

The Beginning of the End

Text: John 12:1-33

Our text brings us into the final week of our Lord's life on the earth. While standing before Pilate in John 18:37 we read, "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." When our Lord came into the earth, He split time. We date everything by BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, Latin for "in the year of the Lord," in other words from the birth of our Lord and beyond).

Although this final week of Jesus marks the end of His brief 33½ years, it was only the beginning of now over 2,000 years of the most influential life to have ever entered the world. Let's go back to that week.

1. THE COMBINATION OF DEATH AND LIFE

John 12:1-11

In this group of verses, we observe Mary, ever the worshipful follower of Jesus, has insightfully anointed Jesus with the precious oil, representing a savings of a lifetime. The unconverted Judas complains that waste was made, revealing his thieving covetousness. Then Jesus seizes the moment to make a statement about Mary's insightful proclamation, i.e., Christ's reason for coming, which was to die for our sins. In verses 9 through 11 we see that many had come to Bethany to see the man (Lazarus) whom Jesus raised from the grave. How very weird, the Scripture says, in John 12:10, "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death." Not only did the religious leaders seek to put Jesus to death, they also wanted Lazarus to go back to the grave, "Because that by reason of him [Lazarus] many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus" (John 12:11).

Jesus is anointed, representing His death. Resurrected Lazarus is present at the same event. This brings to mind Philippians 3:10: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." How true, the death of Jesus brings life to others. It is only appropriate that in the beginning of the week of the Passover, death and life have met. I Corinthians 15:3, 4 gives the definition of the Gospel: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

2. THE CONTRAST OF THE CROWDS

John 12:12-19

The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem brings together the group of disciples who follow Jesus wherever He leads and they are joined just beyond the summit of the Mount of Olives by a crowd from the city. So the group from Bethany and the greater crowd from Jerusalem meet as Jesus approaches the city.

The disciples are the ones who fetch the donkey and her colt and who place their personal garments on the colt, lifting Jesus upon the back of the beast and then they lovingly place their clothes on the path that our Lord was about to ride over, showing by symbol they are placing themselves like their clothes at the feet of the King, to be at His disposal for what ever purposes He chooses (Luke 19:29-36). Jesus said in John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Then our Lord went on to teach the beautiful relationship of friendship combined with servitude (John 15:14-20). This was exemplified in the garments thrown upon the colt and those thrown on our Lord's path.

Now we find the multitude from the city will join the disciples and Jesus as the descent from the Mount of Olives takes place. John 12:12, 13: "On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord." This is the fulfillment of Psalm 118:22-29. As a matter of fact, these are the words you hear on the first Palm Sunday, prophesied 1,000 years before: "Save now [Hosanna], I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD" (Psalm 118:25, 26).

There was a unique Jewish custom of the usage of the palm branches. These were not the freshly broken branches that were layered in the path of our Lord for the donkey to ride over along with the people's garments. These palm branches had been left over from the Feast of the Tabernacles. When first cut, these branches were green and tight, but by now they had dried and opened up. As the Jewish people prepared for Passover, they would get their houses immaculately clean and a main cleaning tool of choice was the dried branch left from the Feast of the Tabernacles. They would use these branches like brooms to sweep their houses clean. As they raised these palms to our Lord, they were in essence saying, "Lord, clean up Your house and set up Your kingdom on earth!" This was no small crowd. It was estimated by one source that five million people gathered for the Passover for this celebration. This is why the enemies of Christ were getting nervous, "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him" (John 12:19).

It was at the convergence of these two crowds that our Lord beholds the glistening Temple in the background and weeps as revealed in Luke 19:41-44.

3. THE CONFLUENCE OF TURBULENCE AND TRANQUILITY

Matthew 21:12-14; John 12:20-33

When the Lord Jesus entered the Temple, He was angry. He was angry at the way the men, who were supposed to be spiritual leaders, were taking advantage of the people of God. He flipped the moneychanger's tables over and the seats of those who sold doves. The people were required to have a sacrifice. Roman coins were not permitted into the Temple because the image of Caesar was considered a graven image, making the very coin a piece of idolatry. So the

moneychangers were trading the coins of Rome for a Temple coin with a rate of exchange that severely took advantage of the people. Jesus tells us that the House of God is to be a place where worshippers feel such a close contact with God that they will be encouraged to pray and expect God to answer. Instead of helping the people seek the Lord, the so-called spiritual leaders had struck deals under the tables with the moneychangers in a form of embezzlement.

We see the Lord in turbulent thunderstorm fury driving the wicked from the temple and yet in contrast we read immediately following this episode, a most tranquil moment: Matthew 21:14: "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them." Although many were shaken to the core of their being, just moments later the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind are perfectly comfortable in the presence of our Lord (Luke 14:21).

And then to the best of our understanding the next scene opens with these words, "Sir, we would see Jesus." These are the words of the Greeks who are forbidden to enter the inner sanctums of the Jewish Temple and are now fulfilling John 1:11-12. And for those who find and see Jesus, they will experience a tranquility that surpasses any peace on earth (John 14:27). In John 12:20-33, the Lord Jesus now describes His mission - the reason for His incarnation. He is the corn of wheat that must fall to the ground and die to bring forth much fruit. He must be lifted upon the cross to bring salvation. This is why the King has come. His first throne must be the cross before the throne of David. His first crown is made of thorns before the royal diadem. Although we have asked you to contemplate the beginning of the end of Christ's life on the earth, this week that culminates in Christ's death, burial and resurrection marks the beginning of the end of a life of hopeless desperation for all who believe on Jesus!

-Pastor Pope-