

SLIDE 1. PALM SUNDAY 2024

Teaching: The Most Important Week in History

Sunday March 24, 2024

Jesus Christ. Or – Jesus the Christ. The Anointed One. The Messiah.
The WORD become flesh.

And by WORD – I mean the ONE who *spoke* all of creation into existence – including humankind – I mean the SECOND person of an eternally existing God in three persons - I mean the ONE who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born to a virgin named, Mary.

The WORD become *flesh*.

SLIDE 2. The gospel writer, John, said it this way: ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He (Jesus Christ) was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men*** (Jn. 1:1-4).

Jesus Christ was born onto a planet He created - to a people He fashioned out of dirt.
His birth was a miracle.

He was born to a carpenter and his teenage fiancé. Born in a manger in Bethlehem.
Hunted by an insecure King Herod – until that King died.

The gospels – 4 biographies of Jesus' life – are pretty quiet about His life as a child.

Here's what we are told – that Jesus was presented in the Temple for circumcision and blessing (as was required by the Law of the Lord) – that He grew up as a Jew and kept that faith with his parents – who went to Jerusalem every year for the Feast of Passover – that when he was 12 years old – at the Feast of the Passover – Jesus found Himself at the Temple in Jerusalem – sitting among the teachers and asking them questions – amazing them with His answers – that His parents found Him there – that He returned with them to Nazareth where he was obedient to them – that His mom cherished all these things in her heart – and that He (Jesus) grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Lk. 2:21-51).

Then there is 19 years of silence.

Jesus bursts onto the scene again at roughly age 30 when He is baptized by His cousin, John – which acted as His inauguration to seek and save the lost.

He then went onto 3.5 years of ministry – a Jewish Rabbi who mentored 12 disciples – showing them how to live a faithful, obedient, and servant life unto God.

First, Jesus resisted the temptation of the devil in the wilderness.

He performed His first miracle at a wedding in Cana – where he turned water into wine. A proof that He was as much God as He was human.

He preached the Sermon on the Mount.

He told parables about the kingdom of God: how it was worth selling everything we own to have, how it starts like a mustard seed in the hearts of women and men, and how it grows worldwide like yeast in bread.

He fed 5000 people on a hillside with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.

He walked on water.

He calmed the storm – which is to say that He rebuked the wind and the waves – the WORD told them to settle down!

He somehow escaped a crowd who forced Him out of town to the edge of a cliff where they planned to throw Him off of. He just walked through the crowd and went on his way.

He paid his taxes with a four-drachma coined pulled from the mouth of a fish caught by Peter as Jesus had instructed him.

He healed a man who was born blind to dismantle old ways of thinking and to give God glory.

He healed a man with leprosy. He healed a paralytic – lowered to him from the ceiling by his friends. He healed those who were possessed by darkness.

He brought Jairus' daughter back to life.

He raised his friend Lazarus from the dead.

He blessed the little children at a time when children were third-class citizens.

He elevated the status of women at a time when women were second-class citizens.

He spoke directly and thoughtfully to the Samaritan woman at the well. He spoke firmly and graciously to the woman caught in adultery. He treated women as equals to men.

He had women among his disciples.

Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb.

SLIDE 3. There is more, but it is as the gospel writer John said: ***Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written*** (Jn. 21: 25).

PAUSE to reflect on the person and work of Jesus Christ!

And then there was Jesus' last week of ministry: *the most important week in history.*

Holy Week.

It began on a **Sunday**...

On the first day of the week, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey – which fulfilled a prophecy and acted as a visual for the Kingdom of God.

SLIDE 4. It fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah of the coming of Zion's King – which says: ***Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey...*** (Zec. 9:9).

In the ancient world, rulers would make a triumphal entry into cities they'd conquered, seated on a powerful horse – not a lowly donkey. But Jesus did – because the donkey was a symbol of humility and service – a character representation of Jesus Himself and a model for those who would follow Him.

The kingdom of God is not a kingdom of victory by violence but of victory by sacrifice.

The crowd welcomed Him with palm branches and shouts of, "Lord, save us!" – which is how we could translate the word "Hosanna."

The crowd believed (maybe hoped!) that Jesus was their Messiah – the long-awaited, anointed One, the coming King of Israel - who would deliver them from their Roman oppressors.

Jesus accepted their welcome (as was His right). He *was* their messianic king – after all – even if they wouldn't believe it in the end.

Whenever Jesus and His disciples traveled to Jerusalem, they stayed with their friends, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus – in the village of Bethany – about 3 km f. Jerusalem on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives.

During Holy Week – Jesus and His disciples walked back and forth from Bethany to Jerusalem several times. If you're a step counter – that's roughly 9,000 steps per foot commute!

That **Monday** – Jesus and his disciples returned to the temple and found it turned into a marketplace. Not good! So, Jesus drove them out and overturned their tables.

He restored the temple to a place of worship: where Jesus healed people of their diseases and taught them about the Kingdom of God, where he pointed out the poor widow who gave her 2 small coins (which was everything she had!) to God's service, where children freely ran through the temple singing His praises!

But before they got there – while on their foot commute – there's this curious story...

Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree with no fruit on it – even though it was full of leaves – and so it should have been full of fruit. Jesus cursed that tree - then it withered and died.

Which is widely interpreted as an object lesson on what happens to those who lack spiritual fruit who ought to have it: that we wither and die (spiritually) - when we cut ourselves off from the work of the Holy Spirit in us to produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – when we become “consumers” of church, demanding that our expectations be met instead of producing fruit for others to consume – when we think others exist to serve us instead of us existing to serve others.

The curse becomes the consequence of our own selfishness. We turn in on ourselves.

Tuesday was about avoiding traps and teaching.

The religious leaders came at Jesus in waves – with questions designed to trap him in something he said – to condemn him. He disarmed their rhetoric and came back at them in waves of His own – calling them hypocrites, blind fools, a brood of snakes, and children of hell.

Gentle Jesus – meek and mild?!

Then – that afternoon – they stopped at the Mount of Olives to rest on the way back to Bethany – where and when Jesus taught in parables and warned them about the Pharisees, predicted the destruction of Herod's great temple, and told his disciples about future events – incl. His own return.

Wednesday – it seems - was a day of rest for Jesus and His disciples.

But not everyone! Behind the scenes – the religious leaders were plotting to kill Jesus.

And so – in some church traditions – this Wednesday is known as “Spy Wednesday.”

The day – so it goes – when a woman poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet – and so – when Judas was indignant of such waste - and so filled with greed to make a deal with the religious leaders to give Jesus over to them for a sum of money.

Thursday was busy!

In an upper room and in a garden – Jesus prepared both His disciples and Himself for his death.

He celebrated a final Passover Meal with His disciples and gave the meal a new meaning.

He was the true Passover Lamb.

He would shed His blood – not just for the redemption of the Israelites at the time – but for the sin of all people for all time. He wasn't a King to conquer just Rome for a particular people in history – He was the one and only King to conquer sin and death to reverse the effects of the Fall of humankind.

SLIDE 5. As the writer of the book of Hebrews says: ***For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest*** (a unique and perfect fit), ***holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens...***

SLIDE 6. ***...who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself*** (Heb. 7:26-27).

The loaf of bread and cup of wine represented His body soon to be sacrificed and His blood soon to be shed.

And so Jesus instituted the "Lord's Supper" - to succeed the "Passover Meal." During this meal...

He told them that He was leaving this world to return to the Father – from whom He had come.

He told them that to see Him was to see the Father – making His deity clear – and the deity of Father-God relatable.

He told them that the only way to the Father was through Him – not through rules, regulations, rituals, or routines.

He told them that He and the Father would send them the Holy Spirit – to guide them into all truth.

And then – after singing a hymn – they went to the Garden of Gethsemane – where Jesus prayed in agony, knowing what lay ahead of Him.

As the Son of God – Jesus knew what was happening and why and was in control of it, but as a man, it is hard not to imagine Him feeling the horror of the cross before Him – and that He would ask the Father if there was another way.

There wasn't. He was in such distress that he began to sweat drops of blood. And yet - He surrendered, "Let your will be done, Father, not mine" (Mt. 26:39).

By the time Judas arrived with the arresting mob – Jesus had regained His composure. The mob stepped back and fell to the ground, Peter lopped the ear off a servant of the high priest, and Jesus – healed the man - and rebuked Peter.

He told His disciples and the mob that all of this was God's plan – a fulfillment of Scripture – and asked that His disciples be let go. At which point – they all fled.

Throughout the night and early into that **Friday** morning – Jesus was shunted back and forth between the religious leaders and Pilate.

He said very little to the former – because it was a kangaroo court of false accusations and false witnesses. It was only when they asked him point-blank if he was the Son of God that he confirmed it – which was all they needed to hear for them to find Him guilty of blasphemy and so worthy of death.

Jesus said much more to Pilate – about authority and truth and about the nature of His Kingdom.

And though Pilate found no basis for a charge against Jesus – and though he even tried to release Jesus – and though his wife told him to have nothing to do with “that man” – Pilate ended up caving to the religious leaders and the crowd who they had stirred up – who shouted, “Crucify Him!”

That **Friday** – Jesus was falsely tried, deserted by his friends, denied by Peter, condemned by the crowd and the court, flogged, and slapped and mocked and spat upon by the Roman soldiers.

They stripped Him of His clothes and cast lots for them, fulfilling another prophecy.

Then Jesus was required to carry his cross to Golgotha – “The Place of the Skull” – where he was crucified with 2 other prisoners.

Zion’s King pinned to 2 pieces of wood! Yet even there – He cared for others.

SLIDE 7. He prayed for the Roman soldiers who crucified Him – even as they gambled over his clothes. ***Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”*** (Lk. 23:34).

SLIDE 8. When one of the prisoners crucified with Jesus turned to Him in faith and said, ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*** ***And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise”*** (Lk. 23:42-43).

SLIDE 9. And when He saw His mother and John standing by the cross, ***He said to His mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother”*** (Jn. 19:26-27).

From noon until 3 p.m. – darkness came over all the land.

SLIDE 10. And then - around 3 p.m. – ***Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Mt. 27:46).

Once his redemptive mission was complete, the sins of humanity accounted for, He cried, “It is finished” and committed his spirit into the hands of the Father.

That Friday was only Good because of what it accomplished for us: freedom from sin and death.

SLIDE 11. As the apostle Paul puts it: ***When you were dead in your sins... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross*** (Col. 2:13-14).

God nailed the Law of Moses to the cross – the religious rules we could never keep – by design – so that we would be saved by grace.

Jesus body was placed in a rich man's tomb that **Friday** night - before 6 p.m. – when the Sabbath began, and all work stopped – and it lay in the tomb throughout the Sabbath.

Saturday was quiet.

But – as S. M. Lockridge once famously preached, "Sunday's a comin!"

And that is what we will look at next Sunday – Easter Sunday!

In the meantime – as you enter this week – I want to encourage you to remember Jesus' last week of ministry on this earth before His death – maybe even stop each day to remember each day – and thank Jesus for who He is and for the work He did in each day of Holy Week.