

JESUS' TRIUMPH & SUFFERING

Luke 19:28-44

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From time to time I have sat with someone who was suffering. Some asked, 'Where is God in this? Where is his love?' Sometimes I don't know what to say. But mostly I point them to Jesus on the cross and say, 'There you see God's love'. I ask them to consider 'just how much Jesus gave to provide you with forgiveness'. We can see this compassion of Jesus already in events of today, Palm Sunday. Looking at the events of that day I want you to grasp something of Jesus' love for us shown in his determination to go to the cross. Max Lucado in his book 'And the Angels were Silent' writes: 'Forget any suggestion that Jesus was trapped. Erase any theory that Jesus made a miscalculation. Ignore any speculation that the cross was a last-ditch attempt to salvage a dying mission. For if these words tell us anything, they tell us Jesus died...on purpose. No surprise. No hesitation. No faltering. No, the journey to Jerusalem did not begin in Jericho. It did not begin in Galilee. It didn't even begin in Bethlehem. The journey to the cross began long before [in the Garden of Eden]. As the echo of the crunching of the fruit was still sounding in the garden, Jesus was leaving for Calvary.'

The tone for our text is set in Luke 19: 28 *"After he said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem."* You see Jesus knows it's close to his time. Watch him as he deliberately strides ahead wanting to get to Jerusalem. The context is that Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. They are part of an enormous crowd as millions make their way along the roads. One of the key things happening with all these people is that they are keeping a close lookout for Jesus. They are keen to see what he is going to do next. They have seen or heard about the amazing things Jesus has done. Imagine with me for a moment as we listen in as they talk together: 'Mate, I was in the crowd when he healed a blind beggar just outside of Jericho. It was amazing.' His mate says: 'I heard that he even raised someone from the dead. Some bloke called Lazarus. You can't top that can you?!' There is a lot of excitement in the air. If Jesus the miracle worker is around it could be very entertaining. Part of the buzz with the crowd is that a rumour is spreading. It's been heard that the Jewish authorities have put out orders for Jesus to be arrested. Well now, that makes it even more interesting. What will Jesus do about that? Will he keep a low profile? Or will he dare show himself? The atmosphere with the crowd is tense. We come to the conflict point in this drama. You can imagine bets being placed as to what Jesus would do.

Well, what does he do? In our text in Luke 19:29 we see Jesus approaching *"...Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives"*. They are two small villages about two miles out of Jerusalem on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. It's a bit of a walk uphill to the top and then downhill into Jerusalem. It is at this point we see the drama begin. As Jesus approaches these villages he does something very out of the ordinary. It is as if he is trying to create an extraordinary amount of attention. In fact, that is precisely what he is up to. Which is odd. It had been a set policy of Jesus to always avoid attracting attention to himself. Remember after the leper was healed Jesus had said *"Tell no one"*! But now, while this crowd is tense, Jesus very deliberately arouses the crowd's attention. Look at Luke 19: 30-31: *"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. If anyone asks you why are you untying it?" tell him 'The Lord needs it.'"* Now, what's going on here? Well, for one thing, God is at work. How else can Jesus know there is a colt ready in the next village and what the owners' reaction will be? The events about to unfold are not just chance encounters. They are an outworking of God's plan of redemption. That is undergirding everything that is happening here. The promises of God over thousands of years are about to come to a climax. But what is the point? Well, Jesus is calling attention to himself as a king. Look at how he does that. Firstly, it is a royal requirement that kings ride on an animal that has never been ridden before. Note again Luke 19: 30 *"...you will find a colt there, which no one has ever ridden."* Secondly royalty has the right to confiscate whatever it needs. We see the colt owner freely submits to the request.

Jesus does this very openly while the crowd is watching every move he makes. He is deliberately making the people aware that he is intending to enter Jerusalem as her king. Now it is so important to keep asking questions of the Bible text we are reading. Why does Jesus do this, why set himself up to ride in as king? On a number of previous occasions, when the people wanted to make Jesus king he rejected it. He walked away. Think of the time he fed the 5000 with a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread. The crowd thought here was the king who could solve all their economic woes as well as deal with the Romans. Back then Jesus would have nothing to do with that crowd's sentiments. And yet, now, Jesus is deliberately inciting this massive crowd. He is stirring them on into a huge demonstration, a great procession praising him as their king.

What is the point? Well at one level Jesus does it because he is king. He is the creator amid his creatures. As Jesus said to the Pharisees in Luke 19: 40 *"I tell you if they [the people] keep quiet, the stones will cry out!"* God is with his people! Not only that but as God he has come to save his people. Jesus is on the last stage of his ministry and he

has come to Jerusalem to conquer! He has come to save and heal. He is there to bring hope and joy! At another level Jesus is pushing the human events to make his saving work a reality. By entering Jerusalem in such a provocative way, he is provoking the scribes and Pharisees into action. They have already decided they want Jesus arrested. Well Jesus is pushing them into action. Not only the Pharisees but the crowd as well. Jesus is deliberately hyping up the crowd. Again why? When he fails to be a hero to save them from the oppression of Rome, their tension will swing from praise to bitterness. Then their shouts of 'Hosanna to the King' will turn to screams of 'Crucify him.' Jesus' death on the cross was no accident. It was what he came to earth for. And he made sure it happened! That's how determined was he to bring hope for those he cared for.

It is in this context that we must interpret what happens next as Jesus comes riding on the colt. We see the crowd goes wild. They spread their coats and palm leaves on the road making a royal way for the king. It is a wonderful, triumphant moment for Jesus. It's the highest point so far in his ministry. And yet, yet, look with me at Luke 19:41. While the crowds are singing and cheering, what is Jesus doing as he rides on the colt? He is weeping! Luke 19:41 *"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it."* The Greek means that Jesus was sobbing very deeply. His whole body was shaking. What in the world is going on? In his moment of triumph Jesus is undergoing something terrible. But what? Well as Jesus comes over the brow of the hill of the Mount of Olives, he sees all of Jerusalem before him. He sees the temple. He sees all the places of work, the homes. He thinks of all the families, their children. And he bursts into deep sobbing because he knows something! He knows that in 40 years everything he sees in front of him will be utterly destroyed. Luke 19:43-44 *"The days will come upon you when your enemy will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 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 recognise the time of God's coming to you."* In 70 AD a revolt by the Jews was crushed and Jerusalem was captured by Titus, who later became emperor. The temple was sacked and destroyed, and all Jerusalem burned. A million people were said to have died in the siege. Most starved to death, others were killed in the fighting, the streets literally flowed with blood. The Arch of Titus in Rome commemorates Titus' victory and the spoils he gained from Jerusalem. The building of the Colosseum was paid for by the plunder from Jerusalem. It was built by 20,00 Jewish slaves. You can sense the suffering of Jesus here. He loves these people. He sobs as he visualises their massacre. He wants to save them. But he already knows they are going to reject him.

Now Jesus could very easily have satisfied this volatile crowd. He was in a position that every politician loves to be in. The gospel of John in a parallel passage records the Pharisees complaining (John 12:19) *"See this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him"*. Jesus had so much going for him politically. He would have had a real mandate. There was no question that the Jews suffered badly under the Romans. There are still so many things today that need to be sorted out, so much injustice, people under brutal regimes, abuse and suffering. But we must realise that these awful situations are symptoms of a much bigger issue. And that is the relationship of humanity with God. All our struggles and suffering stem from our rebellion against our Creator. And unless there is reconciliation with God we will never know real peace. As we well know in Australia and in the Hills communities, we can have the best living standards in the world- yet still be miserable within ourselves. Jesus knew that. That's why he wasn't tempted by all his public appeal. There is no question that justice must be done. And it will be. But first justice must be done before God. Sin needs to be dealt with otherwise every one of us will stagger under the justice of God. That's why Jesus was there. That's why he pushed the crowd and the Pharisees. Jesus came to take the just punishment for sin; to conquer hell and death itself.

There is triumph and suffering for Jesus on Palm Sunday. His riding into Jerusalem was a fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9 *"Say to the daughter of Zion, see, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt...the foal of a donkey."* What the people sang were the words of Psalm 118:26 *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord"*. As Christians we too express our praise for Jesus, our God and Creator. We are also deeply struck by the compassion and care of our Lord. I read the story of a man who was deeply impressed when he read of Jesus sobbing. He realised by those tears how much Jesus really cared for the people. Think about it, Jesus cried over those he also knew would reject him. It's like Paul writes in Romans 5:8 *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us."* When we wonder 'Where is God in this', look at Jesus and grasp his gracious, loving heart.

Next weekend we have numerous services to come together and remember Jesus death and resurrection. Let's come prepared reflecting that it wasn't just the failure of that crowd back then that caused Jesus to suffer. It was also for our failure towards God that Jesus died. Let's not kid ourselves that we are much better these days. We too often put more emphasis on our politics of power and our personal wealth and materialism than our relationship with God. We too can be more concerned with good entertainment and the excited buzz of the crowd than really listening to the Word of God. Let's take some time to be real with God and humble ourselves. Let's understand

the heart of Jesus. Let's express our understanding and appreciation of what Jesus did by serving him as the king he really is.