



Palm Sunday 2006

We hope that this morning as we have focused on the events of Palm Sunday and the day after - the triumphant entry, the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree that we have given you some of the flavour of what happened

The three events we have covered all have a massive significance. Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph - not as a general on his white charger with an army, but on a donkey surrounded by his cheering followers shouting Hosanna which means "Save now".

If Jesus was to be doing any conquering, it was not going to be your normal conquest! A General showed his authority in conquest by military power. So how could a man on a donkey with a load of peasants waving palm branches show authority?

Consider first what He was sitting on. It was a young donkey - a colt on which no-one had ever ridden. Do you know what a donkey that has ever been ridden on will do when someone sits on. It will do one of two things - probably both. Firstly it will become a bucking bronco. Donkeys are really good shakers and kickers. Normally one would have expected Jesus to have landed in a heap on the floor. If not, then the donkey simply would not have gone anywhere. Donkeys, like horses, need to be trained before they obey commands.

But here was Jesus, sitting on the donkey riding into Jerusalem. Impossible. Yet here He was. It was an amazing spectacle and it was not missed on the people waving palm branches. How did He get away with it? How could it happen? Unless of course He is someone who has power over living things.

If you think that's amazing, then what about his trip to the temple. Let's say you are in Swaffham Market on a Saturday morning and an angry man starts turning over the stalls. What would you do?

Here's Jesus, disgusted by the fact that the place that should be the world's premier religious shrine - a place of prayer and worship, should be a den of thieves as He called it - and He's so disgusted that he overturns the tables. You can imagine the chaos. He's making a statement - that in the Temple the authority of God is important, not business. He claims that authority there - He said "don't you know that my Father's house is a house of prayer. What does that mean? The Jews knew. Every time Jesus referred to His Father He claimed equality with God. He was God, living on Earth as a human being.

To
Next is the bizarre story of the fig tree that withered. Why kill it? Because Jesus has authority over creation and He wanted to let people know that He did. But why do something trivial with that power and authority as kill a fig tree when there are plenty of other beneficial things He could have done? Back to that in a minute.

So here's Jesus. He has authority and He uses it to spectacular effect. That rather begs a question? If Jesus is so powerful, then why did He end up on a cross and dead? John 10:17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.

What was the purpose of His death? To die for us Romans 5: 6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

He died for us. Why? Because we were powerless to know God? Do you know God this morning?

If you don't, then what's stopping you? Perhaps you don't know? God has told us in the Bible. The barrier you have God calls sin. It's those things you do that are wrong. What you say, what you do and what you think. And they keep you apart from God. As much God loves us, He's just and can't allow sin to go by in our lives and not be dealt with. It's a serious matter – an offence that needs to be dealt with. When Jesus died He took the burden of my sin off me and dealt with it, so that you and I could go free and know God and be in His presence.

To prove that Jesus has authority over sin and death, He rose again on the third day afterwards. And this means that you can know God in your life too. If you don't know Jesus this morning, if you don't have a relationship with God, then the barrier is still up. Maybe you know what it is already. Maybe you have things in your life that are weighing you down and there seems to be no answer. Maybe God is prompting you towards Himself and you need to know the next step.

And that step is to understand that the barrier between you and God is caused by sin. You need to recognize that but also recognize that Jesus died to take your sin from you. And all you have to do is ask for God's forgiveness and ask Him to come into your life and take that barrier away so that you can know Him.

The best thing about it is that there's no rocket science about this. How far away is God from us right now? He's only a prayer away. So do you want to communicate with God this morning? You can in prayer and He listens and He acts.

Which brings me back to the fig tree. Why did Jesus kill a fig tree? To show that if He can use His power to do something as trivial as kill off a tree, how much more willing and able he will be to deal with all the important things in life. And because He's risen, He has power over death.

That means, the barrier that you have that keeps you from God can be broken. That problem that you have can be dealt with. Those questions of life which weigh you down can be answered.

And all you have to do is speak with God – because He's listening and waiting to respond. Here's what Jesus said:

Mark 11:22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Sounds amazing. What does it mean? You'll notice that a Ferrari is not parked in my driveway. That will tell you that it doesn't mean that God will give you every daft and selfish thing you desire.

What it does mean is that God wants you to do amazing things in your life. And all these things are the result of faith in God which is a product of following Jesus. Jesus said "Have faith in God," The Bible defines faith in this way: *Heb 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

Part of coming into a relationship with God is that we start to understand how God works and the amazing things He wants to do in our lives. When we know the mind and ways of God, we find amazing things happen in prayer. Jesus gives us this example of a mountain being cast into the sea as a way of introducing the fact that God wants to do impossible things through prayer. It doesn't necessarily mean that will include mountain removal. That said, the Dutch must be the world's most prayerful people – they have no mountains! Just a joke!

Do you know God? You don't. Then I guarantee you one miracle this morning. If you come before God recognizing that you're a sinner and recognizing that Jesus died for you; if you ask Him for forgiveness, for a new start, a new life walking His way, an eternal life then He will make you one of His children, you will know Him and you can start a relationship that will last an eternity. He'll deal with the problems you have in your life. They may not be what you had thought of, but let God surprise you – He usually does!

***My Lord and my God.
I have lived life my way.
I have done many wrong things.
I turn away from the sin in my life and want to follow You.
Please forgive me.
Lord Jesus, I trust you now to be my Lord and my Saviour.
Thank You for dying in my place.
I ask You now for Your gift of eternal life.
I give my life to You and want You to be my Lord.
Help me to live for You by the power of Your Holy Spirit.
These things I pray in Jesus' name.
Amen***

*Preached by Mark Reid
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