn would be saved. The Unleavened Bread commemorates how leaven, signifying impurity,¹ was not to be a part of their lives. In that ritual, a piece of the unleavened bread was “broken off” from the “loaf” and hidden. It represented the Messiah. The First Fruits was an offering of the first barley, only after which being given could the harvest proceed. And the day before that barley offering a passage from Ezekiel was read. Chapter 37. Being shown a valley of dry bones a voice asks, “Son of Man, can these bones live?” Then they come to life – the foot bone connected to the shin bone and the shin bone connected to the knee bone.

Get this – Jesus’ “Triumphal Entry” to Jerusalem was on Sunday, Passover lamb *selection* day. Thursday is the Passover lamb *sacrifice* day. Friday is when the piece of unleavened bread called the Messiah is hidden away. Saturday is when the dry bones are read about. Sunday is when the Feast of First Fruits is. They thought they were choosing Jesus as a political king, but they were choosing him as their unblemished lamb. Jesus was the lamb slain and the piece of bread broken off. He was hidden in a tomb and on Sunday, Paul says, in I Cor. 15, that Jesus was the first fruits of those who are to rise from the dead. Jesus both chose to die and to die at a time full of messages about what his death meant.

Sacrificial. What that death meant, the shadow of meaning that those holidays of that week cast, was that Jesus death was sacrificial. It wasn’t just a death. It

¹ See I Cor 5:6-8.

was a death in trade, death as a substitute. When Jesus said that the word of the prophets would be fulfilled, he was drawing on Isaiah. Not just passages about offering his back and his cheeks to blows, but also passages like, “He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; that the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, that by his wounds we are healed, that the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”²

We know how substitution works. In a book I like, Wes Stafford in *Too Young to Ignore*, tells of a time in his boarding school when they were all deprived of going outside until the culprit of some petty matter confessed to the headmaster. The punishment went on for days and days. Finally, Wes, to set everyone free, even though he had not done it, confessed to the crime. He was punished by principal and looked down on by his fellow students. It was only a few who believed him and who appreciated what he did for them all. Years and years later, the real culprit confessed to Wes that he had been the one. Wes had taken his punishment and set them all free. Jesus didn’t commit any crime and didn’t confess to any crime. But he did take the place of the culprit, did take the punishment *in order* to set others free.

Immense. What sort of person plans to die? What sort of person arranges it to be an atoning or substitutionary death? And this wasn’t a death of a mom or dad for their child but one Jesus regarded as applicable to *everyone in the world*. The prophesy Jesus claimed said, “The Lord laid on him the iniquity of *us all*.” What sort of person would think of his death in such

² 53:5-6

grandiose terms? What sort plans, makes it substitutionary, makes it for everyone? The Jesus sort.

I remember a fella talking about his upbringing amid the ranches of Montana. Walking back from school one day he saw a rancher on his tractor out in his field with a big scooping wave like he was beckoning my friend over to him. But he kept walking on. Then he heard his name shouted. So he went over to the tractor. The rancher said, "Why did you keep walking?" My friend said, "I didn't know you were wanting me to come over." The rancher then asked, "How do you gesture come here?" My friend put his finger out and curled it toward him. The rancher said, "That's kid's stuff." This is how a man does it in the big sky country of Montana and he did his windmill of an arm sweep.

Jesus didn't do a little finger death for a few. He did a big arm sweep of a death for all.

That Jesus died for the whole world is immense. But there is another dimension of immensity that we must see today. We might call it the necessity of scale.

Look, if you got a letter on funny looking letterhead from the IRS saying you owed \$3.16, you might or might not investigate it. After all, it's just \$3.16 and the letterhead looked cheesy. But if you got a letter on very legitimate looking letterhead from the IRS saying you owed \$43,000, you'd take it seriously. You have to because of its scale. You can't afford that kind of error to be there.

Or, if you got a letter on funny looking paper saying you'd won some popcorn at the local theater, you say, "Okay." But if a letter came on letterhead from the most prestigious law firm in town saying a relative had left you \$100,000, you wouldn't just say, "Whatever."

You'd get serious. You know you would. That's the way scale works.

For these weeks we have looked at Jesus and seen a wondrous co-mingling in an unparalleled way of the human and divine. His claims for who he is and what that means for us are too big to ignore.

When the blind man cried, "Son of David," he used the special messianic title for the ultimate king, the last king of the world. It's the first time Jesus accepted such acclaim in public. It aroused the disciples. It aroused the crowd. Will it arouse you – the ultimate king who comes so accessible to us, on a little donkey, to deliberately sacrifice himself for us all? Oh, may each of our souls say today, "Hosanna."

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. pastorjeffwood@gmail.com
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