

What Jesus Said and What He Knew

Palm Sunday 2018

John 12:23-32

Jesus was in Jerusalem. He had very recently healed the blind man of John 9 and He was teaching the people. The air was full of tension for the people were divided, some were open to Jesus' teaching and others were influenced by the powers that be to deny and oppose Him. Regardless of their present attitude and posture, Jesus loved them all. So He talked to them about shepherds and their sheep. The people understood the metaphor. Even those who were city dwellers knew well the nature of a shepherd's work and the power of the shepherd's voice to call out his own sheep from among the many. They all shared a rich heritage of good shepherds going back to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Moses, and even to the great King David. Jesus distinguished between those who are hired to watch after the sheep and those who watch after their own sheep. The hireling " sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees..." He explained, "The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep." Of course, Jesus was talking about the sheep-like people of Israel rather than the wooly kind when He said, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

Looking out on the sea of faces in the temple, faces turned up and listening, reacting to His words, Jesus saw the sheep who He was describing and whom He loved. What He knew was that they were lost sheep who needed saving and that to save them (which He was determined to do) it would be necessary for Him to die for their sakes rather than just risk mishap and death as a typical shepherd might. For the sake of His sheep, this Good Shepherd would die.

Having brought the disciples with Him to an out of the way retreat, and after briefly describing His coming death Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after

Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Everyone knew about crucifixion. The Romans did it all the time. It was a means they used to control the population of their occupied territories. So the metaphor of a cross clearly indicated suffering and sacrifice for a cause. To follow Jesus meant to go down such a road but what Jesus knew was that He had waiting down the road a literal cross upon which He would die. He would be lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness so that those with faith and who believed in the promise and who looked to the cross would be saved from their sins and live and not die.

From Galilee, where Jesus spent the great majority of His time, He looked toward Jerusalem. Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe only Jesus' Galilean ministry up until what we call Palm Sunday. Only John tells us about the Jerusalem feasts that Jesus attended and all of the controversies that swirled around them. So at a time when Jesus from Galilee looked toward Jerusalem and all that it held for Him, He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing..." What Jesus knew of the city was much more than meets the eye. He was and is the Son of God. He was before His birth. He watched David take the city from the Jebusites and make it His city. He watched as Solomon fulfilled his father's dream and built a temple for the worship of the one true God. He filled the temple with the shikinah glory of God. Jesus was there for the entire history of the city. He knew all of its triumphs and failures. His heart had been broken time and again by the hardness of the people and their stubborn rejection of Himself. Now, as never before He knew that Jerusalem's previous crimes were nothing compared to what was coming. They were about to crucify the Son of God and their own Messiah. Much more deeply than any Jewish man could experience anguish over a tragic history, Jesus mourned the demise of the city He had always loved.

As the time drew nearer Jesus became more and more specific about the coming trauma they would all go through. The disciples needed to know that Jesus was not going to die because of His own tragic miscalculation of His circumstances. They needed to know that when He died it would be because it was God's plan. They needed to understand that Jesus willingly gave Himself to the death of the

cross. The only way that Jesus could convey this to them was to tell them before the fact what was about to happen. So He said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." Naturally, the disciples were not ready to hear these things. They remained in denial until it was undeniably over but Jesus knew that every step took Him closer to His inevitable suffering. He knew the how and what but He also knew the why, "Heb. 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

There were some Greeks (Gentiles) who were in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and who wanted to see Jesus for themselves. They approached Jesus through Philip and Andrew and when they came to Him, Jesus said, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, Him my Father will honor. Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify their name!" When Jesus had spoken these words, the Father spoke audibly from heaven, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." And so Jesus responded to the occasion of some curious Gentiles with one of His most transparent moments. He shared the necessity of His coming death, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone..." and He shared His own struggle with the sufferings He certainly faced, "My soul is troubled, and what shall I say, Father save Me from this hour?" But what Jesus knew was that the process that included the cross, His mission which was the cross, was essential. It was the only way. "And, if I am lifted up, I will draw all peoples to Myself."

And so Jesus came into Jerusalem at the head of a exuberant demonstration. As He rode on the colt of a donkey, the demonstrators spread their clothes and palm

branches on the road in front of Him, They cried out, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" But the Pharisees called to Jesus from the crowd to disrupt the event, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But Jesus answered, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out." The controversies followed Jesus everywhere He went. He did not fear them or even avoid them. The angry words of the Pharisees were about to turn into violence. Jesus would die before the week was out. But Jesus knew that He was the King, coming in the Name of the Lord and that He would bring peace in heaven and glory in the highest, it would just require Him to first make a payment on the cross, His life and blood for our salvation.