

He Set His Face to Go to Jerusalem

by John Piper

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is not just a physical journey, but a spiritual one that requires us to follow him on the Calvary Road and live a life of love and service.

Duration: 30:36

Scripture: Luke 9:44, Luke 9:51, Romans 9:22

Topics: "Jerusalem"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper discusses the significance of Palm Sunday and the anticipation of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He describes the scene of believers waving palm branches and praises Jesus for dying for each one of them. The sermon then transitions to the scripture passage in Luke 9:51, where Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem. The Pharisees are threatened by Jesus' authority and popularity, leading them to ask Jesus to rebuke his disciples. However, Jesus affirms his kingship and declares that even if the disciples were silent, the stones would cry out in praise.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.DesiringGod.org. The scripture text for this morning is found in Luke chapter 9, beginning with verse 51. Luke 9, 51.

When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him. But the people would not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them? But he turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village. Luke describes the arrival of Jesus that last week in Jerusalem with words like this. As he was drawing near at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

And there's no doubt what those disciples had in their minds was happening at that moment, because they knew the Old Testament. They knew the prophecy of Zechariah, which said, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Lo, your king comes to you. Triumphant and victorious is he. Humble, lowly, riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass.

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off and he shall command peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the end of the earth. The Messiah has come.

That's what's happening on Palm Sunday. The king of Israel is arriving in the holy city and not just the king of Israel, but as the prophecy said, the king of the whole earth. Jerusalem was to be his capital city, and from here he would rule the whole world from the river that is the Nile to the ends of the earth.

Imagine what the disciples must have felt, how their hearts must have been pounding on that first entry into Jerusalem, how their hands must have started to sweat like soldiers in the trenches, just waiting for the bugle call when they would rush forth into battle. How would he do it? Would he muster the excitement of the crowds and storm their praetorium and bring the Roman government crashing down? Or would he call fire down from heaven and destroy the enemies of God? How are you going to do it, Jesus? What a day Palm Sunday must have been in the hearts of those disciples. A people's revolution on the way.

Now, the Pharisees had good reason to want to put this to an end. Double reason. On the one hand, the authority and the popularity of Jesus threatened their own authority and popularity among the people.

On the other hand, they feared a backlash from the Romans because of all this seditious talk about another king. And so they say to Jesus, teacher, rebuke your disciples. And Jesus answers, I tell you, if they were quiet, the stones would cry out.

It had to be said no more talk of silence. Now the hour has come. The authority of the Pharisees.

It's over. If the Romans come, let them come. My time is up.

No more admonitions to silence. Now, to be sure, the understanding that the disciples had of the kingship of Jesus was flawed. But at root, in essence, it was true.

Hastening events would correct soon enough this misconception that they had. Jesus was happy. Jesus was happy that they recognized the essence of the truth.

He is the king. The kingdom he is inaugurating will spread from the river to the ends of the earth. It will be a kingdom of peace over the whole earth.

And Palm Sunday is a foretaste of that great day. Did you know that only John tells us palm branches were used? Did you know that kids only in the gospel of John do we read that palm branches were waved and thrown? And, you know, the the author who wrote about palm branches one other time was John. And you know where Revelation seven.

And this is what he said at the end of the world. I looked and behold, a great multitude which no man could number from every tribe and nation and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the land dressed in white robes with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice. Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the land.

Those are the only two places of palm waving. And is not then in John's mind Palm Sunday a foretaste of the great eternal Sabbath Palm Sunday? I like to think of all our worship here at Bethlehem as rehearsal

for eternal worship in heaven. I know that when I was at that rehearsal for the Thanksgiving festival.

There was a kind of tension in the air because we knew in just an hour this place would be full. That's what it's going to be next Sunday night, too, at four o'clock, you all can come and sing, by the way. There's something about a rehearsal that is full of electricity when we know something great is going to be the fulfillment of it.

And that's the way every worship service is. If we set our eyes on the day when from Bangladesh and Poland and Egypt and Australia and Iceland and Cameroon and Japan and all the nations and tribes under heaven, there will be millions of representatives of God's believers there who hold up their branches and wave them. And can you picture it? Try to picture Jesus seated on a throne and myriad upon myriad palm branches waving like a sea.

I don't know if you've ever like I did one summer when I was surveying, looked out over an Illinois field of wheat when it was green and how it weighed and changed colors in the sun. Jesus is going to look out over millions of believers, waving their palm branches, a sea of life and beautiful, shimmering praise. And then like a thousand Russian choruses, the ascent of praise to the throne.

And Jesus, I can see him just sitting there watching. And tears start trickling down his face because he died for every one of them and bought them with his own precious blood. Won't that be a day? And this is a rehearsal for that day.

And I'm eager to be a part of this and even more eager to be a part of that. But had Jesus taken the throne that first Palm Sunday, nobody would be robed in white. Nobody would be waving palm branches in the age to come because the cross had to come.

He had to purchase us for that great day. And that's what the disciples didn't yet grasp as they waved their branches through their coats down. Go back to Luke nine with me.

Jesus tried. He tried to make them see what was coming. Luke nine is just full of predictions.

Let's go back to verse 22 and see how he tried to get the disciples ready for the true meaning of Palm Sunday. Verse 22 of Romans nine, the son of man, you can see him kind of looking at them with wistfulness in his face. The son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes and be killed on the third day and be raised.

And then look over to verse forty four. Let these words sink into your ears for the son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men. But the very next verse.

They did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them that they should not perceive it, and they were afraid. To ask him about this saying. And therefore, the final journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and that final entry was misunderstood by the disciples.

They thought he's moving in for control. Now he's taking the reins of the earth. And that was true.

But they couldn't see that the victory Jesus was going to gain over sin, Satan, all the enemies of righteousness and joy. He was going to gain precisely through suffering and dying on the cross. The kingdom that they had thought would come immediately, it says in Luke 19, 11.

I thought it was coming immediately remain to be established thousands of years in the future. And that misunderstanding about Palm Sunday led to a misunderstanding about discipleship. And that's what I want us to take heed to this morning, because I don't want anybody at Bethlehem to make that same mistake that the disciples made.

And I think it's being made today. A misunderstanding of Palm Sunday is leading to a misunderstanding of discipleship. Look at Luke 9, 51.

This is a text about how not to understand Palm Sunday. When the days grew near for him to be received up. Now, take notice that Jesus is not taken off guard here.

Days are fulfilled. He is fulfilling a plan. Nobody takes my life from me.

I lay it down. Nobody takes it from me. I have the power to lay it down and to take it again.

He saw the time arriving. And he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Now, when Jesus sets his face like Flint to go to Jerusalem, it means something very different to him than it does to his disciples, doesn't it? Look back just a few verses to verse 46.

And you can see the visions that danced in the disciples heads. An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. Jerusalem and glory lie just around the corner.

What's it going to be like when he sets up his throne? Who's going to be his right hand in his left hand? Oh, is this going to be a great day? How long? Just a few weeks, months, maybe. I think I'm going to be the greatest. I think I'm going to be his right hand in Jerusalem.

But for Jesus, it meant something very different. He said in Luke 13, 33, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following. For it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.

It meant certain death. He set his face to go to Jerusalem. That is, he set his face to die.

Here's the way he predicted it. He had no illusions of a quick, heroic death. Luke 18, 32.

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem. And everything that is written about the son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered into the hands of Gentiles.

He will be mocked, shamefully treated, spit upon, whipped, and they will kill him. When Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, that's what he set his face to go to. Now, remember, when you think about Jesus' resolution to die, he was a man of like nature as we.

He shrunk back from pain. If he put his hand on a hot iron, he pulled it off and cried. He could have wanted to be married, have children, grandchildren, esteem in the community.

He had a mother, brothers and sisters. He had places in the mountains. To turn his back on all that for the sake of spitting and whipping and nails and thorns in his head wasn't easy for Jesus.

It was hard, hard as it would be for anybody here. And when he set his face to go to Jerusalem, he set his face against all that for death, for our sake. And greater love has no man than this, that he laid down his life for his friends.

It wasn't easy. Use Holy Week to try to put yourself back there, because I don't know any other way for you to begin to feel how much he loves you. So he sets out for Jerusalem through Samaria, enemy territory for Jews.

He sent messengers ahead of him, the text says, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him. And the people would not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem. What an irony.

It was all for their sake. It doesn't really matter now whether the opposition in Samaria was because he was a Jew and Samaritans hated Jews. Jews hated Samaritans.

It doesn't matter whether it was because they recognized in him a glimmer of the Messiah and the Messiah was going to set up his kingdom in Jerusalem. And they don't like Jerusalem. They like the mountain of Gerizim.

What matters is that already before he gets to the cross, opposition is set in, rejection. And then the focus shifts to the disciples and to the response, especially of James and John. Lord, you want us to call fire to come down and consume them? The sons of thunder.

Jesus had named them that back in Mark three. Now, I take this very seriously because my dad named me after one of these sons of thunder. And I suspect that if I had been there, I would have probably said what John said, Jesus, we're on the way to victory.

Nothing can stop us now. Let the fire fall. Let the judgment begin.

We're going to set up the kingdom in Jerusalem. Come on. And Jesus turns.

And rebukes them, Piper, shut up, you talk too much. You you speak without thinking, you don't know who you are, you don't understand discipleship yet. Don't talk so quickly.

Good word for me, maybe for you. What does this mean? It means, first of all, a mistaken idea about Palm Sunday and the trip to Jerusalem leads to a mistaken view of discipleship. If Jesus had come to set up an earthly rule, I think it would have been very appropriate for James and John to say, let the judgment begin.

That'll be said one of these days when Jesus comes in flaming fire with his holy angels. But if Jesus came not to judge the first time, but to suffer and to say. Not appropriate, John, not appropriate, James, not yet, not in this age.

Here's a question for all of us. Does discipleship mean deploying God's missiles of righteous indignation? Or does discipleship mean following him on the Calvary road that leads to suffering and death? That's an important question in America today. The answer of the whole New Testament is this.

The surprise about Jesus, the Messiah, is that he came the first time not to establish an earthly throne and to bring judgment. First, there was to be suffering, love, death, salvation. Then in the age to come, righteousness reigning across the earth and judgment and a throne in the world.

And the surprising thing, therefore, about what it means to follow a victorious Messiah in this age is. Not vindictiveness, not vengeance, not returning evil for evil, but the same road of suffering and love and death and salvation. If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him.

Now, what James and John had to learn, what we all have to learn is that Jesus journey to Jerusalem must be our journey. Now, here I want to try to correct a widespread misunderstanding, I think. Maybe you're not influenced by it.

I hope not. But I think there are many who are tempted to reason just the opposite. Namely, since Jesus suffered so much.

I don't need to. He took my place. We're free to go straight to the head of the class, skip all the exams.

He suffered so that I could have comfort. He died so I could live. He bore abuse so that I could be esteemed.

He gave up the treasures of heaven that I might accumulate the treasures of earth. He bought the kingdom so that I could enter it and enjoy all of its benefits here in this earth right now. That's not true.

That's not biblical reasoning. It goes against the plain teaching of the context. Look back again to verse twenty three of Luke nine.

If any man would come after me, let him let him take his electric chair on his back and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

When Jesus set his face to walk the Calvary Road, he was not merely taking our place. He was setting our pace. He's not merely our substitute.

He is our pace setter, our way shower for this world. If we seek to secure our lives by returning evil for evil or surrounding our lives with comforts and luxuries in the face of grave suffering in the world, we'll lose them. Jesus died to save us from the power and the punishment of sin, not from the suffering and the sacrifices of simplicity for love.

Look at verses fifty seven and fifty eight. Now I'm John. I've just said let the fire fall.

Jesus has just rebuked me, and now he tells me what mistake I made as they were going along the road. A man said to him, let's call him Piper. A man said to him, I'll follow you wherever you go.

Jesus said to him, Piper, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests. The son of man has nowhere to lay his head. Now, why do you suppose he says that to John Piper? I think the children could give the answer very easily.

It's because he expects John Piper to be like him. He expects John Piper to know it's costly. To follow Jesus.

The Calvary Road is not the road of worldly prosperity. Now, that doesn't mean that disciples sleep standing up. But.

It does say something about whether. About how many beds Piper invests in to sleep on. How many roofs over his head he has, how he handles his portfolio, how much luxury and comfort he surrounds himself with.

In a world of desperation. Brothers and sisters. With 16000.

People groups yet to hear the gospel and millions of children due to no fault of their own starving. And many people in our own land without jobs and much emptiness. It is unconscionable for the disciples of Jesus to pursue the American dream.

Unconscionable. You know what excites me about Bethlehem Baptist Church? I see so many signs in you that you have an alternative dream. Lots of you.

A dream of breaking loose from the shackles of this self-serving consumer culture in which we live. Freeing yourself for love and service in the world. A dream of doing something radical and surprising, just breaking loose and letting it fly for Jesus sake.

It's rumbling in many of your hearts. Some of you have already begun to do it. Doing something radical with your house.

Doing something radical with your income. Doing something radically loving with your car. Doing something radically loving with your free evenings.

Doing something radically loving with your portfolio. Not being conformed to this world in which we live. Some of you are discovering the wonderful freedom from the love of things.

And you know what goes hand in hand with freedom from finding your security in things? Freedom from vengeance. Freedom from wanting return evil for evil. The more security you find in God rather than in things, the less inclination you feel to return evil for evil.

You've got less to lose. The more this happens, the more Bethlehem Baptist Church is going to shine. It's what Jesus meant when he said, let your light shine.

It's what he meant when he said, put Bethlehem on a hill. Don't put any bushel over it. Good deeds.

Of love. Out of sacrifice, not conformity to this world. Now let me close with a personal word about where I think we are here.

We've just come through seven weeks of messages directed mainly at unbelievers. And I gave invitations at the end of every one of those services. And I don't know yet what God may make of those messages in eternity.

I know for myself. That I love Jesus Christ and count him very precious. For his truth.

For his gift of eternal life. For his taking away my guilt. For his giving authenticity.

For his coming and being present in my family. For his all satisfying spiritual beauty. God ministered to me in those last seven weeks very, very much.

And I want so much to follow him on the Calvary Road. And I want to take all of you with me. And I want us to reach out our arms and gather lots more people.

Take them along. But my heart tells me that it's a mistake to preach to unbelievers on Sunday morning. And to give regular invitations.

You know why? Because here's one of the several reasons. I think it builds into your minds and mine. These two ideas.

Church is where people get saved. And preachers are the people who win them to the Lord. And both of those ideas are wrong and self-destructive in the long run.

Church is for praising God. And for stirring each other up to live radically loving lives in the world. And if we praise God from the heart on Sunday.

And live radically different loving lives during the week. We will be irresistible invitations to Jesus Christ. More powerful than any hymn at the end of any sermon.

And that's what I want to see happen. If Christ set his face to go to Jerusalem. To die for you.

And for me. Then must we not in this service. And evening service.

And Wednesday service. And Sunday schools. And all your small groups.

Must we not week after week. Empower each other to set our faces like flint. To resist all the temptations.

To retaliate. And the temptations of riches. And to set our face on the Calvary Road.

With the King of Kings. Let's pray together. Almighty God.

Do it at Bethlehem I pray. If we are not a distinct people. Aliens and exiles in the world.

All our talk of winning others will be dead. Winning them to what? A little veneer of piety while we live just like everybody else. With all the same goals.

Oh Christ undo it. Make us free. Make us radical saints.

Make us see the implications of cross bearing. Of having no place to lay our heads. May we know the man we follow.

In his name we pray. Amen. Let's affirm that together with hymn number 504.

504. Must Jesus bear the cross alone. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper.

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