

**“If We Don't Praise Jesus, The Stones Will Cry Out”  
(Why Should The Stones Have All The Fun?)  
Zechariah 9:9 and Luke 19:29-39  
by Pastor David Nygard  
Palm Sunday  
March 24, 2024**

All Bible references in this sermon are taken from the New International Version (NIV)

**Zechariah 9:9 (NIV) 9** Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

**Luke 20:29-40 (NIV) 29** ... (Jesus) sent two of his disciples, saying to them, **30** “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. **31** If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’” **32** Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. **33** As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” **34** They replied, “The Lord needs it.” **35** They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. **36** As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. **37** 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: **38** “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” **39** Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” **40** “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

I'm glad that we can talk together. One reason is that you are good listeners. It hasn't always been that way. There once was a guy at Messiah who always sat four rows in front of the pulpit. Every time I started a sermon his head went back, his mouth opened wide. His eyes rolled back, like window shades and he fell asleep. He didn't wake up until I said “Amen”. You are much more attentive. If you listen for God's voice, you will hear at least one idea that you can take home and use in your life.

Our sermon is about your need and my need to experience the joy of the Lord. The joy in our hearts is equal to the praise on our lips.

One of my favorite Jesus stories is that of Palm Sunday. Even as a child I could see the events taking place in my imagination. It was early Sunday morning. The sun lit up the sky. Some people headed to the market to buy food. Many came to the well to drink fresh water. Children played in the street. Others prepared for Passover. Suddenly everyone noticed a man riding on the back of a donkey. It was Jesus riding into Jerusalem!

Everyone began to shout. They remembered an Old Testament promise, **“See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zecharian 9:9)** The prophet promised that God would send them a king, their savior. He would come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Jesus wanted everyone to know. He was the king. Everything was about to change forever. They threw their coats on the road before him. They waved palm branches in his honor. They shouted heartfelt words of praise.

Even as a child I longed to see the face of Jesus. I could almost imagine the love in his eyes, the courage in his heart, the power of his words. **“Hosanna”** they sang, **“Glory to God”**. His time had come.

No doubt about it. The people felt joy on Palm Sunday. They expressed their joy in words of praise. Even little children sang songs of praise to Jesus. If you're like me, sometimes our Christian joy runs low.

**What is the joy of the Lord? Joy is gladness of heart.** Joy is feeling optimistic even when life is hard. Joy is knowing that God works behind the scenes to answer our prayers. Joy is a smile on our face that comes from the heart. Joy is finding little things to celebrate. Joy is loving Jesus and feeling loved by him. We know if we have it. We know if we do not.

Sometimes we lose our joy when we lose our first love for Jesus. It happens when we come to church out of habit, and not because we're hungry for God. It happens when we sing the hymns, without singing them to God.

My mother grew up attending a small white country church. One Sunday she ran home after the service. Later she came back for Sunday School laughing and skipping along. Her aunt grabbed her and said "Why are you so happy? Don't you know that it's Sunday?" How sad to go to church and miss the joy!

Sometimes we run low on joy because our problems weigh us down, or our schedule is too busy, or God seems far away. Here's the thing. If God seems far away, he isn't the one who moved.

I thought for a while that the people of Palm Sunday were filled with joy because the day's events were spontaneous and unexpected. But the events were not spontaneous on Jesus' part.

Did you know that Jesus had a GPS in his heart connected to God? One day he heard something inside telling him it was time. From that moment "**his face was set toward Jerusalem.**" (Luke 9:53 RSV) He was focused. Every step led directly to the cross. Jesus knew on Sunday that he would suffer and die for our sins on Friday.

The joy that people felt that day was not spontaneous either. Just the night before, Jesus raised Lazarus back to life. People wondered "**Who is this that can raise the dead?**" "**Who is this that can calm a storm?**" and "**Who is this that eats with sinners?**" Every day made them excited and hungry for Jesus.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem it was like someone lit the fuse to their excitement. We read "**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!"**"

The crowds were so joyful that the Pharisees told Jesus to silence the people. But their words of praise were so life changing and true that Jesus said "**If they don't praise me, the stones in the street will call out.**"

**There are two reasons why the crowd felt joy. Reason #1) Jesus was worthy of their excitement.** There was no one else like him. He was "God with us." His words came from God. He did things that only God could do. **If I could tell my grandkids to believe one thing, it would be this, "Jesus is worthy of your excitement."**

Our members saw Jesus at work recently when the government came after our church and fined us \$487,000 because a church member gave us illegal funds. They gave us three months to pay it or lose the church. It was overwhelming. Our membership is older. Our attendance was so-so. Our giving was low. But we told our story to the media outlets and had prayer meetings seeking help from Jesus. In God's sense of humor we received the money three weeks ahead of time, from members and strangers around the country. **But it was Jesus who made it happen! Jesus is worthy of our excitement.**

**The crowd was excited because Reason #2) Jesus was worthy of their trust.** Jesus is greater than our worst problem or fear. He is the parent. We are the child. He is the teacher. We are the student. He is the craftsman. We are his handiwork. Jesus tells us **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."** (Hebrews 13:5)

Just think of the many times a crisis has come your way. We always think that we never will get through them. So we pray to Jesus and keep on praying. One day we realize that the crisis is over and God has brought us to a better place. Jesus is worthy of our trust.

I said earlier , **"The joy in our hearts is equal to the praise on our lips."** If we want to experience more joy we need to praise the Lord more often. I don't think that the people on Palm Sunday felt joy and then praised the Lord. I think that the people praised the Lord and then they felt joy in their hearts.

**Here are four ideas that can help you experience the joy of the Lord.**

**#1) Sing to the Lord a new song.** The psalm writer tells us **"Sing to the Lord a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy."** (Psalm 33:24)

Instead of telling God your old complaints, sing to him a new song. Maybe you have a favorite hymn from your childhood or from church? Sing it to God

when you drive the car or go for a walk. Sing it like you know that God is listening.

My brother listens to gospel songs over Wifi on his hearing aids. I go to choir practice, sing wonderful anthems and come home feeling good inside. I invite you to join the choir and experience joy.

Jim and Shirley Johnson were great members at Messiah. Jim was diagnosed with cancer. It shook him up. Shirley gave him an album of Elvis singing gospel songs. Jim said that the music changed him.

Jim gave me the same Elvis gospel CD. Later I had to drive to Minnesota for an unhappy reason. I was just furious inside. I put on the CD leaving Joliet and by the time that I got to Janesville I could have been Billy Graham, a famous evangelist. Sing to the Lord a new song and experience joy.

**#2) Give thanks in all circumstances.** Paul wrote, **“Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18)** Paul doesn't tell us to thank God for our troubles. He tells us to give thanks in every situation.

If I have cancer, I can't thank God for cancer. But I can thank him for supportive family, caring doctors and friends who pray. I can't thank Jesus for losing a job. But I can thank him for having a plan for my life. I can thank him that he will lead me to find a better job.

Instead of telling God the things that are wrong, thank him for the things that are right. Thank him for the health of your kids, or for the good pastors at church, or your vacation over Easter break. I know that you could thank God for five blessings every day and not repeat yourself once in a month. Thank God and experience joy.

**#3) Magnify the Lord with praise.** We read **“...Mary said 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...’” (Luke 1:46-47)** When we magnify something we make it seem larger; easier to see.

Sometimes when we look for God, he seems small. But when we praise him, and list his qualities and abilities, we magnify him. We see him as he truly is in life.

If you lack the words to praise God, find passages in the Bible describing God and read them back to Jesus. Point the words at him.

Praise Jesus with these words; **Psalm 139:1-4**. **“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.”**

Let the words of Scripture bring you joy.

**#4) Praise God with the words that you wish others would say to you.** We read **“Let the words of my mouth... be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord....”** (Psalm 19:14 RSV)

Tell God the words of affirmation and love that touch your heart. Tell him outloud “I love you, Lord”. “I trust you”. “I want to know you better.” “I need you.” “There is no one like you in my life.” “You are important to me.”

Let your words bring you joy. Praising Jesus is so life changing, positive and true, Jesus said that if we didn't praise him, **“the stones in the street would cry out”**. **But I think “Why should the stones have all the fun?”**

Thanks for being good listeners. I only saw four or five people with their heads back and eyes closed. I preach again May 12 and June 9. God bless you.