

STAND UP AND CHEER

Luke 19:28–44

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We're actually going to jump ahead a number of chapters to read a section from Luke that's appropriate for Palm Sunday. Luke 19:28–44, the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and the recognition of Jesus as the King. Recognition is such a wonderful thing. Too often we delay the recognition of someone until it's very late in life. There's kind of a bittersweet nature to most recognitions, because by the time we get around to recognizing someone, just a short period after that, it seems like they're not with us anymore. If you watched the reception of a special Oscar at the Academy Awards, you saw Jimmy Stewart receiving an Oscar for fifty years as a motion picture actor. He received, of course, a standing ovation. That set my mind to thinking back to a few years ago when—I believe—John Wayne received a similar award, and it was only a matter of a short time after this that death came. That's probably ahead for Jimmy Stewart as well. Age catches up with us and recognition in life seems to come late. It's that way that, after working some place for fifty years, you get a gold watch. It's kind of a wonderful tribute, but you realize in your soul that there's not a great many years left. Even a recognition at graduation time for a high school student marks a change, because the family is recognizing in that graduation that things are changing and that a different kind of life is beginning.

Several years ago, my father was among a small group of ministers that was recognized at a General Council meeting of the Assemblies of God, with several thousand people present. They were awarding certificates to people who had completed fifty years as an ordained minister with the Assemblies of God. I realize now in looking back—and how hindsight is so much better than foresight—how much that meant to him, to walk across that platform and receive that certificate.

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I look at my own life with real chagrin that I didn't, in my own recognition of him, make more of the occasion. When someone has been faithful for fifty years, we ought to stand up and cheer.

I recall the story of a missionary who was returning from Africa after forty years of missionary service. He was on a boat, coming into dock at New York City. On that same boat, there was a United Nations ambassador who had spent the last six weeks in Africa on an inspection tour.

There was a band waiting at the dock to greet the boat. But the band was not waiting for the missionary who had served for forty years. It was waiting, instead, for the ambassador who had been on a tour for six weeks. It was sort of a bittersweet experience for the missionary. He is returning home but there is no one to greet him, no band to play for him. He'll have to wait until that great day when the Lord Himself will recognize his efforts, which he, of course, realized and accepted.

Palm Sunday marks a recognition day for Jesus. There was so little outpouring of recognition in His lifetime—in terms of somebody standing up and cheering for Him. He didn't receive gifts from people. They couldn't pay Him for the miracles that He did. He didn't send out fundraising letters to people to maintain His ministry, although that may be proper in its appropriate time for other people. The only time He ever received a gift was the night before when, at Bethany, somebody had poured a bunch of alabaster oil on Him and anointed Him for His burial.

Otherwise, His ministry had been gift-free. He had often healed people and told them, "Don't go tell anybody about it." It was like when He gave His alms; He, too, would sometimes give His alms in secret, that God could reward Him.

But Palm Sunday is a recognition of Jesus for a lifetime of achievement and for a three-year ministry of achievement. But there is also a downside to the recognition in that it also

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commences a week in which He will lay down His life. The recognition, therefore, is late in coming.

One of the surprising features of the Palm Sunday parade is that it is planned by Jesus Himself.

The recognition is planned by Him. He, therefore, is saying to us that He knows who He is. He is the King. He comes as King riding into Jerusalem. He comes as King, riding into our hearts.

Even as He had taught the disciples that they could not deny Him before men, neither can He deny Himself. There's nothing self-serving about His planning the recognition, but it should be

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Himself. There's nothing self-serving about His planning the recognition, but it should be noted that this is not like a Rose Bowl parade, where a committee picks the Grand Marshal. Jesus is the

Grand Marshal and He's chosen Himself as the Grand Marshal of the parade.

Others have laid claim to the title of king by virtue of their bloodline or by virtue of military conquest, but Jesus is the one true King. Others may have laid claim to bringing peace, but Jesus is the only one to truly hold the title, "Prince of Peace." It is in that spirit in which He comes into Jerusalem.

As we read the Gospel text, we noted that Jesus sent two of His disciples over to a village opposite them and told them they would there find a colt tied, out in the open street, and they were to untie it and bring it and if anyone asked them what they were doing, they were to say, "The Lord has need of it." And indeed, this happened. The disciples went from Bethany over to the nearby village of Bethphage and there they found a colt tied in an open street.

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How did Jesus know the colt was there? Some would suggest that He knew it by miraculous prevision. That may well be the case. On the other hand, since He passed through that village rather frequently, it may be that the colt was always tied in that spot, since it appears to have more than one owner. We know that, in the biblical period, a colt was an expensive item and not every person could be expected to own one. Sometimes, a group of people bought into the ownership of a donkey or a colt and it was sort of a co-op donkey. Maybe this was a co-op donkey that Jesus had observed a number of times.

What's important to note is that whatever Jesus uses of ours, He must first have our permission. He will not use what is ours without our permission. So, although as King He could appropriate the colt and as the Creator He had the true title deed of property to it, He will send His disciples and they will, in turn, ask for the owners' permission to use it. Jesus doesn't barge into our life. He doesn't barge into our time. If we are going to give Him time, it is something we must offer Him on our own. He may request it, but He will not require it if we do not give it. When it comes to giving financial resources to the Lord, it is a matter, again, which He will respect, a right to say yes or no. When it comes time to making vital life decisions, Jesus will not force His way onto any one of us. He waits to receive our permission before He can use what is ours.

He comes in genuine humility. He comes—not riding on a stallion, as a great military conqueror into the city—but in conscious fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah that He would come humbly. And that, again, is how He enters our life. He enters humbly. His power may often go unnoticed. Jesus is coming, riding on a colt that has never been ridden before, and there's really a miracle in that. Anyone who's worked with animals knows how hard it is to ride a colt that has never been broken, let alone ride it in a cheering crowd; let alone ride a donkey, the most stubborn of all animals. So, the fact that this colt is going along, and everybody's throwing

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garments in the road and creating all kinds of distraction and yelling at the colt that is still moving under its own power, tamed by Jesus, is an unnoticed miracle of the Palm Sunday story. But that's so often the way with Jesus. Most of His deeds go unnoticed.

I was in a home group this last Thursday night and one of the young men that was in the group came up to me and gave a joyous testimony of how he had, just in the last few weeks, come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "Before I became a Christian, before I gave my life to Christ, I was really dependent upon drugs. I was addicted. But since Jesus has come into my life, I've been drug-free; I don't even have a desire for them anymore. The Lord's done a wonderful work in my life." That didn't get written up in the newspapers as a headline, but it's another one of the unnoticed miracles of Jesus that have occurred all throughout this room to people. The Lord has touched our lives and made us different.

I was sharing, also with that group, one of my very favorite stories of the man who was an alcoholic and who every time he got his paycheck would beat it down to the tavern and get his money exchanged and proceed to spend practically all his money on booze while his wife and children at home were going without. Then he got saved. Jesus Christ came into this life and delivered him from the drinking. He went back to work and he started witnessing to the guys at work about the change that had occurred in his life, the fact that Jesus had made a difference.

The guys at work were cussing at him and unmercifully ragging him about his faith. They started throwing things to him like, "Do you believe this? And do you believe that?" They criticized the story in the Gospels about how Jesus turned the water into wine and said, "Do you believe He did a miracle like that?" Not being trained biblically to know what the nature of the wine was, and the water versus wine and all that sort of thing, he just admitted, "I wasn't there, so I don't

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know if it happened or not. But this I know, that in our home, Jesus turned beer into furniture.”

One of the great unnoticed miracles of Jesus.

His power may go unnoticed, but in His coming, He comes with authority. That’s the idea behind the Palm Sunday parade. Jesus is consciously telling us, “I’m King. I come with authority.” But in His coming with authority, He comes unarmed. He never puts a gun to our head. He never says, “You’ve got to do this.” Everybody in this room that follows Jesus Christ, and certainly from the heart, does it out of the freedom of their own will. It requires no external motivation or pressure to serve Him. It is an inward decision that has been made to live life loyally to Jesus.

There’s no such thing, by the way, as being a Christian without making Him King. There’s no such thing as being a Christian without obedience in our life. The obedience must be freely offered.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, during World War II days, talked about a term which is so vital—“cheap grace.” People who try to claim the title of “Christian” without really repenting, without really consciously seeking to obey Jesus Christ from the depths of their personality. I’m not here preaching about the idea that we’re saved by our works and we’ve got to put more effort into it. But I am saying that our culture is alive with all kinds of people who want to lay claim to the word “Christian,” then want to go out and live as if Christ had never died for our sins, as if He never rose again, as if He had never said anything to us about purity of life and purity of intention and holiness of action. Cheap grace, grace without the cross, grace without obedience, grace without commitment, grace without sacrifice. If we’re going to acknowledge Jesus Christ as King in our life, it must be done from an inward, willing heart that reaches out to say, “I claim

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Him as King. It isn't threat that motivates me to serve Him. It's His love that brings it about in my life."

We ought to stand up and cheer for such a person who comes to us. I've walked that route over the Mount of Olives, down the slope into the lower part of the hill called Gethsemane, and then across the Kidron and up the other side to the St. Stephen's gate. Jesus would probably not have entered the city through St Stephen's gate, but would have entered through the Eastern Gate, which has now been bricked up for centuries, waiting for the Messiah to come. According to Muslim tradition, according to Jewish tradition, and according to Christian tradition, one day that Eastern Gate is going to be opened again and the King of kings and Lord of lords is going to come marching through it. I've got news. The King of kings and Lord of lords marching through it in the coming days is called Jesus of Nazareth.

It's a wonderful sight, picturesque, as you come over the brow of the hill and see, stretched out before you, the Kidron Valley and beyond that, the other hill—the hill of Moriah or Zion, upon which the temple mount rests now. If you had been there on that particular Palm Sunday, you could have looked out over the ramparts of the temple and seen the great crowd, as it wined its way down the Olivet and heard the cheering of men and women and boys and girls echoing through the Kidron Valley. In Luke especially, the doctor notes that among those cheering were those who had been healed by Jesus. I can visualize the paralytic who had been let down through the roof up in Galilee, running around joyously saying, "He made me so that my legs could walk again!" And blind Bartimaeus of Jericho, I think was there as well, telling everyone, "He made me to see!" And I believe, as well, the leper from Galilee may have been there, who had his limbs that had been eaten away by leprosy (since Luke tells us "he was full of it") restored. Now clapping his hands, he too, was crying, "Hosanna!" And Lazarus, just from Bethany, had to be

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there; he had been raised from the dead just a few days before. He was, I think, at the head of the procession saying, “He made me rise from the dead. Here are the bed clothes I was wearing,” and they flapped in the breeze, as he carried them along. It must have been a great day!

This Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is meant for us—who were not there in the original instance—to be reminded that there is a coming parade of triumph when He returns in all of His glory. The Gaithers expressed it so well in one of their songs “Happy faces line the hallways, those whose lives have been redeemed, broken homes that He has mended, those from prison He has freed. Little children and the aged, hand in hand all aglow, who were crippled, broken, ruined, clad in garments white as snow. Oh, the King is coming! The King is coming! I just heard the trumpet sounding and now His face I see. Oh, the King is coming! The King is coming! Praise God, He’s coming for me!” And we say, “Hallelujah! Stand up, and cheer! The Lord returneth!”

This entry, this parade into Jerusalem, this recognition of Jesus in the Gospels, closes on a downside, for it tells us that Jesus, with the procession, had come down the Olivet through the Garden of Gethsemane and then across the Kidron brook and then had begun the ascent up the hill into Jerusalem, and that, when Jesus drew near the city, He wept. The reason why He wept is He foresaw the rejection by the city of Himself and saw, therefore, that the city would resort to violence rather than to the peace He offered and that that violence would bring its destruction. Years later, when the Romans came in 70 A.D. and destroyed the temple and dismantled the it, stone by stone, looking for melted gold in the crevices between the stones (that’s why they tore it apart), there was to be a fulfillment of what Jesus said. He knew that when we reject His way we bring violence into our own life. So He wept.

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I was reading, this week, of a little story that Bruce Larson told. He and Lloyd Olgivie, pastor of the Hollywood Presbyterian Church, were in Israel together. They were doing a little tour and they took a taxicab one day from Jerusalem to Bethany, that's just about two or three miles out of Jerusalem. At Bethany, they visited the traditional tomb of Lazarus. Coming out of that, they decided they would retrace the steps of Jesus from Bethany up the Mount of Olives, over the crest of the hill, through the Mount of Olives and into Jerusalem. They would redo the march of Palm Sunday. So they started off from Lazarus' tomb in Bethany. As they were on their way, some children that were playing came to them and began walking along with them, skipping and talking and acting like children act. As they came over the crest of the hills of the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem unfolded before their eyesight, Bruce Larson said that they were just so happy that these children had joined them because it was like recreating the parade. But then, he says that they were jarred back to reality when one of the little boys came up to them and tugged at their sleeve and said, "Mister, would you like to have my sister? She lives in the house over there." Bruce Larson said, "Suddenly, again, I understood why Jesus wept over Jerusalem. People are still being betrayed. People are still being sold. Human life is still cheap. Life without God is still awful. Jesus wept, and I understand it."

Jesus knew that the rejection of Him would bring ruin to the city. He offered a different kind of kingdom than the one that they were seeking and a different kind of peace than the one that they wanted. They were saying in the city that week, as people without God have said in the words of the popular song all through the ages, "I'll do it my way." When we say, "I'll do it my way," in regard to any decision we are making in life, and we consciously and openly spurn what the Lord is telling us to do, we invite tragedy and ruin into our life. If not now, then certainly in an ultimate sense. If you do it your way, you will ultimately come to grief.

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I think all of us, being human beings, face great trials, times when we are seemingly tempted beyond our capacity to endure; in which it would be easy for us to say, "I'm checking out of this." Or it would be easy for us to evade our Christian responsibilities. It's always easy to cop out. It's always easy to run away. It's always easy to protect self. It's always hard to take up the cross. It's always hard to endure. It's always hard to forgive, especially when the forgiving must go on and on again, because the person who is doing us wrong keeps doing us wrong again and again. We're tempted to take the easy road and the road of self, rather than the road of Christ.

The Lord is saying to us on this Palm Sunday, "Will you let your life's song be one that stands up and cheers for Me? And let Me work the good out in your life and cause you to realize that after the crucifixion comes the resurrection." Or will you say of life, "I'll do it my way," and because you have chosen to handle your life and your family or your marriage or your business your way rather than God's way, you invite tragedy and ruin into your life instead. I'd rather do it His way; no matter how difficult the mettle that is called for by the Lord of glory. The way of the cross is still the Christian way. The way that says, "I will be true to God no matter what. I'll be true to my calling as a Christian no matter what. No matter what the enemy throws at me, no matter what would seem to be proper according to the advice of my friends who are not Christians, I will go the way that Christ is telling me to go. I will be loyal to Him. I will be true to Him." I can assure you, based upon the certainty of Jesus and His resurrection, that beyond every crucifixion we experience out of our obedience to Him, He accomplishes the resurrection, because He is the giver of life.

I think, in our hearts, we should be standing up and cheering for Jesus. He has come quite humbly and quite royally into our life. He has saved us from our sins. He is making a place for us

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in the heavens. He has set before us an example that we might follow in His steps. He has made our life completely different. In our hearts, there must be gratitude to Him.

Closing Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we take this moment in the service to recognize this as the time of Your coming to us. Lord, this time of Your coming may have a special significance for some within the Body today who are struggling with choices, between doing it their way and doing it Your way. Lord, it is so easy, within our culture and society, to do things our way and to take things the easy way; to treat people as though they were as disposable as paper napkins; to walk away from families and marriages and relationships as quickly as we would bake a dinner in a microwave oven. It takes time to build a life. It takes time and a lot of effort to work through controversy and struggle and enmity and animosity. It sometimes means laying down our life. Sometimes, Lord, it means going a second and a third and a fourth mile. Sometimes it means loving when we are hurting. Lord, that is the only kind of life that will offer us the resurrection, because it is in our dying that we are living. It is in our forgiving that we are forgiven. It is in our giving healing to others that we are healed. On this great day, that marks Your entry into Jerusalem, we take time to acknowledge Your entry into our life. We recognize You, the Lord of glory, the one who has absolute and final and complete authority in our life. And for You we stand up and cheer. We praise You and we glory in Your name. We pray these things, in the wonderful name of Jesus. Amen.