

# The Politics of Palm Sunday

John 12:1-50

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2019-04-14

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## Text for reading - John 12:12-19

John 12:12 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!”

John 12:14 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.”

John 12:16 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.

John 12:17 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!”

## I. Introduction - two processions; two kingdoms; two methods; two outcomes

It was Nisan 10 of the year AD 30, and the guards had opened up the gates of Jerusalem so that a procession could come through early in the morning. The crowds weren’t huge, but there were people lining the streets to welcome and to cheer for a man who was quite well known. But the procession I am describing is not the procession of Jesus. While similar in many ways to Christ’s triumphal entry, this one was on the opposite side of the city. You may not have realized that there were two processions on Palm Sunday, but there were. In fact, the entry of Jesus into the city may have been a very deliberate contrast to this one that had been happening on Nisan 10 for most of His lifetime.

While Jesus entered the city from the east, history tells us that Pontius Pilate entered the city from the west on exactly the same day leading an army of soldiers. And while entering from opposite sides of the city, they were both traveling to the same general area - the temple mount where the Roman Antonia Fortress was also located.

And the purpose of Pilate’s entry was to keep control of the crowds at Passover. Verse 12 speaks of “a great multitude.” How great was it? Well, if Josephus’ calculations are accurate, there were probably 2.5 million Pilgrims

who had descended on that city. Whenever you have crowds of that size, there are bound to be some trouble makers. Even a church as small as ours has some troublemakers who like to have fun, right? Well, in a crowd that size you are going to have some fun things going on.

Luke 13 records that Pilate had brutally slaughtered Galileans at the feast of Passover the year before - same week, but one year before. And Jesus said that Pilate had callously mixed their human blood together with the blood of their sacrifices. It was one of his many intimidation tactics. He was a brutal guy, and brutality seemed to be the main way that Rome kept control of its empire. And on Palm Sunday, he came from Caesarea to Jerusalem to very graphically show that Rome was in control. And he stayed there for the whole week.

Christ's procession was largely a peasant procession while the other one was an imperial procession. Christ rode on a donkey while Pontius Pilate rode on a stallion. Christ was surrounded by His disciples while Pilate was surrounded by a large army as well as a bunch of sycophants. Christ's procession proclaimed the Kingdom of Heaven while Pilate's showcased the kingdom of man. The basis for Christ's kingdom was symbolized by the fact that the Lamb of God was surrounded by 250,000 Passover lambs that were being herded to the temple on that day from the east side of the city. That's probably why Jesus entered from the east - in order to symbolically be the Lamb of God walking in the midst of lambs. And it was probably why Pilate never bothered to enter from the east - too much congestion. So the nature of Christ's kingdom was symbolized by the lambs. The nature for Caesar's kingdom was symbolized by the weaponry that Pilate's soldiers were ready to use on anyone who made the wrong move.

One thing that is important to know is that when Pilate's procession came into Jerusalem it represented not only Rome's power, but it also represented Rome's imperial theology. Caesar was proclaimed to be the son of God on Rome's coins, statues, and buildings. And of course, the distinguishing feature of John's Gospel is that it shows Jesus to be the only begotten Son of God. That word "only" was a bold rejection of Caesar's claims. Caesar was also proclaimed to be Father, Lord, Savior, Sovereign, and Provider. You can see that these two parades represent a huge clash in worldviews.

So it was exceedingly dangerous business for Jesus to have His entry as a King on exactly the same day that Roman armies were entering the city to spot and put down any potential insurrections. Of course, Jesus was not engaged in insurrection. He was not a revolutionary. His motive was

transformation and complete replacement of earth's ways with God's ways. And the theology of this chapter confronts the imperial theology of Caesar head on.

On many levels Christ was (and continues to be) opposed and persecuted for the next 2000 years precisely because His Gospel did not leave politics alone. Caesar and Christ were both declaring their Kingship over the whole world. Caesar and Christ both claimed the spot of Messiah and Savior. Both claimed to be the only Lord. 1 Timothy 6:15 says that Jesus is "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords." This was the theology that got early Christians in trouble.

While hundreds of thousands welcomed Jesus with ecstatic expectation, there were also crowds (probably fewer crowds) who welcomed Pontius Pilate and his armies and who cheered his entry. They even threw flowers at the feet of Pontius Pilate's horses. Some people suspect that the Sadducees had to pay people to cheer Pilate in the streets because he was not a well-liked guy.

But here is the point - the city of Jerusalem was ritually welcoming two different kingdoms and two radically different philosophies of life and two different kings - Jesus and Caesar. By the end of the week the Jews would say, "We have no king but Caesar." They probably said it with sand in their mouth because they didn't like Rome much themselves. Statists rarely like rivals. But they said it because the confrontation with Jesus left them no alternative. If they had to choose between Rome and Jesus, the choice was obvious to them. They needed Rome to sustain their power.

Today's sermon title may seem a bit odd - The Politics of Palm Sunday. But John's Gospel repeatedly states that it was politics that led people to reject Jesus. It was politics that made all of the political parties of that day to put down their differences so that they could be united in opposition to Jesus. In some ways we had a taste of that in Alabama when the Republicans and Democrats joined forces in opposing Judge Roy Moore. People were mystified as to why Republicans would support such a horrible Democratic candidate. In effect the Republican establishment was saying that it would rather elect an immoral, anti-constitutionalist, pro-abortion Democrat whom they could control than a ten-commandments Christian Judge Roy Moore whom they could not control and who might expose corruption. But ultimately both situations (first century and twenty-first century) show a clash of Christianity with the politics of the day. It is an inevitable clash if we have the true Gospel. There is absolutely no surprise at the persecution

that China is imposing upon the church in that country. The Gospel of John says that it is inevitable whenever the true claims of Jesus are advanced. The church that is at peace with a government like theirs is a church that is preaching a different message.

So the point I am making in this introduction is that any Jew of the first century who was reading this chapter would have sensed an enormous tension that was brewing in the story. We need to read this chapter through first century eyes. While the Jewish leadership didn't like Rome so well, they were in bed with Rome through bribes, lobbying, coalitions, changes in the law, attempts to control the people. Rome needed them and they needed Rome.

Just take a look at John 11 as one expression of this. As much as the political parties of the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Herodians hated each other, they hated a threat to their power much more than they hated each other. So here is an innocent Lazarus who is going to get in their way and has to be made a sacrificial lamb. They make a back-door deal so that all the parties can reach across the aisle and make a joint resolution. John 11, beginning to read at verse 45:

John 11:45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. 48 If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." [Notice the political pragmatism here.] 49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."

Now take a look at chapter 12:9-11.

John 12:9 Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. 10 But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, 11 because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

Pragmatism has always been the name of the game for most politicians. Very few are statesmen. These Jewish political leaders didn't like the blasphemous images on Roman coins, but they were quite willing to use them. They didn't like Rome's claims to total power because no statist likes to share power unless it can mean his own position gets elevated. But that was the name of game - jostling for position within the kingdom of man and taking out anybody that might be a threat. A true vibrant Christianity that manifests the radical nature of Christ's kingdom (as Lazarus' life did) is always deemed a threat to statist. It doesn't matter if the Christians are as

nice as Lazarus, they are a threat. Why? Because Christ's kingdom has implications for politics. It calls all kings to bow before Christ's throne.

## **II. Fourteen hints that Christ's kingdom will be far more universal than even Caesar's**

### ***A. Representatives from every nation (v. 12)***

Let me quickly show you the literary features John is going to weave together in chapter 12 in order to show that Christ's kingdom will be a universal kingdom that will eventually swallow up all nations and make them Christian. Christ's kingdom is the stone of Daniel 2 that smites the image at the feet, which is the Roman empire, and grinds it and all other humanistic empires into dust, and replaces them. Now, each of these literary features are only hints, but I think they are deliberately woven together to show a theme.

John 12, verse 12 says,

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

All the Jews had experienced these massive crowds every year of their lives (unless they were sick or providentially hindered). All Jewish men were mandated to come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover no matter what part of the world they lived in. Virtually every known nation of the world would have been represented at this crowd that was ritually welcoming Jesus. This is the first hint that Christ's kingdom will be even more universal than Caesar's.

### ***B. Palm branches were a symbol of victory (v. 13)***

Next, verse 13 makes a big deal about palm branches being associated with Christ's entry. In their commentary on Revelation, Evans and Bubeck point out that palm branches were a symbol of victory throughout the Mediterranean world,<sup>1</sup> and were certainly thought of as a symbol of victory by Rome. Rome's symbols of victory were being contrasted with Christ's

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<sup>1</sup> "Palm branches were a symbol of victory throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, in Egypt they symbolized length of life and life after death, and in ancient Judaism they could suggest the Feast of Tabernacles. They also symbolized blessing (Aune, 468; 1 Macc. 13:36–37). Pausanius, a second-century A.D. author, says, "But at most games they used a wreath of palm, and everywhere the winner has a palm branch put in his right hand. The reason for the tradition is this: they say that when Theseus came home from Crete he held games at Delos for Apollo and crowned the winners with palm" (Pausanius, *Description of Greece* 8.48.2–3 LCL)." Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, eds., *John's Gospel, Hebrews–Revelation, First Edition, The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary* (Colorado Springs, CO; Paris, ON; Eastbourne: David C Cook, 2005), 370.

symbol of victory. When you have soldiers on the other side of the city that were in a habit of ruthlessly putting down any hint of insurrection, this was a rather bold statement on the part of these crowds.

### ***C. Christ's kingdom versus the politics of Psalm 118 (v. 13)***

But what is hinted at in the palm branches is made explicit in the next two verses that are quoted from the Old Testament. Verse 13 quotes Psalm 118, a Psalm that puts God's kingdom in conflict with the rebellious kingdoms of the world. Earlier Jesus had quoted verses 22-24 of that Psalm and that quote had made the political rulers furious at the implications that they must bow the knee to Him and if they did not, they would be crushed by the very stone that they had rejected. Was He messing with politics? Yes He was. Those verses in Psalm 118 had shown the radically different orientations that politics and Christ's kingdom had in that the stone that the politicians had rejected was made the chief cornerstone of God's kingdom.

But then come the words that are quoted in verse 13:

"Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!" Jesus is explicitly being called the King of Israel. And in context, He is the Messiah destined to have a worldwide empire. That was considered treason by Rome. No one could be declared king without Caesar's permission. This would have also made the rulers of Israel a bit testy. Just as one example, in the parallel passage of Luke 19, the Pharisees insisted that Jesus rebuke those who were quoting this verse. Jesus' response was, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out." In other words, this was not a random act of a crowd that was inappropriate. Jesus indicates that God Himself was orchestrating these Palm Sunday cries of kingship. They were prophesied to happen and they must happen. Jesus must be recognized as King over politicians.

### ***D. Riding a donkey was a symbol of coronation (v. 14-15 with Zechariah 9)***

When you couple that with Jesus riding on a donkey, and the obvious way that He was deliberately fulfilling Zechariah 9, you cannot escape the conclusion that Jesus was messing with politics. He was insisting that His kingdom of grace invade that arena.

But the symbol shows what stage of the kingdom this is. Where stallions were symbols of ongoing conquest, donkeys and mules were symbols of peace being offered to those who were willing to make Christ king. The donkey or mule came at the beginning of the kingdom. And thus Solomon

rode on a mule at his coronation. The sons of two judges rode on donkeys perhaps hoping that one of them would be inducted into office. So the symbol of the donkey means that Jesus is riding before His subjects to give them an opportunity to recognize His kingship and make vows of submission to His kingship.

According to the prophets, all kings must bow down before the Messiah, and all kings must conform their behavior to His law. As Psalm 2 words it, if those kings refuse to kiss the Son and do homage to Him as their emperor, He will smash them with His iron rod. So riding on a donkey was a straightforward statement that politicians owed Him their allegiance. Verse 42 says that some rulers did indeed believe in Him, but not most.

### ***E. Where Rome ruled by intimidation and fear, Jesus wins and rules by grace (v. 15a)***

But notice too the offer in verse 15: “Fear not, daughter of Zion...” This too is such a contrast in the nature of the two kingdoms. The only way that Rome knew how to maintain control was through fear, and threat, and intimidation. The whole purpose of Pilate riding into Jerusalem on this day was to remind people that He had brutally squashed rebellion in the past and was quite willing to do so again.

But Christ’s kingdom says to its citizens, “Fear not.” Those outside the kingdom do need to fear, but verse 15 says, “Fear not, daughter of Zion.” If you are a son or daughter of Zion, you do not need to fear. You are secure in Christ. Though grace subdues our hearts and conquers our wills, it does so in a way that chases away fear and instills love. It is the very opposite of politics. Politics uses the threat of force to accomplish its will. But Christ’s kingdom grows by grace.

### ***F. Christ’s kingdom versus the politics of Zech. 9:9-10 (v. 15)***

That doesn’t mean there is no judgment when grace is rejected. Of course there is. Zechariah goes on to say that God would judge Israel by letting two statist nations duke it out with each other. Rome and Israel would soon be at each others throats. But that same passage also shows that it would be a redemptive judgment that would cause at least some people’s eyes to be opened up to what a lousy savior the state makes. And Zechariah promises that over time more and more will flee the idol of statism and embrace the peace of Jesus. Hallelujah! It is an exciting story for those who have eyes to see.

Well, verse 15 quotes Zechariah 9:9-10 - a passage that promises to destroy the war machines of civilization and bring peace to the world. Rome tried to bring peace through oppression. But God told Zechariah the kingdom of Christ will eventually be so successful that “No more shall an oppressor pass through them, for...” and then comes the reason that the oppression of politics will eventually disappear. Zechariah says,

- >9 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
- > Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
- > Behold, your King is coming to you;
- > He is just and having salvation,
- > Lowly and riding on a donkey,
- > A colt, the foal of a donkey.
- >10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
- > And the horse from Jerusalem;
- > The battle bow shall be cut off.
- > He shall speak peace to the nations;
- > His dominion shall be “from sea to sea,
- > And from the River to the ends of the earth.’

Rather than imposing world-wide peace with the sword (as Rome did), Jesus will bring universal peace with the blueprints of the Word and the power of His grace. And the next verses go on to show the power of Christ’s blood - the blood of the covenant.

But the point of the Zechariah passage is that Christ’s kingdom purpose will not be finished in history until this world’s political kingdoms are replaced with Christ’s kingdom of grace and Biblical law. Eventually there will be no more need for national weapons to defend nations against other nations, though the chapter does go on to say that weapons will be needed for quite a long period of history until grace has achieved its purposes. In other words, it won’t happen overnight.

But Pilate could never promise what Jesus was promising. Indeed, it takes faith to believe any of these promises of Christ’s kingdom. It is the kingdom of heaven invading earth and transforming every square inch of earth until God is glorified in every realm - including the realm of civics. It is a comprehensive Gospel.

### ***G. Christ’s glorification (that is, His kingdom) started in AD 30 (v. 16)***

Verse 16 says, “His disciples did not understand these things at first.” So take heart; not everyone in the church gets it right away. But it goes on to say, “...but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these

things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.” When He was glorified (past tense), they remembered all the things related to His kingship that were done on this day. Christ’s kingdom glory and His crucifixion are tied tightly together in this passage and in Zechariah 9.

If you read the New Scofield Reference Bible on this verse you will see how the editors stumble all over themselves trying to keep the kingdom glory separate from the cross. Why? Because they recognize that Daniel 7 and other passages explicitly speak of the Son of Man being glorified when He is given a kingdom. And they don’t think that we are in the kingdom. That’s still far off in the future according to them. For Dispensationalists, the time from the cross to the present is not the time of glory, but the time of darkness when things are getting worse and worse. But in Luke 24 Jesus explained that the New Covenant is indeed the time of Christ’s glory (v. 26). 1 Peter 1:10-11 speaks of “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” And 2 Peter 1 says that the light was just now dawning and it would continue to grow until at some point in history there would be the blazing full day sun.

And that concept of glorification gets mentioned several times in this chapter. Verse 23 says, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” I don’t know how you can get around that. In verse 28 Jesus prays, “Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” Those verses continue:

29 Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.” 30 Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” 33 This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

The cross as the instrument of His kingdom glorification is a much-needed correction to the discouragement of our day. The church expects defeat because it sees victory as postponed till the Second Coming rather than flowing from the cross. Sadly, rather than seeing the cross as reversing history, they are still waiting for that reversal at the Second Coming. Their eschatology is not cross-centered. Indeed, I will dare to say that only Postmillennialism sees the cross as reversing history. Only Postmillennialism is truly cross-centered in its view of history.

The church is passive because it thinks that Jesus needs to accomplish something more rather than taking seriously His words on the cross, “It is finished!” Sadly, the New Scofield Bible says in a footnote on this verse, “The King has been rejected by His own nation and, therefore, the predicted temporal blessings of that kingdom for both Jews and Gentiles (Isa. 60:1-4;

62:1-4) had to be deferred until the King's return in glory (Acts 15:16-17).” Christ says, “No. That glory is not off in the distant future.” “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” He links the kingdom and the cross.

But where this conflicts with politics is that God's glory flows through the weakness of the cross and enables an inward love for God's law whereas politics flows from the power of the sword and ignores God's law and forces conformity with man's constantly changing opinion.

#### ***H. The Pharisees fear that they have lost the world to Christ (v. 19)***

Next, Christ's power over death is mentioned in the raising of Lazarus from the dead in verses 17-18. What an incredible power! When the people recognized that grace can do what no leader of Israel could do, they welcomed Jesus. But verse 19 shows what a threat the gospel was to politics. And the true Gospel will always be a threat to politics. It is interesting that the leaders (perhaps because of the demons within them) recognized that worldwide call of Christ's kingdom. Verse 19 says, The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him! Despite their strategies to put an end to this movement, it wasn't working. John does not include that statement by accident. “Look, the world has gone after Him!” Though the humanism of the Pharisees looked unstoppable to many, Christ by the eye of faith could see that it was really the world which was being conquered. And from that time to the present Christianity has been progressively taking over the world.

#### ***I. Greeks come to Christ (vv. 20-22)***

Then in verses 20-22, John weaves another story into the the narrative to show that very literally the Pharisees were correct and the world (the Gentiles) was indeed going after Jesus. Verses 20-21 say, Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. 21 Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” There is something interesting about His language here. Only proselytes who had been circumcised and had become Jews would have been allowed to partake of the Passover, so we know for a fact that these Greeks had become Jews. But the fact that John calls them Greeks rather than Jewish proselytes is to support the thematic picture he is weaving of Jesus being not only the King of the Jews, but the King of the whole world.

And what began on that Sunday has continued non-stop. The world is coming to Jesus, with some estimates of there being 2.2 billion Christians, which is almost one third of the world's population. And what happens when true Christianity invades a country? Persecution and conflict from the politicians. They intuitively sense a threat to their power. Christ's reign will not be finished till all kings bow before Him and all areas of life are subject to His Kingdom. Even in America the self-conscious hatred for Christianity on the part of some is becoming clearer and clearer. They know the implications of Christianity better than a lot of Christians do.

***J. Christ promises much grain will be harvested (v. 24)***

In verse 24 Jesus promises that much grain will be harvested. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." Much grain would result from Christ's death. So yes, there was pain, but through the pain Christ would achieve victory.

***K. The Father promises that Christ will be glorified (v. 28)***

I've already dealt with the next point - the Father's promise to continue to glorify Christ.

***L. Christ is about to conquer the prince of this world, Satan (v. 31)***

But verse 31 is another blow to pessimistic eschatology - an eschatology (by the way) that tends to embrace the politics of this world. If you don't have a robust Gospel, it is unlikely that you will have a robust eschatology. It should not be a surprise that bad eschatologies almost always result in Christians not wanting politics to be radically Biblical. Bad eschatologies almost always throw out the law of God when it comes to politics. Why? Because they don't have a Gospel that is sufficient to transform politics and to make all kings bow to the law.

Anyway, this says, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." Christ's cross would deal a blow to Satan's head that he would not recover from.

We have to get it into our heads that God brings triumph out of the jaws of defeat; He manifests His strength in our weakness. And really, it doesn't matter how weak we are since 100% of His grace and His kingdom flows from heaven to earth, and does not flow from this world. Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world - it did not originate here. In fact, He

told Pilate that Pilate could have no authority unless it was given from heaven. Everything of worth originates from heaven and will take over and conquer the world.

The cross of Jesus Christ is all the power we need to conquer Satan. It guaranteed Satan's defeat and it guaranteed the capture of the world from his hands. And that same blood of Christ continues to be used by Christ's people to overcome demons today. It says in Revelation 12 that God's people resist the dragon, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

***M. He promises that His death will draw all people to Himself (v. 32)***

Next, in verse 32 Jesus promises that His death will draw all peoples to Himself. That's an astounding statement:

32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." 33 This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

Notice the certainty of His words. If He is crucified or lifted up on the cross, He will draw all peoples to Himself. There will eventually be no pagan tribes or peoples left on planet earth - all peoples will be Christian peoples.

Again, you can see that the pretended universality of Rome's empire (the impossible dream of rebellious mankind) is nothing compared to the joyful and willing embrace that the whole world will eventually give to Jesus. It was a frontal rejection of the imperial theology of Rome. Their pax Romana (which means Roman peace) resulted in bloodied and enslaved countries. The pax Christus (which is Christ's peace) redeems countries by Christ's blood and brings them into liberty. Grace always exalts the wonderful law of liberty - the Bible.

***N. Jerusalem was a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem, capitol of the world (Lam. 2:15), the city of the Great King (Ps. 48:2), and the throne of Jehovah (Jer. 3:17).***

And of course, Jerusalem itself was an appropriate symbol for the place where Jesus would be symbolically enthroned on their praises. In the Old Testament, Jerusalem was treated as the capitol of the world because it was the symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem or the heavenly kingdom, which is destined to send its leavening influence until all the world is Christianized. So Jerusalem was such an appropriate symbol.

So this chapter hints at a glorious eschatology of triumph. It is called the Triumphant entry for a reason. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun, does its

successive journeys run. Christ's kingdom declares the eventual defeat of Rome, the earthly Jerusalem, Satan, and all other enemies that stand in opposition to His law. While Palm Sunday is not politics, it certainly confronts politics.

### **III. Four hints that Christ's kingdom will be achieved by grace, not power**

But I want to end by quickly pointing to the most radical difference between these two world-wide empires. It is grace versus power. The Jewish leaders had bought into power religion and power politics. But Jesus starts, continues, and finishes everything by grace conforming people to His law. What politics will never accomplish, grace will accomplish.

#### ***A. Christ's is a kingdom of love, not politics (vv. 1-7)***

The first seven verses illustrate how Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of love. Mary's perfume was so expensive that verse 5 indicates that it would take the average worker a whole year's wages to purchase it. Did Mary need to give away that extravagant gift? No. But she wanted to. She loved Jesus so much that this was a joy, not a sacrifice. And this is true of all those saved by grace. The Triune God has given so much to us that no sacrifice we give seems too expensive. Our hearts are won. We willingly submit to King Jesus. We are inspired by Jesus, not forced by Jesus. We willingly lay down our lives for Him.

This kingdom is utterly different from the kingdom of Caesar that had to constantly bear the sword to force people to submit. The tepid praise and flowers that were thrown in front of Pilate on Palm Sunday was merely fake ritual. This costly gift came out of sincere love. And Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of love, not a kingdom of political maneuverings.

#### ***B. Christ's kingdom does not grow by fear (v. 15)***

Since perfect love casts out fear, it is no wonder that the citizens of Christ's kingdom are told "fear not" in verse 15. Fear, manipulation, and bribery were the tools Rome used to force submission of citizens. But where love resides, fear is absent. And there is coming a day when fear will be banished from the world because Christ's kingdom of love is so pervasive.

#### ***C. Christ's death forms the basis for His kingdom of life (vv. 7,23-26)***

Third, in contrast to this world's leaders who expect their citizens to lay

down their lives in the emperor's ungodly wars, Christ laid down His life for His people. His death was anticipated in verse 7, but it was also prophesied by Christ in verses 23-27. That passage is an amazing statement that dying to self means really living, and when grain dies in the ground it produces an abundant harvest of more grain. All you have to do is look at Rome (which has long ago passed away), and contrast it with Christianity (which is growing), and you can see that Christ's kingdom goes contrary to all expectations. It's unlike any other kingdom. It does not conform to man's thinking. Instead, it calls man to conform his thinking to God's.

***D. Christ's kingdom flows from the light of Scriptural truth, not the wisdom of man (vv. 35-50)***

And finally, verses 35-50 contrast the demonic blindness and darkness of the politicians of that day with the light that Scripture gives to Christ's kingdom. When the light of Scripture is brought to bear in politics, it tends to be rejected. Why? Because it is incompatible with man's kingdom. Romans 8:7 says, "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." Politics will never be changed until God gives a new regenerate heart to men, women, and children and (as Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16 word it), until He writes His law upon their hearts.

Beginning to read at verse 35:

35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them. 37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, 38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" 39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them."

But praise God, verse 42 says, "Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him..."

But there is sadness in that verse as well. Because political thinking was still in their system, the verse goes on to say of even those believers, "but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Those politicians were acting like politicians; they were ashamed of confessing Christ and promoting His law in politics. There is nothing new under the sun. Christians intuitively recognize the conflict between Christ's kingdom and politics and they sadly shrink from confessing Christ in that

realm.

Well, Jesus goes on in the final verses to warn people not to be ashamed of His Word. If politicians would heed the theology of this chapter, we might see the kingdom of light overwhelming the kingdom of darkness. Light always banishes darkness. His light spreads as His Word is shone into every nook and cranny of life.

I started by presenting two parades representing two kingdoms, two centers of authority, two worldviews, two saviors, and two quite different outcomes. Which parade best represents your thinking? One parade boldly confessed Christ's kingdom in politics. The other crowd played the world's games by confessing Caesar. It does not honor your Savior to play politics rather than representing the kingdom of heaven to earth. May we as a church more and more align our thinking with Christ's kingdom and less and less with the pragmatic politics of this world. Amen.