



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

MARCH 29, 2015  
*BE THOU MY VISION*

Open Our Eyes to Christ  
Mark 11:1-11; Philippians 2:5-11

Shortly after Jesus entered Jerusalem, he took a stroll through the city to the temple. It would be one of the last times he would be able to walk freely among the people and to take in the sights, the sounds, and the smells of the Jews and their Passover celebration. He recalled the many times he had been there, including the first time he had talked with the scribes and priests as a boy. Now, as a fully mature man, he had truly been about his Father's business. He had said what he had come to say. He had done almost all of what he had come to do. For three years he had walked through Galilee and into Judea unveiling a new understanding of God. His ministry was almost finished. His time was running short.

Jews from all over the known world were in the city. Many of them had traveled from throughout Galilee and Judea, a journey lasting, at most, only a few days. Other pilgrims were from the further reaches of the Roman Empire and had made the journey over many weeks. The Gentiles who had come perhaps hundreds of miles were understandably excited about reaching Jerusalem and experiencing firsthand the festival which celebrated Israel's freedom from enslavement. Along the way, they picked up bits and pieces of news from travelers who were headed in the opposite direction. The closer they got to Jerusalem the more they heard the name "Jesus of Nazareth."

It seemed that everyone had a story to tell about something this man had said, a miracle he had supposedly performed, or an element of the law he had debated with the Pharisees or scribes. Some folks passed him off as another hapless charlatan parading as a holy man who would soon fade into the wilderness like so many others. There were some people who spoke of him in disgusted tones, detailing how he purported to teach the scriptures but actually spent a good deal of time with drunkards, prostitutes, and even tax collectors. On a few occasions, as night fell and the flames of the campfire burned low, some travelers wondered aloud if this man might be the Messiah as his followers claimed. They recounted how he had healed people of diseases like leprosy, cured blindness, and even caused the crippled walk again. A couple of folks admitted they had heard he had raised someone from the dead. Many people recited stories he had told in which God seemed

to be on the side of the common folk rather than the religious elite. The closer the Gentiles came to Jerusalem, the more they heard about the man named Jesus.

As they approached the city the morning after the Sabbath, some of these Greek-speaking men saw a parade of sorts making its way into the city. It was not a huge crowd, but certainly an enthusiastic one! They could hear the people shouting and singing while waving what appeared to be tree branches. As they danced along toward one of the gates of the city, all of their attention seemed to be directed toward a man riding on a donkey, someone, they soon learned, who was Jesus of Nazareth.

Excited to find out more about this man, a small group of the men hurried into the city and began asking about Jesus. Most people shook their heads or said they did not know where he was. One or two pointed in a direction they thought the crowd had gone. Finally, in a little square among some shops, a man pointed to a fellow across the way and indicated that he was a follower of the Nazarene and might know where he was. Nearly breathless, the men rushed up to the disciple, who happened to be Phillip. "Sir," they said, "we would see Jesus." (John 12:20-21)

The Gospel writer John does not tell us whether or not these men ever had the privilege of meeting Jesus. Philip took their request to Andrew and together they went to Jesus who immediately began telling them that his time had come. It is unclear whether Jesus spoke these words to the disciples alone or to his visitors as well. Regardless, if they remained in the city throughout Passover, they likely saw Jesus numerous times. They saw the man and they saw what made him unique and unforgettable.

They saw his compassion as he moved through the city streets. He sought out people who were lonely. He seemed to have an internal magnet that drew him to people who were heartbroken or distressed. He might come upon someone who had been ill for years, talk briefly with them, touch them, and, before you knew it, celebrate their healing. The men may have overheard the Pharisees ridicule Jesus for associating with known sinners and then clearly heard Jesus chastise their hardheartedness, small mindedness, and lack of mercy. They saw his kindness toward young and old, women and men, poor and wealthy, Jew and Greek. It did not take long for anyone to see the compassion which flowed from Jesus.

His courage was also evident. Often when the Pharisees or priests would walk among the crowd, people would bow, look down, and back away. Jesus, however, looked these religious leaders directly in the eyes and challenged their legalism which held the people in spiritual bondage. His courage could be seen as he taught in the temple portico and walked through bustling neighborhoods with his disciples. He never hesitated to confront people who misused their wealth or position or supposed power to take advantage of other people. Without doubt, if the visitors to Jerusalem did not see it for themselves, they heard about Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the temple courtyard and driving away the livestock while declaring “You shall not make my Father’s house a den of thieves!” Jesus was eager to stare down bigotry, glad to dismantle injustice, and willing to risk reputation and even life for the sake of his people. His courage emanated from within like the light from a thousand candles.

Any visitor to Jerusalem that week saw the confidence which filled the heart of Jesus. His was not the false confidence of the religious leaders who hid behind their tradition and privileged status; his confidence was centered in trust in God. It was obvious when he first climbed onto the back of the donkey who carried him into the city. On the other side of Jerusalem was a similar gate through which Caesar’s emissaries rode in on powerful and majestic steeds intended to elevate their riders above the crowd and create a mood of intimidation and awe. But Jesus needed no smoke and mirrors to create an illusion of authority. Sitting on a donkey, at eye level with the people he loved and served, Jesus exuded all of the humble majesty required.

When his teachings were challenged, when he was accused of blasphemy, even when he was whipped and beaten and condemned to death, Jesus’ trust in God never wavered. He had come to bring light and life to the people around him. He was present to destroy the false notions of power and abuse. He was in the midst of his people to demonstrate the power of love over hate, the victory of hope over despair, and the triumph of life over death. His faith never wavered and, to anyone who paid attention, his resurrection a week later confirmed that his confidence in God was not misplaced.

The people who saw Jesus that last week in Jerusalem witnessed his calling lived out in his teachings, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. Jesus knew the scriptures well. He understood the history of his people. He remembered the covenants God had made with them from the beginning, with each new start, and for eternity. As the embodiment of that covenant, Jesus explained who God really is and how God wants to relate to his people. He

demonstrated how God wants his people to live with one another. He taught how true repentance yields forgiveness and how mercy offers second chances. In his last hours with his closest friends, Jesus made clear his willingness to give his life so that the rest of us might have life. Anyone who saw Jesus that week saw the Savior of the world step into the very purpose for which he was born into the world.

Apparently, many people did see Jesus, saw who he was and remembered him after his death and resurrection for they told the story over and over so that we might see Jesus, too. “We would see Jesus!” has remained the prayer of all followers of the Christ as we seek to understand this man who was both human and divine, who lived as a typical Jewish man in a village in the hills of Galilee, and who stepped forward to become the Christ, the Messiah, for whom the Jewish people had longed and for whom all the world had hoped.

As the Gospel spread and the Church began to grow, those earliest believers, many of whom had seen Jesus themselves, found voice to their faith in song. The Apostle Paul quoted a hymn to Christ which believers no doubt sang with deepest reverence:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.  
Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

If we are to have faith, if we are to embrace the salvation Jesus came to offer, if we are to catch the vision of God for our lives and our ministry, then we, too, must see Jesus. But how? How can we see someone who lived two thousand years ago? How can we see someone who swirls around us today as Holy Spirit?

Over a hundred years ago, Albert Schweitzer, that brilliant physician, musician, and author who chose service as a missionary as his calling in life, offered this advice:

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.<sup>1</sup>

We would see Jesus only when we follow him, listening, learning, and serving in his name. We would see Jesus when we allow him to enter our lives and share our experiences with him. We would see Jesus when we open our eyes to his presence with us in all of life. It is a holy week. May we see Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (Great Britain: A. & C. Black, Ltd., 1910), 403; accessed online at: Kirby, Peter. "Historical Jesus Theories." *Early Christian Writings*. 2015. 28 Mar. 2015 <<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-hoole.html>>.

March 29, 2015

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Merciful God, who bestowed on Christ the name above every name, we join our hearts and voices with those of old as we wave our palms and shout our Hosannas, and we bow before you to offer our praise. We are grateful for your abiding presence among us, for the example of mercy and sacrifice shown to us by our Lord, and for the suffering he endured for our sake. We are grateful for our own call to live lives of discipleship and obedience so that we might reflect your goodness to those we encounter. Each day of our lives, may we remember the sorrow Christ experienced in order to demonstrate your immeasurable love, and may we awaken to the new life you promise—created in your image, transformed by your grace, and sustained by your Spirit.

As we remember the final days of Jesus' life, may we seek to learn and to live his example. Grant us peace as we face the tasks and the pressures of our days. In the midst of all that clamors for our attention, open our eyes that we might see you more clearly. Open our ears to discern your voice even as we are overwhelmed by the myriad of voices that would distort your message and distract our focus. Grant us the grace to guard against pride when the crowds shout approval and despair when their response turns critical. Amid the fanfare and fatigue of our lives, open our hearts to discover the persistent prodding of your Holy Spirit.

O God, as the cross looms on the horizon, support us with the strength of your compassion and mercy when the weight of our sin is too great to bear. May the presence of the living Christ sustain us in spite of our fears, and may we be inspired by the example of servanthood he offered, that we may boldly and gladly give our souls, our lives, our all. In the name of the crucified and risen Christ and by the power of your Holy Spirit we offer our prayers. Amen.

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