

Palm Sunday marks Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem for the last week of his life, a week before his resurrection. It is known as "Passion Week" and symbolizes the final seven days of Jesus' earthly ministry. This event fulfilled prophecies from the Old Testament, such as Zechariah 9:9, which speaks of a humble king bringing salvation and peace to Jerusalem,

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

This prophecy was then fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, as it says in Luke 19: 37,

"[T]he whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power 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 heaven!"

We can try to imagine how it happened and the emotions and enthusiasm at the time. As Jesus entered the holy city, the crowds were shouting excitedly to celebrate his coming. Finally, he is here! And as he entered Jerusalem, they declared their expectation of him as a savior when they said, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

At first sight, everyone seemed confident Jesus was the Messiah on the day he arrived at Jerusalem as crowds celebrated his arrival. However, Judas betrayed him just days later and was arrested as his enemies tried to sentence him to death. Even when Pontius Pilate, governor of the Roman province of Judea, offered to release him, many in the crowd yelled, "Crucified him!" Soon after, Jesus faced physical and verbal abuse as he was led to the cross, where he died after being hailed by thousands.

Palm Sunday quickly moved from a story of triumph to a story of sorrow. It is hard to imagine that people who knew the prophecy would miss its fulfillment in Jesus after everything he did and reject him the way they did. Yet, the same voices that shouted "Hosanna!" were later shouting "Crucify him!" This shift mirrors our faith journey—how quickly we can move from praise to doubt, from trust to fear, when God's path doesn't match our expectations.

But what happened then can be explained. Many of them were never really praising Jesus as the Messiah he was but as the one they wanted. Many people in Jerusalem wanted Jesus to bring political, social, and military liberation from the Romans but were let down. More than a savior of sin and evil, they expected a warrior king to liberate them from Roman rule, and when Jesus didn't meet these expectations, they chose their desires over him. Their lack of understanding of who Jesus was made them fickle and easily influenced by Jesus' enemies, as they stirred trouble against him.

Jesus himself made their issues obvious when he said in Luke 19: 41-42, "As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Jesus knew many of them were misguided and expecting blessings from things and places they did not come from. "If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!" Some of them were perhaps even enemies, looking for an opportunity to get him, yet Jesus still showed up regardless of their misconceptions or ulterior motives.

What does that mean to us? People expect peace from different things: wealth, relationships, stuff, etc. Others believe God does not care about them unless he gives them what they want. Can you imagine a parent who gives their child everything they ask to prove their love for them? Is that love? Is that a good thing? Love is not proven like that.

The things that make for peace can be confusing because of misguided expectations. This was a challenge for many people living in Jerusalem when Jesus arrived, and it caused confusion and discouragement, so much so that many turned their backs on him.

Now, is it possible for us to also turn our backs on Jesus due to discouragement or disappointment? Can we also be misdirected by negative voices around us? Consider how often we might act similarly: praising God when everything goes according to our plans but questioning his love and presence when our lives take an unexpected turn or we don't get what we want.

For example, consider the experiences of trials, tribulations, and storms throughout our lives when we lose our job, when a close friend or family member passes away, when our finances are scraped perilously thin, when a relationship goes sour, or endure chronic illness. Initially, we might have been living a life full of gratitude and faith; however, upon receiving the bad news, the immediate reaction might be fear, doubt, and questioning. Questions like "Why me, God?" or "How can this be part of your plan?" begin to surface. In an instant, our whole world may seem to crumble, and we shift our life perspective from faith and trust to despair and fear.

We, too, may encounter moments when our plans are disrupted, and we feel tempted to turn away from God. We, too, have to deal with unhealthy influences in our lives. How often do we find ourselves in a similar position to the people who turned against Jesus? We think we have a great plan for our life, family, careers, or ministry, but then things go "south" quickly. We don't get the promotion. Our spouse does something terrible, or disease strikes down someone we love. Then, we question the same Jesus we praised when things went according to plan. "Lord, do you really love me? Why don't you give me what I want?"

As we can see, Palm Sunday is not just about the ancient Israelites; it is a lesson for all of us. We can lose hope, give up, and turn away from God when it may seem that God is letting us down or our prayers may seem unanswered.

So, we don't have to pretend this does not happen to us. If there is one thing we have in common, no matter who we are or where we come from, it is that we all struggle in different ways despite our faith. We are not shielded from pain and disappointment.

During these trials and tribulations, we desperately need the peace of God that surpasses understanding and transcends the circumstances of our lives. We need a deep, lasting peace that can't be easily shaken. We need a peace that will sustain us as the storm rages around us.

But how can we remain strong and confident in times of trial? How can we not lose heart when it feels shattered on the inside by disappointment and fear? How can we keep our peace when we face the uncertainty of bad health news, the loss of a job, or the passing of a loved one? Is that even possible?

One of the first Scriptures I memorized as a kid was Isaiah 26:3. It gives me confidence when I am facing challenges: “You will keep [them] in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, Because [they] trust in You.” Isaiah is saying that God gives peace to those whose minds are stayed on God. In other words, peace comes when we remember God, his character of love, and his promises of hope. This verse has been a source of strength to me during seasons when I felt abandoned and betrayed by people I cared about. There were moments when I could not imagine how things would get any better, yet by waiting on and trusting God, they did.

I can tell you that having this kind of peace and confidence because we know God is with us is truly a superpower, and not having it is a huge loss, too, because if remembering God gives us peace, forgetting God does the opposite to us: it robs us of it. How so? We lose hope or turn against God when we forget the blessings of the past, get overwhelmed by trials, and lose sight of what is still yet ahead, just like what happened to many people in the last days when Jesus came to Jerusalem before he was crucified.

So, in the same way, we may miss the things that bring peace because our minds and thoughts wander away from God. Yet, when our plans are disrupted and we are tempted to turn away from God, remembering Jesus' journey from Palm Sunday to Easter reminds us of the bigger picture, inviting us to see beyond our immediate circumstances into the future blessings he offers.

What does this mean? Even when we are going through the storms of life, God is faithful. He will bring us through to the other side. He won't let the waters overwhelm us. The fires won't consume us. He will gently shepherd us to good places of rest and peace. God has promised to always do good to us, and not even the storms of life can stop God from fulfilling his promises. Just as Isaiah invites us, by focusing on him, we can find the peace to calm our anxious hearts and the strength to endure.

Here is the invitation and good news for us today: Trust that God will make everything right, even when it seems impossible. Resist the temptation to let your circumstances dictate your faith and instead embrace God's unwavering, ever-present love despite the disappointments and heartaches we experience. Don't turn away from God; turn towards God and fix your mind on him.

On this Palm Sunday, let us remember that God is always with us, in the highs and the lows, and his love for us is unending even when we doubt and fail. Let us leave room for God to work in unexpected ways and trust that God's desires for us are greater than our own.

May our hearts be filled with peace and strength, may we find comfort in God's loving embrace during the good and difficult times, and may we share our faith with others, contributing to a kinder and safer world for all.