

Following Christ for God's Greater Glory

SPEAKER Steve Hawthorne

DATE Sunday, March 24, 2024

PASSAGES John 12; Exodus 9; 1 Kings 8; Psalm 86; Malachi 1

MESSAGE Begins at 1:04:31 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Palm Sunday handed Jesus the largest, most favorable crowd of his public life, and he did nothing with it — no movement, no synagogue, no fan base. What he asked for instead was “Father, glorify your name,” a prayer that reaches back to Exodus and forward to every people still unreached. Following him means facing the same fork he faced.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ All four gospels build to Palm Sunday. Only two mention Christmas. Whatever happened that week is the crescendo the whole record was written toward.
- ◆ Jesus’ own disciples did not understand what they were watching until after he was glorified. Confusion in the moment is not disqualifying.
- ◆ The Gentile god-fearers asking to see Jesus is the hinge. Their arrival is what makes him say the hour has come.
- ◆ “Lifted up” carries two meanings at once — lifted onto a cross to die, and lifted up in praise so that all may be drawn. The gospel is both.
- ◆ Jesus was avoiding, not missing, the popular following. A mutual-admiration society that maintains its boundaries by kicking people out is the lesser glory, and it is the one most churches settle for.
- ◆ “Let my people go” never ends there in Exodus. It is always followed by a comma — *that they may serve me*. God contended with Egypt to publish his name in all the earth.

- ◆ Two prayers were available to Jesus in that hour, and both would have been answered. Every follower reaches the same fork.
- ◆ The voice from heaven, Jesus said, did not come for his sake. It came for the people listening — which means it is on the record for us.

► 1:04:31

Steve Hawthorne has preached Palm Sunday at Hope Chapel fifteen times since moving to Austin in 1991, all of them in this room, and he opened by admitting the obvious risk: he has probably said everything that can be said. Then he made the case that the day is bigger than what we usually hear about it. The last time he preached this particular text was nine years ago. “Nine years later it’s fresh.”

What the day actually was

► 1:06:00

Christmas appears in two gospels. Palm Sunday is the crescendo of all four — “a big loud wah.” The Bible never calls it Palm Sunday, and never calls it the triumphal entry either; a triumphal entry was what a Roman general got coming home from conquest, cheers compulsory. Jesus does triumph, Steve said, but far more than the simplistic version where our side wins. John mentions palm branches; the other gospels have people breaking off whatever was to hand. “They defoliated the place.”

The setting is Jerusalem days before Passover, a festival drawing thousands from across Israel and beyond, every room in the city taken — which is why Jesus was camping in the olive trees on the hillside, and why Judas could offer to lead men to him in the dark. It may have been the only crowd Jesus never tried to escape.

“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!’ ... His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.”

JOHN 12:13–16 ↗

Both lines the crowd shouted come from the same place — Psalm 118:25–26, read in full as liturgy near Passover. The crowd picked out the two lines they liked. *Hosanna* appears there and nowhere else.

► 1:14:13

Steve read verse 16 twice, and the second time slowed down on the pronouns. *These things were written of him. They had done these things to him.* Something was happening *for Jesus*. It was not about the crowd, or Jerusalem, or the temple. And the inner circle did not follow it while it was happening — they worked out only part of it, only after he was raised and enthroned. What they could see was that everything appeared to be going his way. Even the opposition sounded finished:

“You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”

The Greeks, and five perplexing statements

► 1:16:56

The Pharisees say *the world has gone after him*, and the very next verse produces the world: Greeks, up for the feast to worship. God-fearers, Steve called them — Gentiles who had listened in at synagogues wherever they lived, read the scriptures in Greek, and concluded there was no God like this God. They were wealthy enough to make the journey, and they were not admitted to the temple, so they took what they were allowed. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida and spoke Greek, and Andrew with him. “We wish to see Jesus” — a courteous way of asking for an appointment.

“And Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.’”

JOHN 12:23–24 ↗

To Judas, listening, that first sentence must have sounded like the announcement he had been waiting for — we are going global, starting today, and here are the men to do it with. Instead came five statements that seem to have nothing to do with each other and nothing to do with the Greeks. Most of them describe a fork in the road, two ways of directing a life: a seed that must die to bear anything; loving your life and losing it, hating it in this world and keeping it; “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also” — strange to say to men standing right next to him. Then, from the great teacher everyone was ready to follow, the strangest of all.

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

JOHN 12:27–28 ↗

► 1:22:10

The word behind “soul” is *psychē* — the same word translated “life” two verses earlier. It is the word you use when you say your life is a mess. Not what gurus say. The self-help shelf offers principles; Jesus offered a troubled soul and a prayer.

Then the answer, which the crowd heard as thunder on a cloudless day, and some nearby heard as words from an angel, and the inner circle heard clearly: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” You would expect comfort here — *don't worry, son, I'll raise you*. Instead: “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.”

Lifted up, twice over

► 1:28:50

Circling back, Steve pulled out what the statements have in common. *The hour has come* is a claim about time — something drastic happens within days.

“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” is a claim about power: not annihilated, not thrown into hell, but flipped out of his position of prominence. And then the promise.

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

JOHN 12:32 ↗

The Greek does not say “all men” in the sense of males; it says simply *all* — all peoples, all tribes, whatever you can fit under that word. And “lifted up” means two things at once. John says plainly that Jesus was indicating the death he was going to die. But to lift someone up is also to speak of them highly. To be raised on a cross for sins, and to be exalted in praise — that double meaning, Steve argued, is what the gospel is.

► 1:33:21

He then proclaimed it in his own words, and it is worth having whole: “Jesus is the one sent by the Father. He gave his life a sacrifice to bring many to God. In his death he carried all the sorrows of every child or woman or man throughout the many generations; the weight of that grievous darkness crushed him. He laid down his life in obedience and in love, doing so in faith that the Father would raise him from death — and he was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. He is the new Adam. In him humanity begins all over again. By dying he has slain death itself. Never in history has he been as hated and opposed as he is this very day, but never in history have as many millions praised him with costly love.”

The lesser glory

► 1:35:30

Which is why missions is not, in Steve's phrase, religious sport — the Baptists getting more people to their thing, the Pentecostals to theirs, the Catholics claiming seniority. It is not superior rhetoric and better music enlisting more people into our lifestyle. A momentary popular following is precisely the small thing Jesus was transcending.

He had the favor. Palm Sunday was the hour to build the fan base, the buildings, the branding. He never once hinted at starting a Jesus synagogue, which he could have had easily. And Steve named what such a movement would actually have been: a social club running on mutual admiration, handing out prizes for the best of us, playing boundary maintenance — *we're not like those guys, and we had to remove this one because he didn't comply*. "This is repulsive. But it's very common. That's how humans cluster together."

► 1:39:36

John says it happened even then:

many of the authorities believed but would not confess him, for fear of being put out of the synagogue, because the

The word is *doxa* both times. Steve's point was not that glory-hunger is the problem. God made us to want to be named, known and celebrated, and he intends to satisfy it himself. The problem is settling for the version we hand each other.

The story of his name

► 1:40:49

So what was Jesus asking for? Here Steve warned the room he wrote his doctoral dissertation on this and would keep it to seven minutes. Exodus never says "Let my people go," full stop. There is always a comma — *that they may serve me*. And the plagues, each a strike against a particular Egyptian god from one of the most respected pantheons in the ancient world, were not aimed at wiping Egypt out.

"But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

EXODUS 9:16 ↗

Egypt was left standing in order to tell the story. God's name is a summary of who he is, and he is determined not to be anonymous.

► 1:42:50

Solomon builds a house for that name and dedicates it, remarkably, with the foreigner in view — someone who comes from a far country *for your name's sake*, which is exactly what those Greeks in John 12 had done.

“Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake ... hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you.”

1 KINGS 8:41–43 ↗

The same three words Jesus prayed turn up in the psalm —

“All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name” — and the Old Testament closes still on it:

“From the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations.” It is what Jesus taught us to ask for first — hallowed be your name, meaning sanctify it, make it known and clear and greater than every other god — and it is how Paul stated his own commission:

the obedience of faith among all the nations, for the sake of his name. Worship, Steve said in passing, is not the singing portion of a service. It is what broke at Cain and Abel, and the whole story is about who gets it.

The fork

► 2:03:24

Two prayers were genuinely available in that hour, and God would have answered either. Gethsemane makes it explicit — “let this cup pass from me... nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” — and so does the arrest, where Jesus says he could appeal to his Father and be given more than twelve legions of angels. He was never trapped. *Save me from this hour* was a real option: continued life, tranquility, happy circumstances. He asked for something greater, better and harder.

Every follower reaches that juncture, and Steve thought some in the room were standing at it that week. You can want no more than God's saving work and his help getting you to heaven, and there is nothing wrong with it. But he was blunt about what most of us actually want instead: a helper God, orbiting our affairs, our projects, our finances, arranged to underwrite the best version of the life we already planned. That is not the offered relationship. “Where I am, there will my servant be” is not a promise to show up for you; it is an invitation to join what he is doing — “not just serve him once in a while, but lock yourself in, like that's your identity.” And the honor that follows comes from the Father, which is the glory-hunger finally being fed from the right hand.

Three ways in

► 2:08:48

He closed practically. First, lift up Jesus — tell the gospel clearly and simply, without being pushy, and tell how his story has intersected yours. You are not responsible for drawing anyone; he does the drawing, we do the lifting. Second, pray for his glory specifically: for the people across the street, the family moving into the apartment three doors down, Afghanistan and those who serve there. Third, keep the finish of the mission in view — peoples among whom Christ is not yet named — which is why Hope Chapel has invested where it has among the least-reached.

Then he had the congregation stand and read John 12:27–28 aloud together, and blessed them: not to follow Jesus occasionally but always, not to serve once in a while but as an identity, with difficult things ahead and a reason for them.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [John 12:13–16](#)
- [Psalm 118:25–26](#)
- [John 12:19](#)
- [John 12:23–24](#)
- [John 12:25](#)
- [John 12:26](#)
- [John 12:27–28](#)
- [John 12:28](#)
- [John 12:30](#)
- [John 12:31](#)
- [John 12:32](#)
- [John 12:42–43](#)
- [Exodus 9:16](#)
- [1 Kings 8:41–43](#)
- [Psalm 86:9](#)
- [Malachi 1:11](#)
- [Matthew 6:9](#)
- [Romans 1:5](#)
- [Matthew 26:39](#)
- [Matthew 26:53](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Jesus' closest friends did not understand Palm Sunday until long after it. Where are you currently living with something about God you cannot yet make sense of?
2. Steve described the lesser glory as mutual admiration and boundary maintenance — a club that knows who it is not. Where have you seen that, and where have you wanted it?
3. "Let my people go" always has a comma after it. What has God freed you from, and what was it for?
4. Both prayers in John 12:27 would have been answered. Which of the two have you been praying lately, and honestly, why?
5. Steve gave three ways in: telling your story, praying for God's name among specific people, and keeping the unreached in view. Which one are you going to actually do this week, and with whom?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Steve Hawthorne has been bringing Palm Sunday messages at Hope Chapel since moving to Austin in 1991 — fifteen times, all in this room, most recently preaching from John 12 nine years before this one. His doctoral dissertation was on the name and glory of God in scripture, and his teaching runs toward world missions and the peoples among whom Christ is not yet named. He mentions having been personally involved in some of the mission efforts behind the songs the church sang that morning.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkWtkebA-ao&t=3871s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.