

Matthew Henry Evangelical Church – Sermon from Sun 5/4/20
Steve Hand – On Palm Sunday

Good morning to you all, and a warm welcome. It's good to be with you and to share over the internet! We trust that the Lord will bless each and every one of us as we look into his Word. Today is Palm Sunday, and it's the day when we, as the Church, celebrate Jesus Christ entering Jerusalem for the last time. It is his final week on earth. He actually comes in each day because he doesn't actually stay within the walls of Jerusalem, but this is his entry point, if you like. This is the time when he comes in proclaiming himself King, as we'll find out. We'll get some idea of what the reaction was as we look into his Word. I'm going to read from Luke, Chapter 19:

“And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice, for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord! Peace in earth and glory in the highest’. And some of the pharisees from among the crowd said unto him, ‘Master, rebuke thy disciples’. And he answered and said unto them, ‘I tell you, that if they should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out!’ And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, ‘If thou hadst known even now at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the day shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench round about thee and compass thee round and keep thee in on every side. And they shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone on another because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation’.”

Here we have some very strange circumstances, and some words that today in our modern world possibly we don't really fully understand. But Jesus had fulfilled much of the prophecies of the Old Testament in his life, and now in the final week he comes to Jerusalem to present himself as their Messiah, as the King of Jerusalem, as the King of Israel. He comes to the capital, Jerusalem, and he comes to speak to the chief priests, the pharisees, and the Sadducees. He comes to present himself as the Promised One from the Old Testament! But as we know, they reject him. As he comes in, he then spends the next few days in Jerusalem preaching in the Temple, doing some miracles, presenting himself as the Messiah, being questioned – but when it comes down to the very rock bottom they arrest him at night (which was illegal to do), they question him and trial him during the night, and they find no fault. Eventually the High Priest asks him, “Are you the Son of God?” And he says, “Yes I am.” It was for that reason that they sent Jesus to the Romans to die and be crucified, because he claimed to be God.

Palm Sunday starts this whole ball rolling. It starts with the disciples coming towards Jerusalem and they start cutting down palm branches, laying them on the floor, waving them around. They start praising God and praising the Lord for all the miracles that they've seen. Their hearts are full and they're rejoicing! Jesus is in the midst of them, riding on a donkey, down towards the city. Just an amazing sight! You can imagine a big crowd, praising, singing, and enjoying themselves as they make their way down the mount of Olives.

Within the crowd there's a small group that start to come together, making their way slowly over towards Jesus. They're not happy because they know that Jesus' disciples are proclaiming them as their King. They don't actually say, 'Stop these false claims!' They say, 'Tell them to be quiet'. But Jesus says, 'If these are quiet then the very stones will cry out!' There are so many things we don't know about creation; it is an amazing world in which we live, and we could spend much time on it. Today maybe we won't get out very much, but we are supposed to take daily exercise. I'd encourage you to do that if you can! It's good to get out into the fresh air and into nature, to see the trees, the flowers, the fields. To hear the birds singing. Life is a miracle, and we are designed to live in this world and in the miracle of this world all around us. Even the experts know that it is good for our mental health and well-being to get out and about. I should get out and about a bit more than I do! Maybe in this coming week that'll be the case, but we should only take that one daily exercise, and we should be careful and stay in social distancing. This is the world in which we live at the moment. It's very sad, isn't it?

But Jesus – as he comes towards Jerusalem – he starts weeping as he sees the city, because he knows what's coming. He knows that the chief priests, the scribes, the pharisees and the Sadducees, he knows that they're going to reject him. He knows that they're going to reject him. He knows that they're not going to listen to his claims, that they're going to reject what he stands for. He prophesies that Jerusalem is going to be laid waste and desolate and be razed to the ground. That's exactly what's going to happen in 70AD, when the Roman legions came and destroyed the place, just a few decades later! Oh, what a sad, sad situation. Jesus weeps over it. A time of rejoicing, there are people grumbling, but Jesus is weeping.

Friends, today God looks at this world through sad eyes. He can rejoice over our hearts and he loves us, and he cares for us as individuals, but he sees the world and all the political things that are happening, and he sees the wickedness that goes on, and he's grieved at his heart within. But you see, God has given us life! Life is precious, and that's why Jesus came to die. That's why Jesus came to the city: to be examined. That's why Jesus came for you and for me.

What an amazing sight, the crowd rejoicing, the pharisees grumbling, and Jesus weeping. If only we knew the blessings God has for us. Jesus says whilst weeping over Jerusalem, 'O if you would understand this, all the blessings, all the peace that is yours, O that you would understand these things'. O, that we would take this on board for ourselves! God's blessings for us are there, waiting for us. They can make a difference in our lives. But you see, just like Jerusalem rejected Jesus, so today most of this world rejects Jesus – but God loves us in spite of that! Let us not miss this, that God wants to bless us and be with us and to share in our lives, in the circumstances of our lives. He wants to bless! The pharisees, they found fault. The crowd, they wanted praise. And yet both of them seemed to have missed out what God's heart was – a heart wanting to bless, looking to bless, but they weren't looking for that.

May we take time in our homes during this next week. Take time to be with God, to listen to him. I hope that helps. I hope it can make a difference in your life, and in my life, every day we can trust him. I have a blessing for you before we close with a word of prayer. May God grant you his peace and safety. Whilst you are separated from your friends and from your family, may it be a time of rest and reflection and quiet. From the

busy world, from a hard world, a difficult world, may we find that God is good! That he wants to take care of you, because you are part of his precious creation. May God bless you.