

Let the Stones Cry Out

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Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hello, Church. Good morning. Welcome to those who are here and those who are joining us online! I want to read the passage we have been referencing all morning, from Luke, chapter 19, beginning with verse 28.

After Jesus had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As He approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as they had been told. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it."

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As He went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," He replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

As He approached Jerusalem, and saw the city, He wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

God bless the reading of His Word.

Every year a division of the Masons, the Knights Templar, endeavor to send one clergy person from every state to the Holy Land on a very intensive education and edification pilgrimage. In 2012, I was nominated and selected to represent the state of Idaho. In February of that year, I went to Israel. Going to the Holy Land was never on my bucket list. It just wasn't. I had taken historical geography, that we used to call hysterical geography, and I knew what I needed to know. But I went. I mean, it was an educational opportunity, it was all expenses paid, and it was indeed an opportunity to walk in the steps of Jesus, so I went. It was 12 days total, 10 days in Israel: one day on the Mediterranean coast, five days in Galilee and four days in and around Jerusalem. As I prepared for that trip, I really wanted to see Galilee because that's where Jesus was reared and that's where He spent most of his ministry. And it was really educational and enlightening and uplifting to walk in the very steps of Jesus. When we got there, one of the first things that our guide said to us, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, you have been reading the Bible in black and white. From now on, you're going to read it in color." And boy, was he right! I looked forward to being in Galilee, but I really did not anticipate much about going to Jerusalem. You see, I'm not a city guy. I'm a country boy from way back. I like the country. I like the wilderness. I like to be outside and there's nothing that excites me about a city. And I had no idea what type of an impact seeing Jerusalem for

the first time would have on me. In scripture, any time you read about somebody going to Jerusalem, they're going up to Jerusalem. There's a reason for that. Jerusalem sits on the top of what they call a mountain. Here in the West, we'd call it a hill. It is one mountain with two peaks. You have Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives. Mount Zion is where Jerusalem is. Now, when we went to Jerusalem, we came up from the northwest moving to the southeast. We came up over the top of the Mount of Olives and there's a point at which you have Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives and in between is the Kidron Valley which is about a mile wide. And you come up over the Mount of Olives and all of a sudden, there before you is Jerusalem. It's not there and then it's there. And when we came up over the mountain, there was this collective gasp in the bus followed by shouting and clapping. And I became conscious that big tears were running down my face and I had no idea why. Very soon we stopped and pulled over to the side of the road and there were some bleachers there that gave a very commanding view of Jerusalem. And I can remember crawling up those bleachers and our guide saying, "I want you to separate out. I want you to contemplate what you're looking at." So, we did. And I remember two things. I remember sitting there with big tears just streaming down my face and slowly becoming conscious of why, becoming conscious of all the history that I was looking at and all the things that occurred there through the centuries and what Jesus had suffered and gone through at this place. And I also remember freezing to death because it was 40 degrees and all I had was a windbreaker and my face was wet. And I told our guide afterwards, "I had no anticipation that Jerusalem would have that type of impact on me." He said, "Yeah, most people don't, but it always does."

Our Scripture today is about Jesus returning to Jerusalem. This would be His last trip. This is the final act of the drama that was His life. There are a number of things that I want you to see. First, Jesus is following the long line of tradition of the prophets who came before Him. The prophets that God sent to Israel would preach and preach and preach and preach until they were blue in the face. And when the people didn't listen, very often what God would have the prophets do is act out their sermons, act out their message. Jesus had preached for three years. He had proclaimed the Kingdom of God. He had proclaimed peace and salvation. Many of the common people accepted His message or at least accepted the idea of His message, but the religious leaders and Jewish rulers began with skepticism, progressed to anger, and ended with homicide in their response to His message. In what Jesus did, He was acting out His message. I want you to hear that this is something that is carefully planned. This is not haphazard. This is not spur of the moment. This is something that Jesus had thought about; He had planned out. And He had arranged with the owners of the colt months, perhaps even the year before at the Passover, that this would be a sign. "On this day of the Passover, I'm coming back and I want you to have that colt ready. Have it tied outside and I will send my guys there. And this will be a sign. If you see somebody untying the colt, ask them why they're doing that and they will say to you, 'The Lord needs it.'" And when they went into Bethany or Bethphage, they found it just as Jesus had said. They untied the colt and they brought it back to Him. This is something that was carefully planned. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing.

I want you to see this for the great courage and act of absolute defiance it was. There was a price on His head, so much so that the disciples had begged Him not to go back to Jerusalem. And He said, "Nevertheless, I am going." And He did not slink in through the back gate and stay in the shadows. He came into Jerusalem in a manner to focus all attention on Himself. He said, "You are either going to accept me or you're going to kill me. You're going to accept me for who I am or you're going to kill me because of what I

am.” When the Pharisees said to Jesus, “Tell your disciples not to cry out, not to shout anymore,” He said, “If I tell them that, these very rocks will proclaim the message. This message must be heard.” I want you to see in what Jesus did, Jesus was throwing down the gauntlet. He said, “I am coming to you with a message of peace and salvation and I would rather be killed than to kill my enemies or to compromise my message. I will proclaim it. Accept it or not.” I want you to see in what Jesus did, His deliberate proclamation of being the Messiah, of being the king. Throughout His ministry, people had said, “You’re the Messiah.” He said, “Shhh! Don’t tell anybody.” Why? Because it wasn’t time. When He would cast out demons, they would say, “You are the Son of God,” and He’d say, “Shhh! Shut up!” Why? It wasn’t time. But here in His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He was proclaiming it loud and clear: “I am King. I am Messiah,” but He proclaimed it as a very specific type of king. You see, when a king came into town after conquering, he came in riding on a stallion. When he came in demanding that people surrender, he came in riding on a stallion. When he came in demanding tribute, he came in riding on a stallion. But when he came in peace, everybody knew it because he came in riding on a donkey. Jesus proclaimed to be Messiah, the Prince of Peace, one that would rather die than kill His enemies or compromise His message. I want you to see in this story that this is love’s last appeal, their last chance.

When Jesus saw Jerusalem on that last trip in, probably fairly close to where we stopped, all the people shouted and Jesus cried. They shouted, “Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes from the name of the Lord! Hosanna!” And Jesus cried. We use hosanna as a praise and indeed it is. But what hosanna means is, “Save us now!” So, what they were saying is, “Save us now! Save us now! Save us now! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord to save us now!” Jesus cried because they didn’t want Him. They didn’t want Him. Oh yeah, they were shouting for Him, but they didn’t want Him. He knew what they wanted. They wanted a military king that would save them from their physical enemies and fight their physical battles. They didn’t want the Prince of Peace and the Author of Salvation. He cried because He knew where this path would lead. It would lead to rebellion against the Romans. The Romans were fairly tolerant of a lot of things, especially religion. You could worship however you wanted. But the one thing they would not tolerate is rebellion against their authority and their power. And if you rebelled against their authority and power, they would come down on you like the wrath of God and squash you like a bug. Jesus saw where this path was leading. He knew what the outcome would be and He talked about it in this passage. In 69 AD, the Jewish people rebelled against the Romans, and the Romans, in turn, sent a very small portion of the Roman legion against Palestine. And they practiced scorched earth. As they marched across Palestine, they killed and destroyed everything in their path. And when they got to Jerusalem, they locked it down. They allowed nothing in and nothing out. And the people who wanted to surrender were trapped inside and they would not let them out. That happened in the beginning of 69. The Romans took their sweet time, and they built a siege-work against the city. Largely, by the way, they used the Jewish religion against them. The Jews refused to fight on the Sabbath day. So, guess when they built the siege-work. On the Sabbath. It took them almost 18 months to build it. By the time it was ready to demolish the walls of Jerusalem, the inhabitants of Jerusalem had turned to widespread cannibalism. When the Romans broke down the walls, there was little left. They burned the city to the ground. And that great symbol of the Jewish nation, the temple, they tore it down completely. So much so, that they spread salt over the temple grounds and plowed it into the earth. Jesus cried because of the needless pain and suffering they were causing themselves because of their own ambitions. And He cried because we do the same thing. He cried for the peace and

salvation He offered them that was rejected. He cried because of all the pain and suffering they could have avoided. He cried because they were doing their will in God's name. We would never do that. Jesus' tears were over the needless pain and suffering that we bring on ourselves when we refuse to follow God's way. When we follow our own desires, that leads us away from God's path, and when we get off of God's path, we experience pain and suffering and it is needless pain and suffering.

All of Holy Week is about how far God is willing to go to get His family back, what God is willing to do to say to you and me, "I have your best interest at heart. I do not want you to suffer. I do not want you to experience needless pain. I don't want that for My children. And if you will but follow Me, you don't have to experience that." I can remember my dad having one of those dad talks (you ever have a dad talk?) with me and saying, "Son, you're about to make a lot of the stupid mistakes I've made. I've already made them! If you'll just listen, you won't have to go through it." God is saying the same thing to us today.

So, I got a couple of questions for you. Number one: Do you believe that God wants what's best for you? Okay, that's not a rhetorical question. Do you believe that God wants what's best for you? Do you believe that God actually knows what He's doing? Then I've got a word for you. That word is trust. I didn't say that it was easy. Trust. That was the problem for the people of Jerusalem. They were doing their will in God's name and they did not trust that God's way was better than their way. So, I'm going to ask you to do something pretty difficult this week. Just for Holy Week, all right? If you don't like it, after Holy Week you can turn loose of it. Trust that God wants what's best for you. Trust that God knows what He's doing and put your trust in God's way. Let's pray. I can't do this for you. You've got to do it for yourself. Say, "Lord, I do believe and I do trust that You have my best interest at heart and I trust that Your way is the best way. And this week, to the best of my ability, I am going to trust." Would you do that? Do that now.

Lord, we are a skeptical people and sometimes we are a rebellious people. Sometimes we are a forgetful people. We forget the lessons of the past that You have taught us again and again and again, that Your way is the right way. So, Lord, during this sacred time, during this sacred week, we commit ourselves to trust. In Jesus' name. Amen.