

“Come Lord Jesus”
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Matthew 21:1-11

God is passionate about you. That means, God has an ardent and zealous desire to see you live an abundant life with God and others under the kingship/lordship of Jesus. Therein lies the good news of Palm Sunday.

God is writing a story of salvation in you. And you get to participate. What forms the storyline? God saving you. Think about that. The Jewish people were saved from bondage in Egypt. Jesus’ journey into Jerusalem continued God’s plan of salvation, which began at creation and was further revealed through the covenant made to Abraham, the giving of the Ten Commandments, and the promise of a Messiah through the lineage of King David. God’s plan of salvation culminated in Jesus’ birth, baptism, earthly suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. Audrey West, Adjunct Professor of New Testament Luther School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois writes, “In spite of present circumstances, however threatening they may be, this testimony is sure: God’s love endures.”¹ Our lives are set in the context of God’s steadfast love. Yet, circumstances can cause a misunderstanding between a follower of Jesus and God.

Obedience is responding faithfully even in misunderstanding. Jesus’ journey on a donkey into Jerusalem, didn’t fit the people’s view of a successful king/lord. Jesus didn’t create a powerful nation and subdue the oppressor. Instead, Jesus led as one oppressed, espousing selflessness and sacrifice. From the Gospel reading, Jesus defined his

¹Audrey West in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 148.

kingship/lordship by loving and serving the least. Keith Hartsell from Wheaton, Illinois relates this story,

I was with a friend a few years ago in California, and as we were driving around the busy streets of L.A., I noticed that his cell phone was locked with an unusual password—*pro nobis*. I asked him what *pro nobis* meant and why he chose that for a password. He told me it was Latin, and it meant “For Us” and then he suddenly started choking up. I thought, *why would those two Latin words cause so much emotion?* He composed himself and then explained that after walking through deep personal pain, true healing came when he learned that God is “for us”—or the Latin phrase *pro nobis*. My friend said that after his parents’ divorce, a season when he assumed that God didn’t care or that God had given up on him, he finally found hope through those two simple words. When he decided to believe that God was *pro nobis*, that God had even sent Christ to die for him, he could then decide to lay down his life for others.²

Living a life of selflessness and sacrifice communicates most powerfully how God is for us.

Without any doubt, Psalm 118 sounds a clarion call of how God is “for us!” Jewish people read this psalm at Passover recalling God’s deliverance of them from slavery in Egypt and leading them into freedom. Christians read it to commemorate God’s faithfulness to the church and our requisite call to be faithful. Jesus does not measure up to the traditional and accepted understanding of king/lord. However, Jesus clears up any misunderstanding of “king/lord” and answers the question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Bad things happen to good and bad people.

In this regard, Mark 21:1-11 reframes how humanity is to experience God being “for us” ... through being saved. On the way into Jerusalem, Jesus defined the title, “lord/king.” He identifies the title rather than it him.³ It was the beginning of the week of Passover. Passover is the ritual observance of the Jewish people that celebrates God’s

²This illustration found on preachingtoday.com

³Adapted from Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 136.

deliverance of their faith community from Egypt. The Christian community has appropriated and adapted the ritual observance of Passover as it sought to understand and interpret the life and death of Jesus Christ. Jerusalem is not just any city. It is the city of God and the faithless city, the city of hope and the city of oppression, the city of joy and the city of pain.⁴ As Jesus began his journey to Jerusalem, a multitude of people began praising God with great joy and loud voices, because of the great deeds of power that they had witnessed Jesus do. The people were shouting, “Hosanna! “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!”⁵ “Hosanna” is the Hebrew for “O Lord, grant salvation.”⁶

How we live our lives as students, mothers, sons, fathers, daughters, employees, employers, deacons, neighbors, pastors, grandparents, cousins, elders, worshipers, and friends is critical for the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. We are bringers of salvation. We clear up misunderstandings of what church is and isn’t, what being a Christian is and isn’t, and why good and bad things fall on all humans, “good and bad.”

As Christians, our actions say more than our words. Peter J. Gomes former Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard University, now deceased, writes, “Given that... the disparities between the rich and the poor increase rather than lessen... [might we] unite in a social wisdom that goes beyond the Bible...into a whole gospel for

⁴Adapted from Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 5.

⁵Matthew 11:21c-e is almost a direct translation of Psalm 118:26

⁶In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of John W. Wurster, O. Wesley Allen Jr., and Diane G. Chen as found in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 109-110, 111-113, and 113-115.

the whole person?”⁷ Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem demonstrated obedience is responding faithfully even in misunderstanding.

Come Lord Jesus. Demonstrate that obedience is responding faithfully even in misunderstanding. Let’s live a life of selflessness and sacrifice to clarify a misunderstanding of success. John Piper in *Think* writes, “...make all your thinking an act of love for people...Thinking that does not aim to display Christ and build up people is not worthy of God’s approval.”⁸ Psalm 118:1, 25 read, “O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever...Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!”⁹ Remember, obedience is responding as faithfully as you can even in misunderstanding. Quoting Jim Tozer, former pastor at Covenant Presbyterian Church in West Lafayette, Indiana, “Give as much of yourself as you can to as much of Jesus Christ as you understand.” God is *pro nobis*, “for us!” Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person and Livestream congregations)
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⁷Peter J. Gomes, *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*, (New York City, New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 186.

⁸John Piper, *Think* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 184.