**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 4-2-2023
Victory In Jesus (Palm Sunday)**

Friends, there have been a few times in my life that I have been blessed to travel to places like Florida and Arizona. Perhaps you have been blessed to visit these places as well.

But I must say, while there are many beautiful places out there, there is nothing quite like the beautiful rolling hills of Pennsylvania.

But thinking of Florida and Arizona, I was amazed at the flatness of Florida and the brownness of Arizona – both so different from PA. And while Florida and Arizona are certainly very different and from each other, both of those states share at least one thing in common - have many palm trees.

I really like palm trees. I find them to be beautiful and they evoke in me this calm peaceful feeling.

Our Lord is so creative in creating things He has made --- from people, to animals, to plant life. He’s so creative and lavish and amazing.

But while palm trees are a rarity around here, they are actually a rather common tree to find in the land we read about in the Bible.

 Today, of course, is Palm Sunday. Today, Chestnut Grove and countless other churches are passing out and waving palm branches at worship. Why? It is to remember the extraordinary event of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, coming into Jerusalem as King. Palm branches were an important part of that story.

Jesus came riding on a donkey into the city. He was very intentionally fulfilling prophecy. The prophet Zechariah had written hundreds of years, **“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.”**

Jesus was teaching many things through this action which we refer to as His triumphal entry. **Actions often speak louder than words, don’t they?**

First, Jesus was clearly teaching that He is the King of Israel. He was the long-awaited son of David’s line that would reign forever.

And second, He was also a different type of king that the world typically sees. He was coming in lowliness, in humility, into the city. He wasn’t riding on a tall war-horse, but on a young donkey. He didn’t come carrying weapons. He was unarmed.

Third, this humble King would bring true peace to all who submit to Him.

In fact, if you go on in that passage from Zechariah, the next verse reads as follows:

**I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.**

Jesus is the prince of peace and He would announce God’s peace to anyone from any nation who put their trust in Him.

But although the people were celebrating Jesus’ entry into the city, the vast majority of people did not understand God’s plan and how King Jesus would be exalted. The majority believed that this messiah King would rule through military might and would overthrow the Roman tyrants. But Jesus would bring peace and victory in a very different way – through His suffering and death as a sacrifice for humanity’s sins.

*Take a moment to look at your palm branch.* These branches were very significant in the minds of the Jewish people. Much more significant than if we cut a branch off a tree around here.

We are told from the gospels that people cut palm branches from the trees and laid them on the road in which Jesus was coming into the city.

It reminds me a little bit of how people roll out the red carpet and big events in Hollywood. They do that because they want to make those who walk the red carpet feel special and honored.

But it was far more than that which was going on in Jerusalem that day. Jesus was more significant than a movie star. Jesus was their King and their Savior.

But what is really with the palm branches? What is their significance? If I cut off a branch of a tree around here and put it in front of someone, they may get upset with me and think that I’m trying to trip them.

No. *Palm branches were important because they were very symbolic*. They were symbolic of God’s victory over evil. And they were symbolic of God’s provisions and care for His people.

This symbol stretches way back before Palm Sunday. I invite you to turn with me in the Bible to the Old Testament Book of Leviticus. We will be in chapter 23 and verses 33-34 and 39-43.

**33The Lord said to Moses, 34“Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the Lord’s Festival of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days.**

**39“‘So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days; the first day is a day of sabbath rest, and the eighth day also is a day of sabbath rest. 40On the first day you are to take branches from luxuriant trees—from palms, willows and other leafy trees—and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. 41Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. 42Live in temporary shelters for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters 43so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.’”**

Now what exactly is going on in this passage from Leviticus? In it, the Lord is giving instructions to Moses on one of the annual festivals that the people of Israel were to keep each year. This was the Festival of Tabernacles.

During this week-long festival, the people of Israel were to travel to Jerusalem and live in simple shelters or tabernacles. God gave this instruction to help future generations remember the victory the Lord gave them over Pharaoh in Egypt. They were slaves, but God had delivered them with His mighty hand and outstretched arm. And now they were free and God wanted them to live a victorious and abundant life. Remembering victory in the past will help them to experience victory in the present.

God was also inviting the people of Israel to remember that He was with them in the wilderness after they left Egypt. God was there for them, providing protection from enemies and sustaining them through food and water.

The Lord would have the people of Israel build temporary tabernacles or shelters, using palm branches, along with some other materials. For a week, these palm branches would be walls that would shelter the people of Israel during the Festival of Tabernacles. And this was to be done every year. It would be an annual reminder that they needed God’s help every day and even with a simple shelter, if they have God, they have everything they truly need.

Think about the hundreds of times that this was done over the centuries. These palm branches would be such a powerful symbol of God’s work in their behalf. It was God who rescued them from slavery in Egypt. It was God who parted the Red Sea and led them safety to the other side. It was God who protected them from the Egyptian army that was pursuing them.

It was God who provided food and water for Israel day after day in their wilderness journey. It was God who would eventually led them into the Promised Land.

And so again, fast forwarding to Palm Sunday, the palm branch has now become grafted into the minds of Israel as a powerful symbol of victory over evil and of God’s presence every day in meeting their needs and caring for them.

All of these things would be coming into people’s minds as they were cutting down palm branches for Jesus to tread over on His way into the city. It was Jesus who would bring them victory. It was Jesus who would provide for and protect them. This was the duty of the King who would do all of these things.

But as the events of Holy Week unfolded, most of the people were shocked. What was happening? It didn’t feel like Jesus was giving them victory. Jesus would be arrested. Jesus would be beaten and crucified. Hopes would be dashed.

But in Jesus’ suffering, He was bringing victory. In His pain, Jesus was defeating the enemies of sin and death and Satan. Victory was being achieved at great cost of the King Himself.

So today, as we reflect on the Scripture from Leviticus as well as Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, what is the big takeaway for us?

And I think that it is this. When we live with Jesus as our King, we can live in the victory that He achieved for us.

We may not have palm trees that grow around here, but every time we see a palm tree or a palm branch, we are called to remember. We should remember the victory that Jesus won for us over sin, death, and Satan.

First and foremost, this victory is experienced through repentance of sin and submission to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

And second, we can remember that Jesus offers to be with us through all of life’s journey. Sometimes that journey may feel like a wilderness. Sometimes things may be very difficult. Maybe we are sick or grieving or struggling in some way. The palm branch is a reminder that Jesus said “**I will never leave you nor forsake you**.” It is a reminder that He will meet our needs and provide for us.”

As we remember the victories that Christ has won for us, we will be enabled to experience victories in our day to day lives.

Friends, think about all that the Lord has brought you out of. All of us were lost in our sins and in need of salvation, but Jesus came and laid down His life for us.

The palm branch is a reminder to never stop being thankful to God and celebrating the victory over sin, death, and Satan that Jesus has brought us.

But not only this. We still live in a world where there is so much evil around us. Think about Nashville this week and the tragedy there. And that is just one example.

It is easy to feel defeated in life. But as Christians we are to be people of victory.

Jesus came not only to redeem us, but to invite us to abundant life in Him. So many Christians settle for far less than what Christ desires for them.

Sisters and brothers, where do you need victory today? Are you feeling discouraged and defeated, Jesus is the One who can help. Jesus offers you victory.

Victory over difficult circumstances. Victory over temptations. Victory over sin struggles. Victory over demonic attacks and lies.

I just want to share with you today that seeing people experience this victory in Jesus Christ is a very big passion of mine. It brings me great joy when I see God’s children stepping into the full victory that Christ offers them in Himself.

If you find yourself today living less than a victorious life in Christ, please know that you can find victory through Jesus. And please know that I’m here to help you.

Today begins Holy Week, in many ways the most important week of the year. There is no better time than now to claim the victory that Christ has for you then now.

I ask that each of you please take your palm branch home with you today and put the branch at a place that you see often. And when you see the branch, I want you to think about the victory that you have in Jesus Christ.

May this branch remind you that God goes with you every day and He promises to be with you always. He is there to help you, to provide for you, and to give you victory in life. And as we increasingly live this abundant life in Jesus Christ, we will more and more step into fulfilling God’s vision for us to be a light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ in a world that so needs Him. Let’s pray…

Resources: [www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)

<https://christian.net/resources/the-significance-of-a-palm-branch/>

The Significance of a Palm Branch

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