

The streets were lined with palm branches and coats for the King of kings and Lord of lords. Crowds of people watched this great teacher from Nazareth riding on a young donkey, a victory parade of sorts. Those who knew their scriptures recalled the words of Zechariah, ***“See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey,”*** (Zech. 9:9). Their shouts echoed through the city, *“Hosanna! Save us, Son of David!”* Save us from what? From our sins? From the Romans? From our hypocritical religious leaders? From what?

You have to wonder what kind of salvation they were expecting from Jesus. That first Palm Sunday was so frenzied and frenetic. Their hopes were high, with expectations that he could save them. They shouted, *“Save us, Son of David!”* because that day they thought he could. For the past three years he showed his divine power in the miracles he performed. He saved from hunger, from disease, from the devil himself. Just weeks earlier in the town of Bethany right down the road he had raised a man from the dead. And the message he preached – this was no ordinary religious teacher. If anyone had the power to save them, it was this Son of David. He testified to that very fact, and they praised him for it.

But four days later, they condemned him for it. Under the cloak of night, his cheeks already bruised and swollen, the high priest dares Jesus, ⁶³***“I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”*** And under the oath of the living God, Jesus answered, ⁶⁴***“Yes, it is as you say. But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven,”*** (Matthew 26). They had charged him under oath to tell the truth, but this truth they did not want – not this kind of heart-searing, conscience-burning, pride-crippling truth. Jesus told them exactly who he was, knowing that it would cost him his life. And that’s what he was willing to give up for them, for you and me, and for the whole world.

Such love, so high and deep and wide – I know you see it, too. But that day, he looked like the poor victim of an angry mob. Just days earlier they shouted his praises, but now even his own disciples weren’t so sure. They deserted and denied him. The others cried for his crucifixion. I’d like to ask them, *“Why? Why did you turn your backs on Jesus like that? Did he disappoint you somehow? Is it because he wasn’t the kind of king you were hoping for? Were you swept away by the jealous hatred of your religious leaders to crucify the One you once recognized as your King? How could you turn away from him like that?”*

People do strange things like that, and it’s not always easy to understand why. For a time they’re on fire for the Lord, coming together to worship and shout ‘Hosanna’ like the crowds on Palm Sunday. They even swear to be faithful to this King and to his Word for the rest of their lives. But before they even realize it, the fire can start to fade, along with that promise they made. They’re struggling to see the point of giving up valuable time and energy to hear the same old message and to watch the same old parade. *“Why’s he riding on a donkey anyway? What does this have to do with me?”*

Everything, actually. When your gentle and humble King rides into town, he’s got one thing on his mind: you. Hundreds of years before he was born into this world, Jesus spoke through the prophet Isaiah and said, ²²***“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”*** There is no other God, and this one and only King of heaven and earth was willing to give his life into the hands of sinful men. Why? Because he desires your salvation more than anything else in this world.

²²***“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth...”*** The salvation God desires is clearly not limited to one group of people or country. Not even Israel could claim exclusive rights to God’s mercy. You might remember some of the apostles Jesus sent out with this message of sin and grace. He told these ordinary, sinful guys to go and make disciples of all nations. They went to the ends of the earth, baptizing in the name of one true God. They taught others to obey everything Jesus commanded. And in so doing, the Holy Spirit led many to turn and be saved, to repent and believe in the name of Jesus.

The name of Jesus, however, has taken on different meanings. To some he was just another great moral teacher. To others he was some kind of lunatic or a liar who only claimed to be God. But then there were the miracles he performed and the words of truth he spoke with such authority and wisdom. And the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding Jesus find fulfillment and support in the New Testament too often to be mere coincidence. The Apostle Paul echoes the words of Isaiah when he writes to the Philippians, ¹⁰***“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”***

The name of Jesus is the name of God himself. There is no greater, more powerful name by which anyone can swear. God himself said, ²³***“By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.”*** The point is, when God speaks and says, *‘Hey, this*

is the way things are,' or, 'This is the way things will be,' how could anyone question that? If God says so, then it must be true. And when he swears by his own name, that's one more assurance that everything he says is true and trustworthy...

...Even those parts where he pronounces his warnings of judgment. ²⁴ **They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.'** **All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.** I can't imagine how mortifying it would be to have all my foolish decisions and offenses aired publicly for everyone to see. But on Judgment Day, it will be even worse for all those who rejected Jesus and his Word; who thought of him as merely another great teacher but certainly not the Son of God or Savior of the world; or who considered his Word to be something they could pick and choose from to fit their personal preferences. Their shame will be unbearable as they spend eternity suffering the consequences for their rejection of Christ.

Their shameful rejection stands in stark contrast to Peter's simple, yet beautiful confession of faith in Jesus, ¹⁶ **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.** And with that same faith in my hearts I have stood before God's altar to confess with my mouth that Jesus is my whole life. We have said that his Word means everything to us, because it's the truth, and by it we possess eternal life. Are you ready to swear by Jesus' name that there is no greater treasure in heaven or earth, no other name by which we can be saved?

You know what they say about good intentions, right? (They pave the way to hell.) And I'm sure those people who shouted "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" had every intention to keep on shouting and following after Jesus on that first Palm Sunday. But their shouts changed from echoes of praise and worship to chants of hatred and condemnation, "*Crucify him!*" And one thing becomes clear: people's hearts can change. Do you ever wonder if your heart has changed, too?

I think there comes a point in most people's lives when they realize that not everything they learned as a child was exactly true. Your parents may have taught you about certain holiday stories and traditions, but later you discovered that they had left out a few details. And the older we get, the more our life's experiences teach us the harsh reality of life in this world. Being kind to others doesn't always mean they'll be kind to you. Hard work doesn't always end up in getting the recognition you'd like. Or standing up for your personal convictions and beliefs doesn't always win the respect and admiration of others. And when you come to grips with these realities, you begin to sort out the practical truths you learned from the not-so-practical ones.

I imagine that it wouldn't be too difficult to sleep in instead of coming to worship on a Sunday morning. For many plopping down on the couch to watch 30 minutes (or several hours) of TV is a whole lot easier than reading their Bible for 15 minutes. Some choose to skip Bible class, with the reason that the same people answer all the questions, and that they'd be too nervous to speak up anyway. And I'm sure it would be a really convenient time to run and do some other really important errands while the kids are in Sunday school.

But I hope you see the changes that could be taking place. Is God's Word no longer as practical or valuable as it once was? Has it lost some of its meaning and power, because you've grown up and seen the reality of life? Maybe following Jesus and his Word works for a while, but lately it just doesn't seem to be giving you what you're looking for. You're still struggling and having a hard time, even though the King promised you peace and strength. Can you still swear your loyalty and faith by the name of this King?

Not while we question the power and truth of Jesus' Word for our lives and our faith. Not if we're expecting to sort out what our King has spoken to us, to decide for ourselves what's still practical and what's obsolete. Not if we are unwilling to set aside the time and energy to listen to our Savior show and tell us how much he loves us. Too often we have turned away from our King and his Word, and we have broken our promise to be faithful to him. And for that we deserve to be cast away from his presence forever.

And yet the fact is, our King comes for us, gentle and riding on a donkey. And although we have turned away from him, he does not turn away from us. And we know that nothing can deter him from his goal of the cross, to win our salvation. God's own Son is our sacrificial Lamb who takes away all our sin and makes us his own people. Through faith, you belong to your King, and ²⁵ **...in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.**

We swear by the name of our King, because his Word is filled with everlasting power and love. Look to Christ your King who comes with God's power and authority. Look ahead to that time when every knee will bow and recognize Jesus as King. Don't hesitate to swear by Jesus' name that he is the Lord of all, whom you serve with your entire life here on this earth and forever in heaven. Trust in his almighty, faithful Word as the eternal truth that will strengthen and guide you today and forever. Amen.