

Palm Saturday

By Ken Davies

Let's pray. Anoint me as Your servant, O Lord, open the ears and prepare the hearts of Your people to receive Your Word. Amen.

Just before she dismissed them to go to church, a Sunday school teacher asked the children, "And why must we be quiet in church?"

One little boy spoke up, "Because people are sleeping."

This is the Sunday on which we commemorate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey. You may recall that some of the people who saw Him do this, recognized Him at least as someone special. They were moved to prepare His way by laying down their cloaks and palm branches in the road ahead of Him. Others, specifically, the Pharisees, became angry at these actions.

Most people know that the Pharisees were a group of religious leaders that were sticklers for the Law of Moses (what we call the Old Testament). So, what was it about what the people were doing that got their knickers in such a twist? There are two possible reasons, one or both of which may have been the case:

First, this may have taken place on the Sabbath. According to tradition, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a Sunday, but tradition isn't always true to Scripture. Just consider what the Pharisees called the "traditions of the fathers." They actually *nullified* Scripture! The same could be said of some Christian traditions.

John 12 tells us this event happened 5 days before the Passover. Tradition says Passover (the day Jesus was crucified) was on a Friday, which would make the day of His "triumphal entry" a Sunday. However, the assumption that the Passover was a Friday is based on the Bible calling it a "preparation day." Being unfamiliar with Jewish practices, Christians didn't realize that the Passover could fall on *any* day of the week! It was called a "preparation day," not because it fell on a Friday, the day before the weekly Sabbath, but because it came one day before the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first and last days of that feast were set aside as "high" Sabbaths (KJV). In John 19:31, it says: "Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a **special** Sabbath" (NIV).

Tradition tells us that Jesus was crucified in AD 33. That idea is based on when He began His ministry. Scripture tells us that Jesus was "about 30" when He was baptized by John in the Jordan River (that just means it didn't happen on His birthday). Tradition again assumes that the years of our current era match the age of Jesus. That isn't true, though. Jesus would have to have been born in the year AD 0 (zero), but Bishop Ussher, who came up with the idea of calculating when Jesus was born, began the era with the year 1 (one). He also miscalculated, and Jesus was actually born in 4 BC, the same year that Herod the Great died. (You know, the wonderful man who had all those children slaughtered in Bethlehem – Matt 2).

All that is to point out that when Jesus began His ministry at age 30, it was **AD 26**. That means He was crucified in AD 30 (not 33), and the Passover that year fell on a Wednesday, not a Friday. So...the day on which Jesus entered Jerusalem was either a Friday or Saturday (depending on whether or not you count the days inclusively or not). If Jesus came riding into town on a Saturday, it's no wonder the Pharisees were all in a tither!

Little Johnny was sick on Palm Sunday, so he had to stay home. When his family came back from church, they were carrying palm fronds, so Johnny asked what they were for.

“People laid them in the street when Jesus rode by,” his father explained.

“Wouldn't you know it,” Johnny said angrily, “the one Sunday I don't go, and He shows up!”

So, if it was indeed Palm Saturday, were Jesus and His disciples violating the Sabbath?

You may recall the time when they were accused of that very thing when they were walking through a wheat field plucking heads of grain as they walked, rubbing them in their hands to loosen the grain, then eating them. The Pharisees said they were working on the Sabbath because they considered it to be “harvesting” and “threshing.”

Jesus reminded them, “Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. ⁵ Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? ⁶ I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” (Matt 12:3-8).

As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus could suspend any of its restrictions for His own purposes if He wished to.

The **second** reason the Pharisees were so upset, is that the people were treating Jesus as the *Messiah*. According to the Scriptures, the Messiah was going to be God in human flesh. So, when the people were treating Jesus as the Messiah, they were treating Him like *God*. The Pharisees didn't like that! They thought it was a form of blasphemy. We may find fault with them for not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, but think about it – how would *you* know what God looks like?

As a kindergarten teacher was walking around observing the children while they were drawing pictures, she noticed one girl who was concentrating deeply on her work. The teacher asked the girl what the drawing was.

The girl said, “I'm drawing God.”

The teacher was a bit taken aback and said, “But no one knows what God looks like.”

Without looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, “They will in a minute.”

Jesus had come to reveal “what God looked like”—not physically, of course, but His nature. Many people today have the impression that the God of the Old Testament is an angry, unforgiving, harsh and vengeful Deity, just waiting to squash sinners like bugs. When they read about Gehenna (the lake of fire), and realize it refers to a place of eternal, conscious punishment, they assume God is also *hateful*.

Jesus came to dispel those false notions about God. He demonstrated in a tangible way that God is compassionate and loving. Yes, He is also a God that demands justice, but don't *you* do the same? Haven't you ever said, “That's just not right!” What you're saying is that justice hasn't been done. Why should God demand less?

God had demonstrated from the beginning that the shedding of blood was necessary for there to be any kind of “covering” for sin. He showed this after Adam and Eve sinned by killing an animal in order to provide them with a covering for their nakedness that was more substantial than fig leaves. It also showed the inadequacy of mankind to provide atonement for themselves. Fig leaves are very large, but when they dry out, they're like sandpaper! Not adequate at all for use as a covering.

People—*all* people—needed a Redeemer. From God's example to Adam and Eve, people understood that the sacrifice of an animal would provide a temporary covering of sin, but that covering “wore out” so to speak. In order to be permanent, it would have to be of such value that it would so completely overshadow the heinousness of the sin that the sin would be, in essence, done away with—forgotten.

Yet, even when people sinned, God was merciful. He didn't count the multitude of individual sins against them. Only *one* mattered. That was the sin of *Adam*. In Romans 5:13, Paul wrote:

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law.

If I drive 100 mph on a freeway where there is no speed limit, can I get a ticket? No. What might be considered a crime in another place isn't one here, because there's no law against it! That's what Paul is saying in Romans 5. God, in His mercy, didn't hold the sins committed by people against them before He revealed His Law to Moses. Did that mean they got away with their evil deeds scot-free? Paul continues in v. 14:

Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam....

Paul is not referring here to physical death, but spiritual or covenantal death, that is, separation from God. Because of Adam's sin, “...judgment followed...and brought condemnation.... Consequently, ...one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people...” (Romans 5:16, 18).

At this point, you may be saying, “Wait a minute, that's not fair! Why should everyone be punished because Adam blew it? I'm not responsible for his sin! Why should the consequences be imputed to me?” Well, if you don't like that, you're probably not going to like what I'm going to tell you next.

Romans 5:20 says, “The law was brought in so that the trespass might **increase**.” That’s right, the Old Testament Law only made matters *worse* for anyone who submitted themselves to that covenant! So, if you were an Israelite in the time of Jesus (or before), you got a double-whammy. Not only did you have the sin of Adam imputed to you, you also had your own sins to atone for!

A man went to confession and said to the priest, “Father forgive me for I have sinned.”

The Priest replied “I know. I saw it on Facebook.”

So, by now, you’re probably saying, “How in the world does it show God’s compassion when He condemns everyone with a sin they didn’t even commit, then slams His own people, Israel, with the sins they committed under the Law of Moses? How is that even fair?”

God left Himself (and therefore, *you*) a loophole—one He created, of course, but a loophole nonetheless. It has to do with the nature of a covenant and how it works. You see, a covenant is a legally-binding agreement between two or more parties. The covenants made in those days were inheritable, that is, they were passed down from the father to his children. So, in the case of the Adamic covenant, the penalty of it (i.e. death) was passed down to all Adam’s children. This is what theologians call “original sin.” It has nothing to do with tendencies, propensities, or genetics. It has everything to do with how a covenant works.

If you were a Gentile living in those days, you needed deliverance from the broken Adamic covenant. If you were an Israelite, you needed deliverance from the Adamic *and* the Mosaic covenant (the Old Testament Law).

And this is where the “loophole” comes into play. Adam became the representative of all those born to him. Therefore, someone had to be born with someone *other* than Adam as his “father” (ancestor). The only way that was possible was for Jesus to be born of a virgin. Why? Because if *God* was His Father, Jesus wouldn’t inherit the covenant Adam broke, and therefore would be born without “original sin” (the penalty for breaking that covenant). In essence, He would be a *second* Adam, born without sin. That would make Him eligible to act as a substitute for others, and as a second Adam, He would become another representative of all those “born” to Him.

Jesus would have to live a life of perfect obedience to His Father in order to avoid the penalty that Adam and Eve suffered the day they violated their covenant with God. Since Jesus *did* obey His Father perfectly, even to the point of suffering the most horrific death imaginable at the hands of wicked pagans, He could then pass on *life* rather than death! For anyone who has faith in Jesus as Lord, God, and Savior, their inheritance is life. This is what Jesus called being “born again.” You cease to be a child of Adam, and become a child of God through Jesus.

What about the additional need that the Israelites had of being delivered from the Mosaic Law? Since Jesus didn’t have original sin, He could also be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Of course, that meant that He also had to live a perfect life according to the Law. Jesus never violated the Law during His lifetime on earth, so He was considered “spotless” by God the Father. The Law

required perfect obedience as well as the shedding of blood for any sins committed. Jesus, as the spotless Lamb, offered Himself willingly as a sacrifice to atone for His people's sins.

Romans 5 says:

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a **righteous** person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still **sinner**s, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's **wrath** through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

For those who, through the working of the Holy Spirit (i.e. being "born again"), come into covenant with Jesus, have His righteousness imputed to them! Now, if you didn't think it was fair that Adam's sin was applied to you, you probably won't want Christ's righteousness applied to you, either, right? ☺

God, in His infinite wisdom and overflowing mercy, made a way to satisfy His justice without condemning every single human being that ever lived! The lake of fire is still a reality for those who refuse God's offer of salvation through Jesus. But, our compassionate God has made a way of escape for us by providing everything we need to pay the required penalties and restore loving fellowship with Him.

I hope this has changed your picture of God if you were of the opinion that He is harsh or hateful. How much more could He have given – He gave His only Son as a substitute for you! Why not take the time today to thank Him?