

Palm Sunday: Destroy and Deliver

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're taking a little break from our series in the Gospel of Mark for the season of Easter this morning for Palm Sunday. We're going to take a look at two passages, John chapter 12 and Hebrews chapter 2, and I'll warn you right away, I'll be focusing mostly on Hebrews chapter 2, but I want us to look at John chapter 12 so we have this reminder, this context of what it is we're talking about when we talk about Palm Sunday, that

Jesus is coming in as a king into Jerusalem. And we're just going to have a simple question, which is this, why would we sing at Jesus entering Jerusalem? In our passage from John, I'm not sure if there's singing or not, but they're certainly praising Him. They're excited about the fact that Jesus is coming into the city, riding in like a king. Why should we be excited? What would move us to sing for Jesus entering Jerusalem? So with that question, I invite you to turn with me. You can find both passages printed in your worship guide. You can also flip quickly in your phone or in your Bible, no matter where you go, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now, starting at John chapter 12, verses 12 through 15.

The next day, the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, crying out, Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel. And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion. Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.

And we turn now to Hebrews chapter 2, verses 14 and 15. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you that Jesus is not just our Savior, but He's also our King.

[3 : 25] And we thank you that you've given us your Word to instruct us and to help us. We ask for that help. This morning, we confess that we are not up to the task of understanding and believing what you have to tell us unless your Spirit and your help is with us.

And so we ask for that Spirit and that help, that as we look at your words to us, that you would move in our hearts and our minds, that we would see and love and adore you more and more.

We thank you that we don't have to worry right now about whether we've done enough or been good enough to earn these things from you, but instead we simply ask them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. The 2004 feel-good sports movie *Miracle* tells the story of the USA hockey team in 1980 and how they defeated Russia, and it opens in Colorado Springs, of all places, in 1979 at the headquarters of USA hockey.

Later in the movie, we'll get to see a little bit of the Broadmoor World Arena from 1979. And there's this meeting, this interview with Herb Brooks, who they're considering to be the coach of this team, about how in the world they're going to be able to defeat the Soviet Union.

[4 : 47] The Soviet Union has this lock on the Olympics. They've won it for three or four Olympics in a row. And the American team has been incredibly embarrassed. They recently lost to a B team from the Czech Republic.

And so they have this discussion about whether they have any hope and what they're going to be able to do if they're going to be able to pull together a team fast enough and train them quickly enough.

Now, there's lots of ideas that are put onto the table about how it is they're going to be able to accomplish this, whether they have any chance against the Soviets. There's one idea, however, that never gets put on the table.

No one suggests that they should try to find better players from other countries. Now, it seems like an obvious solution to me.

The Russians are beating you. What should you do? Hire some Russians. Right? I mean, that seems like that would solve the problem immediately. And so why do they not do this?

[5 : 47] Why do they not recruit people from another country? If you think I'm asking a stupid question, it's because I am. It's obvious, right?

That is part of the logic of the Olympics. That's part of the logic of victory. The champion has to be one of you. That question is not even raised.

You probably think I'm an idiot for asking it because those are the rules. No one would think anything different. Of course, the USA Olympic team is made up of Americans.

That's the only way it's going to be able to happen. You don't get to hire mercenaries. Mercenaries are in it for themselves, right?

It's one of you who does it for all of you. Americans are required for an American victory. This principle is obvious to us when it comes to the Olympics.

[6 : 46] It is so obvious to the author of the book of Hebrews that he assumes it. Verse 14. If Jesus is going to be our great champion, of course, he's going to have to become human.

That is the only way he's going to be able to represent us. Verse 14. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things.

In other words, he became a man that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death. Only Americans can represent America.

Nothing else makes sense. It's obvious. Only a man can represent men. Jesus, as the champion of his people, becomes like his people.

Jesus, as the champion of his people, wins for his people. That's the only way it can happen. Who won in 1980 against the Russians?

[7 : 54] Was it the 20 members of the team? Or was it the United States of America? Yes. Yes. It was the 20 members of the team and the United States of America.

It was necessary for American players to defeat Russian players. It's the only way it could be a victory for America on behalf of America. It was necessary for a man to defeat Satan.

That's the only way it could be a victory for men. That's what we see on Palm Sunday in our passage from the Gospel of John.

Jesus, as the king, is coming in to defeat Satan. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he rides in as our champion.

He rides in to be a conqueror. In the movie, when the final showdown comes between the Russian team and the American team, we see the Americans coming onto the ice for the first time as the crowd welcomes them because they have arrived to have the final showdown in battle.

[9 : 00] When Jesus rides in as our king on Palm Sunday, he is skating in on the ice, getting ready to defeat and conquer Satan. He is preparing for that battle.

Jesus has showed up here in John chapter 12 because it's time for Satan to get trashed. Why is it that we sing about Jesus entering Jerusalem?

Why is it that we celebrate Palm Sunday? There are many things, certainly, that we celebrate around Easter. One of them is this. Our champion, Jesus, is entering the arena.

Our champion, Jesus, has finally come into Jerusalem for the final showdown. Our champion, Jesus, is here to take Satan out back.

If you look in your worship guide, page four, we have this verse from 1 John chapter 3, verse 8. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

[10:07] Jesus came because Satan had to be crushed. Jesus came because of the promise that we read in Genesis chapter 3 that one day the offspring of the woman would come and bruise the head of the serpent, which is a nice way of saying that Jesus came to curb-stomp Satan.

That is why he is arriving here in Jerusalem. As the USA team enters into the arena before the game, what are the people shouting?

It's USA, USA, right? Because that's what you do when your champion arrives. John chapter 12, what are these people saying as Jesus enters the arena?

Verse 13, Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel. What do we do with Jesus, our King?

We follow the people of Palm Sunday, and we praise him. We also are able to sing hallelujah. We are also able to say that Jesus is our great and mighty King, and we are excited in praising him here, now, this morning, because he has come as our champion to finish our enemy once and for all.

[11:28] That is why and what we celebrate at Palm Sunday. That's what we did earlier when we sang shout to the Lord together. We said, power and majesty, praise to the King.

Jesus has skated onto the ice. And now, for the rest of Holy Week, we get to watch the game, knowing how it ends.

The time for Satan to be defeated has come. And so we see here this answer, right?

We praise him because he comes. He comes to wreck the devil, and we find out more, verse 14 of Hebrews chapter 2, what that means. He himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

Now, what does it mean here that Satan is the one who has the power of death? Well, I want you to think about it this way. I'm someone who enjoys a good trail run.

[12:35] One of my favorite places to go run is in Cheyenne Mountain State Park, which is just 10 minutes south of here. And when you run in Cheyenne Mountain State Park, one thing you have to be aware of is there's a lot of snakes.

And snakes, during the summer, or really all the time, like to stay warm. Where's the best place for them to hang out if they want to stay warm? Right on the trail.

Because there's no cover or protection on the trail. So they can just sit and lie out in the sun. And so my job as I'm running along is to keep my eyes open to make sure I don't step on a snake.

In fact, there was one time I jumped over two snakes in a row. You might be thinking at this point, what is wrong with me that I would be running in the state park with all these snakes? Why do I not have a healthier fear?

And the reason is this. It's not the bite that kills you. It's the venom. Most of the snakes in Cheyenne Mountain State Park are harmless.

[13:36] They are garter snakes. Garter snakes can bite you. They can't kill you. I did my research. There's only one snake in Cheyenne Mountain State Park that can kill you, and it's the rattlesnake.

Now, I had a conversation, I think it's been a couple years at this point, with one of the park rangers over there, and they told me, you don't need to worry about the rattlesnakes too much because the rattlesnakes are extremely territorial, which means there's only a few of them.

So you got all these garter snakes. I want to say, don't quote me on this, there's maybe like, I can probably count the rattlesnakes on one hand that are in Cheyenne Mountain State Park, and it's a big park.

Okay? It's not the bite that kills you. It's the venom. The point is this. Outside of Jesus, death is a rattlesnake.

Outside of Jesus, death is a rattlesnake. It doesn't just kill you physically, it doesn't just hurt you physically, the bite, it can also kill you spiritually, the venom.

[14:47] Death doesn't just kill you physically, the bite, it can kill you spiritually as well. It has venom. It can separate you from God forever.

Outside of Jesus, death is a rattlesnake. With Jesus, death is a garter snake. The power of death has been removed.

When death bit Jesus, he absorbed all its venom. There is no venom left. When death bites you, there is no venom left for you either.

Okay? That's part of what 1 Corinthians 15 means when it says this. Oh, death, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, death, where is your sting? In other words, death, where is your venom? You know what all you can do now is? [15:53] All you can do is bite. You can't kill. The reality of death is still here for all of us. If you're a Christian, its threat and its power is gone.

That's why we both lament and rejoice at the funeral of a Christian. 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us that we grieve, but not as the world grieves because we have hope.

We know that this person has experienced the bite. They are dead physically. We also know they have not experienced the venom. They are not dead spiritually. In fact, what's true of Paul says in Philippians 1 that if they die, they go to be with Christ.

They're in the presence of Jesus, and death cannot keep them from that. Death has lost its power. If you are a Christian, death will bite you, it will not and cannot ultimately kill you.

It is inconvenient. It is uncomfortable. It is tragic. It is not ultimately fatal. Jesus dealt with the venom when he dealt with Satan.

[17:08] It cannot kill your soul. Death is not your end. Jesus disarms death. He has removed the power of Satan, which is the power of death.

Now, if you were with us a few weeks ago when Jonathan Clark preached, he gave us this amazing, wonderful quote about our hope, and so I pinned him down on it, and I made him help me find it.

And that quote is on page three of your worship, no, it's on page five of your worship guide. And he told us this, that if we're in Christ, we know that our bad things will turn out for good, our good things cannot be taken from us, and the best things are yet to come.

Our bad things will turn out for good, our good things cannot be taken from us, and the best things are yet to come. Those things are true and only true because the power of death no longer has a hold on us.

Our bad things will turn out for good, so there's nothing Satan can hold over us. Our good things cannot be taken away from us. Death does not threaten the inheritance that we have as sons and daughters of God, and the best things are yet to come.

[18:27] We know how the story ends. The story ends in a great, the greatest feast as we're gathered together again as God's people and brought back into his presence. In other words, no matter what happens in this life, we cannot lose what is most precious and valuable.

No matter what happens in this life, it's what we talked about in 1 Peter 1, Satan cannot threaten our inheritance. We have a treasure that's been stored up that is untouchable.

Why is that true? Because Jesus destroyed the devil. And that's what we're celebrating on Palm Sunday.

Verse 14 also tells us about his strategy. It's not just that he destroyed the devil, but he did it through a specific way. Through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death. He used death to destroy death. In the movie Miracle, as they're watching the game tape of the Russians, the coach points out to them that you don't defend the Russians, you attack them.

[19:38] You take their game and you shove it right back in their face. Because the Russians were used to being able to outskate anyone, and so they'd always stay on the attack, never on the defense.

Their goal was to return and play their same game against them, to make them, force them to play defense and let the Americans play offense. Jesus takes death, he takes its game, and he shoves it right back in its face.

Jesus does the unexpected, the counterintuitive, he uses death to destroy death. And so that's why verse 15, he's able to deliver us from the fear of death.

He delivers all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. This means a lot of things, to be delivered from the fear of death. It certainly means that we're delivered from death being held over our heads as a threat.

We saw that with John the Baptist last week. Herod kills him. So what? John the Baptist gets to go and be with Christ. That's one of the amazing things about Christians during persecution.

[20:56] Death is not a threat to them. And so it's a challenge and a witness to those who are opposing them and persecuting them, that they have a supernatural hope beyond the grave.

Doesn't just mean that death can no longer be held over our heads, but death not being a threat anymore means that we can look death in the face without fear. We live in a culture right now that refuses to look death in the face.

That's why we live in a culture that is obsessed with youth. We live in a culture that's obsessed with looking and staying as young as possible, as long as possible.

Why? Because they're subject to lifelong slavery through fear of death. If there's nothing after death, then you have to do everything you can to avoid it.

You must not look it in the face. It's the same reason our culture can't talk about death. We used to have funerals and memorial services.

[22 : 11] Now we have celebrations of life. Now, first of all, don't hear what I'm not saying. If you've had a celebration of life, I'm not throwing you under the bus. What I am saying is that Christians are the only ones who can truly celebrate the life of someone who's died.

If there is nothing after this life, then at some level, ultimately, everything in this life is meaningless. We cannot have a true celebration of life without grieving what needs to be grieved.

And that celebration is hollow if there's nothing after death. That celebration is hollow if you and I are simply tortured atoms in this universe.

But it's Christians who are no longer subject to lifelong slavery. It's because Jesus came and crushed the head of the serpent that we no longer have to fear death that we can look it in the eyes.

We don't live with the fear of death because we look to something after it. We have hope for more.

Tim Keller talks about this in his book Hope in Times of Fear which came out last year which is about the hope that we have because of the resurrection and he points out that life in this world, living in this world and our culture, we're told that there's nothing that comes after death.

[23 : 39] And he points out that ultimately that makes our lives meaningless. We try to take comfort in symbolic transcendence, the idea that what we do will live on in our work or in the lives of our children.

But the reality is that in the end whether you live a life of goodness or of cruelty will make no final difference at all, the knowledge of ultimate oblivion even when somewhat repressed seeps in and robs life of significance.

No one can live consistently with the belief that we are only matter and that our ultimate end is oblivion. So we have no hope. Unless. Unless there is a God who has promised to guide history not to an end but to a new beginning.

to a world in which finally death and evil are completely destroyed and justice and peace reign supreme the sign of which is the resurrection.

Brothers and sisters because Jesus rides in on Palm Sunday to crush the head of the devil you have hope not just in this life but in the life to come. What you do now truly does echo through eternity.

[24 : 50] what you suffer now cannot threaten what is most precious and most valuable. You no longer live in the lifelong slavery that comes through the fear of death.

In the 2008 movie Gran Torino Clint Eastwood plays this man named Walt Kowalski and Walt is a bitter Vietnam War vet who forms a relationship with his neighbor a young boy named Tao.

And Tao gets mixed up in a violent gang in town and finally gets on the wrong side of them the violence escalates more and more until Walt decides it's time for him to defend Tao and finish it once and for all.

And so we see him making his preparations for his final showdown with a gang that's threatening his friend. He goes and he gets a haircut he makes sure his lawn is mowed he makes his final confession to a Catholic priest and then he shows up at the gang's apartment and he stands on the street in front of it.

They open up their windows and they look out at him and Walt begins to yell at them telling them all the things that they've done wrong. While he's doing this all the windows in the neighborhood around him also open up and so we have this scene with tons of spectators watching every move.

[26 : 20] As the gang members draw their guns we see Walt pull out a cigarette and then he reaches into his jacket like he's going to pull out a gun.

instead he pulls it out and all he's holding is a lighter for his cigarette and at that moment the gang kills him.

They just open fire in the street and we see this man fall down dead. What he does there is the exact opposite of what we expect.

The last thing we think is going to happen is that Clint Eastwood is going to show up to a gunfight with nothing but a lighter and give up his life. What we want in that situation is for him to come and bring full and final justice by being the one not who is shot but the one who does the shooting. But instead he reverses all of our expectations as something radical and counterintuitive and different. Walt decides that he is going to defeat death by death.

[27 : 24] he is going to defeat this gang not by shooting but by being shot. And so in the next scene we see the police officers showing up and they tell Tal that because Clint has done this in the open square where everyone can see it they have all the witnesses they need to finally convict and imprison this gang.

Walt knows that the chain of violence is not going to be ended by more violence but by death. brothers and sisters we also have a king who rode in on a donkey and did something the opposite of what the Jewish people wanted and expected.

They were looking for a conqueror who would clean house with the Romans who would use force to end force. Instead he comes to trample and crush the head of the enemy of his people.

He comes to take care of and destroy Satan once and for all. he defeats death through death.

Tal is no longer subject to the lifelong slavery the fear of the gang. He is now able to live his life.

[28 : 40] Why is it that we celebrate Palm Sunday? We celebrate it because it is when Jesus came in to fully and finally destroy the works of the devil.

And so that's why we're able to say with the people in the crowd Hosanna blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord even the king of Israel.

Let's pray. our father in heaven we praise you and thank you that you are not just our savior but our king that you came and you defeated and trampled Satan once and for all.

We ask you would give us the hope that comes from knowing that death cannot threaten what is most valuable to us that it can bite us but it cannot kill us.

We ask that you would show us Jesus this week in all his beauty and his glory and you'd bring us back together on Friday and on Sunday that we would remember and celebrate and know what it is that he's done for us.

[29 : 45] We ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.