

Jesus' State of Glory

Palm/Passion Sunday

Pastor Josh Frazee

Php. 2:5-11

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Hosanna!” That’s what the people were shouting. “Hosanna!” “Save us!” They were shouting this to Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem riding a colt; and they were spreading palm branches and their own garments before Him. Why? Why did they shout “Hosanna”? Why were they placing the palm branches before Him?

To us today, this seems a pretty easy question to answer: because it was Jesus, the Son of God, God in human flesh. We know today as the apostles would remember later that these events happened that this event was preparation for the greatest thing God would ever do for us besides creating us. But how did the people of the time know this? To them, Jesus appeared to be like any of them. He did not use His divine power or knowledge all the time. He didn’t shine like Moses when Moses would come down from speaking with the Lord. He appeared to be like any other man. And He was like any other man. He was one hundred percent man. Just as He was one hundred percent God.

As I mentioned before, it was only after the fact that the apostles realized what was going on on Palm Sunday. For us today, it is the same. We know who Jesus is—who Jesus really is—only after the fact, and only with the help of the Scriptures, because, as we know, Scripture backs up Scripture.

This morning, then, we’ll focus on our Epistle text, from Philippians, where we hear and learn about Jesus’ two states: His state of humiliation and His state of exaltation.

Verse 1

“Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

Jesus was born in the “likeness of men.” The prophet Isaiah affirmed this when he wrote that the Messiah “grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” So why this jubilee? Why this praise for Jesus, who appeared no different than any other man?

People saw what they wanted to see. They wanted to see a king who was going to overthrow Rome. They wanted to see Jesus’ glory as a king, but as Jesus Himself said, His kingdom is not of this world. No, He came to this world to serve; and as a servant, He did not “count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Instead of getting to see Jesus’ state of glory, they got to see His state of humiliation.

Jesus’ state of humiliation, as we learned in our catechism classes, was from His conception and birth, through His life, all the way to His suffering under Pontius Pilate, His crucifixion and death. Jesus’ humility would lead to this end for Him, as the people desiring for Him to be their next earthly king would turn on Him, deliver Him to Pilate, and ultimately demand that He be crucified.

How good are you at remaining humble? Obviously you are not being asked to put aside your divine nature to become a human being. Yet God still commands that we remain humble. Jesus called a child to Him earlier in His ministry and commanded that ““unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3b-4).”” And this command applies to all in every situation. Whether you are simply living your life out in the country or are the focus of a parade in your honor, you have been commanded to remain humble.

How well are you living out that command? As you consider your response, we'll continue with the next verses.

Verse 2

“(B)eing found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Again, Jesus' state of humiliation would carry on beyond His entrance into Jerusalem having the crowds cheer Him on. He knew that they would soon be turning on Him and crying out for His death. But Jesus did not flee His destiny. He rode right into it. He knew that it took perfect obedience to His Heavenly Father to have a perfect life to trade for the sinful lives of the people calling out to Him.

Jesus' state of humiliation would continue from here to His suffering under Pilate, being flogged with whips with stones at the ends of the strands. It would continue to His crucifixion, having nails hammered through the flesh of His hands and feet. And it would not end until He had suffered hell in the place of all people of all time, and He would die on the cross to which He had been nailed.

Jesus was living as a child of His heavenly Father, being “obedient” to Him all the way to His death. How many of you are willing to be obedient to your death? Many of you have declared that you would be at your confirmations. You were asked “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” You replied “I do, by the grace of God.” Well, many of you have made this declaration. A couple of you will be asked to make it shortly.

But remember and take notice that you did not promise to do this of your own power. You declared that you would remain obedient “by the grace of God.” So where is God's grace found? It's found in the means of grace. You've learned in catechesis that “The written and spoken Word of the Gospel and the sacraments are the means of grace (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, p.152).” If nothing else, when you declared this—or when you will declare this—you were humble enough to declare that you could not and cannot live as God desires without Him, with His means of grace. The only way to live as He desires is to live in His grace, to live in His means, coming frequently to hear His Word and to receive His gifts, especially that good gift of the Lord's Supper, which you'll receive again either Thursday on Maundy Thursday or next Sunday, on Easter. You'll receive and continue to receive these gifts because Jesus was perfectly obedient to His Father in His state of humiliation, even to the point of death, for which His Father would allow Him to enter His state of glory, His state of exaltation.

Verse 3

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Because of Jesus' obedience, God would “highly (exalt) him.” But strangely enough, this would include Jesus' descent into hell. Yet if it is remembered that Jesus said “It is finished” upon the cross, then it makes sense that His descent into hell would be part of His exaltation, His state of glory. Jesus would descend into hell, not to suffer, but to proclaim His victory over Satan and all the forces of evil. He would get to do this for three days.

Then, after that victory lap through hell, Jesus would be raised from the dead to demonstrate and proclaim His victory to His apostles. Once that would be accomplished, Jesus would ascend into heaven from whence He will be coming to judge the living and the dead. When He returns, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue (will) confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.”

That is the Gospel that we proclaim as the Church. It is the one into which we were baptized and which we confessed as our own at our confirmations. But thanks be to God it is not up to us to remain in the faith. We made the vow to continue steadfast “by the grace of God,” and so we continue to receive His means of grace—the Word and the Sacraments—and God the Holy Spirit continues to work through those means to keep us faithful to God, and ever-committed to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.