

John 12:12-19  
Palm Sunday  
March 29, 2026

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

*You* are His disciples. Notice the text doesn't say, "His *apostles* did not understand these things," but "His *disciples*..." And, though not those of the *first* generation, you are his disciples of this generation. So, do you understand the things of Palm Sunday?

We think we do; we assume we do... especially when John writes that "these things had been written about him and had been *done to him*." Yes, we tend to recognize those two truths of Palm Sunday: (1) this was all prophesied – we know well the words of Zechariah, our Old Testament Reading, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold your king is coming to you; sitting on a donkey's colt!" (2) this was *done to him*... whether we think of that "being done" as referring to the crowd's exaltation of him in procession, "Hosanna to the King of Glory" or to the religious leaders' plot to kill him, as they despise him as the King of Glory... or perhaps Pilate pointing to him, standing with thorns and purple robe, this humble King of Glory.

But is that really a right understanding (or, perhaps, a *full* understanding) of Palm Sunday and the week to come?... that Jesus

was a hapless victim of fore-ordained and prophesied circumstances? Was He a Messiah destined for momentary praise, destined to suffer, but sort of powerless to do anything about it? That's not what makes this week solemn; and I would urge you not to trudge through this week weeping for the 'victim' Jesus.

Rather, what makes this week solemn is that He actively and willingly was obedient *in our place*, where we sinners should be righteously obedient, but – on account of the depths of the Fall – *couldn't* be, *wouldn't* be, *refused* to be, would *never* be found being obedient! That reality – our sin's participation in this week of history – that makes this week solemn, doesn't it? We know, in the week to come, how – though he died for our sins, his disciples sins – we know how those disciples who *said* they would suffer all, even death, rather than forsake Christ, we know how that ended. And we know that we are likewise "disciples" just as prone to such empty promises of our great faithfulness... symptomatic of the deep corruption and sin that dwells within, from the depths of our heart to the end of our finger tips.

It's not coincidence that this transition from Lent into Holy Week is a scene of the crowds praising Him who comes with steely determination, for this scene of a crowd full of 'the hopeful' is also a reminder of us, a picture of us... we who have spent the last number of weeks in our midweek series recognizing the depths of our sin, urging on New Adam to exercise the fruit of the Spirit, and yet, here

we are this morning again having to confess that we are poor, miserable sinners... and we like the crowds before us just need the One perfect substitute to come do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Paul's epistle to the Philippians says it this way, that Jesus "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Now, our minds race to the phrase "death on a cross;" the bulletin highlights the more complete phrase that is so well-known: "He humbled himself... to death on a cross." But tune yourself for a moment to that phrase *in the middle*, "by becoming **obedient**." To be obedient is not to be a passive, hapless victim. It's to be a willing servant.

We sinners hate that term, "obedience." It immediately handcuffs us and puts us under authority. But the Palm Sunday procession is all about obedience... not ours, in rightly worshiping the King of Glory in procession, but about *His* obedience, having humbled himself and fixed his face to Jerusalem and to the cross, to perfectly and obediently carry out the will of the Father.

Where the crowds sang His praises and focused not at all on his obedience, but his supposed *glory in the moment*... Jesus did not at all glory *in the moment*, but fixed his face to the cross – for there, in that perfect obedience, in that sacrificial death, was his true glory.

Imagine being in the crowd that day, but with the “insider’s knowledge” we are blessed 2000 years later to have regarding the theology of that day... imagine staring at that man upon the humble coat, his eyes fixed to Jerusalem, his intent fixed on the cross... imagine seeing that in him as he rides by, and imagine saying to yourself, “He’s really going to go through with it. He’s really going to the cross. Not some passive victim, but actively going to it!” Yes, of course He is, for he is the obedient Servant, the Suffering Servant, the beloved Servant of God.

It's an incredible phrase to ponder: “He became *obedient unto death*, even death upon the cross.” We often think of His 40 days in the wilderness (the text on the *first* Sunday in Lent) as His obedience; but here, Palm Sunday, the last Sunday in Lent bookends the whole Lenten season in Christ’s obedience as a servant, obedient to death, even death upon the cross. Isn’t this – His active obedience – just as much a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as our mental image of him ‘passively’ withstanding temptation or even being led (passive) to slaughter, as Isaiah says? Doesn’t the Christ say through the same prophet Isaiah,

“The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I **gave** my back to those who strike, and [I **gave**] my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.”

And this rightly brings us to solemn meditation; for we know He was obedient as the Messiah for those who weren't... including us, we who like to number ourselves among His disciples and yet so often in daily life say in our hearts, "I'm too important to be obedient; too busy to be obedient, too free to be expected to be obedient; I'm too proud to be obedient." Yes, we must repent of our sins, not as good people who sometimes do bad things; but as those who have no natural desire to be obedient.

In fact, a quick word study on this term "obedience" shows how it is used throughout the Scriptures. In Acts 7, Stephen uses the term to recall the stubborn Israelites: "Our Fathers *refused to obey* [God and His servant, Moses,]" Stephen says. Of course, Israel's disobedience is not unique to *them*, but is *ours* as well, inbred from Adam. How does St Paul describe it to the Romans? – "By the disobedience of one man (there's Adam), *the many* were made sinners" ... or, for the sake of the argument, they were made 'the disobedient' ... those whose inherited natural inclination is to disobey God's good and holy will for us.

That's the sinner from conception. That's you and me from birth, and the truth of all who want to honestly look in the mirror, honestly meditate upon God's Word. In fact, so much are we disobedient to the truth that we want to rewrite it (make it easier on ourselves) and re-explain it so that everyone is a victim of outside circumstances ("No one can hold this against me; they don't

understand!); and so, that's also how we tend to see Jesus riding into Jerusalem – a poor victim of outside circumstances.

But no, “By one man’s *disobedience* the many were made sinners; so by **the one man’s obedience** (Jesus, with face of steely resolve set to the cross)... by the one man’s **obedience** the many will be made righteous.”

Dissect that last phrase – “by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” First, “by the one man’s obedience.” Doesn’t Jesus himself recognize and testify to this when he says in the verses at the end of our text, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Notice, Jesus knew the purpose for which He came, and He willingly, obediently fulfilled His purpose – “I have come not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me,” says the obedient Son, even to the point of death on a cross, for the salvation of mankind and to the true glory of the Father.

Now, go back to those words to the Romans and that concluding phrase: “by the one man’s obedience **the many will be made righteous.**” How are we to understand *that*?

To be sure, in matters of justification and for a clear conscience before God, the One Man gave His life for all, that His obedience may cover and be credited to all sinners, that we may be *declared* righteous – “not only for our sins, but for the sins of the

whole world,” the apostle explains – so that all who believe in *Him* shall not perish but, having been declared righteous in him, shall have everlasting life. Listen to the same truth described in the letter to the Hebrews, using this word “obedience.” The writer explains,

“Although he was a son (in other words, though he took on true humanity), he learned **obedience** through what he suffered. And being perfected (meaning, having brought all things to completion on the cross – “It is finished, accomplished perfected”), he became the source of eternal salvation to all who **obey** him.”

Notice, the relationship. The obedience that *justifies* is Jesus’ obedience. And those who “obey him” are those who hope in His merit, His righteousness for salvation, those *baptismally cloaked* in his righteousness for salvation (“All who have been baptized in Christ have *put on* Christ”), and thus those who learn, cherish, and mimic his righteousness in the baptismal life... and those who do so are called his disciples. That’s you! And that’s what Palm Sunday and Holy Week was all about – Christ going to the altar of sacrifice as the spotless Lamb, that those who believe in Him may follow Him as His beloved sheep.

And this is why Paul’s famous words to the Philippians are perfect for this Sunday’s meditation:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God [though He was and is true God], He did not count [His] equality with God a thing to be grasped [or safeguarded], but emptied himself, by taking the

form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Yes, God would highly exalt the One who humbled himself in perfect obedience and fulfilled the Messianic mission. And, because of *His* obedience, you are *safe* in Christ Jesus.

So, safe in Him, have this mind of humble obedience among yourselves “*which is yours in Christ Jesus,*” the apostle says. It’s already yours in Christ Jesus – you’ve been baptized into it! – and thus yours to live in with a clear conscience and a humble obedience before the God who loves you. Yours because of Jesus and His perfect obedience, yours because He who has redeemed you has called and adopted you into baptismal obedience... not an obedience of passive bondage... but what St Peter calls an active obedience and joy of purified souls (1 Peter 1:14, 22), those souls *declared* righteous because of Jesus’ perfect obedience on your behalf, those souls *washed* in the blood of the Lamb, those souls now being *made* righteous by the ongoing, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

And it all flows from and depends upon the perfect obedience of the One who, even as He was praised by the crowds, set His steely resolve to the cross... for *this* purpose, that in Him God may be glorified and *you* may be saved.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son

And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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