

I. Set Up

A. Good morning / welcome / special welcome to those

B. Today is Palm Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week, which leads us through a focus on the crucifixion to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Technically, these are not the biggest events in the Bible – that awaits the celebration for Christ that will happen in heaven after everything has been brought to a close. But it's big! The biggest that has yet occurred.

C. As you may know, the Old Testament points to the New. And the New Testament points to Jesus. The first four books of the New Testament are about Jesus – which in themselves point to the final week of his life: holy week.

D. And the rest of the New Testament points back to the events that happened at the end of Holy Week - the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

E. Today we are going to look at all of this in context. We are going to 30,000 feet to see the flow of history. That will become a bit clearer in a minute. Right now let's welcome the children who parade in with Palm Branches – recreating the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.

II. Palm Sunday Entry of kids / Song(s) / Offering

III. Introduction

A. My goal today is to set up the end of the week – not next Sunday (Easter) but Maundy Thursday – which celebrates the Last Supper and Christ's betrayal – and Good Friday, which marks the crucifixion. I am not going to delve too deeply there because we have services celebrating those events and we want you to come back for them.

1. On Thursday at 7 PM at the Highland Park campus we will have a Maundy Thursday service. It features an Improv group doing a modern recreation of The Last Supper. This is back by popular demand.

2. On Good Friday – which is only called *Good Friday* in the U.S – the rest of the world calls it things like, *Sorrowful Friday* or *Long Friday*. But on what we call Good Friday we will open the sanctuaries from 1 – 3 at both the LF and CR campuses for prayer, reflection and communion. And we will have Good Friday services at 7 PM at both LF and CR. Today the goal is to set things in context.

B. If you have been around, you know that we are working our way through Luke's Gospel. And we are doing so slowly. Luke was a travel companion of Paul's and a historian. And sometime after Mark and Matthew wrote their Gospels, but before John wrote his, Luke did his best to create "an orderly account" of Christ's life.

C. Please note, he said "orderly, not "comprehensive." The Gospels do not tell us everything a biography would because they were written for a different purpose – they were written to persuade us that Jesus is God and that we should follow him. To that end, they focus on the most important parts – which means they give a lot of their time and attention to what we call Holy Week. Think of it this way: eighty percent of Luke is focused on the last three years of Christ's life, and fifty percent of that is focused on the last week of Christ's life – which we now call Holy Week.

D. It was not called Holy Week 2,000 years ago, but it was special back then. It was the week set aside for the annual celebration of the Passover, and for reasons I hope become even clearer, Christ's death purposively coincided with The Passover celebration that the Jews had celebrated for 1,500 years by the time Christ showed up.

IV. In the event that I am losing you, let me drill down here, using an outline I have used before – in fact, we used the idea of a Play last Easter. If the Bible was a play, the Old Testament would be Act One and it would open with Genesis 12 – the call of Abraham.

A. Genesis 1 – 11 sets up the story. There we learn that:

1. God created everything everywhere and put us in charge of this small planet.

2. We rebelled and as a result we were cut off. All kinds of things went wrong and humanity fell under a curse from God.

3. It's pretty dark stuff – lots of death and suffering.

4. But, God made a promise when everything was spinning out of control. He would send someone to fix things and rescue us.

5. A few things happen after this promise but before the play actually begins – and they are all bad. Cain kills Abel, the people go from bad to worse. There is a flood. The big takeaway from Genesis 4 – 11 is that mankind is incapable of fixing the problems he was facing.

B. We learn all of this in the Playbill we are handed when we walk in.

1. You know, the book that says

- a) Playing the part of Moses will be...
- b) Substituting for the Apostle Paul will be ...

2. HOLD A FAKE PLAYBILL

C. It's at this point that the curtain rises and the play begins. At first there is one person on stage – a man named Abram, who is a nomadic shepherd living in the Fertile Crescent about 4,000 years ago. God calls out him and makes an offer:

1. Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

D. The deal is, if Abraham will follow him, God will bless him with land and descendants, and bless the whole world through him.

E. Abraham says yes and we read the rest of the Old Testament wondering when God is going to send The One.

F. We follow Abraham and his wife Sarah through a handful of adventures and then watch as this couple becomes a small family, grows to be a small country and eventually – under a man named David, becomes the super power of the world. (SLIDES ON SCREEN THAT SHOW ABE, ISAAC, then JACOB with 12 SONS. Next arrow shows lots and lots of people.)

1. If you know your Old Testament, this includes periods we might call The Patriarchs, Exodus, Conquest, Judges and finally The United Kingdom. This is another slide

G. There are all kinds of subplots going on.

1. Some have to do with the Promised Land and some have to do with the Law. Two of the big ideas that are developed over and over are that:

- a) Sin is a capital offense – that is, while we are pretty casual about sin (especially ours), God is not.
- b) But substitute deaths are allowed. An innocent third party can die so that guilty people can go free.

c) One of the ways this is developed is through the sacrificial system (Slide here of an Altar) that was developed by God in the Book of Leviticus (where everyone stops reading because there is so much blood). What we learn there is that people went to the priest to confess what they had done wrong and the priest would then instruct them on what kind of animal to bring to sacrifice. And the animal would be killed and its blood poured out as an offering.

d) Even before that there are a series of events in Genesis and Exodus animals are killed to cover Adam and Eve, Cain kills Abel, a ram is substituted for Isaac on Mount Herron, and of course The Passover itself – which they celebrate every year for 1,500 years before Christ changes it.

2. This happened after God told Moses that he needed to act in order to secure the freedom of the Jews – who had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. This is where the Ten Plaques happen, with the last one being a visit by the angel of death that would claim the life of every first born male unless a sacrifice was made first – that being the sacrifice of a perfect male lamb, whose blood was to be painted over the doorway so the angel of death would “pass over” it.

H. There are other themes developed in the Old Testament – for instance, God keeps restating his promise to send someone to fix things. And at times it feels like they are clearly moving in that direction. Under the leadership of King David the 12 Tribes are united as a nation, all of their enemies are defeated, their borders are expanded and their treasury is filled. It looks like God is on their side and everything is coming together.

I. But then everything falls apart. After the death of David’s son, Solomon, the kingdom splits in two.

1. The northern ten tribes are then wiped out and the southern two are overrun by the Babylonians and taken into captivity. The Jewish temple is destroyed and the people lose their freedom.

2. And even though after 70 years of exile they are allowed to return, they are a joke. Their once glorious temple looks like a tree fort compared to what it had been. Slide – a picture of Solomon’s Temple and then an arrow that goes to a small shack.

V. This is where the Old Testament ends. And we go into a 400 year intermission during which time God is silent. Slide of Drive-in movie intermission sign.

A. There are no prophets speaking for God to the Jews.

- B. Things look very bleak. Some of the Jews have given up hope that God is going to keep his word. It is at that point that the New Testament begins
- C. Luke opens things up by starting with the angel Gabriel appearing to Zechariah and telling him that his wife would give birth to the one who will walk in the footsteps of Elijah.
- D. The first series in Luke looked at the events surrounding Christ's birth.
 - 1. The angel appearing to Mary alerting her to a virgin conception
 - 2. The birth in a manger, visit of wise men and subsequent flight to Egypt
 - 3. We ended that with a glimpse of Jesus at 12 years of age.
- E. The second series – Amazed – noted how, after he was baptized by John – who identified him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (a clear reference to Jesus as the Passover Lamb) – and after he spent 40 days in the wilderness praying, fasting, preparing for his mission and ultimately wrestling with evil – he started traveling around and preaching, and gained a huge following very quickly, because in a series of miracles he demonstrated his power over sickness, evil, death and nature.
- F. In the series in which we just completed – Revolution – we see how he sets a movement in motion that will spread around the world.

VI. The key thing for you to understand today – in this fly over – is that Jesus was born to die and he did so for you! His death was not an accident.

A. In Genesis 3:15 God promised that he would send someone. And then throughout the Old Testament he kept repeating and elaborating on that promise. We see this, for instance when Micah tells us he'd be born in Bethlehem and where Isaiah describes his death by crucifixion long before crucifixion had been invented.

B. We now turn to the events of the day – the Triumphal entry – and we are going to watch a few clips from The Son of Man film. There are four things to note here

- 1. First, before Palm Sunday was Palm Sunday, it marked the start of the Passover, the big national holiday and patriotic party where everyone flooded back into Jerusalem to celebrate and remember that God chose them (the Jews) as his people and that against crushing odds he had lifted them out of slavery and made them a great nation.

2. Second, the Romans were always scared that this annual party would get out of hand. Remember, 1,500 years earlier the Jews had overthrown the Egyptians. Now, Rome was the oppressor, and there was a bit of irony in having a celebration about gaining you freedom from foreign overlords while being subject to foreign overlords. They are especially fearful this year because of the popularity of Jesus. Jerusalem is a powder keg and Jesus could be the match that sets it off – which is why Pilate, the Roman authority in the area, the one to whom the troops answered was in town – had come into town.

3. Three, Jesus makes a grand entrance. He didn't have to. This was not the 21st century with 24 hour news channels. Jesus did not have a Facebook page with lots of pictures of he and the disciples hanging out. The Romans do not know what he looks like. He could have slipped into town quietly. But he doesn't. He rides in on a donkey – which sounds humble, but was actually a bold claim to be the king. Solomon had ridden in on a donkey.

4. Finally, the Palm branches that were being waved were – in essence – the Jewish flag.

C. This clip portrays the Triumphal entry, and it gives a little foreshadowing of the trouble that awaits with both the Romans and the Jewish religious leaders. **VIDEO CLIP THREE**

D. The entry Christ makes suggests everything the Romans feared. The crowd is with him and he intends to lead a revolt. But then, everything takes a turn for the unexpected. Two events were key. First, Jesus shifts his attention from the Romans to the Jews. Luke 19:45-48. **VIDEO CLIP FOUR**. In other Gospel accounts, it reports that Jesus not only accused the religious leaders of misusing the temple, but while standing outside of it he healed people and forgave sins – things that were not supposed to be happening outside the temple.

VII. We now jump to Thursday evening

A. Jesus parades into Jerusalem on Sunday to the applause of the crowd. On Monday he goes to the temple and overturns the tables. On Tuesday and Wednesday he is teaching and healing.

B. On Thursday he will gather his disciples in an upper room for what we call the Last Supper. At that point he changes the Passover Celebration into Holy Communion. He does this by claiming to be the Passover Lamb.

C. Let's watch this final clip. **VIDEO CLIP FIVE**

VIII. After the Last Supper, Jesus is betrayed by Judas, arrested and hauled before various people and councils. On Friday Pilate will bring Jesus out before the crowds and offer to release him.

A. But by this point the people have turned against Jesus and they shout “crucify him,” – which is where we all come in.

B. It’s important for us to realize that we are the reason Jesus dies. The Bible makes it clear that we cannot blame the Jews or the Romans for Christ’s death. Jesus willingly laid down his life – it wasn’t taken for him. And, we are the guilty ones. We are the reason. He gave up his life for us.

C. And to drive this point home it is common to give the congregation one speaking role in a Palm Sunday service. It is the words “Crucify him.” Please stand. I will read the text and you can follow along on the screen up until the part in red. That is where we all chime in. Luke 23:13-

1. Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.” ^[17] [a]

2. ¹⁸ But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

3. ²⁰ Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹ But they kept shouting, “**Crucify him! Crucify him!**”

4. ²² For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”

5. ²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

IX. This is where our survey ends

A. the next few days I'd encourage you to meditate on the events that are unfolding and join us as we hold special services to guide our attention.

1. As noted earlier, this Thursday we will have a Maundy Thursday service at Highland Park.
2. On Friday, the sanctuaries are open for prayer and communion at both CR and LF – which is where we will also have evening services at 7.
 - a) These services are powerful and will end in darkness and with silence
3. On Easter Saturday we begin in darkness and black, and then, as the service unfolds, the light begins to turn on and the stage turns to white – setting us up for Easter morning, Resurrection Sunday, where we celebrate an empty tomb.

X. Right now we are turning our attention to Christ's death and the Lord's Supper – and focusing on this big idea: it happened for you. Christ died for you. He bore your sin – and my sin – on the cross.