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**[Slide 1 - Title]** Well, welcome again to Riverside, my name is Keith, and I'm one of the pastors around Riverside. And I'm glad you've chosen to come out this morning and check out what Riverside Church is all about, what God has put in our hearts, and what that could mean for you, for our area, and for the world.

## **Intro**

*(John PIPER 2000)* I want you to imagine a scene with me. There is a young doctor who has a wife and three small children. And this doctor volunteers to take a dangerous six-month mission assignment to a place where there is an epidemic of a rare disease and a good deal of hostility from the local people toward outsiders. And the young doctor takes the assignment because nobody else with his special training was willing to go.

The months pass slowly, and the kids really miss their daddy. The wife does an amazing job of holding things together and trying to be mom and dad at the same time. Then the day of his return approaches, and the whole family is full of excitement. Mom has butterflies in her tummy, and the kids race around the house shouting, "Daddy's coming home! Daddy's coming home!"

At three o'clock in the afternoon a taxi pulls into the driveway. The kids charge out the front door followed by mom with her heart beating so hard she can feel it. The back door of the cab opens, and out steps dad, a good bit thinner than before, **a beard that conceals his hollow cheeks**, but with a big smile across his weary face. He kneels down on the grass and is smothered with six clinging arms and legs. "Hooray for daddy! Daddy's home!" Each kid gets their special hug and kiss while mom waits. Finally he pulls himself loose from the kids and he and his wife embrace: "Welcome home." "It's good to be back."

Now I want you to look into this young doctor's eyes, picture his eyes, because there's a message there. What you can see in the doctor's eyes is something he knows that his family doesn't know: **he caught the disease he went to heal...** and has one week to live. And if you can see it and feel that tension in our young doctor's eyes, this tension of being home, having a grand welcoming party, but knowing he only has one more week to live,... If you can picture that, you'll know something of what Jesus felt as he rode into Jerusalem to shouts of welcome and acclamation on Palm Sunday.

As you might already know, might not, today is celebrated throughout the Christian world as "**Palm Sunday**", the Sunday before Easter, in which we remember the day 2000 years ago when Jesus made what is called His "**triumphal entry**" into Jerusalem during the last week of his life here on earth.

The picture from the Bible of Palm Sunday is one where enthusiastic people form crowds that lined the streets, throwing flowers, & spreading their cloaks on the road as a carpet and welcoming for Jesus. And following the traditional method of welcoming kings, they cut palm branches & waved them in the air before Him.

But you might also know how quickly everything changed. We see in scripture that many in this same crowd will within a few short days exchange words of praise for words of death. In just a few days the shouts of "**Hosanna, here is our King!**" turned into "**Crucify Him! Crucify Him!**" And crucify Him, kill Him, they did.

Of course, there is a big difference between the death of our young doctor and the death of Jesus Christ. The doctor's wife and the doctor's children didn't want him to die, and they stuck by him all the way to the end. But many of those who cried, "**Hosanna**," to Jesus at the triumphal entry, cried, "**Crucify him!**" a

few days later. And all the commitment of his disciples vanished in the Garden of Gethsemane, and they abandoned him, every one of them.

And there is so much we can learn about Jesus from the passages that surround His initial entry into Jerusalem 2000 years ago, before the crowd turned on Him. So,... lets turn to John Chapter 12, verses 12-19, to see what we can learn from this Palm Sunday passage. If you are using one of the Bibles we have available here we will be on page 821

Clark to read...

## **Text**

### **[Slides 2&3 - Scripture]**

John 12:12-19 (NLT)

The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted,

“Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said:

“Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.”

His disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him.

Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign.

Then the Pharisees said to each other, “There’s nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!”

### **Context - v.1-11**

The passage starts out by saying **[Slide 4 - Scripture]** *The next day, ...* The next day means something just happened, something happened in the previous day.... Which makes me kinda curious, so if we look at the text prior to the Palm Sunday text we see Jesus has just been at Lazarus’ house (Lazarus is a guy who Jesus had previously raised from the dead). And while having dinner with Lazarus a lady named Mary anointed Jesus with very expensive perfume (burial perfume) ...

Now, you got to understand that people around the area had heard of Lazarus’ raising from the dead,... I mean picture for a moment if one of your neighbors had died, and not just died, but died and had been buried. According to the Bible **Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days (John 11:17)** before Jesus raised him from the dead.

So, imagine your neighbor had died, been buried, and then this religious guy came and raised your neighbor from the dead... OK,... that’s cool, that’s amazing.... But now imagine months or years later you hear that same religious guy is back in town, and back at your neighbor’s house... what are you going to do? Put yourselves in the shoes of these people.

They started flocking to find Jesus.... Crowds start to flock because the guy who raised the buried Lazarus from the grave is back in town... Yet there are some people, according to the text that are not happy about this. We see a guy named Judas who ultimately betrays Jesus, and we see a group of religious people

called Pharisees who are scheming how to kill Jesus. There seems to always be a mixed response to Jesus...

### ***The Road***

So that's the context,... a charged atmosphere to say the least, [Slide 5 - Scripture] then, **The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him.**

Now, [Slide 6 - Scripture] the **Way to Jerusalem** was a road that Jesus knew well.

Behind me is a [Slide 7 - photo] picture of this road from a distance. Jesus had traveled this road before, from the time he was a little kid, when his mom and dad brought him to Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover feast every year. It's a magnificent road, it's especially breathtaking when, after not seeing the city for the whole journey, [Slide 8 - photo] you come around the last mountain, commonly called the Mount of Olives, and there it is! You would see the Jewish temple glistening in the afternoon sunlight, and you'd see its magnificent, towering gates.

The road itself was known and loved. But the journey of that Palm Sunday was completely different. The road would not change, but the things along the way, and the end result, would be different than any other trip ever made to Jerusalem.

### ***Passover***

This trip was typically taken during the Jewish celebration [Slide 9 - Scripture] of the **Passover**. Now, the Passover Celebration was and is a Jewish holy day where the Jews celebrated their miraculous escape from slavery in Egypt, as written about in Exodus in the OT. And specifically, the Passover commemorates God's deliverance and protection of the Jewish people from the 10<sup>th</sup> and final plague that He inflicted on Egypt, where all the firstborn of each family and livestock were killed. And to avoid this, the Jews were instructed to mark the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a lamb and, upon seeing this, the Spirit of the Lord passed over these homes, hence the term "Passover."

It's not a coincidence that Jesus was crucified and then rose from the dead over the Passover holy day. In fact, the Christian holy day of Easter, what we call Easter, is actually called "Passover" in most languages, even today, with the exception being the English and German languages... and this is because just as many centuries prior a sacrificial lamb caused the Jews to be Passovered and delivered, 2000 years ago Jesus, the ultimate Passover lamb, was sacrificed. [Slide 10 - Scripture] According to the Bible, **...Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us 1 Cor. 5:7.**

### ***Palms & Hosanna***

So this [Slide 11 - Scripture] triumphal entry into Jerusalem happens over **Passover**, and as Jesus rides into town we see that a large crowd rushes to meet Jesus, and they are shouting [Slide 12 - Scripture] and waving **palm branches**. Palm Branches were actually the symbol of the Jewish state, similar to our flag or the Bald Eagle. [Slide 13 - Scripture] Palms were even represented on their coins. And palm branches symbolized two things in this time period, the first is they were instruments of worship in different Jewish holidays. And secondly, waving palm branches was a sign or symbol of military triumph or of a royal entry. A symbol of victory and kingship.

So these Jews see Jesus as their king, also as the one who is going to bring them deliverance and victory. Now, the Jews thought Jesus would bring a military and political revolution against Rome,.. the true victory that Jesus brought was much different than their expectations. So, the people are waving palm

branches, [Slide 14 - Scripture] and shouting “Praise God (the literal word here is Hosanna).. Shouting Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!”

Hosanna can mean one of two things. It can be a simple shout of praise,... it can also mean “the one who saves.” So coupling palm branches with cries of “hosanna” suggests that the crowds hoped for Jesus as a king or national deliver.... They’re pumped up and excited about Jesus as their king. Ironically it’s only days later that the leaders of the people will claim no king other than Caesar, when they say [Slide 15 - Scripture] In John 19:15

“Away with him,” they yelled. “Away with him! Crucify him!”

“What? Crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the leading priests shouted back.

### ***King on a Donkey***

So, while we know in hindsight this frenzy of Jesus as king and shouts of Hosanna and the waving of palm branches won’t last, we see that initially the people view Jesus as their king, the King of Israel... And by the way, Jesus doesn’t reject this title, he actually confirms it in John 18:36&37, but in our Palm Sunday passage we see exactly what type of King Jesus is. [Slide 16 - Scripture] According to our text, Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: “Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.”

Have you ever ridden a donkey? Most of us haven’t. [Slide 17 - photo] My cousins have a farm in Maryland that we used to visit every summer, so I have ridden a donkey or two in my lifetime. ...Donkeys are more stubborn than horses. Here Jesus had a young donkey, and according to similar passages in the Bible, this donkey had never been ridden before... so this is probably a rough ride.

Now, I don’t know about you, but if I were a King riding into my most memorable or important week, I would pick a warhorse, a stallion, not a donkey. But Jesus does not arrive in a military fashion mounted on a war-horse, but instead he arrives sitting on a donkey. In this time period a donkey was a sign of peace and of humility. And as the text states, this picture of Jesus riding in on a donkey was actually a fulfillment to prophecy from the old testament, from Zechariah 9:9 [Slide 18 - Scripture], which reads...Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey’s colt.

### ***The Plan***

That’s amazing. Your King is coming. He is a victorious King. Yet His victory won’t come by force or power-plays or brute strength,... instead, your King and my King rode on a donkey, a young donkey, a colt. And this was done to show that Jesus is king, but a humble king. A peaceful King. There’s an amazing amount of insight we gain into who Jesus was and what His plan and desire for us is simply by understanding the humility and peace shown by Him riding in on a donkey. [Slide 19 - Scripture] And according to the scripture, His disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him.

This was always the plan, that our humble King would ride in on a donkey, but this wasn’t first understood, at least not understood until after the cross of Good Friday and the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter... You see, at the time of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem His disciples didn’t fully understand yet what was going on because they hadn’t yet experienced the cross.

... and as a side bar,... This section seems to demonstrate that the Gospel, that the message of Jesus, must always be viewed through the lens of the cross and resurrection... Jesus can truly only be understood in

the context of these. Jesus has to be more than just a nice guy to you if you want to fully grasp who Jesus is. He is more than just a social activist. If we don't have the cross and Him as the sacrificial lamb at the forefront of how we view and interact with Jesus, we'll be like the disciples here and not fully understand Jesus.

It took his 'entering into glory', through death and resurrection (and the gift of the Spirit which flowed from it), to open their eyes... and this needed reminder is why we celebrate communion every week here at Riverside. We celebrate communion every week as a way of being reminded and keeping the cross of Jesus front and center in the life of our church.

### ***Initial Response***

Now, we see in our text this morning many different reactions and motivations in response to Jesus. For example, [Slide 20 - Scripture] we see that some were telling others about [Jesus].

We see a different reaction from the religious leaders, the Pharisees, when they said to each other, "There's nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!"

The initial response we see in the text is that some folks are so excited that they started telling others about Jesus, and of course we saw earlier that they were shouting and having a big-ol welcome parade for Jesus.

The religious folks on the other hand who have been trying to stop and oppose Jesus are beside themselves, it seems like the momentum is on Jesus' side. But we see in the following chapters that this energy and momentum for Jesus doesn't last. It's a matter of days before the crowd turns to shouting cries of Crucify him, which we briefly looked at earlier in John Ch. 19.

[Slide 21 - title] And I think this is very common for us these days. I do... This is important folks... We get excited about a part of Jesus, or a part of His mission, or maybe we even get caught up in the excitement of a new church and what it could mean for us and for our area,... and these are not bad things. It's great to learn something new about Jesus and God. It's awesome to learn more about how to partner in His mission to redeem the earth, and personally I'm way excited about this new church Riverside and how I think God is going to use it to accomplish amazing things.

### ***Required Response***

Yet, It's clear that according to Jesus, our excitement and curiosity isn't enough to drive us long term. You see, we know in hindsight that this initial response and excitement about Jesus from the original Palm Sunday crowd didn't last. And the thing about Jesus is that He knew this. So before anyone turned away and before their excitement died down, Jesus said the following thing [Slide 22 - Scripture] to the people:

John 12:24-26 (NLT)

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.

It's funny, with a bunch of people excited, and momentum, and the potential of being crowned king would be pretty sweet. I mean, if I were in Jesus' shoes, I would not have said these words. I might have said

“yes, I’m a great guy, and you should follow me, we’ll have fun, you find a lot of excitement and enjoyment, and generally I help you accomplish the best life and experience you’ve ever had.”

But that’s not what Jesus says to these enthusiastic people. Instead He says we need to die to ourselves. He says if you love your life here on earth, you’re missing the bigger picture. He says we must follow Him, wherever he goes; not just when it’s convenient or on Sunday mornings or with just a portion of our lives.

Seriously, Jesus raises the bar way high. Being that this church plant “publically launched” last week, you would think that we’d try and have a soft message, a fun, engaging time... really try and make folks comfortable, not push too hard on the more difficult things of being a Christian.

But I’m convinced, based on this passage and many others like it, that’s not what Jesus would do if He were here in the flesh teaching this second week. It’s weird, Jesus has a huge energetic crowd around him, saying “**here is our king**”, and instead Jesus says *you must give your entire life up for me*.

### **Application**

Powerful passage. This Palm Sunday passage is one that for some of you in this room you’ve heard many times. For some of you, you might be hearing it for the first time. But I think the key is that we must never let this passage, and the rest of the story that unfolds this week leading up to Easter, become desensitized or common or routine... it’s so easy for us to become like the crowd who shout “**yea, our king is here, it’s Easter**” and then go about our daily lives like nothing has changed,...

So, how does this Palm Sunday passage affect us today? What should you and I do with a passage such as this? Honestly, I’m not going to give you a lot of practical things this week. Next week, on Easter, we’ll start a new teaching series that will be filled with very practical things,... I’ll say more about that at the closing of our time today, but I think it’s key, that before we dive into “next steps” and “how tos” and the “7 steps of Palm Sunday”.... I think it’s key that we first grasp the overarching story of the Bible and of Jesus.

You see, I can try and tell you that tomorrow, Monday morning at the office or at school you should do 3 things in response to Palm Sunday... or I can ask you to reflect on how this story should change how you approach everything in your life... change how you approach your very life itself.

This week between Palm Sunday and Easter is usually called the Passion Week. It’s a week where the church typically remembers the amazing last week of Jesus in the flesh here on earth. So I want to ask you to really dive into the passion story this week. Dive into what the God of the universe riding on a donkey instead of a warhorse means for you. What **unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies**, means for you and for your family and for your home group and for your world.

### **Communion**

And just as Palm Sunday kicks off a week of remembrance, reflection, and ultimately a big party celebration on Easter Sunday, we weekly come to the communion table as a way of remembering the Palm Sunday message, as a way of remembering the cross of Good Friday, as a way of remembering, as the **[Slide 23 – Scripture]** bible states, **you do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price...1 Cor 6:19-20** God bought you with the true Passover Lamb Jesus.

So, as we continue this morning by singing a few more songs, I want to encourage you to really reflect on this Palm Sunday story from the Bible. **[Slide 24 – BLACK]** Prepare your hearts,...