**Palm Sunday**

**March 28, 2021**

**Text—Psalm 149**

The stage was set. The triumphal entry was about to happen. Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Christ, the king of Israel, was about to process into the holy city of Jerusalem. At long last, God’s people would be welcoming their king into their capitol city. Finally, he would come in and take his place on his throne, deposing Herod and raising an army to drive the Romans out of Israel forever. The people had been waiting for this moment for many decades, and it was now coming to pass. Soon, their foreign rulers would be defeated, and their corrupt government would be overthrown. It was time for God’s anointed one to usher in an everlasting age of justice, peace, and prosperity for a reunited kingdom of Israel.

But, interestingly enough, Jesus of Nazareth did not process into Jerusalem like a conquering king. Sure, there were plenty of people who came out to meet him and cheer his arrival, but the procession itself was not what you might expect a king’s procession to look like. Jesus was not surrounded by servants and soldiers, but rather by a ragtag group of peasants and fishermen. He was not wearing a fabulous royal robe, but rather he wore the simple garb of a Galilean commoner. And he was not riding on a powerful warhorse, but rather on a young donkey’s colt. The image of this procession did not project power, but rather weakness. It did not project wealth, but rather poverty. It did not project glory, but rather humility. And yet this Jesus was supposed to be the conquering king whom God had sent to redeem his chosen people. Jesus was not who the people of Jerusalem thought that the Christ would be, but he was indeed the one whom they would receive.

No wonder, then, that many of the people rejected Jesus as their king. No wonder that they refused to believe that this poor, weak, and humble man could be the Savior of their nation. How could such a man go up against the might of Rome and prevail? How could such a man hope to govern the chosen people of God and bring them eternal peace and prosperity? There was absolutely no way that Jesus could be the real deal, no way that he could possibly be the Christ they had been longing and waiting for. So they did what they should do to any usurper: they got rid of him. Only a few days after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the religious leaders arrested him by night, convicted him of blasphemy, and had him sentenced to death on a cross. Hours later, he was carrying that cross down the streets of Jerusalem, enduring beatings from the soldiers and insults from the crowds. He then was nailed to the cross and lifted up high, so that everyone could see his suffering and humiliation. Eventually, of course, he died, and then he finally had received what was coming to him. Anybody who would presume to be the Lord’s anointed one when he so obviously wasn’t deserved to be treated this way. God would never choose someone so humble and ordinary to be the Savior of his people, and it was blasphemy to claim that he would. Such a thought went against everything the Israelites were expecting, so it could not be entertained even for a moment.

And yet, if the people who rejected Jesus had thought about it for a minute, they might have realized that Jesus was maybe a little bit more like God’s anointed one than they originally thought. Didn’t God have a history of choosing the humble and meek to serve his purposes and accomplish great things for his kingdom? Abraham started out as a nobody who lived in Ur, yet God brought him to the Promised Land and told him that his descendants would inherit it. Isaac and Jacob were the younger sons of their fathers, yet God chose them to be the bearers of his promise. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt, yet God rescued them from Pharaoh and gave them victory over his armies. Moses the prophet was a cowardly murderer with a speech impediment, yet God chose him to lead his people and give them his Law. David was the youngest of his brothers and a shepherd boy, yet God allowed him to defeat the giant Goliath and become the greatest earthly king that Israel would ever have. The kingdom of Israel itself, even during its heyday, was never a match for the mighty armies of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon. The entire history of the Israelites was filled with humble, seemingly unimportant people being chosen by God to do extraordinary things.

Even in our psalm for today, Psalm 149, God makes it clear that he cares greatly about the humble. Verse 4 reads: “The Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.” It was the humble and lowly, not the great and powerful, who were singled out for special attention and mercy from God. And that’s how it was with Jesus. Jesus was the son of a poor carpenter from the backwater town of Nazareth. His followers were uneducated fishermen, tax collectors, and political extremists. He rode a donkey into Jerusalem. And he was convicted of blasphemy and executed by the very people he had supposedly come to save. From the perspective of the world, there was nothing about Jesus that made him a worthy king, no qualities he possessed that made him capable of leading armies or ruling nations. But as the psalm says, “The Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.” God had chosen Jesus, his very own Son, to be the Christ that his people had been awaiting for centuries. It didn’t matter where he was from, what he looked like, or how powerful he appeared to be; God was with him, and that was enough. So when Jesus was crucified and killed, he did not stay dead. Rather, he rose again on the third day, showing the world that he was indeed the Christ and that God had chosen him to be the king of his people. God adorned his humble Son Jesus with salvation: salvation from his enemies and from the power of death itself. Jesus’ humility may have made him worthless in the eyes of the world, but God judges by different standards, and in God’s eyes, Jesus was infinitely worthy to be his anointed one and chosen king.

And it got even better for Jesus. Psalm 149 continues on: “Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them to judgment written! This is honor for all his godly ones.” Jesus may have started out as a humble servant, but he certainly didn’t stay that way. After he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of God the Father, ruling over all creation by his mighty power. He creates all things and guides all things. And on the last day, he will return in glory, the glory that he laid aside to die on the cross, but that he has now taken up again. All people everywhere will see Jesus, fall on their knees, and acknowledge that he is the Son of God and ruler of the entire universe. He will give salvation and eternal life to those who trusted in him, but those who did not will be like the kings and nations that God gave into the hands of the people of Israel. He will execute vengeance and punishments upon them, they who rejected him and persecuted his people. This is indeed honor for the Lord’s godly ones, and the most godly one of them all is Jesus. He will be the instrument of God’s justice on the last day, and then his journey from humble servitude to glorious lordship will be complete.

Of course, though, this psalm is not just about Jesus. Rather, it is about all people who trust in the Lord, especially those who are of humble estate, those who are despised and rejected by the world. It is about everyone who has trusted in the true God despite all of the hardships they encounter in this life: all sicknesses, sorrows, and pains. It is about all those who refused to bend the knee toward the gods of this age and have suffered for their faithfulness to Christ. This psalm gives encouragement to everyone who is dismayed by the dominance in this world of powers and philosophies that reject God and his Word. It gives comfort to everyone who has been mocked, scorned, or abused by those who do not believe in Jesus and do not recognize his identity as the Son of God. And it gives hope to all believers who are aching for a life beyond that of this world, where God and his people are despised and unbelief reigns supreme. In short, this psalm was written for the church, for us. It reminds us that no matter how bad things may seem to get in this life, how much we or other believers may suffer, there remains God’s everlasting promise of salvation. On the last day when Jesus returns, we will rise again from the dead just as he did, and we will sit in judgment over the world just as he will. Those who have rejected Jesus and persecuted his people will be punished, while those of us who have trusted in him will be granted eternal life in his kingdom. Jesus may have been the first humble servant of God who was adorned with salvation, but we who believe in him will certainly receive it too. God has promised that in Jesus, all the ordinary and unimportant people of the world will find a Lord who cares for them and has special regard for them. The world may value power, strength, and wealth, but God values humility and faithfulness. He valued it in his Son Jesus, and he values it in all of you as well.

Therefore, on this Palm Sunday, we will rejoice with the crowds who saw their humble king enter Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. We will sing “Hosanna in the highest” as they did, and we will also sing the first two verses of Psalm 149: “Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly! Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their king!” We will certainly rejoice in the humble Son of God, because we know that his eye is on the humble and ordinary people of this world. He did not consider himself to be above us, but rather took on our human flesh and submitted himself to death on a cross, all to save us from our sins. Though he deserved his exalted throne in heaven, he willingly laid that aside and became a humble servant, our humble servant. Through his death and resurrection, we will stand with him in judgment over the world, and then we will be exalted to eternal life in the kingdom of God, just as he has been. Life on this earth wasn’t so great for Jesus, but in the end, he was rewarded for his faithfulness and humble submission to his Father. Let us, then, walk that same road of humility and obedient faith, and we too will be exalted out of the sins and sorrows of this world to everlasting, glorious life with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.