

# Jesus in the Wild: The Beauty After the Battle

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Sermon Audio file

Scripture Text: Luke 4:14-15 (NIV)

Resilience is a commonly heard word these days. When challenges come, and we face them with faith and fortitude, we come off our battlefields with a greater capacity to hold up – spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically – through the wilds of life.

“Forty days, three temptations, and three vocationally charged answers later, the devil walks away from the battle. The devil calls it quits on the game – but is not calling it quits on the season. There are seasons of relief in our battle with the adversary of our souls – and for those, we can be grateful” (p. 148). Like Jesus, there are battles we go through with the enemy of our souls, battles during which our calling is deeply and relentlessly contested.

But every battle has an end, and it is in taking them on one by one that we find the strength to walk with Jesus through the wild to the other side. Our calling will always be contested but know that with each challenge we can emerge with greater spiritual resilience, capacity to trust, and a more fierce and steadfast commitment to walk in our calling into union with Christ when we take the following three essential actions.

### **1. When we’ve come through the wild, we rest:**

Part of overcoming the temptations that haunt us is maintaining our rest in heart, mind, and body through rhythms (like worship, the Sabbath, and personal prayer) that continually reorient us to living from the rest of God. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Jesus invites us to rest.

In the wild, Jesus has resisted the enemy by using the Word of God and by reinforcing the Father’s love for him, by recalling the truths of his promises. And, in the end, the devil leaves – but not permanently. This is when we rediscover our rest in Christ, and savor a challenge faced and a foe defeated. So, we can say there is an end to seasons of temptation – seasons of testing – and we can trust there is another side – especially when we feel trapped in the center of a storm.

Today, is there a season of temptation or testing you feel you are in, that is pushing you to the edge of your strength and challenging your capacity to bear it? If so, remember the Lord says there will be an end to this season. Be strong and courageous, recall and reclaim God’s Word, and there will be a time when – we trust and hope – it is over and there is some reprieve. Just remain faithful through it, no matter how long it takes.

Become a person who takes rest seriously; even though our guard is never fully down this side of heaven. Practice Sabbath, get good sleep, stay in community, read encouraging books, be inspired, take time off, and become good at resting in Christ.

### **2. When we’ve come through the wild, we feast:**

Biblically, feasts are just that – festive, festival reminders of the future rest that is to come. They are signs of what has been accomplished that point to the new future ahead. When you've come through a battle for your calling, it's vital that before moving on you pause to celebrate the victory. What was, is no more. What is, is about to be birthed. On the other side of every confrontation or conflict is a new world, unlike what was before. You are different at the end of every battle, and that should be celebrated.

In my imagination, Jesus left that place and had some good food. He had something to drink. He may have done it with friends. And I bet it felt good to eat something tasty and drink something sweet after those forty days. If you and I don't celebrate the small victories and give thanks to God, we will lose our ability to see those victories when they occur. Being thankful and celebrating little victories enables us to perceive God's gifts given in the challenges we face.

Call a friend to recount what God did and have a meal out to celebrate. Write a note to someone who was praying for you. Put a "Jesus and I did it!" sign on your bathroom mirror. Celebrate, with feasting if you can, that God did a good thing, and you came out of your wild stronger and more resilient.

### 3) When we've come through the wild, we step forward:

On the other side of a test passed is the possibility of a pure, radiant, world-bending spiritual resilience. Jesus faces down the temptations and tests of faith that Israel could not and emerges from his long season of fasting and faith-strengthening "in the power of the Spirit." Thus, there is, according to Luke 4:14, a benefit to being tested in the wilderness – we come out stronger than when we went in.

There is a spiritual flexibility inherent to resilience; we take hits but have the increasing ability for them to bounce off us without residual damage. In fact, the most resilient and flexible of people can use the momentum with which they've been hit and turn that energy back on their enemy. That's what Jesus did.

Jesus comes out of his season of testing knowing whose he is, who he is, and what his life's purpose is. He will go on to declare that before a fascinated crowd in a synagogue, where, in Luke 4:18-19, he makes his vocational, kingdom-inaugurating declaration: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

We will all have many opportunities in the wild ... in the unpredictable ... in the surprising circumstances of life ... to face down the challenger. Our suffering, our vulnerable places, can be places we enter – having put on our full armor of God – ready to do battle with Word and Spirit in hand.

James 4:7-10 can help us for today: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

Here's to knowing whose we are, who we are, and why we are – as we follow Jesus into the wild. When we come out of the wild having faced the enemy and resisted – having faced a test and been found faithful – good news will spread. We will be walking in our calling as a beloved child of God, and living in transformational love in our homes, workplaces, and communities.

We close our 40-day journey with Jesus in the wild with these concluding questions and an assurance. Is your calling being contested? Is there a wild in your life that has been unpredictable, untamed, and disorienting? If so, take heart; you are on the road to fullness and wholeness in Christ – and God is preparing you for the next phase of your faith journey and your life's purpose of being more like Jesus and revealing Jesus to the world. Alleluia and amen!

# Palm Sunday: The Beautiful Celebration

## Celebrating What We Don't Know

Have you ever thought about how we celebrate what has happened or even what is happening without any idea of what will happen? Just like the video points out, that is what those who lined the streets leading into Jerusalem did on that very first Palm Sunday. They thought they were welcoming in a Jesus who would overturn the current political leaders and set them free. They had no idea what was actually about to take place. The Bible even points that out in John, chapter 12.

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first, his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him. John 12:12-16

Did you catch that? "At first, his disciples did not understand all this." You may be thinking, "Why would they line the streets and wave branches in the air?" Well, that was what they would do when a hero came to town. If a leader had a great victory in battle, throw a "Palm Branch Parade"! If there was a new king, "Palm Branch Parade"! If Jerusalem beat Jerico in the Super Bowl, you guessed it, "Palm Branch Parade!" (I may have made that last one up.) However, a Super Bowl parade might be a decent modern-day comparison. This gathering was to welcome a hero.

What they said that day was not just something the crowd spontaneously whipped up. They are quoting Psalm 118. These words may have been said of other "Messiahs" over the years. People they thought would save them. Notice how it mirrors what is said here in John 12.

LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD, we bless you. Psalm 118:25-26

Here's the thing, those words, written long before Jesus was born in a manger could easily be said of him. In fact, everything they did that day was appropriate. The crowd just didn't understand that what was about to happen was much bigger than they could ever imagine. Let's look at three things they were celebrating and see how, even though they missed it by that much, they kinda nailed it on the head. There were celebrating what they did not know.

## Celebrating Salvation

"Hosanna!"

We may use the word "Hosanna" from time to time in church. It is found in some worship songs. Do you know what it means? It's from a Biblical Hebrew phrase meaning "Pray, save us." The crowd celebrated salvation on this day when they shouted "Hosanna."

However, they were not celebrating salvation the way we think of it. Instead, they may have been thinking about prophecies like the one found in Isaiah 9.

For to us, a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:6-7

The crowd that day was celebrating what they thought would be salvation from Rome. They thought a political leader was coming to town. They thought Jesus would be a war hero, bringing them salvation from an oppressive government.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:8-9

Jesus was coming to town to bring salvation. There is no question about that. However, his battle was much greater than a political victory or winning a battle with an oppressive government. Jesus would provide a way for us to find freedom from the oppression of sin. He would bring the freedom that no one could imagine that day. He would also do it in a way that didn't look like a victory. However, that is a story for next Sunday!

The point is there is the excitement of being saved from the physical oppression of another country. Then there is the excitement of the salvation of my soul from spiritual oppression.

## Celebrating The Coming Savior

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

On that first Palm Sunday, the crowd celebrated the coming salvation and welcomed the savior who would bring it. The phrase “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” is actually a way of welcoming someone very important. Another way to say it is “Welcome in the name of the Lord.” They were seeking to welcome the one mentioned in Jeremiah 23.

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior. Jeremiah 23:5-6

This crowd welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, possibly for two reasons. First, it was the week of Passover, and the city was packed with those planning to celebrate the time God set their people free from slavery in Egypt. However, they also welcomed Jesus into the city that was the seat of power during those days. In their mind, he wasn't just coming to celebrate; he was coming to take over.

Although Jesus would celebrate the Passover while he was in Jerusalem, he had no intentions of sitting on a throne there. However, this is a beautiful picture of something similar God had planned for us.

I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:16-19

Jesus would take the Passover meal and help us see that he would be the sacrificial lamb. And while he did not seek a throne in Jerusalem, he does seek a throne in our hearts. When this happens, we begin to grasp how wide and long and high and deep God's love for us truly is.

A savior came to Jerusalem that day, and his purpose was to pay the price so that we could invite him to sit on the throne of our hearts.

## Celebrating The King

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

The idea of a savior coming to town insinuates that a future king is coming to town. That is why the crowd that day shouted, “Blessed is the king of Israel.” There were giving him the title before he had taken the throne. As they saw Jesus riding in on a donkey, maybe they remembered the words of the prophet Zechariah.

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9

What a king he would have been for them. They had seen the way he treated people so differently. He was the picture of compassion. He brought healing with him. If this great Jesus was anything, he was humble,

speaking the truth in love like none before him.

That week would come and go, and alas, Jesus would not be in a throne room graciously leading the people of Israel. In fact, come Friday night, his body would be in a borrowed tomb. How confused and disappointed the crowd must have been.

But we know the truth of the story. We know Jesus used a borrowed tomb because he planned to return it on Sunday morning. And return it he did. But again...that is a story for next Sunday. So while Jesus may not have sat on a throne in Jerusalem, the book of Revelation lifts the curtain of heaven and shows us precisely what kind of king Jesus is.

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Revelation 19:11, 16

Jesus is a faithful king. He is a true, just, and mighty king. King of what? King of Kings. It is not simply a title; it is the truth of who Jesus Christ is. There is no one above him. He reigns over all and is worthy of our honor, our praises, our lives, and our everything.

## Celebrating What We Do Know

The crowd that celebrated Jesus that Sunday will revisit Psalm 118 that week on Thursday when the celebrated Passover. This Psalm is part of the Hallel, a prayer of thanksgiving added to the morning service on festive Jewish holidays. The prayer, whose Hebrew name means "praise," comprises six psalms (113-118) that amount to an extended-expression of praise and thanks to God for the many kindnesses bestowed upon Israel.

More than likely, Jesus and the disciples would have read Psalm 118 together. Can you imagine Jesus hearing those words? Unlike the rest of all humanity, He truly understands what they are referring to. So let's revisit it ourselves as we celebrate what we know.

The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Psalm 118:27-29

They got so close to getting it right on that first Palm Sunday. But no one could begin to imagine the amazing plan God had set in place. Salvation was coming. Not to set us free from an oppressive government but to set us free from the oppression of sin. A savior was to be welcomed. Not to a city or a celebration, but into our hearts to help us know how great God's love is. And a king was riding on that donkey as it entered the town. But not just a king; it was the king of all kings coming to set things straight and make things right that had been lost in the garden.

Today, let us join our voices with those who, so long ago, shouted to welcome Jesus.