

“MORE THAN PALM-WAVING CHRISTIANS”
Psalm 92:12-15, Revelation 7:9-10, 13-17, John 12:12-19
March 23 & 24, 2024

“Norman Vincent Peale once visited a friend in the hospital. He had previously had one leg amputated and now he had lost his other one. Nevertheless, he seemed happy and enthusiastic.

“Everyone tells me you are the happiest person in the hospital,” said Dr. Peale. “You are not putting it on, are you? (It’s not just a show?)

“No, no, I am as happy as can be.”

“Let me in on your secret,” Dr. Peale asked.

“Do you see that little book lying over there on the table?” the man replied, pointing to the Bible. “There is where I get my medicine. When I feel a little low, I just read that Book.”¹

God has given us a source of great joy that can carry us through all of life’s struggles and disappointments, **if we take** the time to read His Book. Within the pages of this Book (the Bible), we have the greatest account of how God has worked diligently to save us and bring us back to a relationship with Him.

Throughout the Old Testament, we can read account after account of God supplying the people who were seeking Him with protection, provision, and guidance when they needed it and turned to Him for help. Sometimes it was as if they were losing their second leg to amputation, but God was there to bring them joy in it. He led Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through many adventures and as they remained faithful to the Lord God Almighty, He blessed them and multiplied them. He even saved the sons of Jacob (Israel) from famine by sending Joseph to Egypt ahead of them to make a way for them to move to a place where there was food during the drought years.

Then, God provided a savior to the people when they found themselves enslaved by the Egyptians. Saving Moses from extinction as a child, taking him into the household of Pharaoh, and then sending him back to them as the deliverer for the people, helped the people of Israel survive the cruelty

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 500)

and punishment of slavery. Imagine the joy and delight on their day of emancipation from the mud pits and wheat fields. And then God provided the marvelous deliverance of the people at the Red Sea, wiping out the Egyptian army in one stroke - that created such joy for the people that they sang songs of praise to Him.

As the people were able to go into the land promised by God on the west side of the Jordan River, God provided victory after victory against the people occupying the land before them, until the nation of Israel was established by the thirteen tribes of Jacob settled in their allotted places.

Even if the people strayed away from their worship and devotion to the Lord God Almighty, He diligently pursued them, calling them back to Him in marvelous ways. Each of the Judges led Israel back into God's favor and delivered them from their enemies. What joy was theirs when freedom was once again found through the Lord God!

And when King David united the whole country under his kingship, the people were happy, they were safe, and they were united in the worship of The One God, and God blessed them with victory, with abundance, with guidance, and in great love and kindness.

And as King Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem to be the central worship center for the people of Israel, what joy there was as they could see God's presence with them and experience His glory in the Temple. What joy was theirs when God claimed them as "His people," to abide with them and watch over them and grant peace to them as they followed Him!

After every time the people turned away from God, He never let them be destroyed completely. His love still reached out to them, seeking them to come back and honor Him, and worship Him, and obey His commands. God kept promising a Messiah through the words of the prophets, One who would once more unite the people and lead them, and save them, and put an end to their sinfulness, allowing abundant and eternal life to be available to all who would follow Him.

And we heard today how *"the righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will bear*

fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him.' ” (Psalm 92:9-10) What joy is ours as we dedicate ourselves to His commands, follow His laws, and be His people! With great rejoicing we are able to find release from the captors we face, healing from ailments we struggle with, delivery from spiritual blindness, and sustenance given to us in times of plague.

The Bible provides us with great joy as we come to understand the great love of God for us. He loves us so much that He sent us His Son, Jesus, as our Savior, to establish the final avenue for us to come back to Him. God desires that no one be lost in their sinfulness, but that everyone has the chance to become free from the slavery to sin and death.

Throughout the New Testament, we hear how Jesus' ministry here on the earth brought deliverance to people in all kinds of difficulties and situations. He brought health to the woman who suffered from a condition that left her hunched over. He commanded her to stand straight, placed His hand on her and she was relieved from her hunchback and stood up straight again (Luke 13:10-17).

Jesus touched the man with paralysis in his hands (a condition known as dropsy), and the man's hands grew strong once again (Luke 14:1-6). Jesus cured the young man of his epilepsy, much to the father's surprise and delight (Mark 9:14-29). Jesus brought sight to the man born blind so that he could experience real life (John 9). Jesus healed the servant of a centurion by just speaking the healing to the centurion because of his faith in Him (Matthew 8). Jesus healed those who had leprosy when they asked Him (Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 17:11-19). Jesus cast out evil spirits and demons, healing many (Luke 6:18). Jesus even cured a woman of her 12 year bleeding condition (Luke 8:43-48) when she simply touched the edge of His cloak while passing through a crowd.

And Jesus raised people from the dead. He raised the 12 year old daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:49-56), He raised the dead son of a widow in Nain (Luke 7:11-17) while they were on the way to the cemetery, and He raised the brother of Mary and Martha (Lazarus) even after he had been dead for 4 days (John 11).

So many people were touched by Jesus and given new life, and there were many more who sought Him out for healing. The joy that was theirs after they had been relieved of their condition! What joy the families had upon receiving their loved ones back from the dead!

Jesus also informed many people about the difference between earthly things and God's things. Jesus taught about loving one another, even an enemy (Matthew 5:43-44). He taught about forgiving one another, even 70 X 7 (Matthew 18:22)! Jesus taught about the love that God has for us, receiving us even after we have sold ourselves in a distant country and wound up feeding pigs (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus taught about the kingdom of God (Mark 4), helping us to know about what we have to look forward to after this life is finished, and to challenge us to live a life that will lead us there.

And so after Jesus' 3½ years of ministry among the people, so many were excited to hear that He was headed toward Jerusalem. They were ready to make Him their new King, thinking that He might even be the One who would relieve the nation of captivity to the Romans. There was great expectation and hope for Jesus to recreate the kingdom of David, and once more bring peace to Israel. All of this led up to the day when Jesus entered the great city of Jerusalem. Listen to how it happened. This is John 12:12-19. (READ John 12:12-19)

Great was the joy of the people on that day! The One who had brought so much joy to them was now finally coming to establish His rightful place as the King of Israel. The Messiah had at last arrived, and seemed ready to fulfill His role and bring deliverance to the people of Israel as it had been long foretold. Finally, the day had come when the nation of Israel would be freed from their oppression, and they could live in peace again, protected by the God of their fathers.

Although the people would have been delighted to make Jesus their King at that time, there were still far too many people against Him that would have prevented it. The Roman soldiers watched intently to see if this might turn into an uprising against them. And at the same time the Pharisees watched intently, noticing how many people were attracted to Jesus because of His wonderful work. Jealousy niggled in their brains as they saw all of the crowds. *“Look how the whole world has gone*

after Him” was their mantra! Their fear was that they were losing their prominence as leaders of the people and that they would become less important if Jesus were to become their King.

But becoming the King of Israel was not Jesus’ intent. Listen to the way that W. Russel Maltby explains that day. He says, “The triumphant entry into Jerusalem startles us by its apparent incongruity with the way of Jesus. It would surely be true to say that He preferred quiet, personal, and unobstructive ways. It was a principle with Him to avoid the spectacular, and He kept a watchful eye on any rising tide of mass emotion.

“But His entry into Jerusalem *was* spectacular, and even sensational - and it was intended to be so. He arranged secretly beforehand with some unknown disciple for the loan of the animal. He accepted from the crowd, as though it were His due, demonstrations of loyalty which came near to worship. Hope and expectation swept like a tempest over the multitudes. The prophecy of Zechariah which St. Matthew recalls in this connection cannot have been absent from the mind of Jesus, and it is worthwhile to continue it beyond the point at which the evangelist stopped.

“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. 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 (Euphrates) to the ends of the earth.” (Zechariah 9:9-10)

“When Jesus rode into the city that day, silent among the shouting crowds, He knew how much and how little this vociferous enthusiasm meant. But He knew also that every habitable part of the earth had its representatives among the myriads gathered at Jerusalem that day, and all Jerusalem heard a message and were confronted with His claim before the night had come. The action of Jesus is consistent neither with humility nor good sense unless His mind had firm hold of a purpose which reached far back into the history of His people, and forward to a boundless reign of peace and blessedness. Nothing can save the Triumphal Entry from an intolerable theatricality if it was not the symbol of something at least as wonderful and transforming as the Christian Faith has declared Him to

be. History has its comment to make. Now, after [twenty] centuries, when He still has no Kingdom worthy of Him, and His people are so little like Him that the best of them are almost ashamed to claim His name, He yet has such a Kingdom and such a people as no one could have dreamed of then.”²

The excitement and joy of that day had its purpose - to proclaim Jesus as the King of kings, and Lord of lords, to all who would receive Him. Though He would not be the military messiah that most people hoped for, Jesus came as the Messiah of the world, striving to complete His ministry by bringing all people back to a relationship with the Lord God Almighty.

James S. Stewart says that “the entrance into Jerusalem was an acted parable. It gave the faithful the sign they had been waiting for. It inaugurated the Master’s final mission to His people and was a fitting prelude to the days of intense activity and emotion which were to follow. It focused the whole city’s attention on Jesus, so that wherever He went during that closing week, crowds followed Him, and His name was on every tongue. And, not least important, it flung down the gauntlet to His enemies. It defied them.

“Much they could endure, but this procession through the streets was intolerable. This ‘fanatic and usurper’ must be put down finally. Jesus in that tumultuous hour was issuing a challenge. Every token of royal honor which He accepted that day gave point to the challenge, and every hosanna of the crowd drove it home. Let the powers of evil do their worst; He knew His power. He was the Lord’s anointed. He was riding to the throne which God had given Him. He was ready for the last campaign.”³

Even though Jesus knew what the end of the week would bring, He entered into Jerusalem as the victorious King, Messiah of the Lord and of the people. Though there would be great pain and anguish ahead of Him, Jesus rejoiced in the praises of the people, for He was indeed the everlasting King, the Prince of Peace of Whose government no one could conquer (Isaiah 9:6-7). Jesus’ day of recognition had finally come, and the people rejoiced in Him. “*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel!*” (John 12:13). And so they took up palm branches - a sign of

² (Charles L. Wallis, editor, *Lenten-Easter Sourcebook*, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1961] pg. 51-52)

³ (Charles L. Wallis, *Lenten-Easter Sourcebook*, pg. 53)

peace - and waved them ahead of Him. Some took off their robes and laid them on the ground as form of “red carpet” for their King. Little children danced, and sang. All the people lifted up their voices in a great shout of victory. What a day of rejoicing it was. Though they had suffered great hurt and indignity, though they had agonized over their great losses, they were the happiest people in the world because their Savior and Lord had come!

But it was not to be just a single day event, to praise God for what He had done, and then go on as if life had never changed. We know the rest of the account, how Jesus stood alone by the end of the week before the Pharisees and before the Romans, having had all of His followers and even the disciples abandon Him. We know how He was arrested, illegally tried, and then sentenced to death. We know how He endured the scourging of the whip for daring to stand up against the leaders of the Temple and the occupying government. We know that He was given up in exchange for a thief and a murderer named Barabbas. We know that He was forced to carry His own cross to the mount called Calvary and was crucified on a cross between two common criminals. We know how He was scorned by both the soldiers and the religious leaders. We know that He was forsaken by His own Father in Heaven because He had taken the sins of the world upon Himself. But we also know of His resurrection from the dead three days later, defeating all those opposed against Him, and opening the way for us to have eternal life through Him as we claim Him as our risen Savior and Lord. What joy is ours today!

So Jesus continues to seek our hearts so that we might follow Him. “When He makes Triumphal Entry into a heart, [our heart,] He redeems it from pettiness of self-expression and guides it to the fullness of self-realization, bringing an abundance of life and peace. When He comes into a home, impatience gives way to loving kindness, love drives out tyranny and fear, and fretfulness is conquered by generosity. When He enters a city in triumph, all arrogance, racial animosity, and class pride will be done away. It will mean emancipation, and power, and the healing of broken hearts; business will be done for the glory of God ... Men will say, ‘Today is the Kingdom of God come among us.’ It will

come when He has made Triumphal Entry into human hearts, one by one.”⁴

So let me ask you, have you considered the wonders and miracles that Jesus has done? Have you seen His wisdom and truth come to light in your life? Have you found the joy and peace of Jesus, even in the midst of the burdens of life?

You see, we have the promise that if we remain faithful to Jesus and stand firm in our resolve to follow Him, we, too, will receive a great reward of lasting peace and love. If we live faithfully, more than just palm-waving Christians, so that the light of Jesus Christ shines through us, we, too, will have the assurance of His presence with us wherever we go, whatever we face, and before whomever might oppose us. If we resolve ourselves to be His disciples, even if everyone in our life turns their backs upon us and walks away from us, we will never be alone, for Jesus, who has triumphantly entered our hearts and lives, will walk beside us and give us the comfort and peace and joy we need.

The Apostle John was given the vision of those who would overcome the world by the peace of Christ Jesus in their hearts. He was given the chance to see those who were victorious, “*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’*” (Revelation 7:9-10). “*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (7:14). May we be among them, too, to find ourselves victorious at last with Jesus!

Let’s pray...Father God, thank You for the victory we have in Jesus Christ. No matter what we must face in our world today, Jesus has overcome it all first, so that we might be with Him, if we remain faithful to Him. Give us the courage to draw near to Jesus, to let Him be our Savior, so that we might find His joy, His peace and His love in our hearts, no matter what we face here in this world. Give us the courage to live for Him each and every day with true joy, so that all may see and be drawn near to Him, too. Let us stand strong for Jesus, for we pray this in Jesus’ mighty Name. AMEN.

⁴ (Charles L. Wallis, *Lenten-Easter Sourcebook*, pg. 54