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 Title: “The Kernel of Wheat Must Fall to the Ground and Die”  
 Text: John 12:12-32 (vv. 23-26)  
 Theme: In the life and death of Jesus Christ is my death and life.

Its eternal view:

The questions we address in this study are of paramount importance. In the balance hangs the destiny of your eternal soul. If we fail to embrace who Jesus is, then we will continue to be in bondage to darkness and we will never live in eternal life.

Introduction:

The truths contained in this chapter are more than we can address in a single study. **There are several ideas stitching each of the various pieces together.**

The Geneva Notes provides us with this initial insight and sets the tone for the entire narrative.

“The death of Christ is as it were a sowing, which seems to be a dying of the corn, but indeed is the cause of a much greater harvest: and such as is the condition of the head, so will be the condition of the members.”

Our passage is noted for teaching us on our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, an event the church universal calls, “Palm Sunday.” But there is a richer, and perhaps more foreboding idea taught.

The passage teaches us who He is and why life must necessitate death.

Dangerous conformities and seductive patterns:

We are not much different than the crowd that gathered in Jerusalem during the days of our Lord. We are a fickle lot. We seek Him for His miracles. We want better jobs, more money, richer experiences, easier lives, spouses better than they are, and a myriad of creaturely comforts that we believe we are entitled to. We have come to believe that all of this can be had by coming to the miracle worker named Jesus. Today we call out “Hosanna,” and tomorrow we will crucify Him on the cross of our own making. We do not see Him as enough.

I would like to examine the larger context of “Palm Sunday” by noting what events preceded it and the dialogue that followed.

We begin with our Lord Jesus anointed in the house of Lazarus by his sister Mary. Notice the significance of Lazarus to the entire movement (vv. 9-11, 17-19).

I. A sign to an inevitable death (vv. 1-11 [vv. 7, 8]).

The event happened “six days before the Passover.” Passover would be on Thursday of that week. This event is happening on Saturday, which would be the Jewish Sabbath.

What is the Passover?

Every year, on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Nissan, Jews worldwide commemorate the birth of the Jewish nation by celebrating Passover.  
[http://judaism.about.com/od/passover/a/all\\_pesach.htm](http://judaism.about.com/od/passover/a/all_pesach.htm)

“It commemorates the freedom of Jewish slaves from Egypt. The name **Passover** comes from the Plague of Slaying the Firstborn. The Angel of Death passed over the homes of the Jews who had put lambs blood on their doors.

As the Jews were fleeing, Pharaoh changed his mind, and sent his army after the people to bring them back. Moses parted the Red Sea for the Jews to cross, and as soon as they were safely to the other side, the waters closed on the soldiers, drowning them all. The Jewish people were free.”  
<http://www.apples4theteacher.com/holidays/passover/index.html#aboutpassover>

In preparation for the slaying of the Passover lamb, Jesus will be anointed by Mary. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived in Bethany. Jesus will return to their home throughout the week.

Mary did what was done as an expression of an adoring grace. She loved her Lord Jesus, and her actions toward Him filled the house with an aroma of worship. She might have been oblivious to the larger significance of what she had done, but God used what she did as an expression of her devotion to fulfill a preparatory anointing for His impending death.

This same scene is painted for us earlier in Luke 10:38-41 where Martha served and Mary sat.

The response by the chief priests was consistent with their overall rejection of Jesus Christ, “Kill Lazarus” (v. 10).

From the anointing, we move to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

II. An accent to an unstable present (vv. 12-19).

He enters “triumphantly” into Jerusalem.

The crowd fluctuated as a hodge-podge of fickle humanity. Like the swells of a sea at war with the elements, it rose with heightened crescendos and crashed forcefully into the shores of the religious establishment. In the midst of this,

Christ shined like the piercing light of a guiding beacon. His demeanor sat like a rock in the swirling agitations of an unstable circumstance.

The irony of his acceptance as the new Davidic King (Mark 11:10) by the crowds who would only five days later cry for his execution, should be a sobering reminder of the human tendency to want God on our own terms. They only embraced Him for what He might give to them not because of who He was in Himself.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was executed by the Nazis, wrote of the *Cost of Discipleship* and warned of “cheap grace” that did not take seriously either the gravity of sin or the radical call to servanthood: **“When Jesus bids a man come, he bids him come and die.”**

As elders we are constantly fighting against the surge by Christians to have their felt needs met by God when God alone is enough. Friend, there is a subtle, but significant, difference between these two ideas. God is the only one who can truly meet your needs, but we do not come to God for the fulfilling of our happiness hunger or deficiency quota. We come to Him because He alone is enough in this life and in the life to come. It is only when you find Him to be enough that you will find what it means to be truly human.

What is the difference between these two ideas?

#### ILLUSTRATION:

When a child is hungry or thirsty, he might find cotton candy and Kool-aid satisfying, but no one would say this is the solution or even a positive alternative to fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins. The impact of a diet consisting mostly of cotton candy and Kool-aid is devastating to the individual and the nation. Churches must work against such appeals and make every effort to give “nutritionally rich” foods that satisfy the deepest longings of the human soul. It is only when I am spiritually healthy that I can embrace the moments of my life and serve others from the overflow.

Jesus gives hope to the depressed, healing to the diseased, and wholeness to the dysfunctional, but this hope, healing, and wholeness is an internal and spiritual work. Because the work is spiritual the impact is far greater. Our greatest needs are not our struggling marriage, our poor employment, our frustrated existence. Our greatest need is our failure to see Him as the risen Christ who sits enthroned as King ruling and reigning over the affairs of life as they are the outworking of His eternal purpose. This is our greatest need.

Again the religious leaders have a response to His presentation. The Pharisees communicate their desperation, “The whole world has gone after him” (v. 19).

### III. A challenge to an unavoidable end (vv. 20-50).

Palm Sunday is not simply a religious holiday. Palm Sunday is a presentation of who Christ is and what He will do. No one can remain neutral in light of the evidence provided. There is a dialogue that surrounds Palm Sunday. The content lays out who Jesus is and what we must do in light of this.

#### Why am I teaching this?

This is the crux of all our “religious talk.” It all boils down to this. May it please the Holy Spirit to give you ears to hear.

#### A. The challenge

##### 1. I am the master that leads servants (vv. 13-15, 23-26, 31)

In verses 13-15 Jesus is identified as a King. Inherent inside the idea of King is power to determine destiny and dictate action. Those present understood the idea completely. They saw what He did as a direct threat against the standing government (i.e. Rome). **Who Jesus is as King did not accommodate itself to compromise.** His Kingship was inclusive and pervasive. Everyone everywhere at all times fell within the scope of His reign and every area was affected. Marriage, parenting, work, leisure, pleasure, entertainment, and relaxation all bend before the sovereign Jesus. What you purchased and ate bows before King Jesus.

He displaces all authorities in heaven and on earth and under the earth (v. 31). Demons and the Devil all stoop before His authority.

##### 2. I am the light that dispels darkness (vv. 35-36)

As light He breaks the bondage of darkness. As light He shows the way out of error and into the truth.

To miss this is to remain in bondage in a kingdom of darkness under the prince of darkness. Jesus presents Himself for who He is. Neutrality is impossible. Everyone will make a decision as to what they will do with who He is.

#### B. The choice

##### 1. You must die to yourself and follow me (vv. 25, 26)

The word choices are strong. Such words as “hate,” “die,” “serve,” and “follow” are words of commitment. What this looks like is spelled out in verse 42 in contrast to 37 and then with verses 25 and 26. The belief of verse 42 is not the same as that described in 25 and 26.

A belief that does not hate self and die to it, a belief that does not serve and follow is not a biblical belief resulting in eternal life. The faith in verse 42 could show itself to be vain (See also 1 Cor. 15:1, 2).

## 2. You must trust me (v. 36)

The word “believe” in verse 36 is an imperative. Jesus Christ calls out to you to believe in Him as the light of the world. The word “believe” often mystifies us as we seek to understand its meaning. **Our difficulty in explaining “the act of believing” is in over analysis.**

### ILLUSTRATION:

- You believe when you flip a light switch you will get light.
- You believe when you turn a faucet you will get water.
- You believe when you get in your car and turn the key it will start.
- You believe when you go to bed at night the sun will come up in the morning.

Regardless as to where we are now in our understanding, initially we simply believed and the desired outcome happened. Most of us never question how these things work, only that they do. Your initial belief in Christ is like this. I am not asking you whether or not you can understand how all this works. I am asking you to believe what He has said about Himself and His work for sinners.

What your belief looks like is what He describes in verses 25 and 26.

### C. The consequence

#### 1. For the believing

- a. You will have eternal life and be honored by the Father (vv. 25, 26).

What is eternal life? *Eternal life* is life lived in the presence of God’s favor. *Eternal death* is life lived in the absence of God’s favor. Even now the unbelieving enjoy the common grace of God that is impartial in its application, but there is coming a day when common grace will no longer be present for the unbelieving and they will experience the full wrath of God in the absence of His presence.

Their shame will be unbearable.

- b. You will not be overtaken by the darkness (v. 35).

The word “overtaken” means “to lay hold of so as to make one's own, to possess.” If you do not know Jesus Christ, then you are held in the grip of darkness.

- c. You will become sons of light (v. 36).

A result of believing in the light is you will become a son of light.

**ILLUSTRATION:**

Tony Campolo, a Philadelphia sociologist, was seated at a state prayer breakfast next to the governor and found that he was sympathetic but had never committed himself to follow Christ. "Why not?" asked Campolo. The governor honestly replied, "No one ever asked me." "Well, I'm asking you." To his surprise, the governor responded, "OK, I will." Leighton Ford Leadership 1984 5/2 p. 106. <http://elbourne.org/sermons/index.mv?illustration+1465>

Today I ask you "will you commit yourself to following Christ?"

2. For the unbelieving

In verse 48, the idea of unbelief is captured in the words "reject" and "receive." The word "reject" means "to set aside, to disregard." It carries the idea of "nullifying or making void." The offer was made and you turned it down. In fact, you slapped it out of His hands and trampled it under foot. The word "receive" can be a more intimate word. Christ knocked at the door of your life and you did not welcome Him in.

As a consequence of your refusal to follow Him as King and Light, eight things are true.

- a. You will not have eternal life (vv. 25, 26).
- b. You will not be honored by the Father (vv. 25, 26).
- c. You will remain in the grip of darkness (v. 35).
- d. You will remain a son of darkness (v. 35).
- e. You will not find Him (v. 36).
- f. Your eyes will remain blinded (v. 40).
- g. Your heart will remain dead (v. 40).
- h. You will face the judgment of God (vv. 44-50).

Although this is horrible, it does not have to be true. This is what awaits you if you do not believe.

**APPLICATION:** (What is the NEXT STEP?)

Palm Sunday is not simply a prelude to the Passion Week, but an invitation in its own right.

1. For the believer

As believers, where do our devotions lie? He is worthy of all we possess. As believers, He is the bedrock of our existence and the beacon for life's existence.

When we consider 1 Corinthians 15:1 and 2 and now the idea of following Jesus in our present passage, **the intent is not for you to doubt your own profession of faith, but for you to see how worthy He is to ask you to die, serve, and follow Him.** Our Lord can make such an offer because of who He is, what He has done, and who you are apart from Him but can be in Him.

## 2. For the unbeliever

If you are an unbeliever, I call you to come and follow Him as your master and to trust Him as the light of your life. If you do not come to Christ, then nothing but a fearful judgment and eternal separation from Him awaits you.

### ILLUSTRATION:

Dr. E. Stanley Jones tells of a girl who, frustrated by the city, entered a house of prostitution. Learning of her daughter's plight, the mother desperately sought to rescue her. Not having her child's address, she left a photograph of herself in each house of ill fame visited. One day, the errant girl saw on a mantle in a reception room, a familiar picture. It was the likeness of her first love... her mother. Beneath were the words, "come home".

<http://elbourne.org/sermons/index.mv?illustration+1465>

The Holy Spirit stands before you today and calls out, "come home." Now it is for you to act. Do not allow this day or week to pass without seriously considering His claim on your life.