

"The Flickering Light"

Luke 19:28-44; John 1:6-12

I remember when I was a young boy at home that we would play a game we called "I Spy!"

- Somebody would pick something out in the room and tell us what color it was and we would have to guess what it was.
- Of course, we would pick out something that was very difficult to find.
- And we would look for it and when we would get close to it, they would say "You're getting warm – warmer – hot –"
- Or if we drifted away from it, they would say "You're getting cold – colder – freezing."

Do you remember that game?

I wonder what it would truly be like if every professing believer here this morning would get close – warm – warmer – and hot as they get closer to the Savior?

Each year as I look at the familiar stories like the Triumphal Entry, I looked for something that I had never seen before.

Sometimes I gain new insight.

Sometimes I affirm what I have long believed.

This year I saw something thru the staff that gave me a whole new perspective on Palm Sunday.

I have always viewed the events of Palm Sunday as a day of Triumph.

This was the one time, **it seemed, that Jesus received the praise and the honor that was due Him.**

But this year I've come to wonder whether I have read the situation correctly.

For the most part as I studied this I learned that the praise and honor being given to the Savior was more Superficial than Genuine.

The reaction of Jesus when approaching Jerusalem on this day of celebration has troubled me.

Instead of waving to the crowds and signing a few autographs, **Jesus weeps over the city.** It reads in verse 41 ***"As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it."***

He says, ***"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes."*** Verse 42

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Does this sound like someone who is caught up in the adulation of the crowd?

Does this sound like someone enjoying the day . . . or someone saddened by the day?

Something more is going on here.

I am sure that the disciples counted this particular day as one of the high points (before the resurrection, of course) of Jesus' ministry on earth.

I suspect on Palm Sunday evening they talked with great excitement as they relived the "rush" they experienced that day.

"Did you see that old man? He had tears in his eyes."

Or, "Wasn't it incredible how the children joined in?"

But I wonder if Jesus sat quietly in the corner . . . maybe still with tears in His eyes.

The disciples may have thought He was moved by the actions of the crowd.

But I think it was something else.

I want to take you over to the Book of John and read from chapter 1 and verse 6ff

“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify

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concerning that Light, so that through Him all men might believe. He himself was not the Light; he came only as a witness to the Light. The true Light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”

Do you know what I am talking about when people put lighted candles in their windows?

They have them where the light flickers. It's a light that doesn't really shine brightly, but it's enough light to catch your attention.

The light is attractive, but it's only flickering.

On that Day when Jesus came into Jerusalem, Jesus came as the Light of the world, but for some people He was only a "Flickering Light."

Jesus said that they (the inhabitants of Jerusalem) did not know what would bring them peace.

Jesus is surrounded with people declaring that He is Messiah yet He says they don't understand where their peace could be found.

Does that strike you as odd?

Here we have the Son of God, the Messiah sent to the Jews and yet Jesus is saying they just don't get it.

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It says in verse 44b “...***They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.***”

Look at our text. There were people out on the road for a number of different reasons that day.

- **some praised God for the miracles they had seen** (v. 37) (especially the miracle of Lazarus being raised from the dead recorded in John 11)
- It's possible that they were hoping to see something spectacular happen.
- Even though Jesus was the “Light” He only flickered from some people.
- Jesus caught their attention with some of the miracles He had done and they either had seen it or they had heard of it.
- Perhaps they were praising Him for what He could do (for them?) and not for whom He was.
- **some of the people were there trying to keep the crowd from cheering....**
- **antagonists, not supporters** (v. 39)
- Some were just there out of curiosity.
- These people wanted to see what all the excitement was about.
- Some cheered because they were true followers and recognized the true nature of the Messiah.
- They knew Him to be the Son of God who sent to take away the sins of the world.

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Jesus saw through the hoopla.

He understood that many of these people were close to the truth but did not embrace the truth.

In other words the “Light” was flickering.

They were close to the truth and yet did not embrace the truth.

So, It is important that we listen carefully.

THERE IS A CORRECTIVE TO HEAR:

I. There is more to Discipleship than Enthusiasm

The people on the road to Jerusalem that day were by all means excited and enthusiastic.

Isn't that what a crowd will do for you?

- They tore down branches
- They put their coats on the ground for the donkey to walk on, t
- They cheered, shouted and jumped up and down.
- There was a great deal of energy expended that day but being energetic is not the same as following Jesus.

- You see – understand this – you and I can get caught up in the emotion of the crowd.

I was at a Christian concert a while back and I admit that I was troubled.

During the concert everyone was having a great time.

They screamed, they danced, they hopped up and down, they put their arms around each other and swayed back and forth.

But as I looked around I wondered if people were responding to the Lord . . . or the message of the words . . . or whether they were just having a good time.

At one point the artist sang a quiet reflective song.

Some left to go to the bathroom or get refreshments.

Others continued to scream and joke with friends.

It seemed like the only thing missing was genuine reverence for Jesus.

Now the reason this bothers me is that we are calling these kinds of events "**outreach**".

We rejoice that several thousand people got together to hear a Christian concert.

But maybe we should be weeping. . . like Jesus wept at the gates of Jerusalem.

Getting people together is not the same thing as reaching them with the gospel.

When I cry at a movie or come out of an event humming a tune . . . is that a religious experience?

When I'm at a sporting event and I jump up and down and cheer . . . is this necessarily honoring to God?

I understand that music is a powerful influence.

I also understand that different kinds of music provoke responses in different kinds of people.

I know that these concerts and big events are used of God to touch hearts in a life transforming way.

But I'm also concerned that many people are convinced they have honored God when all they have done is have a good time.

You see – now understand with me that what they are seeing and experiencing is a Light that only Flickers for them.

And what they needed was the full effect of the Light!

Sometimes when we leave our own times of worship we evaluate our time based on whether or not we "enjoyed it."

Friends, Worship is so much more than that!

You see - we can have a really good time and never bow our hearts to God!

The measure of worship is not our feelings . . . it is the posture of our heart.

Feelings do not say anything about the nature of our discipleship.

II. Discipleship is more than Great Experiences

In Matthew 7 Jesus says these sobering words:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers.' (7:21-24)

Do you know what troubles me about these verses?

It's the fact that these people who are cast away sounds so good.

If we heard these testimonies we would probably want to make these people leaders in our church.

- **They prophesied in His name.**

They were probably teachers.

They were looked up to.

They seemed to speak with spiritual insight.

They had a lofty vision.

And Yet, listen . . . they were not known by the Lord. WOW!

- **They drove out demons.**

Certainly this was a sign of a true believer.

Yet, Jesus says, ***"I never knew you."***

They saw the Light and yet were not connected with the Light!

Notice, it's not that Jesus knew them once and they fell away from the Lord.

He NEVER knew them.

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They appeared to be casting out demons but it was not because they belonged to the Father.

- **They performed MANY miracles.**

These people could point to lots of signs and wonders in their life.

They seemed to demonstrate God's power.

But they were not God's people.

Again, don't mistake what I am suggesting. I am not saying that anyone who proclaims a message from God, or casts out a demon, or is involved in a miraculous work is a false believer.

That would be nonsense.

We must not dismiss the supernatural simply because some false believers do the same things.

However, I am concerned at the fact that we put an extraordinary emphasis on that experience.

We want people to have a "conversion experience".

By this we mean they should walk an aisle, say a prayer, raise a hand.

When they have this experience we pronounce them "saved". (And wonder about their spiritual standing until they do.)

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Remember the publican who stood close to the temple and bowed his head and beat on his chest and repented with these words, "**Lord, be merciful to me for I am a sinner.**"

We urge people to get baptized, join a church, develop a particular spiritual discipline and when they do . . . we pronounce them "spirit-filled" or "sanctified" believers.

"Depart from me, for I have never known you."

What? Jesus, what are you saying?

What haunting words.

Now get this - **The true indicator of a person's salvation is their heart . . . not their experience.**

The true measure of the Holy Spirit's presence in a person's life is the transformation the Holy Spirit effects.

Experiences are not necessarily bad.

However, none of them define true faith.

Did you know that Mitchell Johnson, the 13 year old boy that killed four of his classmates and a teacher and wounded several others in the Jonesboro AK. Tragedy had had a conversion experience the previous November?

- Did you know that this young boy got involved in church.
- He did church things.
- It looked like he had changed.
- But was he a true disciple?

III. True Discipleship is More Than Having a Knowledge of the Light

If our discipleship was based on how much we know then the Pharisees would have been the most devout followers.

They had a knowledge that would put Christians to shame.

They knew the Word of God better than we do. . . even though they only had the Old Testament.

They knew what the law said and they tried to do it.

And yet, Jesus called them whitewashed tombs.

They looked good on the outside but were dead on the inside.

Again, I do not mean to disparage growing in our knowledge of the faith.

We all need more teaching and grasping the truths of the Word of God.

There is a woeful lack of knowledge in the church today.

- We are prone to slogans . . . not careful study.
- We want managers, people with a vision, promoters, not Expositors of the Word of God.
- It's sad but the church has become more concerned with "drawing a crowd" than they are with ***"rightly dividing the Word of God."***

But, on the other hand, I remember going to United Theological Seminary in Dayton with a number of students who were very knowledgeable.

They were a lot smarter than I ever was or will be at least that's how it came across to me.

They knew the different theological approaches.

They could dissect any Biblical passage.

However, their spirits were cold.

They were unwilling to depend only on Christ for their salvation.

They wanted to argue that the Apostle Paul was a bigot.

Spiritual Application:

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We are prone to measure ourselves and each other by our enthusiasm, our experiences and our knowledge.

None of these things are adequate.

When we rely on these things to evaluate ourselves and others we are in danger of settling for less than a true relationship with God.

We are in danger of getting "close to the Light, but not being effected by the Light!"

**Now let me come to a conclusion for us: Here's
A SUMMONS TO TRUE DISCIPLESHIP**

To us believers – what does this really mean?

**1) First, It Means a true Commitment to Christ,
not just fascination with Christ**

The people on the road leading to Jerusalem were fascinated with Christ but most of them were not committed to Him.

I read about a wedding that was conducted by Dr. Stuart Briscoe.

During the ceremony Dr. Briscoe reached out and grabbed the groom by the arm and said to him, "Do you know what you are doing?"

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This simple question arrested our attention. It was the right question to ask.

Marriage is not a ceremony . . . **it is a commitment to another.**

Many people fail in marriage because they don't "know what they are doing".

Being a disciple of Jesus is like a marriage.

It is not a casual relationship . . . it is a committed relationship.

A true disciple loves Jesus.

A true disciple wants to know Him better and serve Him more completely.

So - Here's the question: Do you love Christ or do you love being a Christian?

Are you committed to the Lord, or are you committed to a movement or a group of people?

When we declare ourselves to be His children, we need to ask, "**do we know what we are doing?**"

Have we counted the cost?

Have we understood what being His follower really means?

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Is our relationship one of convenience or commitment?

2) It Means Obedience to Christ, not just testimonies about Him

Though the people on the road and in the example of Matthew 7 knew the right words to say, they were not true disciples.

Reciting creeds and giving testimonies is a part of following Christ.

However, the true believer is willing to trust Christ in the everyday areas of living.

Jesus continues in the Matthew passage to say, “... ***anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*** Matt. 7:24

The true believer is the one who is committed to Christ; who trusts Christ enough; to obey Him.

Even though this obedience will at times be imperfect the desire is to do what God says.

- The command to love our enemies is taken seriously
- The commands to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving are instructions we seek to apply in our relationships

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- The command to seek the Lord with all our heart is a command we are seeking to obey.
- The command to speak the truth in love is a command we are working on.
- The warning against prejudice is a command we heed.

Obviously the list could go on and on.

True discipleship is not just about what we say - it involves what we do!

Christian discipleship is practical.

A young woman who was greatly troubled went to a Scottish preacher, asking how she could resolve the question of her own desires when they seemed to contradict the will of God.

The minister took out a slip of paper and wrote two words on it.

Then he handed it to her with the request that she sit down for 10 minutes, ponder the words, cross out one of them, and bring the slip back to him.

The woman sat down and looked at the slip. It had two words on it, "No" and "Lord."

Which should she cross out?

It did not take her long to see that if she was saying no, she could not say Lord, and if she wanted to call Christ Lord, she could not say no.

3) It Results in Humility, not Self-Promotion

Do you know what one the characteristics that describes all true followers of Christ?

It's humility.

The true follower is aware of their own sinfulness and the need to be forgiven.

They are conscious that they have been extended an undeserved grace. Amazing Grace How Sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

Just this week I was reading about several noted Christian leaders: Moody, Finney, Wesley, Edwards and others.

The account related the most dramatic encounter these men had with God.

And in each case the response was the same:

- there was a tremendous sense of unworthiness.
- They were humbled and silenced before the Almighty.
- They did not boast about their experience.
- Most of them talked with hushed tones when they talked at all about these times of their acute encounter with God.

How different this attitude is from much that we see today.

Many who are considered to be converted today take on an air of arrogance as they look down on others and make sober pronouncements on them.

Rather than speak in hushed tones, they hit the talk show circuit.

This is not a Biblical response.

Throughout the Bible anytime an individual truly encountered God they had an experience similar to Isaiah who said, "***Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips.***"

The cornerstone of Christian commitment is repentance and humility.

Without repentance and a realization of our need for grace . . . there is no true discipleship.

We cannot be His follower until we are willing to acknowledge that our only hope is His mercy and grace.

He will not be Lord in our lives until we recognize that we have no right to lead.

We will not be greatly used of God until we are willing to step out of the spotlight and let Him take center stage of our life.

Conclusions

I realize that this is not the typical Palm Sunday message.

But do you see how vitally important this really is?

You see the Palm Sunday message has to deal with distinguishing true and genuine believers.

Do you understand that I must tell you these things?

My greatest fear as a Pastor is that some of you will sit in this sanctuary week after week and on that last day you will hear, "I did not know you."

I'm concerned that you might be "playing the game."

You might know the right words, you might be conforming to accepted practice . . . but you aren't trusting Jesus.

You see - I'm concerned that your devotion is to the church or it's Pastors . . . rather than to the Lord of life.

Certainly, everyone of us must ask ourselves:

"Does He KNOW me?"

We must ask, "Is my relationship with Christ real or imagined?"

And when we ask the question we must not be hasty in our answer.

If we will linger over these questions we may find that our faith is genuine.

Our trust is in Him and not our feelings, experience or knowledge.

When we do this honestly - We will see that our love for Him is growing.

We will see that our commitment to Him, though imperfect, is growing.

And this time of careful reflection will lead to a deeper, more committed discipleship.

And it may be that as you ask the question you will discover that you do not have a relationship with Christ.

You may have professed Him.

You may be part of the church.

You may even be respected as a Christian person.

But you may realize that it is all superficial.

You may this day come to realize that you need more than adequate knowledge, a good feeling, or a great experience.

Maybe today you will come to realize that you need Jesus.

If that is the case, I pray that today, in the quiet of your heart, you will bow before the Savior and place all your confidence in His ability to save and transform you.

I pray that you will be led to consider who He is . . . and commit yourself wholeheartedly to Him.

Please, take the time to search your heart.

This exercise may be painful but it is essential.

It will make the difference between whether the Savior greets you with a tear or a smile; **a "depart from me for I have never known you" or "welcome home. Enter into the joy of your Lord."**

When you have settled this issue then you will cheer Him not because of the crowd . . . but because He is worthy to be honored.

You will celebrate not because of what you have received but because of who He is in your own heart and life.

You will urge others not to an experience but to a committed relationship.

And your most fervent worship will take place in the silence of your heart.