

EXAMINE YOURSELVES AS TO WHETHER YOU ARE IN THE FAITH**Sermon for Palm Sunday, 2022****John 12:12-19**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, John 12:12-19: **On the next day, the large crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.** ¹³ **They took branches of palm-trees, went out to meet Him, and began to shout, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!” and “the King of Israel!”**

¹⁴ **Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as Scripture has said:** ¹⁵ **“Stop being afraid, daughter of Zion! Look! Your King is coming, sitting on the colt of a donkey.”**

¹⁶ **His disciples did not understand these things at first, but, when Jesus had been glorified, they remembered that these things had been written about Him, and that they had done these things to Him.** ¹⁷ **Therefore the crowd that had been with Him when He had called Lazarus out of the tomb and had raised him from the dead continued to bear witness.** ¹⁸ **This was also a reason why the crowd went to meet Him, that they heard that He had performed this miraculous sign.** ¹⁹ **Therefore the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are not achieving anything. Look! The world has gone after Him.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The apostle Paul wrote: *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified?”* (2 Corinthians 13:5). It was with these words that Paul had challenged the Corinthians. He wanted them to take a good look inside their souls, to test themselves to see whether they actually believed in Jesus Christ. This was not a meaningless exercise, for their eternal salvation was ultimately at stake. They were living in challenging spiritual times and needed to confirm that which they believed so that they would be prepared to fulfil their callings with confidence and with faithfulness.

Today we need to examine ourselves, for we, too, live in challenging times. While we say we believe, we too need to know *what it is that we believe and why we believe it* so that we may fulfil our callings with confidence and with faithfulness. A fine way for us to examine ourselves is to go back in time to that day when Jesus entered Jerusalem just five days before the Passover, five days before He would hang from the cross.

On that Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, we can imagine the crowded streets outside the temple. The streets of the city were busy. Hordes of religious pilgrims were headed towards the temple courtyard, while locals tried to pass through the streets to their homes and businesses. Suddenly someone cries out: *“Behold, your King is coming!”* and the crowd begins to move towards the Golden Gate, which provides the entrance to the city on its eastern wall.

As the large crowd runs to greet Jesus, we can divide them into four different groups. There are those who wish to greet Him with sincere faith; there are those who greet Him with mild curiosity; there are those who greet Him with outright opposition, and finally, those who greet Him with general indifference. Let us look at each of these groups and make comment.

The first among the crowd going out to meet Jesus were those who had sincere faith.

John writes, **“the large crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.** ¹³ **They took branches of palm-trees, went out to meet Him, and began to shout, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!” and “the King of Israel!”** Among this crowd would have been those who recognised that Jesus was someone special - not just an ordinary rabbi, but the very **“King of Israel!”** They knew and rejoiced in the many Old Testament prophecies of the Saviour, even though, at this time, they were unaware of all their intended meanings. They knew, however, that the LORD God had promised David many years ago that his Descendant would rule on his throne forever.¹ They believed Jesus was that Descendant and that, as Isaiah had once prophesied, He would sit *“upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever”*

¹ cf. 2 Samuel 7:13

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do we greet Jesus today with sincere faith? Do we possess a strong desire to come to meet Jesus in His house of worship? Do we say with David: *“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’”* (Psalm 122:1) or when such opportunities arise, do we find ourselves saying, *“I would rather not go”*?

Throughout the centuries, the Devil has continued to plant doubt about Jesus and His work of salvation into the Christian faith, so much so that many in our day now compromise that truth and suggest that Jesus is just one of many ways back to God. Jesus once warned His disciples *“See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray”* (Matthew 24:4-5). That warning is for us too. We must examine ourselves; we must test ourselves as to how we greet Jesus. Do we have faith in the One True God **“who is coming in the name of the Lord!” and “the King of Israel”** or do we place our faith in other false gods? Surely, we must recognise in Jesus someone more than just a teacher of morals or a great religious figure! We must see Him as our Saviour and Lord, confessing with Peter that *“there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12b).

Let’s look at the second group of people, those who went out to greet Jesus out of mild curiosity.

Although Jesus was not as popular as He once had been, He was still quite famous. Certainly, after His powerful miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, which had occurred only a few months before, there was no question that He possessed great power. The people who had witnessed that miracle had not remained silent. **“Therefore the crowd that had been with Him when He had called Lazarus out of the tomb and had raised him from the dead continued to bear witness.”** Word had spread, and so now there were many among the crowd who pressed forward to greet Him in view of the miracles He had performed.

So, for them, Jesus’ arrival was simply a matter of curiosity - they wanted to see this “miracle man.” Perhaps they would get lucky, and He would demonstrate His great power. For the most part, however, these people were not motivated by faith but rather by their *curiosity* and the available opportunity to see someone extraordinary.

So it is today. There are many who only come to greet Jesus when it is convenient, and they really have nothing better to do. Such people come just for the special services - to hear the children or grandchildren in the Christmas Tree programs, or at Easter time, or when a child is being baptised, or at a wedding or funeral. If this sounds all too familiar, then ask yourself: *“Do I truly understand my need for Jesus Christ and the importance of my relationship with Him?”* Ponder these words of the writer to the Hebrews, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, **not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some**, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:23-25). “The Day approaching.” That is the Last Day, the great Day of Judgment! That day is coming! How horrible it will be for some to hear Jesus say, *“I never knew you; depart from Me!”* (Matthew 7:23b) Remember, Jesus once said, *“I shall confess before My Father in heaven whoever confesses Me before others. I shall also deny before My Father in heaven whoever denies Me before others”* (Matthew 10:32-33).

The third group of people we want to examine are those who greet Jesus with outright opposition. Here we are talking about the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were the religious leaders among the Jews who had opposed Jesus throughout His ministry, but their opposition had now developed into a determined plan to kill Him. In fact, in the verses immediately preceding our text, their plot to kill Jesus had expanded into a plot for multiple murders. They now wanted to kill Lazarus because it was his resurrection from the dead which had influenced so many people to follow the One they considered to be a deceiver. In the other Gospel accounts, we are told that they reproached Jesus on this day - telling Him to silence the crowds and to refuse to accept their claims that He was indeed fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Saviour. However, Jesus said to them, *“I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out”* (Luke 19:40). What could the Pharisees do? They could not intervene at this point. If they had tried to have Him arrested, the crowds might have become violent in His defence. They were reduced to casting aspersions against each other, **“You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look! The world has gone after Him!”**

Surely, none of us would find ourselves standing with the Pharisees! *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.* How do we greet Jesus in our everyday lives? Do we find ourselves disagreeing with His teachings as found within His Word, finding little joy in Christianity and concluding that it is just too restrictive? After all, if I want to redefine the nature of marriage; if I want to end the life of my unborn child; if I want to say that all gods are essentially the

same and all roads lead to the same place - who is the Lord to tell me differently? Such people who think this way stand with the Pharisees and greet Jesus with outright opposition.

No, we live our lives striving to conform to God's will, seeing what He lays out for us in His Word. We must be like those Bereans in Paul's time, who searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and we remember Paul's words to Timothy, namely, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting and for training in righteousness*" (2 Tim. 3:16).

The final group of people were those who went to greet Jesus with general indifference.

Where do we find those who were indifferent as Jesus rode into Jerusalem? We find them in-between the lines of our text. There were indeed many people - sincere believers, curious onlookers, and determined opponents of Jesus, all of whom greeted Jesus on that first Palm Sunday, but there were many others in Jerusalem who, like many people today, just stayed home. They just stayed on their jobs. They were too busy to pay much attention to the cry: "**Hosanna!**" "**Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!**" and "**the King of Israel!**" They were too tired, too preoccupied with their household chores, too much in love with the world, and too stubborn to take the time to check out and greet a religious man coming into their city.

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do any one of us greet Jesus with general indifference? It can happen so very easily and does happen all too often. So many today have the attitude, "*I believe in God, but have plenty of time to think more about Him and that place in the sky when I get older.*" Let us remember Isaiah's admonition, "*Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near*" (55:6) and Jesus' warning about keeping watch, because He is coming at a time He has determined.²

So it was that there were a number of different people among the crowd flocking to greet Jesus who were very indifferent to His coming.

Praise God, then, that as we enter Holy Week once again, it should be apparent to each of us that Jesus was not indifferent to our spiritual condition and needs. Jesus carried His cross to Calvary and was nailed to it - not because He was forced to do so and had no choice. No, He chose to die for you and for me! Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*He has died for all, that those who live may no longer live for themselves but for Him, who has died for them and has been raised He chose to die so that we may live*" (2 Corinthians 5:15). When Jesus died on the cross, as the sinless Son of God, all who ever lived or would live were connected to His death. As God in the flesh, He took the punishment for all sinners upon Himself. That means, *He died and rose for us!* Do we believe that? Has that message made an impression upon our hearts and in our lives? *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves* Test yourself and see - how shall we greet Jesus? It is vital that we know, for behold, our King is coming! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT (PALM SUNDAY)

Heavenly Father, we come into Your presence with thanksgiving and joy. You are a great God. You rule over the whole earth from the deepest seas to the highest hills. We bow down and worship You, for You are our Maker. We are the people You care for, and the flock for which You provide.

We thank and praise You especially that You have sent to us the living Word, Jesus Christ, Your Son. We praise You that He willingly accepted the disgrace of dying on the cross for us. Grant that we may keep our eyes fixed on Him, and may not grow weary in doing good, become discouraged, or murmur when we are chastened and corrected. Uplift us with the assurance that, as we share in Jesus' sufferings, so we shall also share in His resurrection to eternal life.

Save us, then, O Lord, not by any good deeds that we have done, but by Your mercy, through the new birth given in our baptism and the new life created by the Holy Spirit. Rescue us from all sin, and purify us to serve and praise You.

Put Your will into our minds, and write it into our hearts. Put Your song into our spirits, that we may proclaim with joy: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Give us the power to seek out those who are still strangers to Your salvation. Send workers to preach Your Word in truth, and to proclaim the name of Jesus as the only name under heaven through which people can be saved. Prosper the witness of all Your children throughout the world, that all may know You.

² Mark 13:33-37

Give to this congregation, and to all who worship here, joy and energy as we serve You. Give us all willing minds and pure hearts that we may do our utmost to build and strengthen Your kingdom.

We pray for all who are burdened by sickness, sorrow, pain, anxiety, and fear of death. Be with them as they pass through troubled waters. Give them the faith that knows that You will deliver them in Your wisdom and love.

Lord, You are able to keep us from falling and to bring us faultless and joyful before Your glorious presence. To You, the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, in all ages past, and now, and for ever and ever! Amen.

PALM SUNDAY

Deuteronomy 32:36-39

³⁶ “For the LORD will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their strength has gone away and that no one is left, either anyone imprisoned or anyone free.

³⁷ “Then He will ask: ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they have taken refuge, ³⁸ who used to eat the fat of their sacrifices and used to drink the wine of their drink offerings?’ Let them rise and help you! Let them be your refuge!

³⁹ “See now, that I, even I, am He and that there is no god besides Me. I shall kill, and I shall make alive. I have wounded and I Myself shall heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus had! ⁶ Although He was in the form of God, yet He did not consider His equality with God as a prize to exploit. ⁷ Instead, He emptied Himself, took on the form of a slave and became like other human beings; and, when He was found in the appearance of a human being, ⁸ He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ That is why God also has very highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every other name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven and on earth and under the earth may kneel, ¹¹ and that everyone may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 12:12-19

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