

Rejoice for the King is Coming

Psalm 96

This morning we celebrate Palm Sunday.

We call it Palm Sunday because we are told in John chapter twelve that a “great crowd” goes out to meet Jesus with palm branches on His way into Jerusalem.

Jesus’ procession into the city and up to the temple turns into a great celebration.

I would call it a celebration of anticipation.

Jesus comes into the city riding on a donkey.

He does this as a clear fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 which talks about the coming of the messianic king.

It is a prophecy most Jews in Jesus time would have been very familiar with and those who believed the Bible would have been very much looking forward to it.

No doubt all of them had heard about the miracles and His powerful teaching and a good number of them had probably personally witnessed some of them.

It was just a day after He had called Lazarus out of the tomb, so it is not hard to understand why so many people believed Jesus to be the long awaited king and saviour of Israel.

As this large group of people are making their way through the streets of Jerusalem they are anticipating Jesus taking the throne and ushering in a new and glorious age for their nation.

It is a scene of great joy and excitement as they anticipate what is to come.

Listen to how Mark describes the scene in His gospel,

“Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" 10 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!”

Imagine being there with those praises of Jesus ringing out for the people of Jerusalem to hear.

Whenever I imagine this scene in my mind the image of a parade comes to mind.

People throw parades for all kinds of reasons.

Things like holidays, big sporting events, and historic accomplishments often receive parades.

Why do we do that?

It’s because human beings like to celebrate significant people and significant events.

There is almost something instinctive about cheering for something or someone we delight in.

[That is the scene of Palm Sunday. A great celebration of people delighting in the Lord Jesus as the messiah. This is a celebration that we should want to be in on. It is much bigger than a onetime procession through the streets of Jerusalem. This is a celebration that has been going since the dawn of creation and will continue on forever in the new heavens and the new earth. With that in mind I'd like to turn our attention to a psalm which celebrates the Kingship of God. Turn with me in your bibles to **Psalm 96**. This psalm is a declaration that the LORD is the King and He will come to set things right. That is what Palm Sunday is about. It is a joyful celebration anticipating God's righteous rule being implemented upon the earth through His chosen instrument of Salvation. Psalm 96 invites us into that celebration and it reminds us that the King is coming. That is where we want to spend our time together this morning. I see in this passage of Scripture four compelling reasons for us to join the praises of the King of Kings. First...]

Point #1 – The continual praise of the LORD is the obligation of all. (Verses 1-2)

It is the duty of the entirety of creation, including every human being, to sing the praises of God.

It is important to say here that it is wrong and useless to compel someone to praise the LORD by force.

No human being can make another human being worship God.

If we try to do that, we may get the right words to come out of their mouth but it would have no effect upon their heart.

[Most parents have experienced this. When a child steals a toy or hits their sibling a good parent will discipline their child in love and part of that discipline often involves having them apologize. Often times they child will comply with arms crossed and an angry face, "I'm sorry." Are they really? Good parents will not be satisfied with that because they want to see a genuine apology.]

God can never be satisfied with spoken words that are denied in the heart, because even though the words may be right His glory and worth are still being rejected.

Now just because genuine praise cannot be forced does not remove the obligation to acknowledge and delight in Who God is.

We can clearly see the obligation here in **verses 1-2**.

Five commands are given in these two verses.

Three times we are told to "sing."

Some people might be thinking, "I can't sing."

What most people mean by that is that they don't think they are very good at singing which is something different than having no ability to sing.

Being a bad singer is not an excuse for not singing in church.

It is true, no one is going to ask you to do a solo, but you are still commanded to sing.

Some might be thinking, “I don’t like to sing.”

That says something about the condition of your heart.

Music is throughout the Bible, it is a gift from God not only for His praise but also for the encouragement of our hearts and the renewing of our minds.

If you don’t like to sing, then I would encourage you to spend some serious time asking God to give you a desire to sing.

Why is that? Because look at who is included in the command. It says, “all the earth” which means everyone.

I think this is a particularly good reminder for Christian men.

Brothers, can I say to you that you are harming the worship of God in this place if you stay tight lipped week are week when we are singing to the LORD.

At the same time you have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to encourage your fellow believers by calling attention to the glory of God with your voice.

All of us have that obligation.

Also notice here that the praise of God is to be ongoing.

It says “tell of His salvation day after day.”

In the original language that is a command with emphasis. The idea is an impassioned proclamation about the work of God.

These verses are both clear and emphatic. God commands His continual praise by all people.

We will see in a few moments why that is a right command to give, but before we get there we need to think about the question, “What about when that is hard?”

When it says here “tell of His salvation” it very clearly reminds us that we need to be saved from something.

David doesn’t write this Psalm from a problem free life, he writes it having experienced a whole lot of trouble and heart break.

There are plenty examples of people crying out to the LORD in anguish, in bitterness, and even anger over their suffering and loss.

I don’t believe the purpose of this Psalm is to say to us that we need to put on a fake happy face and sing to the LORD and pretend like everything is awesome all the time no matter what.

If everything were awesome all the time then we wouldn’t need to be saved from anything.

The purpose of this Psalm is to say that God never changes and that His worship is always right, even with tear filled eyes and a heart of anguish.

[That raises an important question. Why is that? Why is God's praise always right? Why does God command the praise of His name? If a person did this it would be sinful, so why is it right for God to do this? The answer is, it is necessary for God to do this because of Who He is. We see that in verses 3-6 and it gives us a second reason to join in the praises of Palm Sunday...]

Point #2 – Only God is MOST worthy of praise. (Verses 3-8)

Because God is infinitely glorious He must command His own worship or else be guilty of denying His own greatness.

Another command is given to us in verse 3.

At the time this psalm is written, when Jesus is making His way to the temple, as we sit in church together this morning, and all the time in between the majority of people on the earth live in disobedience to the command to praise God.

If people refuse to fulfill their obligation it in no way diminishes their obligation and so God's glory is to be declared among the nations.

This should affect the way we think about missions. Often when we think about spreading the gospel message to the ends of the earth we are thinking about people being saved from God's wrath by believing in what Jesus did for His people to deal with our disobedience to the LORD.

To be sure that should motivate us, but there is more here for us to consider.

People need to believe the gospel because the LORD alone is worthy of worship and it is for their highest good to praise Him.

He gives the reason for this string of commands in **verses 4-8.**

God commands the praise of His name because He is "most worthy of praise."

What are the gods of every other religion? Verse five calls them idols which is a way of saying they are nothing.

They have no power to save and they have brought nothing into existence.

They themselves have been created in the imagination of human beings who do not know the One true God.

The LORD on the other hand "made the heavens."

He brought everything into existence and everything depends upon His power to go on existing from moment to moment.

How insulting is it then for someone to exchange the infinite 'splendor and majesty...strength and beauty' of the LORD and attribute it to false gods?

You see God must command the exclusive praise of His name because there is no one and nothing else like Him.

For Him to do otherwise would make Him liar and that is completely foreign to His nature.

In addition to making Him a liar it would make Him unloving.

If God were to be o.k. with false religion then He would be leading people to think that their misplaced faith can accomplish something good for them when the truth is it can only lead to their destruction.

No brothers and sisters only the God of the Bible is *most worthy* of praise.

[Imagine for a moment that you have entered a baking competition and you enter the chocolate chip cookie division. You have a recipe for chocolate chip cookies that is just incredible. Everyone that has ever tasted your cookies tells you they are the best they have ever had. Just the smell of these cookies in the oven should guarantee first prize they are that good. But instead of your cookies winning first prize a plate of plastic toy cookies from the dollar store wins first prize. Not only would you be upset, but everyone who has ever tasted your cookies will surely see the injustice of that decision.]

How much greater is the injustice of attributing our highest praise to someone or something other than the LORD?

Knowing that God is most worthy of praise fuels our desire to participate in praise of His name.

Go back to the cookie illustration for a moment.

Think about the best homemade cookie you have ever tasted.

Think about walking into the house when they are baking, what do you say?

Think about taking a bite of one still warm from the oven, what do you say?

Is it any trouble for you to offer praise? Why? Because you truly believe they are the best cookies.

It is the same with God when we truly see Him as “most worthy”, our praise is a delight instead of a burden.

[Yes worship is our obligation but it is also our delight on account of the supreme worth of God. It is hard to say what the people in the streets on that first Palm Sunday knew about Jesus, but they had it right when they were shouting ‘Hosanna in the highest’ for Christ is most worthy of our highest adoration. Here is a third reason we should desire to join the praise of Palm Sunday...]

Point #3 – God alone is King over all of creation. (Verses 9-10)

The Lord is actively governing everything in the universe which should completely astound us whenever we think upon it.

Look with me at verse 9.

The phrase “the splendor of His holiness” captivated my attention as I thought about this text.

This phrase is where we come to the end of our capacity to describe God.

It conveys the idea of unequalled brilliance or we might say unique perfection.

Notice the reaction the psalmist tells us to have at the thought of such glory.

We should “Tremble before Him” it says.

The nature of God’s being is such that fallen creatures such as ourselves are automatically overcome with fear at the very sight of His glory.

Now look at what we are told about the Holy One (Verse 10).

It is this One Who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16) Who “reigns”.

The idea of telling “the nations” (that is people all over the earth) that God ‘reigns’ is to let everyone know that He rules over everything.

God has ultimate authority over every nation, every ruler, every hill and valley, every planet, every star, every atom in the whole universe.

[Just think of the power involved in that. For example, our own sun produces about 386 trillion-trillion watts. I saw on NASA’s website the other day that they estimate there are 200 billion stars in our galaxy alone. God is reigning over all of that! That is worthy of our praise.]

He also reigns over us.

As King He is the one to whom we will give an account.

Notice it says He will judge the peoples in equity.

Most of us realize that human legal institutions can be corrupted.

If you are wealthy or have a position of power you can manipulate the system and escape judgement.

Impossible with God! What could you give Him as a bribe?

What power could a person have that could force Him to do something different?

Whether you are a poor beggar or rich and powerful God will apply His righteous standard to all.

Our lives both now and into eternity are under His power and rule.

We cannot escape it, nor can another power take us away from it.

He reigns over us.

[Admittedly that initially strikes me as a fearful thing. Any right thinking person who grasps the holiness of God is fearful of the thought of coming under God's judgment. But this psalm does not end on a note of fear and trembling. Quite the opposite. It is a scene reminiscent of Jesus riding into Jerusalem upon a donkey. It gives us a forth reason to join in the praises of Christ on this Palm Sunday...]

Point #4 – The coming of King Jesus is our highest joy.

The church has waited a long time for the LORD to come. His arrival is the hope of every believer, because at His coming He will set everything right.

In verses 11-13 the creation is personified.

Listen carefully as I read and you will hear the point of this personification. **(Verses 11-13)**

Five times here there are expressions of joy.

'Heavens rejoice', 'earth be glad', 'sea resound', 'fields jubilant', 'forest sing for joy'.

He is trying to emphasize the fact that the entirety of creation will delight at the coming of the LORD Who is Christ the King.'

You see when Christ comes, He is coming for more than to simply deliver us from this corrupt world.

He is coming to completely restore the creation as well.

No more disasters, no more failed crops, polluted oceans, dirty air, drought, earthquakes, tornadoes, or any other trouble throughout the earth.

Sin's curse will be completely lifted and we will get to enjoy God's creation to the fullest capacity in the light of the glory of King Jesus Who will sit upon His throne forever giving unending joy and satisfaction to His people.

Palm Sunday is all about anticipating the coming of King Jesus.

It is a joyful anticipation because we know that if we belong to Him by faith, His presence will be for our eternal benefit.

[Anybody ever been broken down on the side of the road before? That happened to me once years ago when we still had our Honda Civic. I was on my way to Cambridge and the alternator died and shortly thereafter the car died. Thankfully we had a CAA membership. I made the call and then waited. How many of you can guess what I was feeling when the tow truck driver showed up? I was happy to see him because he had come to solve my problem.]

The people on Palm Sunday were way happier than that to see Jesus coming into the city on a donkey because they believed He was there to solve an enormous problem.

That is certainly true He was there to solve a problem, a problem much bigger than they realized.

If we understand that, then we will have that same kind of joyful expectation as we look forward to Jesus coming again.

He will once and for all deliver everyone who has accepted Him as Lord and Saviour from sin and death.

As it says here in verse 13, “He will judge the world in righteousness.”

That would be a terrifying thought apart from the ‘righteousness that comes by faith.’”

Instead of being a great dread, the thought of Jesus coming is one of great joy for those who belong to Him.

You see being saved is NOT primarily about getting a ticket out of hell.

It surely does that. When we acknowledge our offenses before a holy God and understand that Jesus died in our place to make us right with God and that He rose from the dead we are totally free from the condemnation that we deserve.

That is wonderful, but there is something far greater that happens when the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart.

You see, even a person with a deep seated hatred for God would want to escape hell if they had any inkling of what it is truly like to suffer its torment.

When we think about our salvation, if our primary thought is simply relief at escaping eternal torment, then we are missing the primary purpose of belonging to Christ.

Salvation is NOT primarily about getting a ticket out of hell, it is about changing our hearts towards God and His ways.

It is about longing to be with Him and enjoy His goodness to the highest possible capacity forever.

It is hard to know how much the people on that first Palm Sunday truly appreciated the first coming of King Jesus.

What is clear is that they say right things and are filled with joy as He comes into the city. That is the joy that we should have as believers as we anticipate His coming.

Do you know that He died in your place? Do you know that by faith in His atoning work at Calvary He will make you righteous by His shed blood? Do you know the delight of giving Christ your highest praise?

If you do then you truly know the joy of Palm Sunday.

The King is coming, let us therefore join our voices to the eternal chorus of praise to His Name!