

## PALM SUNDAY

*John 12:12-50*

The familiar Palm Sunday story is told very briefly in John. We should be sure all the classes are familiar with it and then go on to the rest of our chapter, which teaches more general spiritual lessons. All the teachers should read the Junior, Intermediate, and Senior notes for today, as a different portion of the chapter has been singled out for development in each, although the general lessons are the same.

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### Doctrinal Points

*Using Christ as our example, we must conquer the temptation to think of ourselves first.*

*We should regard our bodies as mere tools, and our life in the world as our opportunity to form our souls into a heavenly pattern.*

*Evil has no real power over goodness.*

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### Notes for Parents

As we enter upon the week which in the church is called Holy Week, and read the story of the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, two questions naturally arise in our minds: (1) How could that great crowd of people welcome the Lord on Sunday and crucify Him on Friday? and (2) Why did the Lord allow His enemies to crucify Him? The Lord Himself answers both these questions for us in this chapter from the Gospel of John.

The people who welcomed Him did so because they had heard of His miracles, especially of His raising Lazarus from the dead. They—like many people today—thought of death as the ultimate misfortune, because their minds were concerned only with their health and prosperity in this world. They had no thought of the promised Messiah except as one who would come as an earthly king to overthrow the power of Rome and make their nation great once more. Even the Lord's closest disciples, we are told, contended

among themselves which of them should be greatest, and when the Lord was crucified, they all “forsook him and fled.” Our chapter tells us that even those leaders who believed the Lord’s claim were afraid to support Him lest they should be put out of the synagogue, “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” This is the reason why the people so soon turned against the Lord, and it is the reason for moral and spiritual cowardice in all times.

The answer to our second question grows out of this answer to the first. The kingdom of heaven is made up of people who love the Lord and the neighbor instead of just themselves. “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal.” This was the lesson which the Lord came to teach us. It is not what happens to our bodies that is important, but what is going on in our souls. The Lord took on from Mary a human nature like ours, in which He could feel all our temptations. Even to the end of His life in the world He had to fight this fundamental temptation to think of self first. We see this in our chapter when He says: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.” He always conquered the temptation, and in conquering set us an example and showed us how to conquer it. He had to pass through death to show us that death is only a necessary incident in our continuing life. He had to put off the physical body so that the divine man within might be seen. He had to let His enemies do their worst to teach us that evil has no real or lasting power over goodness. As Psalm 118:6 puts it, “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?”

To be a Christian is to take the Lord Jesus Christ as our king, to learn His teachings and obey them, to set Him up as our ideal and hold His example steadily before us day by day. “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” “If any man serve me, let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be.”



### Primary

This is a good lesson in which to give the younger children an idea of the purpose of the Lord's life on earth, and the reason why some people loved Him and others hated Him. The contrast between His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and what He knew was to come can be shown. Draw as much as possible from the children themselves.

This week is a very special week in the church, for in it we are thinking of the last week of the Lord's life on earth. God Himself long ago came into the world as our Lord Jesus to show us how we ought to live. He let Himself be born as a little baby in Bethlehem and grow up just as we do and finally die as we all do and then rise again from death, as we all do. And we know that, if we try, by studying His life and trying to live as He taught us to live, we can become more and more the kind of people He wants us to be, and that He is always near us and ready to help us.

You know that the Lord had many enemies when He was in the world, because He always told the truth, and people who want their own way do not like anyone who tells them that their way is wrong. Are you ever like that? The scribes and Pharisees hated the Lord so much that they finally had Him put to death.

Because the Lord was God, He knew that this was going to happen. He came to Jerusalem on Sunday, at the beginning of His last week, knowing that on Friday He would be crucified. His disciples did not know it, and neither did the people who welcomed Him. Let us read the story of how He entered Jerusalem and of some of the things He told His disciples at that time. [Read John 12:12-24.]

The feast to which our chapter refers was the Passover.

How did the people receive the Lord?

Why do we call this Palm Sunday?

What kind of animal did the Lord ride into Jerusalem?

The Gospel of John says the crowd went to meet Him because they had heard that he had raised Lazarus from death.

What did the Lord say about a grain, or kernel, of wheat?

What He meant was that His death would teach us something we could not have learned without it.

On Easter Sunday we shall see what that something is.

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### Junior

We have centered the lesson for this age group on verse 24 as an explanation of the nature and purpose of the Lord's life on earth and the reason for His death, with a secondary application to our own lives. Be sure the class looks up and reads the prophecies of the Advent, as suggested in their notes, and as each one is read, point out that it is God Himself who is promised.

Since our lessons for this Sunday and next are about the last week of the Lord's life on earth, let us make sure that we know the general facts concerning that life up to this point.

- Where was the Lord born?
- What two groups of people were told of His birth?
- Where was He taken to save Him from the wrath of Herod?
- Where did He grow up?
- Where did He go when He was twelve years old, and why?
- How old was He when He began His ministry?
- Who was sent to prepare the people to receive Him?
- Where did He make His home during His ministry?
- Who was the Lord Jesus Christ?
- What does the first chapter of John say about Him?
- What did He tell the woman of Samaria about Himself?
- What kind of people believed in Him?
- Why did the scribes and Pharisees hate Him?

We are all familiar with the Palm Sunday story, which is told in all four Gospels. We know that today we commemorate the Lord's entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His earthly life.

- What kind of animal did He ride?
- How did the people receive Him?
- What did they carry in their hands?
- What did they shout?

*Hosanna* means "save now." All those people who greeted the Lord in this way on Palm Sunday were acknowledging with their minds and lips that Jesus was the promised Messiah or Christ come to be their king and savior. Look up and read some of the things their prophets had told them about Him: Isaiah 9:6, 25:9; Jeremiah 23:6; Micah 5:2; Malachi 3:1. If they accepted Him, they should

have known that He was God Himself. But even these people who accepted Him were most of them really thinking of themselves. They wanted to be saved from their worldly troubles rather than from their sins. They were expecting a king who would overthrow the power of Rome and make them the leading nation in the world. We say we know better. But we are often very much like the people who hailed the Lord as their king on Palm Sunday and crucified Him before the week was over. We call ourselves Christians, but what we really expect the Lord to save us from is suffering in this world; and when suffering comes to us or disappointment of any kind, we sometimes blame the Lord and say, “What is the use of worshiping the Lord if He won’t do for me what I want Him to do?” Whenever we do this it shows that we really want to rule God—not to let God rule us.

The Lord knew all that was in the hearts and minds of the people, and He knew—as He always knows—the future. He knew when He rode into Jerusalem in triumph on Palm Sunday that He would be crucified the next Friday. The Gospel of John gives us more of His teaching on this occasion than the other Gospels do. Read carefully verses 23 to 33.

Verse 24 gives us in one little parable the reason why the Lord allowed Himself to be crucified. The important part of a grain of wheat is the inner kernel, and the outer parts of the seed are of value only because they protect, nourish, and foster the living wheat germ within. They are necessary for these purposes until the germ has attained its full development. Then they have to be put off, as they are when the seed is planted in the ground. In any person the living kernel is the soul, and the physical body is only the outer husk. So we all have to pass through death and put off that outer husk. Our life in this world is the time when we are developing the special kind of kernel we want to be. While we are here, we are choosing whether we want to be good and useful plants or weeds and poisonous plants. The kernel cannot be changed after the husk is put off.

The Lord’s soul was God Himself. While He was on earth, He

was making Himself a divine human nature by choosing always to do right in spite of all the temptations which came to Him from day to day. When this divine human was fully formed, He had to put off the outer husk by passing through physical death just as we do. As long as He was seen only in the physical body He had taken on through Mary, people could form only imperfect ideas of what was within. What was accomplished by His death is our lesson for Easter Sunday.

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### Intermediate

The correspondence of the Palm Sunday story and of the incident of the Greeks and Philip and Andrew introduces the general teaching of our need for putting the welfare of our souls above that of our bodies. Since this was the avowed example which the Lord set, it should be one of the distinguishing marks of every Christian.

The actual story of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday takes only four verses in the Gospel of John. It is told in much more detail in the other Gospels. However, we need to remind ourselves of the facts and of their meaning. At the beginning of the last week of His earthly life the Lord entered Jerusalem as its king, in fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. He rode upon a young ass, or an ass's colt, the symbol of natural truth, to picture the fact that He had completely mastered the inclination of the assumed human nature to judge things by their outward appearance and to make decisions on the basis of results in this world.

The palm branches which the people carried correspond to "Divine truth in ultimates" or "Divine truth of the sense of the letter" of the Word. The Jews had the Scriptures. They knew from the literal prophecy that the Messiah was to enter Jerusalem in this way as king of Israel. So they hailed Him as king. But their idea of a king was a wholly worldly one. They took it for granted that the Messiah, when He came, would overthrow the power of Rome and restore their nation to first place in the world. It was because the Lord immediately showed by His words and acts that He had no such purpose that the very people who had hailed Him as king on

Palm Sunday shouted for His crucifixion on the next Friday. We should always remember that the Lord's concern is with our souls. If in the case of any particular individual He sees that constant health and prosperity are possible without "spoiling" him spiritually, then He is happy to permit these worldly blessings—and He also often permits them to such selfish people as He sees could not be benefited by adversity—but often people need adversities either to check them in wrongdoing or to stimulate the development in them of understanding and sympathy and spiritual strength. Then adversities come. If we take the attitude that the Lord ought to keep all His professed followers from any earthly suffering, we are like those who welcomed the Lord and then crucified Him.

John's account of Palm Sunday is concerned principally with the Lord's teaching on that day. Perhaps we think it strange that in the letter this teaching is prompted by the request of "certain Greeks" to see Jesus, a request which in the letter is apparently ignored by the Lord. The Greeks of that day were Gentiles and, like the Samaritans, picture those in good states who do not have the truth they need to guide them, and the Greeks characteristically were of a higher degree of intelligence than the Samaritans. Swedenborg does not give us the correspondence of Philip, but, though a Jew, he had a Greek name, a name which means "lover of horses," and horses picture our higher reasoning faculty. So Philip may be thought of as representing intelligence in a person of the church. That he was of an inquiring mind we may gather from the other incidents in the Gospel of John in which he figures (1:43-46; 6:5-7; 14:6-11). Andrew, we are told, represents obedience. These two qualities are necessary if we are to "see" the Lord. And the Lord's answer is really the answer the Gentiles were seeking. They were not looking for an earthly king, but for a teacher who would make clear to their minds the true way of life so that they might walk in it.

So Jesus said, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." Then He showed them why He must pass through death. It was because men must be brought to see that it is not

what happens to their bodies that is important, but what kind of soul they are developing within them. This is beautifully taught in verses 24 to 26 of our chapter, verses which we should all read and think about again and again. We should all begin as early in life as we can to think of our bodies as mere tools, and of our life in the world as our opportunity to form our souls into a heavenly pattern by resisting our selfish impulses and learning to serve the Lord and the neighbor.

We should notice also verses 42 and 43. How often we are afraid to stand up for what we know to be true and right! The Lord came into the world to be its light, to show us how to live so that we may be happy forever. He came to save us from ourselves. Some people think of the Lord as a stern judge, condemning those who do not accept Him. He tells us in this chapter, as well as in other places in the Word, that He does not judge and condemn. He seeks only to save. But we condemn ourselves by choosing to live for self and the world after He has shown us the better way.

*Basic Correspondences*

an ass's colt = natural truth  
Philip = intelligence  
Andrew = obedience

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**Senior**

The two questions suggested in the first paragraph below form a good basis for the development of the lesson, since the young people will have to face these questions in their own minds and from the lips of others.

Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of the week which the Christian Church calls "Holy Week" because it commemorates the last week of the Lord's earthly life. The week begins with His entry into Jerusalem as the "King of Israel" and ends in His resurrection, but in between lies the dark episode of His rejection, condemnation, and crucifixion. Our Palm Sunday lesson, therefore, should answer the questions which this contrast naturally raises in our minds: How could the people hail the Lord as king on Sunday

and shout for His crucifixion the next Friday? and, Why did the Lord permit Himself to be put to death by His enemies?

In this chapter of the Gospel of John both these questions are answered for us by the Lord Himself. We should note first that the Lord rode into Jerusalem on a young ass to signify His complete subjugation of the natural reason, which judges according to the appearance in the world, and that the palm branches that the people carried signify divine truth as it is found in the sense of the letter of the Word.

Because of the Lord's reported miracles the people were prepared to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and when they saw Him riding on an ass's colt, in fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9, they acclaimed Him. But their idea of the Messiah, based on their strictly literal understanding of Scripture, was of an earthly king who would exalt their nation once more to world power. As verse 40 tells us, "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Their question in verse 34 shows their lack of thought of any other life than that in this world. Even many who were disposed to listen to the Lord's teaching were afraid to support Him openly "lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God" (verses 42 and 43). We should keep this verse in mind, for we often lack the courage to stand up for what we know to be right. There is nothing praiseworthy about spiritual cowardice.

The two classes of people—those who did not want to believe and those who believed but were afraid to stand against the others—are described in verse 29 by those who, hearing the voice from heaven attest the divinity of the Lord, said, "it thundered," and those who said, "An angel spake to him." In the same way, our minds either refuse or welcome spiritual truth.

The reason the Lord permitted Himself to be put to death by His enemies is clearly stated in verses 23 to 28. His death on the cross was foreseen from the beginning and recognized as necessary

to His purpose: “for this cause came I unto this hour.” His enemies had to be allowed to do their worst that we might see that evil has no real power over goodness. Men had to be shown that the death of the body is only a necessary step in the endless life of the soul, and that the real power is in the soul. The Lord does not condemn the evil; they condemn themselves. If we reject the Lord’s teaching, we reject God Himself; and if we reject God, we condemn ourselves to walk in darkness not only in this world but after death to eternity.

We may think of the Lord’s riding into Jerusalem on a young ass as the symbolic embodiment of the teaching of the whole chapter. The Lord enters our lives as our king when we recognize that the soul is more important than the body and resolve steadily to obey the laws of the Lord at whatever cost in terms of comfort or pleasure or position in this world. To be a Christian means to be one who follows the teaching and example of Christ, and nothing in the teaching or example of the Lord gives us any excuse for worldliness or self-seeking. “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.” “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” We may think that the verse which follows this one is a mere literal statement: “This he said, signifying what death he should die.” But *death* in this verse does not mean merely the death of the body. The death He died was the death of all the selfish promptings of the assumed humanity. This is also what is meant for us in verse 25.

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### Adult

What is involved in being a Christian is perhaps the chief topic which this chapter presents to the Adults—what is meant by receiving the Lord as king, and our individual responsibility in the decisions which follow.

The Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem is recorded in all four Gospels, some giving more detail than others. John links it closely with the miracle of the raising of Lazarus, saying that many people hailed the Lord as the Messiah because He had performed this miracle. When we realize the Lord’s power to bring us

back from spiritual death, we are prepared to welcome Him into the “holy city” of our minds as king and savior. He comes riding upon a young ass as a symbol of His subordination of natural reason, which the ass represents, and is greeted with joy. Palm branches picture divine truth in the sense of the letter of the Word, and the waving of the palm branches suggests the joy which comes from the realization that the Lord’s truth does bring life and happiness (AC 8369; AR 367). *Hosanna* means “save now.”

The people, even the disciples, were still thinking of the Lord as a temporal king, one who would save them from their enemies and lead them to victory. Our first recognition of the Lord’s power is often of this character. We are thinking of our own welfare, our own salvation. The Lord’s entry into Jerusalem was “the beginning of the end.” Our first full acceptance of the Lord is followed immediately by temptations more severe than any we have known before. This is because we must be purified of natural thoughts and selfish motives. The first three Gospels emphasize the more external consequences of the entry into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the temple, which pictures the examination of our thoughts for selfish and worldly things which may be polluting them, the incident of the barren fig tree, which points to the necessity of bringing forth fruit, and the Lord’s weeping over Jerusalem, the realization of the extent of our departure from the Lord, which comes to us as soon as we begin genuinely to try to bring ourselves under His rule. But John characteristically teaches us the depth of the change which must take place in us if we are really to follow the Lord.

First we have the reaction of the Pharisees (verse 19), the immediate stirring up of the Pharisee in us—our vanity and self-satisfaction—against this new, deep allegiance to the Lord. The good Gentiles always represent our good impulses which have no truth to guide them, and the Greeks perhaps especially intellectual need for the truth, for a rational understanding of the Lord. They appealed first to Philip, the Jew with the Greek name which means “lover of horses,” thus representing the quality of intelligence, and

sought introduction to the Lord through him, with the help of Andrew, who represents obedience. It requires both intelligence and obedience to bring us into a state in which the Lord can really teach us concerning Himself and the requirements of true discipleship. The Lord's discourse from verse 23 on is an answer to this desire to understand rationally the earthly life of the Lord.

There can be no simpler explanation of the Lord's whole life and purpose than the parable of the "grain of wheat." The living kernel in each of us is the soul. Until the soul is developed, it needs the external coverings of mind and body which envelop it in this world, but these are of value only as they minister to its proper growth. It cannot produce its final fruits until the material wrappings have been cast off, as they are by the death of the body. With the Lord the inner living kernel was the Divine Itself, the outer wrappings the finite humanity. This finite had to be put off completely before His divine humanity could exercise its full power. So the Lord had to pass through death. But death is only the last act in the putting off of the outer coverings. As we have seen before, the Lord throughout His life was putting off the finite through temptations, and replacing it with the Divine.

We can perform a similar work with His help. So far as we persistently subordinate worldly considerations to spiritual ones, by doing the Lord's will instead of our own, we become spiritual men and women instead of natural ones even while we are living in this world. The life which we are to hate is the selfish nature into which we are born. The life which we should seek to keep "unto life eternal" is the regenerate life which we receive from the Lord as we learn and do His will. In every situation which we face from day to day we feel the pull of both natures, the lower or worldly and the higher or heavenly; we are free to yield to either, but so far as we choose either we reject the other. That the Lord, to the very end, felt these two appeals just as we do is evidenced in our chapter, for He says: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." The first alternative

came from His finite nature, the second from His divine nature, and His soul was troubled because of the conflict. The fact that our choice is free and not enforced by any authority or fate is shown in the rest of the chapter, in which it is evident that some believed and others did not. Those who wished to follow the Lord found conviction in His miracles and in His teachings: they believed in the light. But those who did not wish to follow Him were blind to the truth, and were permitted to remain blind because if they had acknowledged His divinity and then had not followed Him, their sin would have been greater.

In verses 47 and 48 the Lord shows us plainly that the responsibility rests with us. He came into the world that all men who wished the truth might have it and be saved. The Lord condemns no one. His love and truth are free to all. “He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45) Those who choose to open their hearts to His love also see His truth when it is presented to them. “He that is of God heareth God’s words.” (John 8:47) Thus the truth, the Lord’s Word, is our judge, for if we do not hear and obey it, it is only because we voluntarily choose self-love, which is the life of the hells. That is, our choice of the Lord or of self while we are in this world builds our souls into forms of heaven or hell, and when the outer covering of this world is laid off at death, the form which we ourselves have made determines our final home.

So the entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, our recognition of the Lord as the true king of our souls, ushers in the real conflict between heaven and the world in our hearts and minds, which is a conflict to the death, the death of heaven or the death of the world, as we choose.

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### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Apocalypse Explained*, n. 899<sup>14</sup>: “As men rise again after death, therefore the Lord willed to undergo death and to rise again the third day, but to the end that He might put off every thing human that He had from the mother

and might put on the Divine Human; for every thing human that the Lord took from the mother He rejected from Himself by temptations, and finally by death; and by putting on a Human from the Divine Itself that was in Him He glorified Himself, that is, made His Human Divine; therefore in heaven His death and burial do not mean death and burial, but the purification of His Human, and glorification. That this is so the Lord taught by this comparison with wheat falling into the earth, which must die that it may bear fruit.”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. How long was the Lord’s ministry? *about three years*
- J. Why did He frequently go down to Jerusalem? *for the feast days*
- P. Why did He go there at the beginning of the last week of His life on earth?  
*Passover*
- P. What kind of animal did He ride into Jerusalem on that day? *an ass*
- J. Why did most of the people welcome Him? *thought He would become king*
- P. What did they carry in their hands? *palm branches*
- P. What did they cry? *Hosanna*
- J. What does *Hosanna* mean? *save now*
- I. Why did the Lord ride on a young ass? *sign of royalty, to fulfill prophecy (Zechariah 9:9)*
- J. Who were angry at His coming? *scribes and Pharisees*
- J. What Gentiles were anxious to see Him? *Greeks*
- J. Which apostles were asked to introduce them to Him? *Philip and Andrew*
- J. How did the Lord explain the necessity of His death? *parable of grain of wheat*
- J. What did He say we must do to save our spiritual lives? *lose our selfish life*
- J. Why did He say the scribes and Pharisees could not see the truth? *didn’t want to*
- J. Why did some who did believe Him not support Him openly? *loved praises of men . . .*
- I. What is it that judges us? *divine truth*
- S. What is represented by the Lord’s riding on a young ass? *His mastery of inclination to judge by worldly reasoning or outward appearance*
- S. What is represented by the palm branches? *the divine truth of the letter of the Word*