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THE PASSION OF JESUS

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~ Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11 ~

INTRODUCTION — Read Scripture

Today is “PALM Sunday”. It is the day that Christians celebrate the beginning of Jesus’ last week of earthly ministry. We get the name “Palm” Sunday because as Jesus was riding into Jerusalem, the Disciples laid down palm fronds on the road ahead of the donkey.

Today is also known as “PASSION Sunday”—referring to the suffering that Jesus went through leading up to the crucifixion—depicted so well in the film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

So what do we preach, what do we celebrate on this day? PALMS or PASSIONS?

If I preach about “**Palm Sunday**”, I would have to tell you:

- About people hailing Jesus as a king, deliverer, liberator. He rode into town on an animal.
- About how they laid down branches in front of Him as He made His way into Jerusalem. PALM BRANCHES were a symbol of national pride (like the eagle that’s printed on our \$).
- About how happy they were to see Him. So excited were they that they literally took the COATS off their backs and laid them in front of Jesus (knowing it’d probably ruin them).
- About how these events fulfilled prophecies of long ago. . .how ZECHARIAH foretold about a king (Messiah) who would ride into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey.
- About how the people went wild with hope as they shouted loud HOSANNAS. “*Hosanna*” is a shout of praise. . .but also a cry for help, a prayer for divine intervention—like when we’re desperate and crying out (“*O God...*”) for rain in a time of drought. . .or for justice and truth to prevail in the face of evil & corruption. . .or for liberation from some form of oppression (e.g.: racism, poverty, economic decline). In this case, it was a cry for freedom from cruel Roman domination.
- No matter the people didn’t quite get the DONKEY part. They thought deliverance would come by war & conquest, which would have been the case if He’d ridden in on a HORSE; but Jesus threw them off by riding in on a DONKEY (thus demonstrating His Kingdom and kingly rule would be one of peace & love). How do you “love” a dictator off the throne?
- Nevertheless, this day was like no other—a day of great hope for people who had lived in hopelessness for so long.

On the other hand, if I preached about “**Passion Sunday**”, I would tell you a very different story:

- That this parade was really a funeral procession.
- That this day marked the beginning of the end.
- That this day led into a week of betrayal and incredible suffering that ended in death.

- *I would tell you about* the Last Supper, and how Jesus shared with His Disciples those things He most wanted them to remember.
- The intense time of prayer in Gethsemane where Jesus asked for the cup to be removed.
- The familiar stories of betrayal, arrest, mocking, torture, and finally being nailed to a cross.

- About the burden of the cross, which had to be carried by Simon of Cyrene (a foreigner)—and how that was an acknowledgment of utter human weakness.
- About the cry from the Cross, “*My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me (left me all alone)?*” This may well have been the loneliest moment in all of human history!

What should I dwell on this morning:

- The glory of the palms ~OR~ the gloom of the passion?
- The celebration of the parade into Jerusalem ~OR~ the passion that reached its climax at the cross?

Sunday was a day of PALMS—full of joy & jubilation. Every year, I look forward to our kids starting off this service with a Palm Parade. But Sunday was also a day of PASSION. While the crowds were rejoicing and jumping up & down, Jesus was weeping for the people, according to Luke’s account [**cf. Luke 19:41**].

Everybody had their hearts set on a royal Messiah...a figure with great power...someone ready to lead a war or uprising (if necessary) to liberate His people. Nobody was ready for a suffering servant...a humble figure, subject to humiliation...or a peaceable kingdom.

So, if we are to do justice to the events of long ago recorded in all four Gospel accounts, we need to celebrate this day both ways: as *PALM SUNDAY* and as *PASSION SUNDAY*.

But even as I say this, I am aware of our tendency to dwell on the palms over the passion. It’s too painful, too heavy, too ugly. Give me the brighter side, please. We are creatures of denial, aren’t we? Don’t give me the bad news, just the good. But being that the events of Holy Week are tied in to one of Jesus’ strongest emotions—**passion**—I’d like to pay some attention to it this morning.

You see, *the passion of Jesus* refers not only to events of His last week on earth. . .but to the very thing that drove Him to go through all that He did.

MESSAGE

Jesus went through what He went through to complete His mission—to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world [**cf. John 1:29**]. That was His calling. . .His passion.

He said, “*My meat (food) is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work*” [**cf. John 4:34**]. That’s my bread & butter—to carry out His plan—that’s what fuels me, energizes me, drives me.

Passion! It’s something you are fervent about. . .obsessed over. . .excited about. It’s something that draws out strong feelings. It’s the “fire in your belly” (something inside that drives, propels).

- It’s the “gazelle intensity” to get out of debt that Dave Ramsey (FPU) talks about.
- It’s compassion for the hurting that drives some college students to take their spring break in ravaged areas like Louisiana instead of sunny Florida.
- It’s uncompromising devotion to justice. . .
- It’s what drove the Civil Rights movement and the War on Poverty (a generation ago).
- And the Great Awakening, the revivals of early 20th century, the Charismatic movement.
- It’s what Jesus wants when He asks us to love God with all our heart-soul-mind and our neighbor as ourself.
- It’s what He wants in our worship (not just dry ritual or lackluster singing).
- Our spiritual life and our relationships are to be marked with passion & intensity.

WHY? For one thing, that’s how God loves us—with a deeply passionate, jealous love.

Exodus 34:14 — “Do not worship any other God, for the Lord your God is a jealous God.”

He is passionate about His relationship with each of us. He wants us all to come to Him and rely on Him. He doesn’t want us off chasing other “gods”. . .and clutching onto the things of this world with relentless passion. That only drags us downward. He’s made each of us with a God-shaped hole that can only be filled by Him, and Him alone.

Passion is like an ADDICTION. An addiction is a life force—it drives a person, moves a person, and controls a person. A person’s life is built around whatever the addiction is. He can’t let go of it. . .and it won’t let go of him.

You know what? GOD is the ultimate addict! He’s never been able to get over His passionate love for His people. You say, “*This could kill you.*” Indeed it did—at Calvary!

But God’s addiction is not dysfunctional (like ours). He doesn’t *need* to love or be loved (i.e.: He is self-sufficient); rather He *chooses* to love.

He’s never let go of the passion. . .and the passion won’t seem to let go of Him.
Same with JESUS!

John 15:13 – “*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*”

Mark 10:45 – “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*”

That was Jesus’ passion, His mission, His calling: TO SERVE and TO SACRIFICE.

I’ll never forget that scene in *The Passion* where Jesus is dragging His cross up to Golgotha. He passes by where His mother Mary is crouched in the crowd trying to get a glimpse of her son. He sees her and their eyes meet, and He says jubilantly: “*See Mother, I’m making everything new.*”

Sure didn’t look like it at that moment. But Jesus saw what we and His mother couldn’t see. He was completing the mission God had sent Him to do. His passion was being fulfilled—His passion for sinners, for backsliders, for those who don’t want to believe, for those who do want to but need a sign, a wonder or miracle. Jesus was moved with passion and compassion for the whole world, and gave His life for friends AND enemies alike.

APPLICATION

What moves you? What is your passion? What consumes you? What is it that you invest time, thought, energy, and money in? Because “*where you treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (says Jesus in **Matthew 6:21**). What you put your heart into is a passion for you.

There are lots of “passions”. You may be passionate about:

- Music
- Football or some other sport
- Knowledge
- Reading or Writing
- Being the best parent you can be
- Being the best at whatever occupation you’re in
- Taking care of the environment
- Taking care of people with special needs
- Children. . .Your spouse or the love of your life
- Building things
- Creating things
- Growing things
- Outdoors
- Cars
- Food / Cooking
- Designing things (bringing organizational or material structures into existence)
- Social justice. . .compassion for the hurting and the underprivileged

- Equality (i.e.: that people be treated fairly & equitably)
- Moral reform based on an uncompromising devotion to Biblical truth
- Missions. . .helping other find Christ
- Loving Jesus and people (and discipling them)

Obviously, you can have more than one (many) passions. If you can't identify any passions:

- 1) Take your pulse; and if you are still alive..... ☺
- 2) Ask the Holy Spirit to move upon you.

The opposite of passion & compassion (love) is NOT hate or animosity (that takes too much energy). . .BUT apathy, being ho-hum, "don't care attitude".

ILLUSTRATION> Your basketball team is down a few points...everybody's head is just sort of going from side to side...then your team scores on a few quick turnovers and hits some 3-point shots...all of a sudden everybody comes alive with a zeal & passion you can feel. The momentum has shifted. We can't afford to lapse into apathy like that, or we will lose the game.

Apathy is the great relationship-killer. . .and the great dream-killer.

Paul says in [Romans 12:11](#) – *“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”*

- Christ-followers are passionate people.
- Christ-followers are people who burn with a passion to serve God and others.

The world should never be given a chance to view the church or Christians as being lukewarm, boring, or half-hearted.

Do you need a new passion this morning? Or a “renewal” of passion?

Of all the passions you are pursuing in your life, I hope toward the top of the list is a passion to love & serve the Lord your God as He leads you. I hope, like Jesus, you are driven to finish the work He has given you to do—thus to fulfill His calling upon your life.

There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son.
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, for sinners slain.
Thank God He completed His mission
How He has left us His Spirit till our work on earth is done.

Listen (as Matt sings **vv. 1 & 2** of *“There Is a Redeemer”*¹):

There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son.
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One.

Jesus my Redeemer, name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, O for sinners slain.

Thank you, O my Father, for giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit 'til the work on earth is done.

¹ Words and music by Melody Green; sung and recorded on *“Songs for the Shepherd”* by Keith Green.