
Experiencing Palm Sunday with Jesus

SCOTT HOEZEE

We call it Palm Sunday, and yet, only one of the four gospels mentions palms specifically; and one makes no mention of branches of any kind. We call it the triumphal entry, and yet, in one of the gospels, Jesus caps off the whole event by breaking down and weeping. We always picture children singing and waving palm fronds as Jesus entered Jerusalem, but only one of the four gospels mentions children singing, but without palm branches; and even the children singing happened a while after the whole donkey ride into the city was finished. Do we understand the meaning of Palm Sunday? Today on *Groundwork*, let's dig into all four gospels to see what they reveal about that day. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this year on *Groundwork*, we are doing a short, three-part series to cover the events of what many Christians call Holy Week. So, these are the events from Palm Sunday, which is sometimes called Passion Sunday, from there all the way to the following Sunday, which is Easter; and so, in between there we also have Maundy Thursday, when Jesus established the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Good Friday, and also a day we don't think so much about, Holy Saturday.

DARRELL DELANEY

Needless to say, Jesus himself had a lot going on in this last week of his life, and many of the gospels focus primarily...like John...primarily on the last week of his life to make sure that all the things that you need to know are packed into that week.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because that is the week where it all comes together, as I think we have noted before on *Groundwork*. A lot of scholars call the gospels passion narratives with long introductions...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In other words, everything that comes before this final week is prelude—it is a preface.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in this introduction, you talked about how there were many different aspects that people put together when they... It is like an amalgamation of different things...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And what I learned in seminary is that that is called a casserole when you decide to put all the things together in all the gospels, but they all had different emphases on why they put what they put in, but we kind of put them all together; kind of like the nativity scene has the wisemen, it has Jesus, it has everybody there; but if you look at it closely, then you can see they are very important emphasis points.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and so, as we look at each of the four gospels in this program, each one brings out just a little bit of a different aspect of this one singular event; and as you just said, not everything that we associate with Palm Sunday is in every gospel; and some of the things we emphasize kind of are not there at all; but let's start, Darrell, with Matthew 21, and we will use Matthew to cover a part of the story that is also in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and that is Jesus' instructions on how to secure the donkey and the donkey colt. So, let's listen to Matthew 21.

DARRELL DELANEY

It starts like this: As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." ⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵"Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, as we have noted before, Darrell, we think Matthew's intended reading audience was mostly made up of Jewish people. Some readers that Matthew had in mind already had embraced Jesus as the promised Messiah, but Matthew also wrote his gospel to convince others of his fellow Jews to also believe in Jesus as the Christ—as the Messiah. So, Matthew, a little bit more than Mark, Luke, and John even, threw in a lot of scripture from the Hebrew scriptures, or what we call the Old Testament, and he also just had some allusions...things he just referred to because he knew that his Jewish readers were very literate; that they would get it. They would pick up on all these references to the Old Testament.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Matthew actually starts his gospel with the genealogy that starts with Abraham because he believes he is talking to the children of Abraham...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Who grew up in the orthodoxy and understand these things in the Old Testament that he references; and so, he usually shows: Okay, this is how scripture was fulfilled in Jesus; this is what happens to prove he is the Messiah; which is why he goes back to that verse in Zechariah 9; that is the Daughter Zion and the colt of a donkey, which is fulfilled in the triumphal entry.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we have the first part, and it kind of looks like Jesus maybe prearranged the loan of a donkey and a colt because he tells the disciples exactly where to go. He kind of gives them like a code word; say: The Lord has need of it. Oh, yes... so then he will give it to you. So, Jesus may have had this prearranged...

DARRELL DELANEY

I love it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He kind of made a reservation, you know; it is like a rental car, except this is a rental donkey; but the main point isn't how Jesus got the donkey, but exactly what you just said. This was to fulfill prophecy from Zechariah 9:9. This is how the king was supposed to come; and it was a very humble way, Darrell, because usually in the Roman Empire, this kind of entry wouldn't have happened with a donkey.

DARRELL DELANEY

The contrary way that Jesus does this is so opposite of what is normally expected. If he were the Messiah they expected, he would have come in on a strong horse; he would have come in with a broad sword and some armor and a lot of pomp and circumstance; but he comes in on a donkey...he comes in humbly; he comes in meek; and he comes in mild. That is the actual way that the Messiah was supposed to come through that fulfills the scripture; and the issue is that he is not a symbol of strength and power like they expected.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is not Caesar entering the city. Yes, as you just said, Darrell, he would be on maybe a white stallion... I don't know if they had white horses back then, but that is how you would kind of picture it, right? Like a warrior, right? A military...powerful...that is...you know, the Caesar would enter a city that way to spread a little bit of fear: Hey, ooh, this guy has the sword; he has the power...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus is doing something very, very different; but the people responded as they would for the Caesar. They didn't have a red carpet back then, but they had the equivalent of a red carpet. They would put their coats in the road as a sign of respect, and they would cut down branches. Matthew doesn't say they were palm branches, by the way, but branches. So, this was like a royal carpeting for Jesus to ride in on.

DARRELL DELANEY

They also say this word, *hosanna*, when he is coming in, and *hosanna* is a very interesting word to think about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think we tend to...when I was a kid I know I did...I used to think *hosanna* meant hooray! You know, hail...all hail the king! It actually means *save us...save us*. This is a cry for deliverance actually. Probably most of the people and the disciples who said this word said it politically. They want Jesus to save them from Rome...save them from Herod and Pontius Pilate and Caesar...save us *politically* is what they would have had in mind, so that a new Israel...a political new Israel could be established. Again, Jesus is actually undercutting that by the manner of his entry, not on a stallion with a sword but on a donkey's colt. So, Jesus is going to go on and do the very unpopular thing of dying on a cross, and that is probably, Darrell, why a lot of the people in this crowd in about four or five days, they are going to shift from "hosanna" to "crucify him," because what he is going to do was not what they wanted him to do.

DARRELL DELANEY

Isn't it interesting that when Jesus doesn't do what we expect him to do, then our attitudes change; and I pray that that is not the case, but that we would fully see what he was trying to do in the rest of the passages. So, when we continue in the next segment, we want to show you what Mark and Luke are going to say about this event. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this program on Palm Sunday, or Passion Sunday. The so-called Triumphant Entry. Darrell, we just looked at Matthew's version of this, now let's turn to Mark. We think Mark was the first gospel that got written down. We are very sure that Matthew and Luke...probably John...had Mark and used it as a source of material when the Holy Spirit inspired them to write up their own accounts. Mark contains almost word for word what we already saw from Matthew, but Mark has one interesting difference.

DARRELL DELANEY

Let's look at it here, starting at Chapter 11:11: It says: Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. ¹²The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴Then he said to the fig tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. ¹⁵On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers'."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is a little interesting twist. Jesus enters Jerusalem on Sunday...what we call Palm Sunday; but he just looks around...inspects things...and then quietly leaves and goes out to Bethany with the disciples. Maybe they went to the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus; probably; they were good friends of his in Bethany; and he spends the night there. So, most of what you just...everything you just read there, Darrell, happens on Monday...the next day of Holy Week, but when Jesus enters the next day, it is a very different picture from the day before.

DARRELL DELANEY

We don't normally think about where he goes out and then he comes back in. When he comes back in, he has a whole nother attitude. That is when he begins to drive out all these people from the temple courts, but before that, he also curses the fig tree for not giving him the fruit that he needs because he is hungry. It is a really interesting passage because he is hungry but it is not the season for figs, and he still curses the tree. I think that is very interesting.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the poor tree. I mean, it wasn't supposed to have any figs on it, but it was a symbol for Israel, that they were not able to tell time; that they should have known it was the season of the Messiah, but they didn't. When I preached on this one time from Mark 11, Darrell, I titled my sermon: *The Indignant Reentry*, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We always talk about the triumphal entry, but in Mark it is on Monday, the next day, when we get the indignant reentry because Jesus comes in kind of with a head full of steam and is full of judgment: On the tree, but then on the temple courts; and the reason for that is different than we think. We always turn this into a story like you are not supposed to sell things at church, like you know, the cadets cannot sell lightbulbs in the lobby; the young people cannot sell things on a Sunday. That is not the point. The point was where this little bazaar and flea market was, and it was the Gentile courts.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the Gentiles have no other place where they could come to worship because they are not allowed in the inner court...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

They are not allowed in the Holy of Holies; and the Gentile court is the only place where they can actually get these animals that they could sacrifice as worship, and they set up their sales right there in the way so they are literally blocking the worship of these people, and that is what Jesus has an issue with.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is why he also quotes Isaiah, that the temple is a house of prayer for *all* nations. The point being, you are pushing out everybody but Israel. He didn't like that, but then he also throws in a line from Jeremiah here in Mark 11 about how you have made the temple into a den of robbers. In Jeremiah, what that meant, Darrell, was that Jeremiah was assailing the people of Israel for living wicked lives all week, being totally unjust and ungodly, and then they would come to the temple and hide out on Sunday, like if I, you know...on Sabbath rather...if I hide out here, God won't see my sin. So, it is sort of like the place where a bank robber goes after he robs the bank to hide out until the police move on. So, that is why he says that. Jesus is here for all nations; Jesus is here for true righteousness.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that true righteousness does not use Jesus or God as a rabbit's foot to say: Oh, yeah; we've been giving; we've been going to church; we've been attending...and then you should forget everything that we did Monday through Saturday. No. God is calling us to an obedience that happens daily, and he is calling us to trust in him daily and repent and walk with him daily. That doesn't mean that your religious acts will erase those things. Your confession of sins will release those things, but he needs that to be a daily exercise.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is Mark 11. Let's pick up Luke 19 yet in this part of the episode, beginning at verse 41, Luke throws in a detail that Matthew, Mark and John does not have: As he (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴²and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They 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."

DARRELL DELANEY

We see Jesus here in a sad state. It is contrary. It throws the popular notion of triumphal entry...it throws water in the face of it. He is upset because he tried to show them; he tried to witness to them; he tried to just illuminate their hearts and minds, but they were not willing; and he is weeping about this situation. It is like: I wish you would have heard me; you didn't hear me; therefore, judgment is coming to you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the same thing we just saw in Mark 11, Darrell, when he cursed the fig tree. We said, you know, the fig tree couldn't tell time. Now is the time, and that is exactly what we are saying here: You didn't recognize the time when God came to you, in me, is what he is saying, right? So, Jesus kind of ruins the party here. In fact, you know, we often think of children on Palm Sunday, but the only children mentioned here are the ones who are going to die when Jerusalem gets sacked. So, that is a rather chilling and spine-tingling thing there. By the way, what is interesting about Luke 19...if Luke 19, Darrell, were the only story of this day we had, we would never have learned the word *hosanna*, because Luke doesn't include it; we would never have

thought of palm branches because Luke doesn't include it; and certainly, we wouldn't have thought of children singing, because again, the only children Luke mentions are the ones who will die. I think Luke strips it all back, Darrell, to focus on the face of Jesus. We have to see the sorrow of Jesus, because he knows what is coming up.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because we study scripture and because we have been to many church services, we know what is coming up. We know the suffering, the crucifixion, the death are coming; and so, it is interesting that it is a contrast to what many churches are celebrating on that day. It is a high day. It is worship. We are excited. Our kids are waving branches and things, but Jesus is somber; Jesus is sober; Jesus is sad; and he sets the tone for what suffering he is going to endure for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; we do tend to make Palm Sunday into a bright, happy day, but really, the Bible says...and there are positive things, right? I mean, people hailed him as king; that is right. They had the definition wrong, but that is right. So, there are positive things about this day; but really, as you just said, Darrell, it is supposed to be kind of a sober and sobering day as we brace ourselves for all the things that are going to happen to Jesus in the days to come. I mean, it is no wonder Jesus wept.

So, we have now looked at this day in the so-called synoptic gospels: that is Matthew, Mark and Luke. As you know, that leaves one: John. We will dig into that next, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we just said, Darrell, we've got one of the four gospels left. John's account of Palm Sunday isn't very long, so let's listen to the whole thing here from John Chapter 12.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: ¹²The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!" ¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: ¹⁵"Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." ¹⁶At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him. ¹⁷Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, John skips the little story about Jesus sending the disciples to find the donkey and colt. He does include, though, the same prophecy from Zechariah 9, to identify Jesus as fulfilling that prophecy of the Messiah. John, by the way, is the only one of the four evangelists who mentions palm branches specifically. The other one, Luke, doesn't mention branches at all, and Matthew and Mark don't identify them as palms; but he also includes the cry of "hosanna", and as we said earlier in this program, that means "save us". But Darrell, what makes John more distinctive is his honest admission that at the time on that day, the disciples didn't get it.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I love the fact that John is very transparent and open about that; that they don't fully understand everything that is happening. Sometimes when there is an event that is really passionate or powerful, even in your own life, you don't really know what is going on until you reflect back on it, because as they say,

hindsight is 20/20.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; the other thing that is unique to John, Darrell, and there is a very obvious reason for that, John frames this up as something that happens very soon after the raising of Lazarus; and indeed, that is in John 11. Jesus' entry is John 12, so it was just the previous chapter in John. Matthew, Mark and Luke don't tell us that story for whatever the reason, but that is important for John because, boy, that was a big miracle. So, people are really excited about Jesus. The raising of Lazarus was the final sign in what is often called the *book of signs*—the *book of miracles*—John calls them signs that point to the kingdom of God; and the Pharisees are all upset, Darrell, because, boy, if you are trying to convince people that Jesus is a fake, well, raising somebody from the dead kind of undercuts that big time.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, after that miracle, and then they say the whole world has gone after him, now they are like, okay, we have to get rid of this guy. That is when the plots begin; that is when they go to, like they are getting ready to get with Judas, who is going to betray him. That is when they plan to snuff out him because of all the things that are happening that are bringing glory to his name.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Of course, what the Pharisees don't know is they arrange exactly what God and Jesus knew had to happen. He had to die for the sins of the world. So, by trying to snuff him out, as you just said, they actually did exactly what had to happen; but what a sad state of affairs. The disciples didn't understand it; the Pharisees didn't understand it; and yet, Jesus alone knows what he has to do; but Darrell, as we wrap up this episode, we get to the so what. What does this mean for our lives today?

DARRELL DELANEY

So, as we think about how to practically apply this, I think one of the things that we need to think about is that Jesus really is our King. This is the one who spoke everything into existence. This is the one that Colossians says all things hold together in. By him and for him all things were made. He runs the cosmos. He is the creator. He is the sustainer of everything. This is one thing we need to remember: He is the King of Kings.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And related to that, Darrell, is a bit of a gut check for all of us. Do we today sometimes try to turn Jesus and his Church into something Jesus and his Church are not meant to be? The disciples and the crowds didn't understand the nature of Jesus. They had political things in mind. They wanted Jesus to be a new Caesar. They wanted to kick out Pontius Pilate. They wanted to get rid of Rome. They wanted a new political Israel. But we still do that today, right? I mean, I think there has been a lot of temptation for the Church, particularly in the US in recent years, to go for political clout and influence and power to get things done. There has actually been a lot of writing that has undercut the humble way Jesus came into the city. A lot of Christians want to try to present Jesus as a tough guy...Rambo-like military leader. So, I think there is a warning in these stories: Don't do what the people then did. Don't try to turn Jesus into something he wasn't.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is a good point because he is humble, meek and mild; and he came in on a donkey; and the way he is going to beat strength is through weakness; and that is a very powerful point; but also, you mentioned earlier that they say: Hosanna. And hosanna doesn't mean hooray or yay or woohoo. It means *save us!* And they are asking for the deliverance that comes only from the Messiah.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is a reminder that salvation is our common need. We all need it; and right, as you just said, he didn't come with military might, but through suffering, humility and sacrifice.

You know, Darrell, I don't have any doubt the devil, who tempted Jesus right to the end, was tempting him that day to say: Look; hey, Jesus, look. You got something going here. Give in. Cave into the crowds. Go get Caesar. Be political. You know, I am sure the devil tempted him, but we can be thankful Jesus didn't give in.

DARRELL DELANEY

And because he stayed the course, and because he did the will of the Father, that is our example, and that is why he even earned the title to be the Savior and the King; and we thank God that he did that. This is actually how we begin the Holy Week. We see the Lord Jesus following the will of the Father, doing exactly what God has called him to do; and it gives us reasons to thank and praise him, because Jesus is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, and the one who gives thanks to God alone, and for him we thank God as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney, and we hope you will join us again next time as we turn our attention to the scriptures that describe the days we now call Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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