

Palm Sunday

If you have your bibles, go ahead and open to Mark chapter 11. Welcome to Hardin Baptist Church on this Palm Sunday on this Sunday where we've paused to have our Baby Blessing service. What a privilege it is to be here as we get ready to celebrate a great, great week, anticipating next Sunday morning celebrating the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

You've heard me say before; I revisited history this week, because when I was a kid, I remember February 21st, 1972, many of you do too, when we watched Airforce One land for the first time in Beijing, China. After a week of activity where Richard Nixon, the first president of the United States to visit China, after he toured many places in the country and met with the leaders of that communist nation, the people's Republic of China, he boarded Airforce One again to land safely in Washington DC. If you'll remember, when that week of travel was over, Richard Nixon looked back at that week and declared to the world that his visit to Beijing, China, will be remembered as the week that changed to world. I disagree. The week that changed the world was not when Airforce One landed in Beijing, China, to later successfully land in Washington DC. The week that changed the world was when Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, and before the week was over, many in the crowd who cried Hosanna would cry crucify Him, crucify Him, and He would be crucified. But three days later, He would rise victoriously from the grave, and that's the week that changed the world. That's the week that changed Ricky Cunningham's life, and it's the week that will, or has, changed yours.

Now, out of tradition, we've opened to Mark chapter 11, and normally we would read verses 1-11, but this morning we are going to do the sermon a little differently. I'm hesitant to even say this because you know there's not a musical bone in my body, but this week, instead of us looking at one of the gospel narratives and have a solo song from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, we want to look at Scripture in what I'm going to call four part harmony. Many of us like four-part harmony. We love it when Matt leads

by himself, but when we really love it is when he's got more singers beside him and you hear his voice taking lead, but you hear those other singers like Melissa, Michelle, or whoever, and they're harmonizing with him. I want you to see the four gospels this morning. I think I'm right; the four main parts in four-part harmony are the soprano, the alto, the tenor, and the bass. You know that while each one of those are singing the same song, they just add a richness when you hear the soprano, and you hear the tenor, and you hear them reach notes that there's no way the bass singer could ever think about reaching. But then on the other side, (I see Steve grinning) there are some notes that the bass singer can take us down to that provides a depth that no tenor alone can ever reach; that alto voice, wow.

So I want us to look at what Scripture teaches from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John about what we call Palm Sunday. You realize this, right; Jesus died at a fairly young age of about thirty-three, or thirty-three and a half. He only had a public ministry for three years, and yet, when the gospel writers record the life of Christ, they spend the majority of the gospel talking about the last seven days, the last week on the earth. Luke's got twenty-four chapters, and five and a half of those chapters talk about Passion Week. Mark only has sixteen chapters, but in six of those, he talks about Passion Week. Matthew has twenty-eight, but in eight of those, he talks about the passion of Christ. John, writing the last gospel as an older man, only writes twenty-one chapters, but in ten of those chapters, he focuses on the Passion Week. All four of them spend great depth talking about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

The Bass of John

Now, normally, this doesn't happen, but could we begin this morning with the bass of John? For see, we know the story, it's Palm Sunday, and Jesus is going to ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. They are going to put their coats on the back of that animal to form a saddle, cloaks on the ground. They are going to take palm branches, other leafy branches they are going to lay before Him and He's going to ride into Jerusalem on the back of that donkey, and the crowd in front of Him and the crowd behind Him are going to be shouting Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He

who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna to the son of David. But in this story, do you hear the harmony of John? John takes us to a depth, writing years later, that Matthew, Mark, and Luke don't quite reach.

John reminds us that just a few days earlier, Jesus got news that His friend, Lazarus, has died. His sisters have great faith that he can prevent him from dying, but Jesus waits until he dies before He heads out, and now Lazarus has been dead four days when Jesus shows up. And when Jesus shows up, He raises him from the dead. Can you imagine being in that crowd that day when you went the funeral to help console Martha and Mary about the loss of their brother, and then his best friend, Jesus, shows up and raises him from the dead? John tells us that many believed in Him, meaning they believed He was the Messiah. See, John tells us that the purpose of his gospel was so that we might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, after seeing all the signs that He did. And the signs that he's writing about are a few, because if he wrote about all the signs, there aren't enough books in the world to contain the signs. But these few signs that he's using are to point us to Jesus so that we'll believe, and that by believing, we'll have life in His name. And now, he takes the sign of the raising of Lazarus and shows that many in the crowd that day believed Jesus was the Messiah. But while some were believing, some went straight to the Pharisees. Instead of believing Jesus was the Messiah, they told on Jesus to the Pharisees. The Pharisees gathered the religious leaders, they gather what's called the Sanhedrin council together, and they decide what to do about Jesus because they're worried if people keep following Jesus and He keeps doing what He's doing, then Rome might come down and take away their right to self-rule. All of a sudden, Caiaphas, the high priest, stands up and says hold it guys! You're missing the point here. Here's the truth; it would be better for one man to die than the whole nation perish. And John, in that deep bass voice, says, while he was using his human logic, while he was using his human brain, while he was analyzing the situation, making a decision on what was best for Israel as a physical people, he actually prophesied that it would be better for one man to die than all the people of the world to perish.

So do you know what they plot to do? They are going to kill Jesus. So do you know what Jesus does? In John's gospel, He slips away with His disciples to the wilderness, and it's almost like He's hiding. Now earlier in John's gospel, every time there's tension between Jesus and the religious leaders, John will say His time has not come yet, so they don't lay hands on Him, which lets you and I know that Jesus isn't just on the earth living by the seat of His pants, He's not just making decisions on the fly; He's on a divine time schedule. And now, John lets us know His hour has come, but Jesus is out in the wilderness. He's hiding. It looks like He's afraid. As a matter of fact, some in the crowd that saw Him raise Lazarus now wonder, with this death sentence on Him, will He even show His face in Jerusalem.

Now, you know this, right; up until this point, when Jesus went somewhere, He always walked. Occasionally, He takes a boat. He didn't even need a boat, though; He can just walk on the water, right. Have you ever thought about this? Have you ever been in a crowd of people and lost someone? The first time we took G to Disney World, all we said all day long is where is G? Where is G? I remember being in a Small, Small World, and I had responsibility that day for G, (it seems like I always have responsibility for G) and all of a sudden, somebody looked at me and said, "Where is G," and I looked down and G wasn't there. Papaw's heart liked to have jumped out of his skin! Have you ever noticed that when you're in a crowd of people, it's easy just to fit in? Have you ever noticed how you can hide in a crowd from someone in the crowd?

You get it, don't you? Jesus is now two miles from Jerusalem, and He tells His disciples to go to the city, you'll find a colt tied with its mother. Just unloose him, don't ask for permission, and if anybody asks you why you're untying these, just tell them the Lord has need of them. Sure enough, someone did, and they said the Lord has need; they said fine, and all of a sudden, the disciples, two miles from Israel, standing with a mother and a baby colt, and Jesus is going to ride into town on the back of a donkey. Why? He's not hiding. He's not incognito now. He's going to elevate Himself, and as He makes that two-mile trek, He's going to rise above the people so that anyone who wants to come to Him for whatever purpose, they can come. Wow! Hold it! Does anybody hear the soprano voice of

The Soprano of Matthew

Matthew? Matthew tells us what Mark doesn't tell us, or Luke tells us. Matthew tells us that the reason He gets on the back of that donkey is because He is fulfilling the prophecy of Zachariah 9:9 that was written five hundred years earlier, written to the nation of Israel to one day look forward to the coming of their King, because when their King comes He will be righteous, and having salvation He'll be humble and mounted on the back of a donkey, the foal of the donkey. Wow!

It would have to be impressive to be in the presence of Airforce One and see Airforce One land. Regardless of which political party you affiliate with, to see the President of the United States arrive on Airforce One. Do you realize what an intimidation factor that is? And then, to have him visit your town and get out of that airplane into a motorcade of not one limousine, but many limousines, and he show up. Jesus didn't have Airforce One, He didn't have a motorcade, but please understand He was doing the cultural practice of His day to send a message just as Airforce One sends a message and the motorcade sends a message.

See, we didn't invent that as a nation. For years, leaders have been trying to get an advantage, and so in the culture of this time, you need to remember that when a king came into a town, he had two choices of transportation. He either rode his white horse, or he rode his donkey. Now, the donkeys fell out of a place of esteem in our culture. But see, in the biblical world when a city saw the imperial motorcade coming, they looked to see if he was on a horse or a donkey. If he rode in on his white horse, that meant he was bringing war with him, and he would show off his soldiers, but if he was coming in peace, he would come on a donkey. Do you get it?

If you'll notice, Matthew paraphrases the prophecy. He paraphrases the prophecy because the prophecy is written in poetry and it employs Hebrew parallelism. If you've read the Psalms, you've read the Song of Solomon, you've read Proverbs, you've read Job, you know that when you're studying a poem, you're studying a song in the Old Testament, that there are always two lines in a verse. The one line states a point, and then the

second line either repeats the same thought with different words, or it totally opposes that thought or it expands and explains the first sentence. You can never know what the first verse of a poem means until you see that second line; "behold, your king is coming," Zachariah says, "righteous in having salvation is he, humble, and mounted on a donkey." Matthew, when he quotes this, just said, "Your king is coming, humble, and mounted on a donkey." Why? Because everyone there knew the second line gave the meaning of the first line. But in America, we don't understand that. So what's Matthew trying to tell us in that soprano voice? He's trying to tell us that Jesus, the Messiah, on the back of this donkey; He's righteous and He's bring salvation. He's humble, mounted on a donkey. Humility describes His righteousness, and mounted on a donkey describes the salvation He' bringing. So when they see Him riding on the donkey, the salvation that He's bringing is not a salvation that will contain war, or be based on war, but He'll bring peace. Tell me you see this.

The Tenor of Luke

What's that I hear? Is that Luke? I believe it is. Have you noticed when you read Luke's gospel that Luke tells us that as this crowd comes to town, and there are some in front of Jesus, there are some behind Jesus, that they're crying out like the others, saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" The Pharisees tell Jesus to hush His disciples. See, John tells us that the crowd, you may not have realized this, the crowd that day that's following Jesus are the same people who saw Him raise Lazarus from the dead. They got the thought that this might be the Messiah, but they're wondering if He's going to come to Jerusalem and proclaim Himself the Messiah. So when they hear He's on the back of that donkey, they know He's declaring Himself to be king, and now they're rushing to follow with Him. They want to get in the parade. They want to be on His side when the Kingdom comes, but John tells us they've also told other people and those other people who heard what they said, they are in the crowd too. They've taken off their coats, they've put them on the back of the donkey, they've taken their coats off (not an extra coat, the only coat they had) and they've thrown it on the ground. They've take palm

branches; they've thrown them on the ground. They're not going to let the hoof of that donkey even touch the ground because He's the coming King. He's on the back of a donkey that's never been ridden. That's weird. I'm never going to go to a stable and ask for an animal that's never been ridden, amen. I want a horse that's been rode a lot. Have you ever seen somebody try to get on a horse for the first time? Imagine trying to get on a stubborn donkey for the first time, and here Jesus gets on the back of a donkey that's never been ridden! The King has dominion that man forfeited in the Garden of Eden, and now that animal, with his own resistant, stubborn will, submits to the will of Jesus! As that foal brings Him into Jerusalem and they're crying out, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Save us now! Save us now!" the religious leaders tell Jesus to hush the crowd. Have you ever noticed in the gospel, up until this point, every time somebody recognizes who Jesus is, Jesus Himself says hush, shhh, be quiet, don't tell anybody. Boy, we Baptists have been really good about that, right, shhh, shhh. But now, all of a sudden, when somebody else is telling Jesus to tell your people to be quiet, He says if I tell them to be quiet, the stones will raise up and praise Me. Wow! Hey guys, it's one thing when a human being sees Jesus raise somebody from the dead and that person pins their hope that He's the Messiah and they line the street, crying out to Him for personal salvation for themselves and the nation, but it would be another thing if we saw something that does not have life all of a sudden raise up and begin to praise God, King of kings, Lord of creation; that would be a sight, amen!

The Alto of Mark

The alto of Mark, He comes into Jerusalem, and all the gospel writers agree that He goes straight to the temple. Now think about this with me. You're Jesus, you're on the back of that donkey, you're fulfilling Scripture, and you hear your followers crying out for personal salvation to save them now and you know they want to be saved from the Romans, but you don't go to the Roman barracks where the ambassador to Israel from Rome is, and neither do you go to the palace of the leader of Israel, and you don't go to the house of Caiaphas, you go straight to the temple. What's the Bible trying to tell us? Our problem is not with government. Our problem is with ourselves. We've got a sin problem. We want self-rule, and that has

separated us from God, so Jesus is going to save us from our sin because we've got a sin problem with God. He goes right to the house of God. They all agree, but notice this, Matthew, Mark, and Luke have Jesus going to the temple and cleansing the temple in the beginning of the week. John has Jesus cleansing the temple, but he has Jesus cleansing the temple at the beginning of His ministry three years earlier. This is not a contradiction. Matthew, Mark, and Luke write with the progression of the gospel that if you were a follower during the time of Jesus, you would not know His ultimate purpose until He entered Jerusalem. John's now writing as an old man, knowing that the very purpose of the ministry of Jesus was to make us right with God, so he tells us right off in the beginning about the ministry of Jesus, that His purpose was to come to cleanse the temple. Does that make sense?

Now, watch this; Matthew has Jesus come to the temple and cleanse the temple and then go back home. Not Mark; this is not a contradiction. It's you have to understand each gospel writer is singing a different part in the gospel story, and he has a purpose. Mark has Jesus ride into Jerusalem, stop at the temple, dismount from the mule, and He goes into the temple and He looks around, and then Mark says, "But it was late" and then He goes back home, and He doesn't cleanse it until the next day. Whoa. What's God wanting us to see? He's wanting us to see what He showed Mark. Yes, it was late in the day when Jesus came into the temple, but what Mark's trying to say through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is this; it's late, it's too late, there is no hope for the temple. The temple era of humanity is ending. In a few days Jesus will announce that the temple will be destroyed at the hands of the Romans, and every stone in that massive temple will be turned upside-down, and it will be turned over. Luke even says that when that happens, (he writes to the church and says to the church) when you hear the news that the temple is destroyed, lift up your head, lift up your eyes and look, because your redemption is near! I ask you this question; the first thirty, forty, years of the life of the church, who persecuted the church? The Jewish nation persecuted the church until that day that God wiped out their temple. And when He wiped out their temple, the Jewish nation has never persecuted the church since! God had to free the church from the legalism of Judaism! And He did with its destruction.

So when Jesus walks into that temple and He sees what He sees, He knows that the temple days are over, and He goes back home.

Then Mark has Him getting up the next morning, being hungry, going toward Jerusalem to go back into the temple and deal with what He saw in the temple. But on His way, He looks and sees a fig tree, and it's early in the morning and He's hungry so He goes over to the fig tree. Now, you're supposing that He's hungry and He's going to get a fig, but when He pulls back the leaves, there are no figs on the tree. But then Mark says it's not season for figs. So He doesn't find a fig because it's not season for the figs, so He curses the tree. And you think, whoa, Jesus is unjust to do that. No, He's just. See, when He pulled back those leaves, being hungry, He knew there would be a little bitty green fig there, that in season would ripen, and you could, if you were hungry, go to that tree and pull a fig and eat and be satisfied. But He knows if it already has leaves and there are no immature figs, it'll never produce figs. It's going to advertise falsely to someone who's hungry. Jesus knows that tree has no purpose if you can't deliver what you promised, so He curses the tree. He curses the tree, and then goes into the temple and sees a religious shopping mall in the courtyard of the Gentiles. A Gentile would come to the house of God, couldn't go into the inner part, but he had this courtyard where he would offer his prayer to God, and he couldn't even pray to God for the noise of the animals and the moneychangers! Jesus said this is supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations, and who you are supposed to be influencing, the Gentile, you are not influencing, and He overthrew the money tables, and He got rid of the animals. Then He leaves. When they head back into town the next day, one of the disciples said, look Jesus, (this is Mark) you know that tree You cursed, it's already withered up and gone! Then Jesus talked about the power of faith. Wow!

Have any of you ever heard the phrase, "Best thing since sliced bread"? How many of you like sliced bread? I love it when Celisa goes to get a fresh loaf of bread. I love sandwiches; I'm a sandwich kind of guy. I love sandwiches. I mean, you just take out two pieces of bread, put your favorite ham, your favorite turkey, a little slice of cheese, and wow! I mean, it's not about the bread. The bread holds the meat, but if you've got

really good bread, man, it enhances the sandwich. Everybody agree? Mark must have loved sandwiches too. Mark has a writing device, an interpretive device to help us get things. Here's what he would do; he would take a story and slice it in two. Now imagine before sliced bread when you had a loaf of bread and you had to slice it. Have any of you ever tried to slice bread? You can't hardly do it and make a sandwich out of what you sliced. You have to have a really sharp knife, right, because once you start to cut bread, what will bread do? It will squish, so your sandwich that's this big is now this big, so somebody invented sliced bread. Mark would take a story, cut it in half, insert another story in the middle, and then close the story.

Do you see this? You can't understand Palm Sunday unless you understand the alto of Mark. The meat of the story is Jesus cleansing the temple, but what holds that story together, what helps us to be able to digest that story, what helps us get that story is this; people coming to the temple are hungry for God, just like Jesus was hungry when He went to the fig tree. But if you go to a fig tree that can't give you figs, that fig tree is useless, and it needs to be taken away because it will be a false advertisement. But here's this fig tree, it's leafy, it looks good on the outside. But on the inside, it doesn't have fruit so it can never satisfy your need. And that's what the temple was like. The temple looked impressive on the outside, but when you went inside, the temple it was rotten. It was corrupt! It could not deliver! If you went to the temple hungry, you would go home hungry. Your spiritual need couldn't be met. So Jesus is letting us know this temple is going to be destroyed by God, but John says, if you destroy this temple, I'll raise it up in three days. They looked at Him and said it took us forty-six years to get this temple where it is right now, and You are telling us that if this is destroyed, You can raise it up in three days. But the Bible says He wasn't talking about the physical temple; He was talking about His body.

Oh, please hear this! Jesus came to Jerusalem to cleanse the temple, but to cleanse the temple He had to die on a cross because that curtain in the temple said holy, holy, holy God, and man is sinful, sinful, sinful, and man can't approach God on the basis of the blood of a bull or goat. So to cleanse the temple, Jesus took His own blood into the presence of God so

that He could cleanse the ultimate temple, which was not a building but it is you and me, the people of God! They're crying save us! Save us! Save us now! It was never God's plan to save Israel through a building. It was God's plan, always, to save Israel through a body, and that's the body of Christ. It was never God's plan for salvation to be a place. It was God's plan in salvation to be in a Person. See, the ultimate purpose of Jesus is to cleanse you, the temple of God. Have you been cleansed? Does your body say the resident inside is holy, holy, holy?

I looked over this morning and I saw my dad, and just as soon as Terry and Kelli came in, my dad whispered to them, I saw them grin and hug him, and I saw him grinning. Then my cousin, Sissy, came in and I saw my dad turn and start to tell her something. See, what you need to know is my dad came over last night and sat at my bar (not that kind of bar, just a regular bar!) that didn't sound good. ☺ I'm a t-totaler for those who don't know. He said, "Ricky, when I was fourteen I went forward a Sugarcreek Baptist Church, but I went forward for the wrong reason. I just went forward because my friend, Joe Walker, went, and some of my other friends went. I didn't really understand what I was doing, and I didn't really get saved. I've not been saved all these years. I'm not happy. I've never been happy. The last several months when you and Kory preach, I just feel something inside me is grabbing hold of me and I want to change. I want to be different. I now know Jesus died for me on the cross, and I know what it means to put my faith in Jesus." I saw my dad, in my kitchen, put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Seventy-six years old. Why? Because Jesus didn't hide in a crowd, He rode a donkey into the town to go to the temple to let us know we're not right with God. If the cry in our heart is save us now, He will save you now, right now, if you will turn from sin and put your faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Heads bowed, eyes closed. One of my dad's questions to me was, he said, "Is it too late for me to be saved since I made a false profession?" I said, "No Dad, it's not too late." He said, "Since this is on my heart, doesn't that mean God wants to save me and will save me?" I said, "Yes Dad, that's exactly what it means." Are you experiencing that conviction? Have you been experiencing that conviction? Right now we've got men, we've got

counselors who would love to talk to you about Christ. We've got ladies. Why don't you just slip out and come if you're not sure about your salvation? If you've never made a profession of faith in Christ, why not come right now. See, we're going to celebrate the week that changed the world, but before the week would change the world, it was meant to change you, one person at a time. Jesus didn't just die for the Jewish nation; He died for the nations of the world, and that's me and you too. The purpose of this message is to let us hear that four-part harmony and get us excited about getting into the Word this week so that we can truly celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ next Sunday. This is the week that can change your life. You don't have to wait until next Sunday; you can start right now. Will you make a commitment to not let this week just fly by, to set aside time in the Word, follow our daily Scripture readings, and let's get ready next week to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.