

The Authority To Die

Palm Sunday
April 2, 2023
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INI - SDG

John 12:12-19 ¹² The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³ took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!" ¹⁴ Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵ "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt." ¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and *that* they had done these things to Him. ¹⁷ Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. ¹⁸ For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. ¹⁹ The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"

Abuse of power

The constitution of our nation was created in the hopes of limiting the abuse of power. It has so far done a decent job of protecting the American people from the negative effects of an extreme abuse of power, but it certainly hasn't stopped it altogether. Judges, senators, congressmen, presidents, governors, mayor and many others have all abused their power for personal gain. Even pastors and teachers and others that we feel we should be able to trust abuse what little authority they have.

But probably the worst abuse of power comes from husbands, fathers, wives and parents. It's on a much smaller scale but it's so much more personal that it makes it that much worse. It's a betrayal not by some unknown government official but by one that is supposed to love you.

God warned Eve in the garden of Eden this would happen.

Genesis 3:15 "Your husband . . . shall rule over you."

This passage is sometimes mistaken as permission from God for Husbands to act in this way. It is not. Rather it is a warning to women that because of sin men will abuse their power. Else where God does give the men the authority as the head of the household, but it was never God's intention for men to abuse that authority for their own selfishness. God says instead that husband's ought to follow the example of Christ. They should use their authority to serve their wife and family, even being ready to give their life for them.

Women are not free from the same sinful of men. They too often take it upon themselves to "change" their husbands. They too sometimes use their authority to get what they want rather than to serve.

We think that authority and power means that we can do what we want. Instead, our epistle encourages us to take the attitude of Christ. Christ had all authority on heaven and earth, but came to earth and rode into Jerusalem to die for our sins.

Jesus rides as the King, with all authority, but all that authority all that power is used for one purpose: to serve sinful people, to die for us.

Jesus Rides among the Palm branches

To the Jews the Palm branches were a symbol of national identity. Some of you may remember we have mentioned the name Antiochus IV Epiphanes in bible class, and we talked about him in our Lenten sermon a couple weeks ago. It was during his reign that Judas Maccabees lead a revolt against this Seleucid ruler and used the Palm branch as a symbol of an independent Israelite nation. Ever since then the Palm branch was used in this way. During a brief revolt against the Roman Empire, it was printed on the coins the rebels made and used. When the Romans destroyed the nation of Israel, they also printed coins with the palm branch on them in celebration of Israel's defeat.

The waving of the palm branches for some in that crowd, indeed possibly many of them, was not unlike a large group of southerners waving confederate flags. It was a symbol of independent nationalism and a proclamation that they desired Jesus to be their liberator from Rome.

This of course was not what Jesus meant by the Palm branches.

What does a palm branch mean to you? In our modern world, palm branches make us think of paradise in the Caribbean Islands. We associate them with sun and ocean and warm breezes, a nice relaxing chair on the beach and a cold drink, lemonade, in our hands.

This may seem like a modern idea, but it is actually a very ancient understanding of the Palm Branch. When God lead the people of Israel out of Egypt He caused them to rest beneath the Palm trees of an Oasis. Later He had them build the tabernacle, He instructed them to decorate the walls with palm trees and animals. Later these same themes were duplicated on the temple walls and doors that Solomon built.

These pictures were a reminder of the garden of Eden from which man was driven out because of his sin and to which God would restore His people. Coming to the temple was coming back into the presence of God. It was through the temple that God would restore his people to what we lost, to paradise.

Jesus rides surrounded by Palm branches not because He has come to use His power to liberate the nation of Israel, but because He has come to use His power to liberate the souls of the Israelites. **He has the power and the authority to restore the kingdom but not the kingdom of men but of God.**

He gives His life in order to restore us to paradise. This is a paradise far better than the one you might find in the Caribbean Islands. He gives us a paradise where no one will ever again abuse their authority. It is a wonderful thing to think of a place where no one in power abuses their authority. It is even more wonderful to think of a place and time where I will not abuse my authority. Where I will finally be capable of being as loving and thoughtful and selfless as Jesus was. As we heard in the Children's sermon, Jesus dies for our sins that He might restore our hearts to the purity which they had before sin.

Jesus rides a donkey

Jesus' ride into Jerusalem, in many ways is a proclamation that He has come to be king. The manner of His entry and His acceptance of the people's praise made it clear that He was accepting the title of king. Yet even though He enters as the glorious king, still He comes on a donkey.

The prophet makes it clear what the meaning of the donkey is. He comes as King, but He comes in humility.

He is not coming on a warhorse or a chariot or an elephant. He does not come surrounded by 75 golden camels or peacocks. He comes on a donkey lowly and humble. He does not come to show off or to appease His pride or to make war. He rides into Jerusalem, the city of peace, to bring peace.

This is God coming not to his friends but to his enemies. You heard last week how the apostles were afraid to come near Jerusalem because the leaders were trying to kill Jesus. Jerusalem was the stronghold of His enemies. Yet He does not come with armies to crush, defeat and destroy. He comes to bring peace.

We also are His enemies. We rebelled against Him in the garden and took the side of the enemy Satan. We are at war with God. Yet God comes to His enemy not to bring war but to bring peace. What would we do with that authority and power? We would use it to crush our enemies. He uses all authority and all power not to crush his enemies, but to bring reconcile us to God. He says to us, you are once again sons of God.

Jesus accepts the titles they give to him: Son of David, the one who comes in the name of the Lord, King of the Jews. He accepts the titles but not the image of the king which they want. He is not the image of a king that men seek but rather He seeks men to give to us the image of God.

We have such little authority, and we use it for selfish goals. Having all authority, He does not send us to die for him, but rides to die for us. Amen