

One BRMC Small Group Study

Palm and Passion

Leader's Guide

Please note that this study guide accompanies the pulpit sermon on 5 April 2020. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

Scripture Passage:
Philippians 2:5–11 (NRSV)

Context:

The scripture passage in this lesson is traditionally read on Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Resurrection Sunday. This is the day when Christians celebrate and remember how Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king, received by joyful, triumphant cries of "Hosanna!" "God saves us!" Are these words unreal in our current circumstances? Are we weighed down by the fear and uncertainty brought by a pandemic? Is this really how we are going to enter Holy Week?

We appear to have been muzzled. Our worship is decentralised. There will be no palm branches waving, no crowds rejoicing in the pews, yet perhaps Jesus would hardly notice why?

Lesson Objectives:

In this lesson, we will attempt to understand the following:

- Jesus is humble of heart who came, not to be exalted, but to be despised.
- Jesus' triumphant entry and His suffering on the cross helps us see our God as one who fully understands all our circumstances because He experienced it Himself.
- The confession of Christians entering Holy Week is that Jesus is Lord!.

Introductory

1. Why is Palm Sunday also known as "Passion Sunday"?

- Palm Sunday is also known as "Passion Sunday" because we would traditionally read Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem alongside the Passion story, His suffering and death on the cross.
- We cannot understand one without the other. When we read the triumphant entry together with the understanding of the cross Jesus faced, we ought to discover our God is not what we may expect Him to be:
 - Jesus enters Jerusalem not to claim a crown of gold, but to claim a crown of thorns.
 - Jesus comes not to be elevated on a throne, but to be lifted up on a cross.
 - Jesus comes not to enforce His rule, but to beckon people to follow Him.

2. What did it mean to be sentenced to death on a cross?

- "In Roman society dying on the cross was not just shameful, it was obscene. The word "cross" was considered a profanity, a word that civilised people do not use. Even when judgment was pronounced the word "cross" wouldn't be used, and another more elaborate phrase would be substituted instead. Dying on the cross was something horrifying and shameful on a scale that's hard to draw an analogy to today. If you were crucified, you'd be somebody universally reviled, to be forgotten and dismissed." (Pastor Benjamin, sermon, 5 April 2020)
- It was the intention of the rulers that when Jesus was crucified, He would soon be forgotten as despised and dismissed.

3. Why has Jesus been given the name above all names (i.e. that Jesus is Lord) (v9)?

- He is not just similar to God but He is God. He has all the power and authority over everything in existence.
- Although Jesus was God, He did not demand the status of God, but became human. He became a slave, one with no status and of humble means.
- Because this is how God chose to be glorified – by Jesus taking on human weakness and suffering with us. And because Jesus obeyed the will of God – He was obedient to accept His death on the cross.

Reflection

4. Holy Week is an especially appropriate time for us to slow down and stop and gaze in wonder at the cross. To contemplate Jesus' suffering. To observe the hands that flung stars into space, surrendered helplessly to cruel nails. Our God who became human, completely dehumanised. What does Jesus' death on the cross mean to you?

- This is an opportune time to reflect on Jesus' death on the cross.
- For some, it may be the first time they have been asked to do so. For others it may be such a regular practice that they have taken it for granted and have set or pet answers and views. This week, encourage everyone to take a fresh perspective – that our God may not be what we expect. His humility of heart, His willingness to be despised and dehumanised.
- "The point is to behold the extent of [Jesus'] suffering, and in doing so realise that Jesus has really embraced the human condition to the uttermost. Jesus stands in solidarity with those who suffer, those who are despised and forgotten, those whom the world has written off as being of no value. There is no person on earth whose pain and suffering Jesus does not understand, because He suffers with us. He is with us in our pain and our sorrow." (Pastor Benjamin, sermon, 5 April 2020)
- In the circumstances of this pandemic, it is in Jesus that we can find comfort and solace, because in the midst of all the pain and suffering, anguish and heartbreak, Jesus has been through it all, He willingly walked that road, so that He can bring victory over the worst circumstances.
- Which leads us to the next question ... what role does Jesus play in our lives?

5. Are you able to declare that Jesus is Lord? Can you declare that Jesus is Lord over your life? What concerns do you have that cause you to hesitate to declare that Jesus is Lord over your life?

- This is an opportunity for people in the group to share without fear of judgment. Yet, be prepared to share your views on what it means to declare that Jesus is Lord over your life.
- There are perhaps two aspects to this question that could help those who are newer to the faith. 1) Jesus is Lord overall all things; and 2) Jesus is personal and Lord over our life.
- Being Lord over all:
 - o "Jesus is not only the one who suffers with us, but He's also the one given all power and authority over everything in existence. He isn't just similar to God, but He is God. There's none above Him and none before Him. There is nothing in this universe that can claim power over Jesus, and there is nobody who can demand the allegiance of our hearts." (Pastor Benjamin, sermon, 5 April 2020)
 - o "Because Jesus is Lord, nothing else can claim that title. Not our circumstances, not our fears or our worries. Not death, nor disease. Not even the coronavirus." (Pastor Benjamin, sermon, 5 April 2020)
- Some in your group may have less difficulty recognising and declaring that Jesus is Lord over all things, but may have challenges declaring that Jesus is Lord over their life.
- Being Lord over my life:
 - o Declaring Jesus as Lord over your life means a total surrender of your life to Him. Your work, finances, family, relationships, time are all surrendered to Him and are for Him to control.
 - o It means submitting to Jesus' rule and authority.
 - o Yet in this lesson, we can see that Jesus did not come to impose His authority or claim His kingship. He came as a humble servant to the people and accepted the will of His Father to be obedient.
 - o For those who have experienced or who have trusted in Jesus' loving kindness and His goodness, this surrender to His authority might well be a comforting step because they put their trust in Jesus and His words, and in what Jesus has done for them on the cross.
- For those who are able to declare the Jesus is Lord over their lives, the question is to what extent to Jesus is Lord over your life. In terms of aspects: is Jesus Lord over your financial planning, spending and giving? In terms of relationship: is Jesus Lord over your bible study and worship, does He take priority first person in the day, last person at night?
- For those who are challenged by this notion of Jesus being Lord over their lives, perhaps a useful small step to encourage them to reflect on the cross and what Jesus went through in His journey to the cross. Today's lesson is a starting point to see their circumstance, their life, their relationships, through the lens of what Jesus has done.
- **Are we willing to know Jesus as the Lord of their lives so that we can declare Him Lord with confidence that brings comfort.**

Application

6. What can you do to declare that Jesus is Lord? How should you live in full evidence that Jesus is indeed Lord?

- What are some practical steps you can take?
- To declare Jesus Lord over all:
 - o Perhaps it is talking more about Jesus, sharing the Good News that Jesus is the resurrection and the life (cf 29 Apr 2020 Study Guide).
 - o Perhaps it is the Church (all of us within the Body) stepping up and presenting a different narrative to the world, that death is not Lord and the coronavirus is not Lord, but our Saviour Jesus is Lord!
- Let us focus on shining the Light of Christ: in these times, it may be truly expressing our faith, to comfort, engage and serve those in need, those who are isolated, those who are anxious or afraid.
- This may be a scary time for the world... but we are invited "... to join with Christians through the ages, in repeating that defiant battlecry in the face of darkness – Jesus is Lord, and He will have the final say." (Pastor Benjamin, sermon, 5 April 2020)
- To declare Jesus Lord over our life:
 - o Spend time reflecting on this week's lesson, Jesus' triumphant entry read with His journey to the cross.
 - o Get to know Jesus better by spending time reading the Bible in a spirit-prompted manner (as suggested in Session 2 of the Holy Spirit sermon series), allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and speak through the words of scripture.
 - o Spend regular time in prayer with God. Present your thoughts and requests with thanksgiving, yet also leave time in quietness to hear.
 - o Be ready to respond to what you have read and heard, that is part of obedience.

7. Jesus has shown us the greatest act of humility – He stripped off His royalty and traded His crown of gold for a crown of thorns. As followers of the humble King, can we think of some practical ways on how we can convey this "nature of our God" to the people around us?

- Think of: (a) family, (b) friends, (c) employees, (d) table cleaner in the hawker centres, (e) construction workers, (f) domestic helpers, and others.

Prayer

8. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.

(a) What is in your heart for yourself?

- Perhaps you need to reaffirm that Jesus Christ is Lord. There is a simple song that has resounded in the face of both triumph and adversity, which you can adopt as a declaratory prayer:

“He is Lord, he is Lord!
He is risen from the dead
and he is Lord!
Every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess,
that Jesus Christ is Lord!”

(b) What is in your heart for others?

- Perhaps you feel led to pray for those who are in despair and suffering:

“Merciful Father, please grant (*name/s of family and/or friend/s*) comfort and peace amidst the troubles they are facing. Give me wisdom as to how to minister to them and show them how much You love them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.