

Sermon  
Lanier Christian Church  
March 28, 2010

## Palm Sunday – A Day of Triumph and Tragedy Luke 19:37-44

You don't need me to tell you our country is divided over the recent health care bill that was passed by congress. There are people that are for it and they are shouting, instead of "Yes we can," now it's "Yes, we did." Then there are those who oppose the bill and they are shouting: "Repeal the bill." Then there are those who simply have no opinion whatsoever and have a "Wait and See" attitude.

It is amazing how different people respond differently to the exact same situation. There are always 3 distinct groups of people present. It's just like a ball game. There are those who are happy because their team won. There are those who are sad because their team lost. Lastly, there are those who really didn't care about who won or lost. They were just there as observers not placing any significance in either winning or losing.

Today is Palm Sunday, the day we remember Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem a week before His crucifixion. Just like politics and sporting events there were three distinct groups of people that were there that day long ago. There were those who saw triumph, there were those who saw tragedy and there were those who simply missed what was happening. They saw no real significance in the events of that day.

Luke 19:37 - "When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" 40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." 41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will

come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

### 1. TRIUMPH - those who received (vs. 37-38)

A few days before the cross Jesus entered Jerusalem to cries of praise and worship. This was the Triumphal Entry. It was at that time that Jesus was at the height of His public ministry. He was recognized as being the Messiah. In Matthew it says "Hosanna to the Son of David!". In Mark it says: "Hosanna - Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David". In John it says "Blessed is the King of Israel!" The word Hosanna means "Save us now!" and was an expression of praise. The crowds recognized who Jesus was and "for all the miracles they had seen."

On Friday, a similar scene took place on the cross.

<sup>39</sup>*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"*

<sup>40</sup>*But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup>We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*

<sup>42</sup>*Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."<sup>[7]</sup>*

<sup>43</sup>*Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

One of the thieves nailed beside Jesus accepts Him as Lord. He recognized his crime and knew he was getting exactly what he deserved. He had broken the law and was being punished for it. His "Hosanna" was a simple declaration of faith and trust "remember me when you come into your kingdom". Jesus responded to his request with a promise: "today you will be with me in paradise". Even

though it was nearly at his dying breath, this criminal received the triumphant news that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord. This man's conversation with Jesus on the cross resulted in triumph because he acknowledged Jesus for who he is.

A boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon, when a bumblebee flew in the car window. The little boy, who was allergic to bee stings, was petrified. The father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. The boy grew frantic as it buzzed by him. Once again the father reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to his palm. There stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. "Do you see this?" he asked. "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you."

We do not need to fear death anymore. Christ has died and risen again. He has taken the sting from death. We need no longer fear the grave.

Like those early followers of Jesus, I hope Hosanna is on your lips today. At his birth the angels sang out: "Glory in the Highest." At His triumphal entry into Jerusalem the people who received him as the promised Messiah shouted: "Glory in the Highest." The people on that first Palm Sunday laid down palm branches to welcome him. The palms were a symbol of triumph and victory. Like those early followers we worship our king and lay down what we have before Him as He moves through our lives. He is our triumphant Lord!

## 2. TRAGEDY - those who rejected (vs. 39-40)

At the triumphal entry the Pharisees had understood clearly what the crowds were saying. They knew that the crowds were naming Jesus as their Messiah and they knew that this was a terrible blasphemy against God. Jesus responded to their complaint that He was more than just a prophet but He was creator – God come to earth. If the people didn't praise Him, the rocks would cry out in praise. The only reason a rock would praise Him is if He himself were the maker of that rock. The Pharisees had made up their mind that Jesus could not have been what He claimed so they plotted to have Him killed.

A week later one of the thieves nailed with Jesus rejected Him as Lord. He hurled insults at Him rather than praises. He had made up his mind that Jesus was not who he claimed to be. He wrote Him off as just another crazy man dying for some crime. He rejected His claim to be the Messiah or savior. Though Jesus was so close to Him, He rejected Him and the eternal life He offered.

On December 6, 1829 two men, George Wilson and James Porter, robbed a United States mail carrier in Pennsylvania. Both men were subsequently captured and tried. On May 1, 1830 both men were found guilty of six indictments which included robbery of the mail "and putting the life of the driver in jeopardy." On May 27th both George Wilson and James Porter received their sentences: Execution by hanging. The sentences were to be carried out on July 2nd, 1830. By today's standards, this sentence seems very harsh. Remember, no one was killed in their crimes. James Porter was executed on schedule. George Wilson had changed his plea to guilty and was not executed at the same time. A number of Wilson's influential friends pleaded for mercy to the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson, on behalf of their friend.

President Jackson issued a formal pardon. The charges resulting in the death sentence were completely dropped. Wilson would have to serve only a prison term of twenty years for his other crimes. Incredibly George Wilson Refused The Pardon!

According to the official report, THE UNITED STATES VS GEORGE WILSON (Peters 7 Report Sections 150-163) Wilson was returned to court as they attempted to "force" the pardon on him. It is recorded that George Wilson chose to:

"...waive and decline any advantage or protection which might be supposed to arise from the pardon referred to..." Wilson also stated that he "...had nothing to say, and that he did not wish in any manner to avail himself in order to avoid sentence ..."

The case reached the Supreme Court. The Attorney-General made the following comments:

"The court cannot give the prisoner the benefit of the pardon, unless he claims the benefit of it... It is a grant to him: it is his property; and he may accept it or not as he pleases."

Chief Justice John Marshall wrote the following in the decision:

"A pardon is an act of grace, proceeding from the power entrusted with the execution of the laws, which exempts the individual, on whom it is bestowed, from the punishment the law inflicts for a crime he has committed..."

"A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential; and delivery is not completed without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered; and if it be rejected, we have discovered no power in a court to force it on him."

"It may be supposed that no being condemned to death would reject a pardon, but the rule must be the same in capital cases and in misdemeanors."

In other words, George Wilson committed a crime. He was tried and found guilty. He was sentenced to be executed. A presidential decree granted him a full pardon. But George Wilson chose rather to refuse that pardon. The courts concluded that the pardon could not be forced upon him. So, George Wilson, as punishment for his crime, was hanged.

Pardon, declared the Supreme Court, must not only be granted, it must be accepted.

We live in a world that does not recognize Jesus for who He is. Though a pardon has been granted they refuse to accept it. They have rejected the idea of Jesus as Lord and Savior. They have rejected the forgiveness, mercy, grace, and hope that He offers. They pass Jesus off as just a prophet or a good moral teacher - ignoring the fact that He is Savior. Some who reject Jesus see our praise as blasphemy of the worst possible kind. They would seek to quiet us - but even if we should stop, all creation would still worship. Nothing can stop God and His plan for our lives and this world.

### 3. Apathy - Those who missed what was happening (vs. 41-44)

Perhaps the largest group on that first Palm Sunday were the bystanders who saw what was happening but did not understand what it meant. With the Passover approaching the road to Jerusalem would have been a very busy place. Certainly there must have been many there that day that wondered what was happening. Perhaps they had heard all the things that Jesus had done, but just didn't care enough to pursue it any further. They were spectators and undecided in what to make of Him.

When Jesus looks up at Jerusalem as He approaches He knows what will happen. He sees the day in AD 70 when it will be burned and destroyed by the Romans. He sees the destruction. He sees that the enemy will triumph over it. It would be destroyed because it did not recognize the time of God's coming. It was a horrible destruction. Vespasian sent his son Titus to conquer the Jews that had rebelled against the Romans. It all started in AD 66 but finally ended in AD 70. Over 600,000 Jews lost their lives and the city of Jerusalem was laid waste. The temple was destroyed never to be rebuilt to this day. Jesus foretold this destruction at his triumphal entry. He was their only hope – but most chose a political solution to their problems and war over the hope of salvation in Christ.

A few days later there were also bystanders at the foot of the cross. Yes there were many soldiers who mocked and cursed Jesus but I am sure that there were others there that day who were just doing their job. That were told to crucify an outlaw and that is what they were doing. They were not there to bless or to curse. They were simply there because they were supposed to be. That was what was expected of them. They were there playing games at the foot of the cross totally apathetic about what was going on around them.

These men were so close. That sat at the foot of the cross, inches away from the savior of the world. Seeing a chance to make some money they took the clothes of Jesus and rolled the dice for them. They were so close, and yet so far away. They neither accepted nor rejected - they were simply there. Killing time and playing games.

Just doing their jobs and not really caring about anyone or anything else.

There are people like that who may be here today. But there are definitely people like this that you encounter every day. On the sidelines...claiming to see, and yet don't see. Not cursing God, but not praising Him either. Not denying the claims of Jesus, but not accepting them either. Such apathetic people...such people that miss what is happening.... Are not shouting insults and mocking Him, but they also will not fall at His feet and call Him Lord.

Some even cross the line just enough to come to church but only to be nice. They really don't believe. So close to the cross – but in reality just playing games.

Easter is a time of decision. Two thieves crucified on either side of Jesus. One believes and one rejects. One is saved and another is lost. It is the very picture of decision.

For each one of us here this is a day of decision. You must decide today between triumph and tragedy. Between apathy and faith. Either accept Jesus or reject Him, but you cannot keep sitting there playing games at the foot of the cross. As Josh McDowell challenged in His book, "Evidence Demands a Verdict" – "Call Him Liar, or Lunatic or Lord" - you must decide.

When Jesus looked up at Jerusalem it says he wept. He said "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace -- but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you ... They will dash you to the ground ... They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you".

Jesus saw the future of the city. He knew what would happen. He wept because he knew the city He loved would reject Him and be destroyed.

When Jesus looks at you today what does He see? Does He rejoice over you or does He weep that even though He was so close you still did not recognize the time of God's coming to you. Jesus is passing by each of us again today. You must decide what you will do. How many times have you seen Him pass by you. Don't let Him pass you by again. Respond in faith to Him today.

Adapted from S. Sheane with additions and illustrations by D. Simpson