

## Title: “A Faith that Kills”

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John 12:16

4/10/2022

**Service Readings:** Zech. 9:9-12; Phil 2:5-11; John 12:12-19

*Is your faith a faith that kills? You see, when we hope in the things of the world – of vengeance and retribution of those who have caused us harm or who we consider enemies, we attach our faith to a hope that is selfish and self-serving. It is a faith that is sinful and rooted in evil. It is truly a faith that kills – not our enemies but ourselves. It destroys us and pulls us away from God, all while blinding us to this reality.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Lent series about Jesus outside of the city walls. Today we trace his journey inside. Palm Sunday is about the entrance into Jerusalem. Our passage describes the entrance in this way:

<sup>12</sup>The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>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!” <sup>14</sup>And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it

You see, the people that went out to meet Jesus had faith in him. More specifically, they had faith in the potential power and might of this man. He may have entered on a colt but they had faith that Jesus would surely ride out on a horse, victorious.

This was not the first grand entrance from Jesus. Thirty-some years before he entered into his creation, but as a helpless infant, born in a manger. But the birth of this infant brought with it news of a newborn king. And when King Harrod heard about Jesus – he also had faith in him. But it also was a faith in the potential power and might of this man. Jesus may have entered as a baby but Harrod had faith that Jesus would try to leave as a victorious king over a kingdom. And so he attempted to have Jesus killed.

King Harrod had faith; the people in Jerusalem had faith. They both had faith – but it was a faith that kills. It was a faith born from the sinfulness of man. A faith that was rooted in selfishness and pride. But it was also a faith that, at least in the case of Jerusalem, *believed* was rooted in the God’s word. Listen again to a portion of our Old Testament reading. It comes from the prophet Zechariah, a man who helped rebuild the temple and gather the people of Judah back to Jerusalem. His visions were full of encouragement and assurances that a lowly king would fulfill the old covenant and restore the kingdom of Israel. Here is part of what he said:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,  
...  
He will proclaim peace to the nations.  
His rule will extend from sea to sea  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.  
<sup>11</sup> As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,  
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.  
<sup>12</sup> Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;  
even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

This was where they placed their faith – in this humble king who would rise up and defeat their enemies. Their faith was a faith that kills. It was a faith rooted in the belief that God would send a soldier that would destroy the Roman empire. The problem was, Jesus refused to be their weapon of vengeance. He had come to destroy their spiritual enemies, not their earthly ones. He had been sent to do the will of his Father, not the will of his creation. And the will of his Father did not include crushing Caesar but crushing Satan. This is what he came for and this is what he entered the city to accomplish. And the people of Jerusalem soon realized their faith had been misguided. It had been attached to desires of man. But their faith was strong, unshakable, even. There *would* come a king that would do their will. But they soon realized that their king wouldn't be found in Jesus. Did they question their faith? No of course not! Their faith was strong. Theirs was a faith that kills! And so they sent Jesus to die.

King Harrod had faith; the people in Jerusalem that Palm Sunday had faith. They both had faith. But their faith was anchored to the will of man, not the will of God. When Jesus entered into each of those scenes, he challenged that faith. He arrived with a mirror instead of a sword, and they hated him for it.

Lest you dismiss this as little more than a history lesson, there is yet another entrance from Jesus that is worth considering today. In our baptism, Jesus entered into our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit. He didn't enter as a baby or on a donkey, but his entrance was just as lowly – through nothing more than water. And although that water was combined with God's Word, the earth didn't shake and those outside of the church walls didn't even notice. But he entered into your heart, nonetheless. And your faith grew. And it became strong. How do we protect our faith? How do we ensure that the faith we have this Palm Sunday is a faith that is true, that is of God and not man? The answer is in our Gospel passage, verse 16:

<sup>16</sup> At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

The disciples had faith similar to that of the crowd. Their expectations of Jesus were self-serving and sinful. But theirs was a faith that was open to the corrections of the Holy Spirit. They studied scripture and let their hearts and minds be affected by the power of God's Word. They allowed him to build a faith that was true, a faith that was Godly, a faith that was anchored to Christ and his *true* work. Their faith *became* a faith that killed, not their enemies but their sinful selves. They died to their earthly desires and God raised them to new life – a life anchored in Jesus. Their faith became one not of vengeance but of service. They desired salvation for their enemies, not destruction. This is how they protected and grew their faith. It was the only way they could; it is the only way we can.

And so on this Palm Sunday I plead with you. Examine your faith. Pray that God would show you where your faith is a faith that kills, that seeks vengeance and self-serving goals. Read scripture, and let the power of God's Word strengthen and nourish your faith this week. You have a faith that kills – let it once again kill your sinful self and renew a faith that will lead you to eternal life.

Please pray with me.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Amen.