

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem

SCOTT HOEZEE

In this *Groundwork* series, we started to follow Jesus on his way to Jerusalem back near the end of Luke Chapter 9. Now the day has come. Jesus arrives at the sacred city and famously rides a donkey's colt into Jerusalem to begin what would become the week of his crucifixion. Many Christians know the day we mark this entrance as Palm Sunday, even as we label the event itself as Jesus' triumphal entry; but as we will see, Luke does not have any palm branches, and the Jesus Luke shows us hardly looks triumphant. So, what is really going on in Luke Chapter 19 and in this entry to Jerusalem? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and Dave, we are coming near the end of a series we have done for Lent, where we followed Jesus on his trek to the cross, really. It started back at the end of Luke 9, and now we are at Luke 19. Actually, in the previous program we were in the first part of Luke 19 with the story of Zacchaeus, but now we come to a latter part, as Jesus now finally gets into Jerusalem and begins what we now in the Church today call Holy Week.

DAVE BAST

Right. One of the interesting things that has happened fairly recently in the Christian Church as a whole has been a heightened observance of the seasons of the Church year, including among many evangelicals, many Protestants – it used to be, I think when I was a boy, really, that was a Catholic thing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we never heard of it.

DAVE BAST

To observe Lent. Yes, we still did Palm Sunday and Good Friday and Easter, but what we call Holy Week, this program is a program designed for Palm Sunday, as it is commonly called. In some circles it is known as Passion Sunday because it really does open the door on this highest and holiest of Christian seasons leading up to the commemoration of the Last Supper, the betrayal and trial of Christ, his death on Good Friday, his rest in the tomb on Holy Saturday, as it is known, and finally, his triumphant resurrection on Easter morning.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here is how Luke begins that whole sequence. I am reading from Luke 19 at verse 28:

After Jesus had said this, (by the way, we will get to what the "this" is in just a moment) he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, ³⁰Saying to them, "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. ³¹If anyone asks you why are you untying it, say, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³²So those who were sent ahead went and they found it just as he had told them. ³³And as they were untying the colt, its owners asked, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴And they replied, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵So they brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus

on it, ³⁶And as he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷And 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!” ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” ⁴⁰“I tell you,” Jesus replied, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

DAVE BAST

One of the things we usually do with stories in the Gospels is conflate the different accounts; we combine them – we do it with the Christmas story – we do it with the Passion story – and we often do it with this story of Palm Sunday. But, it is maybe helpful just to look at one Gospel account, in this case, Luke’s, and notice what is different about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have four Gospels, we know that; but if Luke were the only Gospel we knew, we would never call this day Palm Sunday because Luke does not have anybody waving any palm branches; we would never associate little children singing to Jesus because Luke has no children in this story; and we never would have learned that strange Hebrew word *hosanna* because Luke has nobody singing *hosanna*. So, for all of us who begin our Holy Week on Palm Sunday or Passion Sunday with little children running down the aisle waving palm branches and singing *hosanna*, *loud hosanna*, if Luke were the only Gospel, that would never happen. We would probably call it Coat Sunday because Luke talks about people laying their coats in the road, but that is really the only detail Luke gives us. He cut back, pared back, shorn back a lot of the details that the other Gospels include, and Luke must have had a reason for doing that, because he was a good storyteller; he was good at details, so if he leaves some out, there must have been a reason.

DAVE BAST

Well, one thing that he does include, that the other Gospels do as well, is this reference to the colt – a young donkey – and clearly there must have been some prearrangement here because Jesus sends a couple of his disciples to pick this animal up and bring it to him so that he can ride into Jerusalem. Actually, I do not think I am mistaken in saying this is the only time in all of the Gospels where we are told that Jesus rode.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think that is right.

DAVE BAST

He traveled by foot everywhere, along with his disciples. So, why now, at this moment, on this Sunday morning, does he want to ride? And the answer is found in the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah, who said that the king – the Messiah – would enter Jerusalem some day humble and riding on a donkey’s colt; and so Jesus is self-consciously putting himself into that prophecy. He knew it without doubt. It is as much as he is signaling: I am the king; I am the Messiah, and I am now entering the Holy City.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is curious that there is no doubt that the Pharisees, and probably the disciples, too – people well-versed in the Bible – that they knew Zechariah. They knew what this image meant and they were right to conclude that he is a king; however, it is very interesting to notice that sometimes – and I think, Dave, we can all do this, and I think the disciples did it, too – their expectations of the Messiah – their expectations of the king Jesus would be were formed out of selective reading of the Old Testament. They did not take the whole thing, and so, even though they were right to call Jesus a king in their loud voices, as we just read it, the definition they had of Jesus’ kingship was still incorrect. They thought he was going to re-establish Israel. In fact, Luke also wrote the book of Acts, and you can go to Acts 1, forty days after the resurrection, even, and the disciples still say, “Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?” So, they were still thinking Jesus would be an earthly king of power, and what they missed was the humble nature of this king as symbolized by the little colt.

DAVE BAST

Right. It is not a warhorse. It is an animal of peace; yet, you can see how the disciples would have made this mistake. They were longing for the coming of the Messiah. It was like victory day. It was like a team that has lost season after season after season, but they have this promise that one day you will be a champion, and here comes the day and this is the guy who is going to do it. They had seen his miracles. This is a guy who can command the wind and the waves to be still. He is not going to have any problem chasing the Romans out. So, you can understand their temptation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is another detail, and I said that when I read verse 28; I said, “After he had said this,” and what is the *this*? Well, you have to back up into the middle part of Luke 19, where Jesus tells a parable about a king, and at the end of the parable, if you read that in verse 27 of Luke 19, the king gets rough on his enemies in the particular story; so, after he had said *this*, Jesus went to Jerusalem; and so, the disciples had that vision of a king dancing in their heads, too.

DAVE BAST

Sure; yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we can understand why they got it wrong, but Jesus is very soon going to do a couple of things that is going to reveal the true nature of his kingship, and we will look at that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are looking at the story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on what Scott, with tongue in cheek, called “Coat Sunday,” because in Luke’s account of Palm Sunday, there are not any palm branches, but nevertheless, it is the familiar story, I think, for Christians, of Jesus going into the city, and here is how he goes on in verse 41:

As 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 on 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.” ⁴⁵When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. ⁴⁶“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.” ⁴⁷Every day he was teaching at the temple, but the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. ⁴⁸Yet, they could not find any way to do it because all the people hung on his words.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there we have it. If we were to call this, as we often do, or as the people who insert the subheadings into our modern-day Bibles do, the Triumphal Entry, then we would have to wonder why the man at the middle of the triumph ends up blubbering and crying his eyes out...

DAVE BAST

Yes, Jesus weeps over the city.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is that song from the 1950s that had an ironic title: *It’s My Party and I’ll Cry if I Want To*, the song title was ironic because parties and crying do not go together. As soon as somebody starts to cry at a party, the party is over; but here, Jesus no sooner – he is being hailed as a king – and then he starts to cry, which is strange enough, and sad, and then he makes predictions about the fall of Jerusalem; and we said earlier, Dave, that Luke does not have any children singing to Jesus? The only time children appear in Luke’s

version is when Jesus said they are going to get killed – the children of Jerusalem are going to be slain one day soon. This is not a sentimental Palm Sunday story in Luke’s telling of it.

DAVE BAST

Jesus really can foresee what is going to happen to the city of Jerusalem and he actually pauses here as he is weeping over the city because they choose to reject him, God’s Messiah, which is a rejection of God himself. The day is going to come in the not-too-distant future when Jerusalem is going to be surrounded – and the Romans did this, we know, in the year 70 A.D.

Even as I was reading that I was struck by something else that only Luke records. A little bit later, as Jesus is literally on the way to Golgotha, carrying his cross, the women in the streets are weeping, and he pauses and says, “Do not cry for me. Cry for yourselves.” This terrible, ominous note that an awful thing is going to happen to the citizens of this city, and yet, he can see it coming. There are overtones here of the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, really.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When you think about it, some people might point out and say, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, what do you mean, they are rejecting Jesus? They just now hailed him as king. They just now said ‘Peace in the highest;’ aren’t they celebrating Jesus correctly, even right now? What is he doing crying?” Of course, the answer to that is, again, they were right to call Jesus king, but the kind of king they expected was not the sacrificial, suffering servant, God of compassion that Jesus came to be and to do. He is headed for a cross, not an ivory throne. That is very important to see.

DAVE BAST

They are also very fickle, aren’t they?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, yes.

DAVE BAST

Because everything is hunky-dory here and it is a big party and a processional parade coming into the city; but five days later, when Jesus has been arrested and it looks like the Romans have him well in hand and his career is about to be cut very abruptly short, then the crowd turns on him and cries out, “Crucify him!” We do not want him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They are looking at the surface of life. They are looking at politics. They are looking at re-establishing a new Israel, getting rid of the Romans and the occupying forces. Jesus is seeing deeper, to deeper spiritual realities, to what is really going to be needed to fix this world’s addiction to sin and evil, and he knows that is only going to come through his own sacrifice; which is also why, when he gets to the temple, instead of saying: Well, fine. I am going to take over here. He drives people out; he gets rid of the moneychangers, but then he also quotes that very interesting line about how you have turned this into a den of robbers – and that is, I think, Jeremiah, right? You were saying that this is in Jeremiah.

DAVE BAST

Yes, there is an echo right there. This is a quote.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what did Jeremiah criticize the people of his day for? Well, they had turned the temple into a place where they – it was like a hideout for bank robbers – they would rob a bank and then they would hide out in the temple. They would sin all week long; they would cheat the poor; and then they would go to the temple on the Sabbath and they would say: This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. We are safe here. God will not judge us for our sins.

Jeremiah said, “You have turned the temple into a den of robbers.” This is like the hideout for bank robbers, where you try to hide. It is not going to work.

Jesus is saying: You have done the same thing today. You are ignoring the poor; you are ignoring the deeper spiritual realities of life. So, Jesus comes and literally smashes everything up to say: The way of God is leading a different way.

DAVE BAST

My house will be a house of prayer for all nations. This incident of cleansing the temple, which Luke mentions here in common with Matthew and Mark – it happens – perhaps it was Sunday afternoon, even, when Jesus did this. The point is that this was the courtyard where non-Jews could at least approach the God of Israel; and they had been displaced by all of the commercialism. So, it is not just that they are turning a profit. This does not mean that you cannot sell youth group fundraising stuff in the church lobby or you are guilty of the same kind of thing. The point was, they had usurped the sacred space of the temple, which should have been for gentiles to come close to Israel’s God, and turned it to their own profit. So, they were really, in effect, excluding people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They were not confessing their own sins; they had turned it into a den of robbers; and they were making it a members-only club to boot, where there was no room for anybody else to come in. So Jesus, not as the earthly king the people were looking for, but as the suffering servant who was going to set things to right by his own sacrifice, Jesus comes in and shakes up everything.

So, what we want to do before we leave this story, Dave, is one of the things we have seen is that Luke has cut away all of the details so we can look at Jesus very, very carefully. Who is the man at the center of all this hoopla and what does it mean for our lives? We will think about that in a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and to sum up, Dave, our program so far on the last part of Luke 19 and Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, we have noticed that it is not Palm Sunday in Luke – no palms; there are no hosannas, no children, a lot of stuff that is definitely not triumphant, including a weeping Jesus making terrible predictions, and what has Luke done by taking away all of the trappings of what we usually associate with Palm Sunday? Well, he has brought us face-to-face with Jesus, and what do we see when we get really close to Jesus? We see a furrowed brow, a troubled mind, tears in his eyes, tracks of tears down his cheeks; we see the face of God lamenting the sin of this world that Jesus has come to fix, and that, Luke is telling us, is why he enters Jerusalem; not to have a party; not to have a lot of people whooping it up and celebrating and having some political celebration. No, no; you look deeply into Jesus’ eyes and you see the compassion of God to save a world gone very, very bad.

DAVE BAST

A different kind of king, isn’t he, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

Imagine a United States President taking the oath of office on the day of his inauguration, and this “triumphal” entry really is a public proclamation of Jesus’ kingship. So, the President takes the oath of office, he is sworn in, and he starts his great inaugural address, and suddenly he breaks down weeping and crying

about the sins of America. That just would not fly. Can you imagine what the commentators would be saying, and how people would be hooting and howling...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, my word.

DAVE BAST

A leader is supposed to project strength and confidence and everything is great...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Optimism...

DAVE BAST

Under my leadership, we are going on to great heights.

Here, Jesus is just reduced to tears...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Luke has brought us up close to Jesus. We see the tears; we see the trouble; but the crowds seem to still want to see something else in Jesus. They are projecting onto Jesus who they want him to be.

When I preached on this I have, tongue-in-cheek, said, "Well, it is a good thing we never do that today anymore." Of course, I am tongue-in-cheek because I am afraid I do it, you do it, the Church has all along done it; we tend to make Jesus over into our own image. We tend to make Jesus be what we want him to be. We assume that if he came to our church, he would not turn over the pews or throw the hymnals around; he would love our church!

DAVE BAST

We've got it right, don't we? Yeah; we do church just right; just the way God wants it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The way we think; where we shop; how we vote; Jesus would be in with all of that. Sometimes we too need to have happen to us what Luke does for us as readers, which is to grab us by the chin and bring us real close to Jesus to say: This is the real Jesus. You cannot make him into your own image. You have to follow the one that God has given, and he is going to a cross.

DAVE BAST

Here is another thing that strikes me about this. It is the way we read scripture and the way we handle scripture. We sometimes, I think, have a hermeneutical problem – to throw out a big word – it means a problem in interpreting. We choose the parts we like and we downplay or ignore the parts that do not fit in our world view or our political beliefs or our prejudices. The thing about the people of Jesus' day – his disciples and the crowd, for that matter is, they were absolutely right about what the Messiah would do. He would destroy evil. He would liberate his people. He would create a new Israel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is the king.

DAVE BAST

He is the king, yes. The problem was, that was going to happen in two stages. And first, the problem of sin had to be handled. As you pointed out, there was a spiritual liberation that had to precede the political liberation, and we are still waiting for the consummation of the kingdom. We are still waiting for the final triumph, for complete deliverance from all our enemies, real and imagined. So, they downplayed the part in the Old Testament that Jesus continually pointed back to about suffering; that it would happen only when the servant of the Lord suffered. All of that stuff in Isaiah that underscored that that Jesus lifted up.

In fact, we have been dealing here with Luke Chapter 19, and just at the end of Chapter 18 Jesus predicts his suffering and death, so he tried to tell them – he tried to alert them – but they did not want to hear that; they only wanted to focus on the glittering future.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes when I have taught in class at seminary, or when I have preached on this, and have really picked up on Luke and the non-triumphant nature of it – no palms, no hosannas, no children – sometimes people have said, “So, what? We are wrong to be celebrating Palm Sunday? We shouldn’t let the children sing hosanna? You just want this to be a dark day?” And I always say, “No, no, no. We are right to celebrate Jesus as king; especially if today, unlike the disciples on the original day, we can have the right definition of Jesus as king; but what that means is we need to celebrate Palm Sunday and begin Holy Week with a good balance of the joy and the celebration, but also the deep, deep sorrow of what it took for Jesus to save this world. In fact, at my own church a few years ago, all of the children came forward on Palm Sunday morning. They all had a palm branch and they were singing on the front steps of the church, and just into the song, one little boy’s palm frond snapped in two. So, here he is holding this limp palm frond and he starts to bawl his eyes out, and he is crying; and I thought to myself, “This kid gets it!”

DAVE BAST

Yes, here is Luke; that is Luke’s Gospel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But humor aside, something of that combination of the joy and the tears – in an ironic way, that little kid did provide the balance we needed – the joy of Jesus as king, but the seriousness of what his kingship really involves, and that is what we reflect on during Holy Week, above all in the Christian year, climaxing of course, on Skull Hill, on the cross on Good Friday.

DAVE BAST

It is easy for people to make light of sin when they do not have to pay for it, but God does, and that lies behind Jesus’ whole attitude and approach; not only sorrow for what is going to happen to those who end up rejecting him, but also a sober realization of what it is going to cost him to welcome us into his kingdom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we would like to know how we can help you dig deeper into scripture. So, visit groundworkonline.com, our website, and tell us topics, passages, or questions that you would like to hear next on *Groundwork*.

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