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## **Palm Sunday**

### **The Good News Should Change You**

Shay Robbins

It's Palm Sunday; can you believe it? That means spring has sprung, which I'm thankful for. Who loves the sunshine? Thank you, Lord. As you guys know, we're celebrating Palm Sunday. As you guys came in... We're going to take communion today, so we passed out the elements. If you didn't receive the elements, please raise your hand. We're going to take the elements together at the end of the message, so we want to make sure everybody has that. You also know that we love to be cheerful givers around here, so we take an offering as part of our worship service. There are a couple of ways you can do that. We have offering boxes located in the foyer, the Church Center app online at [woodhills.org](http://woodhills.org), or you can text any amount to 84321. Again, we thank you for your generosity.

We just came out of our Intentional Parenting series, and we're kicking off a great season in our church, a great season in our faith. The title of our message today is *The Good News Should Change You*.

Number six in the Robbins family came home with a palm leaf here today. Isn't that nice? Oh, it's beautiful. We were great parents with our first two kids. I mean we did an amazing job. We read them hundreds of books, we taught them their letters and their numbers, worked on second languages. I'm just going to be honest with you. Things have gone downhill since then. So, typically when we get one of these little treasures, we'll pat her on the head and then just quietly slide it into the recycling bin. But when I saw this, I thought, *Honey, I will be able to pull on people's heartstrings with this. We are going to keep this one.* But we are very proud of her. I was actually surprised to find out this spring that number six actually knows the alphabet. That blew my mind because I had no involvement with teaching her the alphabet this time around. I was even surprised that she wasn't wearing a diaper. I'm like when did that happen? They grow up so fast.

On Friday night, four, five, and six came to us and they were like, "Dad, we all want to sleep in the same bed. And me being the accommodating, fun dad, I was like "Absolutely. That seems like a party. That's a great idea." My wife is like, "No. they are going to fall out of bed." I'm like, "It will be fine." We get them all tucked in and packed in there and they are very giggly and excited. Well, About 11:30. We hear a thump and then a scream. Number four comes in and we turn on the lights and she's bleeding from her face. Turns out we've got a wound from hitting the dresser on the way to the floor, and it is worthy of stitches... and probably some measure of plastic surgery. So, we put some super glue on her forehead and sent her back to bed. You'd be amazed how much, with the last four, superglue has played a role in their life.

Number three... I'll be honest with you; I still think there is a clump in his hair from when he went through our entertainment center. It's hard to brush out. But I had some friends who asked me, "Shay, why didn't you teach during the Intentional Parenting series?" I was like, "Well, I think it's because our kids have too much glue on them." But we have the perfect amount of glue for Palm Sunday, so here I am. I decided to be with you guys.

This is a super important message. I'm going to open up the message. We're going to zoom out a little bit and give you the 30,000 ft view. What was happening 2,000 years ago in the region? What's the political setting, what are the tensions, what's the background of the story? I think what you'll find, as we zoom out and we take a look at that, is that you and I, 2,000 years later, have a lot that we can relate to. In fact, you'll find out that this story, for this day, is incredibly relevant.

During Jesus, public ministry, he was very quiet. In the background, he would gather his disciples and he would talk about his kingship and his role as the Messiah. But publicly, he spoke in veiled terms. He did that for a season because his time had not yet come. As we're leading up to Palm Sunday, the fever pitch around Jesus' ministry was hitting its peak. In fact, recently, he had risen Lazarus from the dead. And while they didn't have any social media or evening news, when somebody is raised from the dead, like literally a dead man that sat and rotted for days in a tomb, and he comes walking out, the word gets out.

Not only that, on the way to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, Jesus and his followers make their way through Jericho where they meet a guy named Zacchaeus. He was a scumbag. Everybody hated him. He was a Jew who had turned his back on his own people to serve the Roman Occupation by collecting taxes. He was despised by his countrymen and yet he has this encounter with Jesus where the people witness him turn a complete 180 right before their eyes. In fact, he started giving back money in multiples, paying back the wrongs he had committed over the years.

And then on the way out of Jericho, a blind man cries out to Jesus and Jesus stops. At this point, there is a mob around Jesus following him everywhere to see what he's going to do next. He heals Bartimaeus who receives his sight right then and there, in front of all the people.

As Jesus and his followers are moving in a mob, they are moving toward Jerusalem, and they are not the only big group that is flowing into Jerusalem. As you know, the celebration of the Passover feast is a massive part of Jewish culture. The reason that it was such a big deal is because the Passover was a celebration of the Jewish people being liberated from slavery in Egypt. It was a celebration of freedom. And yet, this celebration was in the setting of Roman Occupation. So, you can imagine the tension.

People are flowing from all over the country, every highway and byway, making their way to Jerusalem. At the time, we think that the population was somewhere between 40,000 and 80,000 people. That population would have doubled, tripled, and quadrupled the number of people coming into Jerusalem. The reason they are coming, the actual celebration itself, the Passover, is celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> plague that God used to finally unfasten the Pharaoh's grip on the Jewish people that they might walk out of the country and the slavery that they had been living under. In that tenth plague, the Jewish people were given instruction by God's man, Moses, specifically to go and take something that was extremely valuable to them, a lamb, a perfect and unblemished lamb. And each household would take that tremendously valuable asset and they would sacrifice it. And the blood that was spilled, they were

instructed to take that blood and wipe it over the doorpost of their house. And then they'd go into their house and that night, God said, Through Moses, that the angel of death would sweep across the country and every firstborn would die. The only firstborns that would survive, would be the ones that were covered with the blood of the lamb. Can you believe this? That's the celebration that they're going to partake in as a country. The tension was tremendously high and the story of Lazarus... If the mob itself was kindling, Lazarus himself is the match. Have y'all ever met that guy? Everybody has that guy in their life who tries to start a fire with just a little bit of gasoline. It never turns out well. You always end up with hair singed off of your body, if not worse. Well, Lazarus is that guy.

At this point in Jewish history, his testimony, his story is about to light this place a blaze because the Jewish leaders hated him so much, because of his testimony that people were following Jesus, that they had decided they were going to kill Lazarus. What kind of idiots would try to kill the guy who... He was dead. He's alive again so we're going to try to kill him again? But they are so filled with envy, anger, jealousy, and, frankly, the fact that they could lose control because in this day, as you can imagine, the Roman occupation ruled with an iron fist. I mean just with physical brutality. And the Romans, as you can imagine, know about the Passover, they know what it means to people. They also know the implications of these hordes of people flowing into this city. It was super volatile. So, all those commanders and the legions and the centurions gathered together ahead of time and I guarantee you they were deployed to go out and crush any kind of rebellion that could possibly bubble up.

So, as the people are pouring into the city, they are walking past the centurions that represent their new slavery. And then another group, the religious leaders, the Pharisees and the Sadducees of the day, worked out this tenuous relationship with the Romans, their occupiers. They are carrying themselves about in self-righteousness and nobility that *we have controlled this situation, we are going to lead the people, we're going to do the best job under these circumstances.*

Well, behind the scenes, they're a part of this financial machine. As the people are pouring in, the Romans are set up to just tax the fire out of them to line their pockets. And these Jewish leaders are getting a cut of the action. And it is their responsibility... and under a tremendous degree of pressure. These religious leaders are supposed to squash anything that's going on because there are rumors of zealots and an uprising. They, no doubt, have been threatened with all of the perks of their relationship that they have to protect them or else Rome is not only going to crush the people, but they were going to lose their standing in this culture. Tension, pressure, volatility.

You think about all those factors and fast forward 2,000 years, and you think about our world today. Tension, pressure, volatility. There are some things happening in our country, politically, that are literally blowing my mind. It's like how could we possibly be having these conversations? This is insanity, right? There are things that are happening around the world right now... We're on the edge of a world war. Standing on the very edge. And even more personally, as you interact with other people... And I know that God did this on purpose, just like the interactions that I had this week during preparation for this day. So many people hurting – divorce, broken relationships, financial ruin, any number of things. It's just tense. So, you look at this story and I always... You always have to know when God is putting something before you, spiritually speaking He's wanting to speak into your life on a Sunday morning, in a personal interaction, or when you open up the bible on your own time, just know God wants to do work on you. He wants to help you by growing you up in your faith. So, we approach this text and we realize this is wildly relevant to where we are at today, is it not? Really and truly, it is.

So, Jesus, as he has these crowds coming around him, and the testimony of Lazarus is lighting people up and they are coming to see this Jesus. He approaches the city, and he decides, *I'm going to ride in on a donkey*. Why would he do that? I think it's a really important question. Why in the world would he ride in on a donkey? That doesn't make sense. What's the purpose of that? If it was me... I grew up watching Westerns with Grandpa. I would have rode in on a painted pony. Or a wild stallion that's been broken, bridled, and tamed. Or a war horse like a Clydesdale. That wasn't Jesus' way. He chose a different entrance, and he chose it for a reason, which is where we pick up our story in Mathew 21.

***As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."***

***<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:***

***<sup>5</sup> "Say to Daughter Zion,  
'See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"***<sup>[a]</sup>

***<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.***

Jesus chose to ride in on a donkey for a couple of reasons. First of all, it was prophesied in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is riddled with scriptures that describe the coming Messiah. What he would look like, where he would be born, how he would carry himself, and specifically what he would ride in on as the King. But there's more to it than that. The donkey represents something in the culture of the day. For a general or a king or a warrior, if they are coming into a city and they were bent on war, what do you think they would ride? They'd ride the horses in. If you saw a general riding into a city with an army behind him on horses and they were charging after the city, you'd know they were bent on war. But on the other side, similarly, if a King or a general rode in on a donkey, it meant they were coming in peace. Perhaps just armies passing through and the King is coming in to get some supplies from our city,

It was a visual, it was understood. And yet, what were all the people wanting? They were expecting their King to ride in on a warhorse. That's what they needed. They needed to deliver from their oppression from the heavy hand of the Roman occupation. But Jesus, much to the bewilderment of the culture... Even his closest disciples chose to ride in on a donkey.

Now, I would have done it differently. I look at all the issues of our day and I want immediate justice. I want delivery through strength. I want to ride in and knock over all of this evil and wipe it out of our country, wipe it out of my town, wipe it out of my life, but Jesus surprised them and he came in a different way. He came with a purpose.

We are going to continue our story in John 12: 17-18 – ***<sup>7</sup> Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. <sup>18</sup> Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. <sup>19</sup> So the***

***Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"<sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,***

***"Hosanna to the Son of David!"***

***"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"***

***"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"***

Continuing in Luke 19 - ***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.***

Instead of riding in as the conquering king, instead, Jesus came in on a donkey and he presented himself as the Prince of Peace.

The mob was looking for something different, as were the Pharisees. And what's so ironic about this story is there was a celebration that was happening as Jesus entered. The mob rallies around and they are quoting the Old Testament scriptures like, this is the Messiah. We recognize him as our coming King. The city, the nation, was rallying around him, and yet, Jesus, knowing what would happen in just a mere few days, rides in through the city, and then he weeps over Jerusalem.

Jesus came in with some... I want to read these to you and they are kind of heavy statements. Jesus came in as the Prince of Peace and the mission of peace was out of a well of compassion that is more sincere than what we can produce, of patience greater than we can muster, and an empathy deeper than we can feel.

While the crowds were exuberant, Jesus' heart broke for broken people. That is the passion of the Christ. It is his passion for his people. As I mentioned, a few days later after his entry into Jerusalem, the tide of public opinion would turn against Christ because he didn't represent the king they had pictured in their mind. In fact, they flipped to the extent that some of those people who had cut down the palm branches to welcome the Son of God into their city would soon stand in front of Pilot's judgement hall and cry out for the death of the Lamb of God. Crucify him Crucify him Crucify him.

As we come up to this text and we process through... Every time we come to this scripture, church, we have to be asking God what he has for us today. Hebrews refers to the Word of God as a sword and that sword is living and active and it is a sword that does surgery on his people. It cuts away hardness of heart. It cuts away sinful and broken ways of living. And the more carving that he does on us, the more we become like him. But you and I have so much control in the way that we approach the scripture and even if it's a spiritual conversation, in a teaching environment, it's in quiet time or reflection, sitting at a stop light, talking to God. We have a measure of control like "What is my attitude in how I approach you Lord and what would you have for me? What do you want to do in my life and through me?"

I was in a bible study with some guys on this Friday at lunch. We entertained what I would say potentially is maybe one of the hardest, scariest prayers that are out there.

This was put in front of me probably 15 years ago and if I remember right, I want to say I spent weeks mulling it over before I ever prayed the prayer.

The prayer is this – “Lord, make me more like Jesus no matter what it takes. That’s a scary prayer on the front end. And I don’t recommend that anybody rushes into it because you’ve got to consider, “What do I believe the character of God to be?” I think it’s the kind of prayer that when you stand in front of and if your picture of who God is off, it’s not a prayer that you should pray. But when we go to God’s word and we discover this is who God really is, you place your faith in a god that you trust he knows what’s best for you. In a father who loves you more than you can fathom. In a God that knows you intimately. In a savior who wants to introduce you into the abundance of life. So, we stand on the front end of that prayer, we stand on the front end of a passage, and we say “Okay, God, “What kind of work do you want to do on me today?”

As I’ve just personally processed through this passage in that way, I kept landing on the different characters that are involved in this story and the attitudes that each one of them carried.

I want to introduce them to you. The first group was **the Romans**. Their attitude and posture is one of domineering pride under the guise of authority. And to be honest with you, I can relate to that. In fact, I’ve spent a good part of my life in this category. As a leader, I can fall into being a dominator. That’s the Roman’s attitude and posture.

Then you’ve got the **Jewish Leaders**. Their attitude and posture was a manipulative pride under the guise of spiritual righteousness. And there have been seasons in my life where I’ve moved from a domineering pride to a manipulative one under the guise of spiritual righteousness and thought, *You know what? I’m doing pretty good. I’m doing a lot better.* But in reality, it’s just a different brand of pride. It’s the same sin.

Then you’ve got **the crowds**. This is one we’ve got to pay tremendous attention to. The mob is blindly swept away with popular thought. This is one of the conversations we have with our kids at breakfast time. We always talk about how Satan is a trickster. He’s always going to try to deceive you. And the things he’s going to put in front of you to tempt you are going to look good, they are going to taste good, they’re going to feel good, they’re going to philosophically make a lot of sense. He wants to draw you into that way of thinking because underneath that, his motives are evil, and he wants to destroy you. I just had this picture in my mind for all the fishermen around here. It’s sending out that lure and reeling it in. Here we are just following along. *I’m hungry, I’ve got flesh to feed.* And when you bite onto that shiny thing and get pulled into your demise... It is the way of the mob. It was that way 2,000 years ago and it ain’t no different today.

Here's the reality, followers of Jesus, we’re just as susceptible. The things that we are scrolling in front of, you better believe that they have an enticing nature to them. Some of them are bad and some of them are not. The ones that are not have the same shiny glimmer of that lure that’s coming across the nose of the fish in Table Rock Lake.

The next one is **followers of Christ**. Their attitude and posture is like a tale of two cities. They’ve got two ways of thinking. They are in absolute awe. They are in. *I believe he’s the one. I believe he’s the Messiah, but I am straight up confused.* Awe and Bewilderment. You’ve got an expectations of the way

things should go and yet they keep going in different directions and it causes doubt to stir. You can imagine what the disciples were thinking when he rode in. It's this huge celebration and you're thinking *it's on! This is it. This is the week it's going down. Jesus is going to be King.* And as the week progresses, they begin to scratch their heads and think *what in the world is happening?* I have to admit, I've spent a lot of time here, even recently. Like, Lord, what is going on? I have faith. I believe, but I've got doubts.

And then finally, the central character is obviously Jesus. And Jesus is compassionate, he's on mission, and he's unwavering. Here's something I want to make sure that we have right today. A lot of times, we look at any hero, any central figure, whether it's this story or in a great movie or in a great book, and you look at the hero and you think, *Wow, I'm inspired by them, but I could never be like them.*

Oftentimes, we put Jesus in that box, but that's not how our faith works. In fact, there's this little phrase throughout the New Testament that says, "In Christ." And there are a couple of dozen promises that are attached to that little statement "In Christ." It is not I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I'm going to start living it more and more like Jesus, and that is by his design. The more time that I spend with him and his people, the more I become like him. Christ is not unattainable. He wants to give you a hug. This is how close he is to you. When you hold an embrace like this, when you scoop up a grandkid and you hold that little squirrel like you're close enough for them to go where you go. You're with me. And so it is in our relationship with Christ.

So, you look at all of these. You've got issues with pride. You've got the crowd going on with itself. You've got self-righteousness. You've got confusion and bewilderment. Has anything changed in the human condition in over 2,000 years? No. So, the message is relevant for us today. So, how do we move from a posture of the Romans, the Jews, and the Crowd, to the followers of Christ, and in maturity to the posture of Jesus himself. That's the question we've got to ask. God illuminates that in the John 12, part of our story. I want to show you this.

***14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:***

***15 "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." 16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.*** The lightbulb moment of faith.

This remembering happened after Jesus died, rose again, was resurrected, spent about 40 days appearing to the believers, and then when he left, he said, "I gotta go." And the reason it's important for me to go is because I'm going to send a helper, the Holy Spirit, and when the Holy Spirit comes, it's going to give you power. The Holy Spirit, when it comes in the life of a believer, John 14 and 16 tells us all these gifts we get. We get the helper – help from God. We get the Convictor of the world intimately in our life to show us right from wrong. We get discernment to discern good from evil, right from wrong, and left from right. The Holy Spirit helps us to remember and bring to our remembrance the words of Jesus. And that's what's happening with these believers, right?

So, when they were rallied together after Jesus ascended they're thinking, okay, what is happening? This is awesome, but this is insane I have no idea what's happened. They did what we need to do today. The followers of Jesus. They sought the scriptures through the power of the Spirit to seek understanding

in a season of great confusion. And watch what happened. As they searched, they arrived at clarity and hope. Even more, their faith was emboldened by their discovery.

One of the things I love about our faith is that God is in the Christian faith, and we are encouraged to seek out answers. There are many false religions that don't allow that because they are forcing a way of thinking. They are forcing small-mindedness. Christianity is not that way. It says if you seek, you will find.

Watch what happened in the lives of these examples. Simon – fisherman – impulsive fisherman part of the crowd just going on with his life. He gets called and through a relationship of walking with Christ and many ups and downs, he becomes Peter.

Saul – a religious leader, a persecutor of the church has an encounter with Jesus that completely transforms him and he becomes the Apostle Paul.

This is even more radical. The Roman Centurion, one of the soldiers on the hill of Golgotha that put Jesus to death. When Jesus gave up his spirit, there was an earthquake, and lightning, and this man says, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." I guarantee you he did not walk away the same.

My question for us today is, "Who are you becoming?" Do you ride into a room on a warhorse or do you ride in on a donkey? On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem as the Prince of Peace. His kingdom was established through humility and compassion. And Jesus is coming again. But next time, he won't be riding on a donkey. In Revelation 19, John writes... He is given a revelation. He says, *"I saw the heavens open up and behold, a white horse and he who sits on it is faithful and true. And he comes judging and waging war. His eyes are flames of fire and on his head are many crowns. There's a name written on him that only he himself knows. He's wearing a robe that has been dipped in blood and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of the angels of heaven ride behind him, clothed in fine linen, white and clean on white horses and a sword comes from his mouth that he might smite the nations. And he will rule them with a rod of iron, and he will tread the great winepress of the wrath of God. And on his robe and on his thigh is the name written – 'The king of kings and the Lord of Lords.'*

There might be someone in here or watching online who says, "I'm on the edge of my seat, and whatever you have want it. I want a relationship with Jesus. I'm done doing it my own way."

To that person, wherever you are, your life can be changed in an instant and I just want to walk you through a prayer. You pray this prayer, and your heart is his.

*Jesus, I agree with you about my sin. I am in the wrong. I recognize that you are holy, and I need a Savior. Jesus, I make you the Lord of my life. Would you fill me with your spirit and make me a son or a daughter of the King.*

In Jesus' name we pray... Amen

Lord Jesus, we rejoice in the good news. Thank you, God, for loving us too much to leave us as we are. We thank you, God, for salvation. Thank you for hope and for peace. In Jesus' name we pray... Amen