

**Lake Cities Community Church**  
**April 17,2011**  
**Pastor Craig Schill**  
**Palm Sunday**

**Celebrate Good Times!**  
John 12:9-18

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Last year Taylor played on a basketball team through Mesquite Park and Recreation department. Her team was called the “Lady Mavs”. The first game of the season was the Lady Mavs verses the Lady Wildcats and our team was clearly outmatched, and they lost by a large margin. But over the course of the season, the Lady Mavs worked hard and improved week by week. The coach preached teamwork, and soon they began to win their games. Before we knew it, the regular season was over and the playoffs began and then - believe it or not - it was a rematch of the Lady Mavs vs the Wildcats in the finals – for the *City Championship!* The game was very, very close – back and forth. We were on the edges of our seat wondering if the game would end with the thrill of victory, or the agony of defeat!

Do you know what it is like to root for your favorite team? To be caught up in the emotion of a close game? Parents new to organized sports are often surprised as how quickly and intensely they become wrapped up in a simple sports game. And it is not just kid’s games. I know some of you also have strong attachment to the Rangers or Mavs, or Cowboys – or anyone BUT the cowboys!

Well, 2,000 years ago, on Palm Sunday, Jesus was like a sports team on a playoff run, and as he entered into Jerusalem, hundred of fans came out to root him on. These fans were wrapped up in Jesus emotionally and really hoped that He would score a victory for them!

This morning we are going to explore the celebration of Palm Sunday, through three question: First **How did they celebrate?** Second; **Why did they celebrate?** And third (application); **What should we celebrate today?**

### **How did they celebrate?**

First how did they celebrate? Could I have three volunteers please come forward to help me with this point for a brief demonstration of celebration! I am going to assign each of you a word to shout. (1) “**whoo-hoo**” (2) “**Let’s Go Rangers!!!**” and (3) “**D-Fence.**” Now everyone say it together! Making noise is an important part of celebrating – the verbal expression of joy! But in the best celebrations we also must have something to wave (1) POMPOM, (2) Foam Claw, (3) Banner. You see there is a **VERBAL** part of celebrating and a **PHYSICAL** part of celebrating. Something to say and something to do. That is great – you may sit down!

Turn with me, now, to the Gospel of John, chapter 12, beginning with verses twelve and thirteen. How did they celebrate? [John 12:12](#) On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, [John 12:13](#) took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and *began* to shout, “Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel.”

Back then, they didn’t have a foam finger that said, “Go Jesus!” They had palm branches they waved and they shouted from Psalm 118: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!!” Celebration involves something to say and something to do.

But there is a little more to it than that - Let's take a moment and talk about why they waved the palm branches. After all this is "Palm Sunday" a Sunday defined by a part of a tree, and a little background will help us to enter into the story.

First, when we think of Palm Trees, most of us think of tropical beaches and coconuts. But that is not what the people in Jesus' time would have pictured at all - the kind of Palm Tree in Israel were Date Palm trees. The palm tree's place and importance in the Ancient Near East cannot be overstated. The date palm was a tall noble tree that had a striking beauty and grace with its slender trunk and beautiful green fanned leaves. The Hebrew word for Palm Tree is "Tamar" and it is associated with beauty - you might recall David named his daughter Tamar for her beauty. My wife's full name is "Tamara" which technically means "Palm Tree" but is really associated (rightly so) with beauty.

But the tree was not only beautiful but also practical. The dates were an indispensable source of food as they could be eaten raw or cooked. The sap of the tree was used for milk. The fibers of the leaves and trunk were made into mats and baskets, sails and cords. The hard kernels of the dates were soaked in water and ground up as food for camels. Quite literally, the palm tree was an important source of life for ancient Israel as a cow or goat might be in certain cultures today.

Because of its importance, in Palestine the **palm tree and the palm leaf took on national significance**. For example the palm tree and palm branch was used extensively on Jewish coins of the day. Palm trees were also important in architecture. Solomon's temple was dominated by the symbol of the Palm Tree. **2Chr. 3:5 He overlaid the main room with cypress wood and overlaid it with fine gold, and ornamented it with palm trees...**

It is not surprising therefore that this imagery of beauty and provision ultimately became a symbolic message of **victory and celebration**. For example, at Jewish weddings palm branches would be waved in celebration. During the Feast of Tabernacles, God commanded palm branches be waves to symbolize victory and God's provision to Israel..

[Lev. 23:40](#) Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, **palm** branches...and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God... David, in Psalm 92, says:

[Psa. 92:12](#) The righteous man will flourish like the **palm** tree...

And so you see, when we come to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, how they celebrated is somewhat important. The palm branches were not an incidental detail, but an important symbolic, national message of victory and triumph of the highest order.

### **Why They Celebrated:**

Now let's turn to the question, "why." Why were they celebrating? There are from our text, two clear reasons.

First, many in the crowd had just seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. And there is nothing like a public resurrection of a previous dead person to gather a crowd! Look at John 12:9: [John 12:9](#) The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. [John 12:10](#) But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; [John 12:11](#) because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus. [John 12:12](#) On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. If the palm branches represented victory, one victory was victory over death. Lazarus was alive!!

The second reason for their celebration was that they had clearly come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah – the anointed king. Again - they recited Psalm 118: **“Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel”** And the events were a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, **“FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY’S COLT”** – these two Old Testament texts predict the Messiah - the coming king – who would bring victory to Israel just like King David did -- and boy was that exciting. At they were in desperate need of such a man.

Israel, was oppressed by Rome, Israel had little power, Israel had no respect of neighboring countries and Israel faced regular persecution. They hoped that Jesus would bring victory over Rome, re-establish their status as a favored nation and take away their troubles.

**Review:** So far we have looked at two question. How did they celebrate? With shouting and palm branches – meaning it was a celebration of victory. Victory over what? Victory over death, and hopefully, victory over Rome.

### **What should we celebrate today?**

And so we come to the last question “What should we celebrate today?” It is, I think a fair question because as it turned out - to the crowds utter disappointment - Jesus did not overthrow Rome or usher in any kind of era of peace or justice. In fact Jerusalem would be completely destroyed by Rome in just a few years. What a let down! And, raising Lazarus from the dead would be one of Jesus’ last earthly miracles. He would never again enter towns and villages to heal the sick, restore sight and cause the lame to walk.

What they thought they were celebrating, victory over death and victory over Rome didn't work out too well in the end.

We might consider the problem this way:

**"In Jesus I have victory over \_\_\_\_\_."**

What do you put in that blank? This is the key question for the morning. Do we put in there – victory over death? Do you think that if a loved one dies he will be raised from the dead like Lazarus was and restored to your home? How about victory over Rome or for us – enemies? Do you expect Jesus to give you victory over all your enemies. Is that reasonable? How about victory over cancer or sickness in general? Or victory over being hurt by others. Or victory over poverty?

Please listen to me, I think this is important. If you **honestly feel** that Jesus has promised you a "tragedy-free" life, with no sickness, no hurt, no enemies, no financial need. If you think Jesus will put you in a protective bubble where nothing bad will happen to you -- then when you get hit hard by these things, rather than running to Jesus for help you will run away from Him in anger. In just a few days...[Matt. 27:22](#) Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "**Crucify Him!**"

Let me, instead, suggest as we close two things that we CAN put in the blank! Two things we do have victory over in Jesus Christ. We DO have VICTORY over **SIN and DEATH.**

First, we have victory over death, and that is what we have been talking about – but here we must add a nuance – and keep in mind the "when." We do not have any promise of

victory over disease and physical suffering and death today, but we do WHEN Jesus comes back. Paul says, [1Cor. 15:54](#) But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in **victory**. So, the victory is accomplished in Jesus Christ, but it is not realized until later.

Last year, 2010 was the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Tammy’s brother Jon, who died from Primary Pulmonary Hypertension at age 24. Here is Tammy and Jon, not too long before he died. Here is Jon fishing, He loved to fish! This is Jon being baptized and this is Jon dead at the funeral. Jon did not have victory over death, in this life. But, for the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death - I put together about a 15-minute slide show of his life, collecting pictures like these and video clips from family members – and I did this for one reason – because I believe in Jesus’ victory over death. I made the video primarily for all of Jon’s nieces and nephews who never had a chance to get to know him in this life, because (I figured), they would one day see him in heaven, and I didn’t want them to be unprepared! Victory over death means that ONE DAY when the mortal puts on immortality, and the dead in Christ are raised, death will be GONE - VANISHED and we will be forever reconnected and forever with those who are in Christ. Jesus defeated death at the cross, but the realization of that will become clear only in the future, when Jesus returns.

But victory over sin, promised for TODAY. [1John 5:4](#) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the **victory** that has overcome the world—our faith. In other words, our faith in Jesus Christ grants us victory over sin now, today! When I meet with a new believer or share the gospel with someone who has not yet trusted in Christ, I cannot promise them that God will take away all their problems or heal all their diseases –

but I CAN promise them that in Jesus Christ they can and should have a measure of victory over sin.

I don't know what sin or sins you struggle with. Addictions, alcohol, drugs, pornography, or gossip, greed, envy, discontentment, anger, and the list goes on and on – but I promise you this. The Bible teaches that in Jesus Christ we CAN and should EXPECT to gain victory over sin, through our faith in Jesus Christ. I am not promising this will happen overnight. I am not saying you can do it in your own strength, but with help, with friends and in the body of Christ, with the Spirit at work within you, you can be set free from the sin that entangles you. And I hope that gives you renewed hope this morning.

### **Conclusion:**

Taylor's Lady Mavs won the City Championship. It was a close game and you can imagine the great celebration we had from all the parents and friends! But what were we really celebrating – that they won their final game. That they got a big trophy? I think the real celebration was that they had overcome adversity. They had learned and grown together. They had done it with a good attitude and forged friendships that continue to this day. I would like to think that whether they won or lost the final game, the parents would have celebrated the true victory of the spirit.

Similarly, in this life the true victory is not to remain free of cancer. It is not to live to be 100 years old. It is not to have a million dollars in the bank. In this life the true victory is to have faith in Jesus Christ and to live a life that is set free from sin and its destructive

powers. It is living a life of peace, because death has been defeated and one day will be done away with completely.

In the end, when we are all finally in heaven, this is what John tells us, and I as close with this verse, I trust you will notice a small detail you may have never noticed before:

Rev. 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;