

The Stones Would Cry Out

The time had finally come. The mystery of Jesus as the Christ had to be revealed to the world. We talked in last week's sermon from Deuteronomy about the king of God's choosing. Well, today on this Palm Sunday we celebrate the revelation of that king. Jesus was the king of God's choosing. Here on this triumphal entry the masses proclaim him as this king.

This is what churches throughout the world are celebrating today. Palm Sunday is the start of the final week of Jesus' life before he died on the cross. Here Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey and the people all herald him as a coming king. They lay down palm branches before him, sort of like rolling out the red carpet for this king. Unfortunately, so many of these people didn't really understand what it meant for Jesus to be king. They herald him here as the Lord's anointed, but in just a few days the crowds will instead be calling for his crucifixion. The Pharisees and other religious leaders help to make that transition happen. The events of Palm Sunday here set into motion the things that would quickly lead to Jesus' death on the cross. But of course, the good news is that would quickly lead to the resurrection three days later where Jesus shows what it really meant for him to be king. He's the king who had come to conquer sin and death.

And so as we look at this passage, we'll have a chance to remember what went on at that first Palm Sunday. And I chose to look at Luke's account of this Triumphal Entry today because he alone records the dialogue in verses 39-40. That's where the Pharisees call Jesus to silence the crowd, but he replies that if they were silent, then even the stones would cry out. Luke's account is the only that reports that memorable dialog. And I'd like to spend some time thinking about the significance of this interchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. And so we'll look at this passage today in three points. First we'll consider the multitude of praise; this set the context for the Pharisee's objection. Second, we'll look at why this concerned the Pharisee's. Third, we'll consider Jesus' response, that the stones would cry out.

So let's begin first by considering this multitude of praise. Look at verse 37 with me. Here it describes the people praising God as a "whole multitude of disciples." So you have this large crowd of people who have been following Jesus and his ministry. As he rides into Jerusalem they start getting excited. It says they rejoice. They are just ecstatic. Just full of joy! They had such wonderful expectation about who Jesus was and what he would do.

Just look at what they say about Jesus. They say some pretty wonderful things about him. Verse 38 records their praises. The first part is, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!" This is a quote from Psalm 118:26. However, Luke records that they add an extra word in here. Psalm 118:26 doesn't use the word "king." They add that in here. Psalm 118 is about a procession into the holy city and into the temple. And the people interpret and apply that Psalm to Jesus as describing a *king* coming into the holy city. And so this shows what the people thought. They were calling Jesus the Messiah. They were calling him the Christ, the Anointed King. The one they had been waiting for. As he rode into Jerusalem

that Palm Sunday they were declaring him as the promised king. Luke's account very clearly brings this out, how they were honoring him as king. Please understand the significance here. For them to add the word "king" here into this Psalm shows that there was no doubt on the part of the people about what they were saying there that day.

When you read the gospels, up to this point, people weren't going around publically declaring that Jesus was a king or the Messiah. Many people hoped that he was. The disciples themselves had come to that conclusion. But in terms of public announcements that Jesus was the promised King, this is the first major public announcement by the people. You can understand their joy then. Think about yourself. If there's some dream you've had for your life, but it seemed unattainable, but then all of a sudden it happens; think how excited you are then! You just want to leap for joy. The people's long expected hope was that the Messiah would come. Now they believed he had. And they were right. Jesus was the promised Messiah, the king of God's choosing.

Luke also records a second thing they said about Jesus. Look at the second half of verse 38. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. This line of the people's praise is only recorded by Luke. Does this line sound familiar to you at all? It should. In substance, it's what the angels declared to the shepherds at Jesus' birth. Though the angels declared peace *on earth*, and here the people declare peace *in heaven*. But it's a nice complement, isn't it? With the angels, they came from heaven to declare peace on earth. Here, you have people on earth declaring peace in heaven.

And both the angels and the people here declare glory in the highest. That's the most exalted form of praise you could give. Glory *in the highest*. You might recall that in my sermon for our last Christmas service we looked at that passage with the angels declaring "Glory to God in the highest." I made the case how fitting it was that Christ's birth would be the *best* reason to glorify God. God deserves glory all the time for everything. But at his birth, and now here at the Triumphal Entry, we see that these are reasons to give glory to God in the highest. God is glorified the most by sending Jesus to live and die for us. And so Luke's gospel presents these two calls of "glory in the highest" as sort of bookends to Jesus' life and ministry. At the start of his life, it's glory to God in the highest. And now as the final stage of his mission goes into effect, it's again, glory in the highest. This final stage that will signal the beginning of the Passion Week. This final stage which will mean the cross. You know as a church, so often the greatest celebrations we have throughout the year are Christmas and Easter. Well, these are the two events that the Bible records for us as the reason to give the most glory to God. In Christ, through Christ, God is *most* glorified. Christ's work to save fallen mankind brings the most glory to God.

And so in light of all the things the people are saying here about Jesus, we shouldn't be surprised about the Pharisee's concerns. Let's turn now to our second point to consider that. Look at verse 39. "And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples.'" They try to get Jesus to silence the crowds. Notice that *they* don't rebuke the crowds. They are the religious leaders after all. It would have been appropriate for them to have rebuked the crowds, if they believed there was something sacrilegious going on. But they don't do it. They demand instead Jesus to do it. I'm sure it was because of fear. They were probably too scared of

the crowds at this point. Instead they thought it would have been the right thing for Jesus to do to try to silence them.

Why did they think that? Well, the people are praising God here, but they are essentially praising Jesus too at the same time. At the same time they are declaring him as King. These are all things that the Pharisees thought were wrong and incorrect. They didn't believe Jesus deserved this sort of praise. They also didn't think he was to be called the king. And so they wanted Jesus to correct them on these things. You might think of an analogy from the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 22:8, John is so in awe as he sees all the visions that he begins to worship the angel who is delivering the message. But the angel instantly stops John. He essentially rebukes John and says that he's just a fellow servant of God. Instead the angel tells John to worship God. You see, that was a fitting response for the angel. The angel wasn't God. He didn't deserve that sort of homage. And so he rebuked John for falsely giving it. That's probably what the Pharisees were hoping Jesus would do here. They were hoping that when Jesus saw the way they were basically worshipping him and the way they were heralding him as king, that Jesus would stop them. That he'd correct them. Tell them that these things weren't right. That they weren't true. But of course Jesus didn't stop them, because these things were true. He was the promised King. The Messiah had come.

This word for rebuke here in verse 39 has the idea of censure or warning. It's a strong word of correction. This is what Peter did to Jesus in Mark 8 when Jesus had just told them of his impending suffering. Peter rebuked Jesus for that idea. Of course Peter was wrong, but it was Peter's way to try to tell Jesus that he just didn't think that was correct.

Luke's gospel actually uses this word "rebuke" a lot. Twelve out of the twenty-nine occurrences of this word in the New Testament are found in the book of Luke; that's over 40% of the occurrences. And most of the time, Luke uses this word to describe an action of Jesus. Jesus does a lot of rebuking in this book. Let me give you some examples. Jesus repeatedly rebukes the evil spirits in this gospel. Jesus rebukes the fever in Peter's mother in law to heal here. He rebukes the winds and waves to calm the sea. Jesus teaches that we should rebuke sinning brothers, but also be willing to forgive repentant ones. And so Jesus does a lot of rebuking, and even teaches about times to rebuke. But he won't rebuke the people here!

Instead, think for a moment about this. Earlier in Jesus' ministry Luke records Jesus rebuking the disciples in chapter 9, verse 21. There the English translates it as warning them, but it's the same word in the Greek. That's right after the disciples come to the conclusion that Jesus is the Christ. At that point he rebukes them or warns them not to tell anyone about this. So Jesus acknowledges secretly to his disciples that he was in fact the Christ, the promised king. But at that point in his ministry he didn't want them to make that information public. Instead he in a sense does there what the Pharisees want here. To silence them. "Don't let people know that I'm the Christ... yet." The reason he gave the disciples then is that he had to first go and suffer and die and then rise again.

Jesus' withholding a public declaration of his identity was obviously only temporary because of what we see here. Here, on this Triumphal Entry the people declare the same thing. They call Jesus the king. They are saying that he's the Christ. But now at this critical moment, Jesus won't rebuke the people. He had done so much rebuking in Luke's gospel. But now, Christ

won't hold anything back in revealing himself. The time had come for his identity to be clearly unveiled. Of course, it would be this very thing that would bring him to the cross. His refusal to silence the people here would escalate matters. It would bring the pressure on the religious leaders to condemn him and crucify him. Good Friday would be just a few short days after this Palm Sunday.

The Pharisees wanted the people silenced. They didn't want Jesus to be declared king. They didn't want any kingdom that had to do with Jesus as king. This seems to be the primary concern of the Pharisees. This seems to be their motivation. They were concerned the people might try to actually crown Jesus king. They knew that would likely result in the Roman government coming in and laying down the law. It would surely mean that they would lose their own position of power. Just listen to John 11:47 to get a clue here on the Pharisee's motivation (you can turn there if you have your Bibles open).

John 11:47-48 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this man works many signs. If we let him alone like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."

John's gospel brings out this concern again at the Triumphal Entry as well. Right after the Triumphal Entry, John records the Pharisees talking to themselves in John 12:19, saying, "Look, the world has gone after him!"

All this shows the success of Jesus' ministry. It shows the people coming to a conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah. It shows that this made the Pharisees nervous and concerned. They come to the conclusion that this could result in the very least with the Romans coming in and getting rid of all the local leadership. They knew that if it went far enough, it might even result in the Romans coming and destroying Jerusalem completely.

And so the Pharisees were concerned. They had both spiritual and political concerns. In reality, their concerns were not justified, as Jesus really was the Messiah, and he was not looking to displace the Roman government. But these were their concerns, nonetheless. And so they made their demand of Jesus. Silence them! Rebuke your disciples. But Jesus would not. Let's turn then to think about this final point for today. Let's think about Jesus' response to the Pharisees.

Verse 40. "But he answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out." Here's a question for you. Is Jesus being literal or figurative here? Does he mean that the stones would literally cry out in some audible voice that Jesus is king, if the people didn't? Or is he just using exaggerated language to make his point? Well, I don't know if I can answer that with certainty. But realize, that it wouldn't be beyond God's ability to make a rock cry out. If he could make a donkey speak, as he did in the Old Testament, then he can make a rock cry out.

In fact, don't forget all the places in Scripture that call for the creation to praise God. Plenty of Psalms express just that. For example, Psalm 98:7, "Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD"

And don't forget all the extraordinary things God has done with rocks in Scripture. Think of some of them. In the Old Testament, God made water flow twice from a rock. In Matthew 3:9, John the Baptist says that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from the stones; that was his way of telling people not to trust merely in their ethnic heritage. At the death of Jesus, Matthew 27:51 records a great earthquake at that moment, with the rocks splitting. That's sort like the stones crying out. In other words, it wouldn't be a problem for God if he wanted the stones to actually, literally, cry out in praise and joy.

There is one usage of this language of stones crying out in the Old Testament that's very similar in wording to what we have here. That's in Habakkuk 2:11. There the usage appears to be figurative. It's talking about wicked people building homes with unrighteous gain. It's talking about people constructing buildings with money they gained by taking advantage of people. That's when it says in Habakkuk 2:11, "For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the timbers will answer it." In other words, it's saying that, figuratively speaking, the very house itself will stand in judgment against the wickedness of its builders. The stones of the house, by their very existence, would figuratively cry out against them. The stones, by their very existence in those buildings, would be a testimony against them of the dishonest actions that resulted in their construction.

Well, that sort of figurative language makes sense here too at the Triumphal Entry. We can also understand Jesus words to be figuratively saying that the people *have* to proclaim this. This is Jesus' way of saying that if the people didn't cry these things out, they'd be guilty. They'd be guilty of such a dereliction of duty, that the stones would even cry out as a sort of testimony against them. At this point in Jesus' ministry, it has become obvious that Jesus is the Christ. Remember verse 37. The reason they are proclaiming this is because of the mighty works they had seen. God had already shown Jesus to be the Messiah through these works of power that Jesus did. Now it had become obvious who Jesus is. That obligated the multitude to say what they are saying here. If they didn't they'd be guilty.

And so whether Jesus was using literal language here or just using figurative, exaggerated, language, I'm not entirely certain. Frankly, that becomes secondary, because his point is abundantly clear either way. His clear point shines through. There's no way he's going to silence the people. This message now, at this perfect time, must be declared. It'd be wrong if they didn't. It was wrong of the Pharisees themselves to not join with them in this praise. Now was the right time. Before Jesus had told them to keep the truth to themselves. But now at this Palm Sunday it was time for the public announcement. It was time for the world to know, Jesus is the Christ. And yet, even if the people wouldn't do that that day, God would no longer keep silent. This was a message that could not, must not, be silenced any longer. Jesus started his ministry announcing that the kingdom was at hand. Now it is announced who is the king of that kingdom. God's king had come. His peace was at hand. This all would be glory in the highest. This is what we celebrate today together with them.

And yet we must be careful not to miss what Jesus goes on to do in the next few verses. Verses 41-44 of this passage show what Jesus does as he draws near the city. He weeps. He weeps over the city. On that Palm Sunday the people praised Jesus as king. Their message was right, but for so many, their heart and mind was not. Jesus could commend what they literally said.

And yet what so many of them actually believed made Jesus weep. Because it would bring judgment on them.

Many of these people said the right thing, but didn't believe the right thing. They didn't understand in what sense Jesus was really the Messiah. They thought he came to be a king of an earthly kingdom, but really Jesus came to bring us into a heavenly kingdom. So many people thought Jesus would conquer the Romans. But Jesus came as king to conquer sin and death. And so it wouldn't be long until the people realized that Jesus was not the kind of king they wanted. That's why the crowds in just a few days would turn from this praise to shouting instead, "Crucify him!"

Though Jesus wouldn't silence them when they spoke this clear truth on Palm Sunday, he was not ultimately pleased by those who confessed him with misunderstanding. It instead caused him to weep. There's an application there for all of us. It's not enough to praise Jesus. We need to praise him with understanding. Likewise, it's not enough to say the right thing in church, or when you profess your faith and become a member of the church to just confess the right things. No, we need to really understand the things we confess and sing about. We need the faith that actually understands. Faith that understands who Jesus really is, what he really came to do. Faith to understand that he saves us from our sins.

You see, Palm Sunday is about a visitation. That's the last word in verse 44. Palm Sunday is about Jesus visiting us. It's about God coming to man in the person of Jesus. Do we understand properly why he came to us? It's what the angels announced when he first arrived. It's what they proclaimed again today. He came to give us peace. Peace through our salvation. Saved from sin and death and instead given eternal life. Understand in real faith why he came. Trust your life to him today. And you will be saved.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, I'd like us to ask ourselves two related application questions to us as we close. First, are we more like silent stones, than the people crying out here? Second, do we have more understanding than these people here about who Jesus really is, but yet less zeal than them in our public praise?

Let's all be challenged today in our zeal and praise of God. We know and understand so much more than most people did on that Palm Sunday. The rocks didn't have to cry out because they did. But have we grown too silent? I'm not so much talking about what we do here on Sundays. We all sing loudly from the heart here on Sundays. But I'm talking about out there, in the city gates, in the world? Do we announce to the world that the true king has come? Do we zealously proclaim this, even at risk of being persecuted by others?

This is an area I long for myself and all of us to grow in. Our church spends a lot of time in the academics. We spend a lot of time learning about who Jesus really is. We make sure we really understand who Jesus is. But if we know so much about Jesus, shouldn't we have even more zeal than anyone else? Let us confess to our God the ways we have become like silent stones. May we instead look to our Father God. He is the one who can work praise in non-living stones. He is the same one who can renew us again today with a zeal to praise him in the highest before all. Amen.

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