

Palm Sunday: Heroic Love – *John 15:12-14, Eph 5:1-2*

Introduction – *Definition: Hero (noun) - A person admired for achievements and nobility of character.* We love to have heroes, to recognize, follow, and imitate heroes (although sometimes we are afraid to do what our heroes have done). In our current world crisis, we laud the many medical professionals, first responders and others who put their health and lives on the line for others – something they actually do all the time in their professions. As we celebrate the Triumphal Entry of Jesus Christ on Palm Sunday, let us consider the greatest Hero, His heroic love, and the call to imitation.

Greater Love (John 15:12-14) – John 12 records Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. He had told His disciples numerous times that He was going to Jerusalem where He would suffer, be killed, and be raised from the dead (Mark 8:31, 9:30-32, 10:32-34, Luke 9:51). The Gospels record many details about what Jesus did during what has been called Passion Week. In John 13 we have the only recording of Jesus washing the disciples' feet and, following that, we have several chapters of instructions that He gave privately to them. Jesus said that He spoke these things *"that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full,"* (15:11) inviting us through these teachings and the actions on the cross to a joy that we cannot measure.

Heroic Love - In order to enter into that fulness of joy, we must understand and receive the great achievement of Christ's death for us and see the nobility of His character. A good man may lay his life down for a friend, but Jesus died for sinners who were not His friends in order to make them His friends (Rom 5:6-11). More than any other enemy, Jesus rescued us, and He rescued us from ourselves. Not only did He take upon Himself the penalty of our sin, He took the sin itself upon Him (2 Cor 5:21). The reason the Father forsook the Son as He hung on the cross was because the Son was full of our sin and the only word He heard from the Father was "guilty." He took your sin, your guilt, and the penalty, all of it, laid upon Him by imputation – and He did it as an act of heroic love – to save you. No other man could do this than the One who knew no sin but humbled Himself (Phil 2:8).

Humble Obedience – *"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."* Obeying God is not what makes us His friends. Obeying God identifies who His friends are, who it is that Christ came and died for. And so, just as Jesus humbled Himself before the Father, so we, His friends, must follow. And just as the world hated Jesus, so they will hate His friends (John 15:18-20). Why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem as the Son of God? Because God said. Why must we tell the world that Jesus is the Son of God? Because God said. Why must we tell the world that all scripture is God-breathed and true? Because God said. And why must we obey His commands regardless of the cost? Either Jesus is Lord or you are lord. Which is it? Humble obedience means God defines who we are and everything else: our worship, our sexuality, our marriages, our childrearing, the realms of governing authority, our finances, everything (1 Cor 6:20).

Sacrificial Obedience – *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."* Paul teaches the same thing (Eph 5:1-2). It is as common as can be: little children imitate their parents. And the more they are loved and nurtured by their parents, the more they long to be just like them. So what is it that we are imitating as *"dear children?"* It is, of course, His gracious glory, His giving spirit, His merciful care. We are to walk *"as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us"* and so this defines the kind of love we are talking about. Not sentimental feelings, but costly, giving and forgiving love that transforms the other. Jesus gave Himself willingly, not begrudgingly (John 10:17-18). He was not being dragged into Jerusalem; He was actively giving Himself away on our behalf.

Courageous Obedience – Courage is not the absence of fear but doing our duty in the face of fear. Courage comes from self-control, a fruit of the Spirit, which disciplines emotions in order to remain on set principles. Courage requires believing the promises of God and His presence with you when you cannot see He is there (Heb 11:1). Courage rides into Jerusalem knowing that it is the road to Golgotha believing there will be an empty tomb. But this virtue doesn't just show up. It is a gift of God that is nurtured, tested, and strengthened by daily tests of trusting God while obeying Him when it appears it will cost you everything in that moment.

Applications and Aromas – When loving and giving are hard or unnatural to do, God’s first answer is not to shame us or make us afraid of His eternal judgment. His first response is to charge us with not believing in His gracious glory – His giving and forgiving nature (Deut 7:9-10). When we do not obey in these realms, we are imitating a false god, we are idolaters. But again, the answer is not shame (it may be conviction); it is love and forgiveness, restating the Good News. Jesus Christ died for that sin, that idolatry, that unforgiving spirit. Would you turn to Him and receive forgiveness for your unforgiving, un-giving heart? What do you think He will give you?

A World of Death/An Aroma of Life – Jesus rode into a city, a world, that was dead. Everything was death. Everyone was going to die. The world was a carcass that was decaying, the smell was putrid; death was everywhere. But Jesus said “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*” (John 11:25). Everyone still dies. But everyone who dies in Christ, believing in Him, shall live and never die. Your death in Christ does not mean that you will not physically die; it does mean that all of your life and even your death, is a sweet-smelling aroma, a glorious barbecue, before God. In Christ, you are life to the world. Overtaken by His heroic love, you are to imitate what Your heavenly Father is and what Christ has done - and you will be life to the world around you.

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