

# YOUR WORLD NEEDS YOU

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## **Palm Sunday**

For centuries, this Sunday before Easter has been set aside to commemorate the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. This event is recorded by all four Evangelists (Matthew 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–40; John 12:12–19).

Jesus' disciples brought a colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, and He sat on it. Many spread their cloaks and palm branches on the road, as they did when royalty entered town (so the king wouldn't get his feet dirty on the dusty streets). This was the ancient equivalent to rolling out the red carpet.

At Passover time, hundreds of thousands of Jews from around the world came to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. Arriving at the Temple, they would greet each other with the words: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This was the official greeting at the Temple, and it had messianic implications, for the Jews referred to their coming Messiah as "The One Who is Coming." Now the crowd, together, greeted Jesus with these words, as He arrived. It was a profoundly joyous celebration.

The tragedy is that they had the wrong Messiah in mind. A donkey is an animal of peace. A horse is an animal of war. Revelation 19 speaks of Jesus returning, not on a donkey, but on a white horse, when He will battle Satan and the armies of earth. He will establish the everlasting kingdom of David, and righteousness will encompass the world. But on this day, Jesus was not coming to sit on the throne, but to die on a cross. He was not coming to conquer Rome by the sword, but to conquer sin by His own death. On this day, He was coming to bring peace. He was lowly, riding on a donkey, as the prophet Zechariah had predicted (9:9).

This 2000-year-old report is still relevant today. Jesus comes to you today in the same spirit—as Prince of Peace. Will you cry out, "Hosanna!"? It isn't just an expression of praise; it's a prayer to God: "O LORD, save us!" If you will receive Him and pledge your life to Him, He will secure your peace forever.

As we contemplate that royal reception this morning, will you apply its message to your own life today?

What are you willing to lay down before the Coming King? What can you offer, to mark the path of His approach? What will you surrender as a gift of homage to Him? Will anyone hear your shouts of praise?

Perhaps your whole life could be viewed as a celebratory reception for the Savior. Perhaps the whole of your life is an announcement to the world of His gracious power. Your announcement. Your celebration of faith.

As we consider once more this morning the theme, “Your World, Your Mission,” I hope that you will discover that the mission—your mission—is not a long *time* away (either in your past, or in your future). Neither is it a long *distance* away (across continents or oceans).

It may be as close as your living room, or your neighborhood, your school, or your workplace. Still, the thought may stir more apprehension than celebration. You may feel afraid. You may feel ill-equipped. Very likely you feel awkward. That’s a good thing!

### **Awkward is Just a Feeling**

If you didn’t feel awkward, you would take off in your own strength and try to fulfill your mission as you see it in your own way. Instead, your awkwardness will keep you dependent on the Holy Spirit, and that simple faith will lead you to miracles.

To begin with, you *are* a miracle! Broken, defeated, and lost—while you were still a sinner, Jesus Christ offered His life in exchange for yours. He took your sin, and gave you His righteousness (His right standing with God).

Now, you know you’re not perfect yet (and some of us know it, too), but God is not finished with you. And He won’t stop until you are fully transformed to the likeness of Jesus. He intends to complete the good work He began in you.

However, this is a lifelong process, and you cannot wait for that day to begin your mission. In fact, your mission is key to that very process of transformation. AS YOU GO... you will be cleansed, you will be healed, you will be instructed, you will be filled, and you will be used.

How do I start? How do I prepare?

Know this: your mission has less to do with what you have to bring to the table, and more to do with who you are. God is more interested in your character than your accomplishments. It is your integrity that equips you for your mission.

### **Practice Integrity**

Integrity is forged from unswerving faithfulness—in the little things, especially the little things. Jesus said, “*Someone who is trustworthy in a small matter is also trustworthy in large ones,*

*and someone who is dishonest in a small matter is also dishonest in large ones” (Luke 16:10; CJB).*

Why do the little things matter so much? Because big things are usually made up of a lot of little things rolled together. And because it’s the little things that are easily and often unnoticed; therefore, they represent the biggest temptations to cheat and not get caught. Someone has said that integrity is found in what you do when no one is watching. It is also lost there.

How you respond to such temptations—whether you (faithfully) look to God for grace to help, or (faithlessly) turn your back on Him to suit yourself—determines not only the immediate outcome, but also your destiny.

Mark Batterson wrote, “Just because something looks like or feels like a God thing doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a God thing. Just because it’s endorsed by your closest confidants doesn’t mean it’s a God thing. Just because it seems like a golden opportunity doesn’t mean it’s a God thing. An opportunity isn’t an opportunity if you have to compromise your integrity.” (Soulprint: Discovering Your Divine Destiny (p. 74).)

Batterson added, “When we submit our lives to God’s authority by living with integrity, then we come under His umbrella of authority. And that umbrella of authority shelters us and provides us with a supernatural covering. It also takes all the pressure off us. There are those who believe that tithing would add financial pressure to their lives by taking away 10 percent of their income. It’s not true. Tithing relieves financial pressure because you are no longer responsible for your finances. God is. And God can do more with 90 percent than you can do with 100 percent. As an act of integrity, tithing forms a supernatural covering over our finances. Ultimately, the only thing we ought to fear is living outside the umbrella of His authority. Nothing fills you with holy confidence like knowing that God Himself is your advocate. You don’t have to take matters into your own hands, because they are in the hands of God Almighty.” (Soulprint: Discovering Your Divine Destiny (p. 81).)

Jesus once illustrated the Kingdom of Heaven in this way:

Matthew 25

<sup>14</sup> *The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. <sup>15</sup> He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.*

<sup>16</sup> *“The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. <sup>17</sup> The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. <sup>18</sup> But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money.*

<sup>19</sup> *“After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. <sup>20</sup> The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver*

came forward with five more and said, 'Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.'

<sup>21</sup> "The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

<sup>22</sup> "The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.'

<sup>23</sup> "The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

<sup>24</sup> "Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. <sup>25</sup> I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.'

<sup>26</sup> "But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate, <sup>27</sup> why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'

<sup>28</sup> "Then he ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. <sup>29</sup> To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup> Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Have you buried your gift? Or, are you using it for the Lord?

And I'm not referring to money, or any other external benefit or supply. That was merely to illustrate the real gift, which is internal—the gift that Jesus can see, but we cannot.

## **Divine Treasure**

Do you realize that you're sitting on a treasure? God is shaping you to do His will. He is shaping you for your mission. And you have what it takes to do his will today. That doesn't mean you currently have everything you will ever need, but you have everything you will need for today, and the promise of everything you will need for tomorrow.

Sure, that treasure is in an earthen vessel—a simple clay pot—but the vessel is not what determines the fruitfulness of the mission; it's the treasure within. The vessel may have been chipped, dented, cracked, or broken, but that cannot damage the treasure inside; in fact, that's how the treasure leaks out to bless others.

Preoccupation with your own pain, loss, and offenses will distract you from the opportunities that you meet. If you're absorbed by bitterness or grudges over your past, you cannot move

forward into your future. You'll be too self-absorbed to notice the open doors. Self-pity will blind you.

It's time to shift gears. It's time to look up. It's time to grow up and realize that God really does know what He's doing and He really is in control of your life. He really does have a plan and YOU are His secret weapon.

## **Identity Issues**

Your vision for your mission may be vague or it may be grand. The difference is in how you see yourself, how you identify yourself. That's right: the clearer your self-awareness, the clearer your mission.

If you identify yourself by your past—errors, oversights, failures, injustices, victimizations—then you will be limited by those things and your future will have to bear their weight perpetually. On the other hand, if you identify with the One who loved you and gave Himself for you, if you identify with the redeeming grace of God, your wrongs will be forgiven and you will forgive the wrongs done by others, and you will be free to love, free to give, and free to serve.

Jesus prayed over a young boy's lunch and then fed five thousand men (plus women and children) with it. When everyone was full, He instructed His disciples to "*gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted*" (John 6:12). God is the Supreme Economist and the Supreme Ecologist. Everything there is to know about those subjects may be learned from Him. He wastes *nothing*.

There is not one scrap or shred—one wound, one loss, one injustice—that you have suffered that He will not redeem. Your brokenness will become your strength. Your pain will become your gentleness. This is what Jesus does!

We often try to *look* like we've never had a trial. But it's a cover-up! If you had no sin you wouldn't need a Savior. If you had not been broken you wouldn't need a Healer. If you were not in bondage you wouldn't need a Liberator.

Don't wear a religious mask. Don't play the hypocrite. Just be yourself. Don't try to be someone else. Be the you that God made, that God loves. Then you'll be the you that God can use.

## **Opportunities Abound**

The ingredients of your mission will not be found outside of yourself. "*A person's gift makes room for him*" (Proverbs 18:16). It is what you offer of yourself that will open doors for you.

Starting with your personality—loud or quiet, introvert or extravert, geek or jock—God makes all kinds and uses all kinds. There is a role of service to suit who you are.

Your passions are equally important and telling. Do you have an overflowing heart for children, for the elderly, for pets, or for persons with disabilities? Do you love cooking, shopping, gardening, writing, or creating works of art? Your heart and your hobbies give clues as to your mission. For God made you to do what you love and love what you do.

Your experiences, especially the difficult ones, are part of your spiritual formation, engraving deep trenches of grace in your life, and they are further keys to your mission. Paul wrote, “[God] comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us” (2 Corinthians 1:4). Don’t bury them like the foolish servant who misjudged his master; bring them to Jesus for healing and resolution. He still turns water into wine!

You have a unique blend of abilities—both natural and developed—that point to your mission, and very often generate occasions of service. The people who require your abilities, and those who possess similar abilities, may be your arenas of ministry.

All of that before we even think about spiritual gifts—those unique and supernatural endowments from God for effective service!

My point is that there is literally *nothing* about you that God cannot and will not redeem and anoint for His purposes and the honor of His name. Who you are and what you’ve been through and what you love to do provide the occasions for your mission, if you will keep your eyes and ears open to the Holy Spirit’s leading.

And how will you recognize the Spirit’s leading? Follow the love. God always works from love. So should we. Paul taught that conforming to religious rituals does not matter; the only thing that really matters is “*faith expressing itself in love*”(Galatians 5:6).

Opportunities or occasions of ministry do not guarantee *open doors* of ministry. But you hold the keys to all the doors, and they are *acts of compassion*. When you are moved with compassion, as Jesus was, do not hesitate to follow it. That’s the Holy Spirit; it is surely not the devil. Your response may require forethought and planning before you can act, but at least make up your mind to pursue it.

## **Ordinary Things**

What are you willing to lay down for the Coming King? What can you offer, to mark the path of His approach? What will you surrender to pay Him homage? Will anyone hear your shouts of praise?

Jesus' exuberant disciples offered ordinary things—their garments and the branches of nearby trees. But they offered them in faith and love, and they became a Royal Road, the El Camino Real of Jerusalem. It's just your ordinary things that God wants, and wants to use. Your donkey, your cloak, your praise, your life. This is your opportunity. Use it, every day.

Your world needs *you!*