

- Most of us have seen a video of a presidential motorcade. When those black sedans, one of which carries the President of the United States, travel down roadways that seem to have no other vehicles traffic on them. You've certainly seen it in a movie, if not on the news, and maybe you have actually watched one live.
  - What you probably don't know is what goes on behind the scenes for one of these.
  - Up to three months before a President's visit to a particular place, secret service agents begin checking local routes for safety, possible problems and blind spots. People who are security threats are brought to attention.
  - As the date of his visit gets closer, bomb sniffing dogs and equipment check parked cars, potential stops along the route, and to set to ensure that he isn't exposed.
  - Coordinators and agents ensure hospital facilities in the immediate area readily available.
  - And finally, as Air Force One, the presidential plane arrives; another, almost identical plane lands at a secret location in case the primary aircraft becomes disabled.
  - The morning of the Presidential visit, highways and local roads are shut down to ensure the 20 vehicle motorcade is able to advance unimpeded. As the motorcade travels between locations, hundreds of heavily armed law enforcement and secret service agents travel with him the entire way.
  - Nothing is left to chance and every risk is considered and mitigated to its barest minimum. The price tag on all this – currently it can go between \$100,000 and several million.
  - All this serves a greater purpose than simply ensuring the safety of the leader of the free world. They serve to project the power of the President and the country he represents, the United States. You will rarely find a more impressive sight in the modern world than 20 black vehicles traveling down a roadway carrying hundreds of armed men, Naval and Coast Guard vessels patrolling the nearby waterways, and Army helicopters patrolling overhead with Air Force fighter jets ready for a fight at a moment's notice.
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- What we celebrate today is about this kind of procession. A person who rode into the capital city of Jerusalem 2000 years ago on a special "vehicle" flanked by his group of agents, with multitudes of cheering people who wanted to see and encourage this rabbi who had come to Jerusalem and whom they hoped would be their king.
  - Yet this king, who deserved more than even the greatest president, had no real security, and was condemned to death, with some of the same people who cheered the day of his parade asking for his death, less than a week later.
  - We call it Palm Sunday
  - Many of you are very familiar with the account. All four of those who wrote the life accounts of Jesus talked about this event. I want to focus on what Luke wrote about this. He had investigated all that happened closely, and he included something that should give us pause today.
  - A little sidebar about Jesus' response to all this, that I hope will challenge and encourage you today.
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- Let me go through the story as a refresher.
  - Jesus had been preaching and teaching and doing miracles around Israel, but mostly in the north part of the country, for three years.
  - There were three groups of people that he interacted with during this time.
  - He had his disciples – these included the 12 disciples and some more who you might call his core group. They listened to him and followed him. They traveled with him. They listened to his teachings and for the most part, even when they did not understand him, the trusted him and wanted him to be their teacher.

- He had the crowds – Jesus was constantly surrounded by crowds, and it was for two reasons. They had seen him to amazing miracles and then wanted to see and experience more. They flocked to Jesus to see him heal people and do these amazing things. At the same time, they loved to listen to him teach because he did not teach the way or with the material that the religious leaders taught and the masses were intrigued.
- He had the religious leaders – these were the elite. The ones who led the current religious system that gave them power and influence in the world. They had come to hate Jesus. He undermined their power and influence and threatened to disrupt the political order of things which threatened everything they believed in and lived for.
- And now Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem. He was heading into the perfect storm. His disciples were with him and he had been telling them unsettling news about what lay ahead. There were huge crowds in Jerusalem for the once-a-year Passover feast. And Jerusalem was the center of power of the religious leaders.
- Jesus was intentionally going into this volatile mix, knowing what the end result was going to be, all as part of his sovereign plan. He had just passed through Jericho, about 15 miles from Jerusalem, meeting people and still teaching.

*Luke 19:28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives,*

*• This was about a mile and half from Jerusalem he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 They replied, “The Lord needs it.” 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.*

- There is huge symbolism here, because in ancient times, when a king wanted to symbolize power, authority and victory, they would parade into a city on a magnificent horse. But there was a tradition that when they wanted to symbolize peace, they would ride into the city on a donkey.

*36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

- This is not just some random chant that the people had come up with. This is the kind of welcome reserved for Israel’s Savior.
- It’s a phrase found in the Hebrew Scriptures, going back to Psalm 118, a Psalm of hope that focused on salvation and success going through a person — the Messiah of God — the one sent to rescue his people.
- That is why they threw their coats on the ground and those who didn’t have clothes to throw cut palm branches to put on the road. The Messiah was too lofty to have to be in contact with the dirt.
- For these crowds, this was the culmination. Jesus was going to be king. He was the Messiah. He was going to deliver them.
- The religious leaders totally understood this with all its implications.

*39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”*

- They gotta stop. Not only is this blasphemy, because you are clearly not the Messiah, but the Romans are going to get wind of this and that will lead to nothing but trouble.
- Jesus’ response is classic.

*40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”*

- I'm not going to do that. You religious leaders don't understand. I am the king. Not just of Israel but of all of creation. I am the Messiah. The universe is designed for my praise and nothing will stop it.
- It's an event of great insight and great misunderstanding.
- The great insight was that this Jesus really was "the King who comes in the name of the Lord." He was the Messiah, the Son of David, the long-awaited Ruler of Israel, the fulfillment of all God's promises.
- But the great misunderstanding was that he would enter Jerusalem and by his mighty works, take his throne and make Israel free from Rome. Jesus had made a name for himself as the worker of miracles, and they remembered them. He had healed leprosy with a touch; he had made the blind see and the deaf hear and the lame walk; he had commanded the unclean spirits and they obeyed him; he had stilled storms and walked on water and turned five loaves and two fish into a meal for thousands. So as he entered Jerusalem, they knew nothing could stop him. He could just speak and Pilate would perish; the Romans would be scattered. He was sovereign.
- It wasn't going to be that way: he would take his throne but it would be through voluntary suffering and death and resurrection.
- So Palm Sunday was a day of insight and a day of misunderstanding. The insight gave joy, and the misunderstanding brought about destruction – the murder of Jesus a few days later, and the destruction of Jerusalem 40 years later. And Jesus saw it all coming.
- And that leads us to the 4 verses that I want to zero in on. Because it is so at odds with the whole situation. Jesus is seeing the fulfillment of all that he and God had planned. Despite the misunderstanding, the multitudes are pumped. There is excitement. He is reaching the culmination of it all. You might expect Jesus to, even if he said nothing, to at least acknowledge or engage in all that is going on. Instead, he cried. And not for the reasons we might think.

*41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."*

- The betrayal, the mockery, the shame, the spit, the flogging, the murder – and so much more – was all planned. In other words, the resistance, the rejection, the unbelief and hostility were not a surprise to Jesus. They were, in fact, part of the plan. But Jesus was not weeping over this, but over the hard-hearted, perishing Jerusalem. Even though their actions fulfilled his plan, it broke his heart.
- It leads me to ask us two questions this morning. The first is this:

## **I. How are you trying to get your peace?**

- Jesus had no problem with the people's desire for peace. They had been under oppression on and off for 500 years. They wanted autonomy. They wanted to flourish. They just wanted to live life without huge obstacles and pain and problems.
- Jesus' lament is not that they want peace, but that they missed completely what would bring them the peace they long for.

*"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.*

- What do you long for that would bring you peace? If you're not sure, think about what things you would like to have happen and if they did, you could relax and enjoy life. I would feel better if . . .

- If the virus was done and I could go where I want and have freedom again?
- If I had enough money coming in or saved so I wouldn't feel like I'm on the ragged edge.
- If I had good family relationships with less conflict?
- If I was able to engage in those activities that I love to do?
- If I had a job that is secure and lets me work with purpose?
- If my health (or the health of someone in my family) improved so I didn't have to deal with the doctors so much
- If that other party was elected. Or reelected.
- If they would only apologize.
- The Israelites were so concerned with getting peace through all the circumstances they wanted fixed, they missed the king of peace, riding on a donkey as a symbol of peace, right in front of them.
- Jesus wept because he knew that within 40 years the Romans would utterly destroy the city of Jerusalem, kill many thousands, and end Israel as a nation for 2000 years. They pursued peace in all the wrong places and it ended up destroying them.
- I wonder if our pursuit of peace in all these other places will end up wrecking us. When Jesus invites us to himself, the one who can grant the kind of peace you cannot get anywhere else.
- What or who are you pursuing to gain peace? You will only ever get it from Jesus, and with him, you can have it no matter what your circumstances look like.

## **II. How are you responding to those you need peace?**

- Despite the hardheartedness of the Israelites and Christ's sorrow for the people, he did not let it prevent him from acting. Jesus did three things.

### **A. He felt deeply the plight of others.**

- He feels the sorrow of the situation. No doubt he has a deep inner peace that God is in control and that God's wise purposes will come to pass. But that doesn't mean you can't cry.
- How do you respond to the suffering of others? Do you give your space to feel for others after your own needs are met? Or always?
- I appeal to you here: pray that God would give you tears. There is so much pain in the world. So much suffering far from you and near you. When I die and stand before the Judge, Jesus Christ, and he asks me, "How did you feel about the suffering around you?" I will not feel good about saying, "I saw through to how a lot of people brought their suffering upon themselves." I wonder if Jesus will say, "I didn't ask you what you saw through. I asked you what you felt?"
- Jesus felt enough compassion for Jerusalem to weep. If you haven't shed any tears for somebody's losses but your own, it probably means you're pretty wrapped up in yourself. Ask God to give you a heart that is tenderly moved.

### **B. He denied himself for their benefit.**

- Feeling sorrow towards those who are needy and don't have peace is useless if we don't let it move us to action.
- Jesus saw all that would happen, all they needed even though they did not get it and would reject it, and he acted with painful, self-denial. He knew exactly what was ahead of him, but he did it anyway because of what was needed for them and for us.
- Jesus calls us to deny ourselves the comforts and the securities and the ease of avoiding other peoples' pain. Jesus' tears were the tears of a man on his way toward need.

**C. He moved into their need.**

- Jesus wept for the people and kept on moving directly into the pain so that he could help them.
- Real mercy is helpful. It doesn't just feel – though it does feel – and it doesn't just deny itself – though it does deny itself – it actually does things that help people. Jesus was dying in our place that we might be forgiven and have eternal life with him. That's how he helped.
- My friends, as we continue in this stressful time, it will continually come back to these two things.
- What is your source of peace? If you are trying to get it through anything other than Jesus, it will never permanently work. Only Jesus gives a peace that owns us in the midst of this kind of turmoil.
- How are you moving towards those who need peace? What is tenderly moving you these days? Is there movement toward pain or suffering or misery or loss or sadness, that means denying yourself – in the short run – and multiplying your joy in the long run? And what help are you actually giving to those in need?
- Let's continue to be a family that leans into Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Let's be his representatives to others. Boldly. Mercifully. With great love.