

April 9, 2006
Palm Sunday

"The Mindset of Jesus as He Goes to the Cross"

PHILIPPIANS 2: 6-11

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If I were directing a movie about the life of Jesus, I would find it very difficult to know how to portray the face of Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. Do you show the face of Jesus sad as he sees the people waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord." Later that week the crowd would shout out, "Crucify him. Crucify him." Or do you show joy on the face of Jesus as he waves to the crowd the way a popular hero might wave to the crowd that loves him? Or do you show fierce determination etched on his face as he rides forward to his death and difficult task of making a payment for the sin of the world?

No artist was there to capture the face of Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem. We don't have a picture, but we have words that tell us what was in the heart and mind of Jesus. If you know what was in his heart, you can imagine what was written all over his face. The words just read to you speak about Jesus having a love so great that he was willing to humble himself and become obedient to death, even death on the cross. These words also tell us that in the heart of Jesus there was the joy of knowing the time has come to be exalted once again to the glory he had with his Father from all eternity. Let's look at "The Mindset of Jesus as He Went to the Cross."

Jesus wanted to humble himself

What we see in Jesus is a desire to humble himself or empty himself so he can give his life for us. The Apostle Paul says of Jesus, "Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Jesus was "in very nature of God." He looked like God, not in his outward appearance of course, but by what he did, especially the miracles that included raising people from the dead. The prophet Isaiah said of Jesus, "He had no beauty of majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men." Remember what Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" One look at Jesus and he drew the hasty conclusion, "This man cannot be a king. This is a joke."

When we see Jesus this morning with the eyes of faith given to us by the Holy Spirit we see him as Paul saw him after his heart was changed. Jesus is equal with God the Father.

The religious leaders proclaimed him worthy of death because he dared to claim he was God's Son. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, because it was already his from all eternity.

What was in the mind of Jesus as he went to the cross? He rode in glory as Lord and God from all eternity. He also rode with desire to make himself nothing, become a servant, and give his life for us. When we think of God, we think of power, yet Jesus was willing to set aside his power as the creator of the universe. Hands that held billions of stars in the universe, held onto the mane of the donkey to keep from falling. He stumbled under the weight of the cross. When we think of God we think of glory. Jesus set aside his glory to be spit on by the Roman soldiers, rejected and despised by people. When we think of God we think of someone to whom we can pray. Jesus prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. The book of Hebrews says, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death."

Jesus, Lord and God, from all eternity, did not just look like a man. He was fully human. He was not like an actor on the stage or a clown who dresses up to play a role. The other day I saw a clown coming out of Smart and Final. He was wearing a clown nose and he had a clown's hair and a clown's clothes. Underneath the make up, the wig and the clothes was an ordinary human being. Jesus was not wearing the clothes of a human being, or pretending to be a servant when he rode into Jerusalem, or pretending to suffer when he cried from the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" It was all very real. He was not like angels who took on human form and appeared to people. Our Lord and God made himself nothing. He took on the very nature of a servant. "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us." The more we look into the heart and mind of Jesus and think about this, the more we are overwhelmed at how much Jesus loves us.

What was in the mind of Jesus as he went into Jerusalem? He had to be thinking of the cross. Jesus became "obedient" to death. It would not be long before Jesus would pray in the Garden, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, not my will but yours be done." No other religion in the world teaches something like this. That is why we believe the Christian faith is the only hope of salvation for people. Other religions have great leaders who offer advice to people on how to improve their lives and make themselves acceptable to God. Their prophets and religious leaders are honored because they point people to how they can save themselves. There is no one like Jesus, who is God from all eternity and takes on the form of the servant. It was Jesus who prayed, "Not my will be yours be done." It was Jesus who said, "The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many." The book of Hebrews tells us, "For the joy set before he endured the cross and the shame."

What do we see in the mind and heart of Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem? We see a Shepherd who was willing and eager to give his life for sheep who were lost. That includes all of us. When I read the words of Ezekiel 34 it is hard not to get emotional. The Lord describes your situation in life and mine as sheep that are scattered. "So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill." I read these words and with tears in my eyes say, "That describes me! That describes me! Then the Lord says, "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them." What do

we see in the heart of Jesus and on his face as he goes to the cross? We see Jesus love the sheep who want to wander.

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder. The Shepherd dies for sheep that love to wander. The Master pays the debt his servants owe him. Who would not know him.

Jesus wanted to be exalted

There is more in the heart and mind of Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem. The mighty warrior God is about to enter into the final battle and be crowned victorious. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongues confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We know that Jesus was thinking about this glory. It was written all over his face. We know from words he spoke such as, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The night before he died, when he was alone with the disciples in the Upper Room, he prayed to his dear heavenly Father. "Father the time has come, Glorify your Son, that he may glorify you." He prayed fervently. "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

When a mother goes into labor pains, she looks forward, beyond the pain, to seeing her baby born into the world. In the midst of her pain, there is the joy of knowing that a child is on its way. So it was with Jesus. He saw the cross as he rode into Jerusalem. He also saw the glory that was waiting for him when the Father would raise him back to life again and gave him a name that is above every other name.

Jesus has a name that is above every other name. The name Jesus means the one who saves us. The word "Hosanna" means the one who saves. Most of the people in the crowd wanted a Jesus or Savior who would deliver them from their day-to-day problems. They were hoping for a Messiah who would restore the glory and greatness to the nation of Israel. God's plan from all eternity was to raise up Jesus and give him a name that stands for salvation at the highest level. Psalm 103 captures what the name Jesus means to us when it says, "Praise the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases and redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion." Yes, Jesus has a name that reminds us every day how he has redeemed us from the pit and crowned us with love and compassion

Some day ever tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and God. When Christ Jesus comes in glory, even those who rejected him will have to admit the truth about Jesus, but for them it will be too late. The opportunity to have him as their Savior will have passed them by. They will only see Jesus as their Lord and Judge. The Revelation says, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be!" Jesus does not want people to mourn when he comes again on clouds of glory. As the donkey on which Jesus was riding entered Jerusalem, the face of Jesus suddenly changed. We are told in Luke, "As he approached the Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you even, you had only known this day that would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes.'" Jesus wanted the people to join him glory.

We cannot end this Palm Sunday sermon without looking once more at these palm branches and thinking of what we will do someday when we stand before Jesus in all of his glory. He wanted all people to share in that glory, even those who did not want him. In the Revelation John saw a large multitude of people from all over the world standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb. "They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice; 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" How true are the words of the great Easter hymn by C.F.W. Walther. "Then sing your hosannas and raise your glad voice; Proclaim the blest tidings that all may rejoice. Laud, honor, and praise to the Lamb that was slain, Who now sits in glory and ever shall reign." Amen.