

## Palm Sunday John 12:12-19

*You see that you are gaining nothing, the Pharisees said to one another. Look, the world has gone after him.*

It would seem that they were right, at least to a certain degree; it did seem, as if perhaps not exactly the entire world, but at least the majority of the people, had gone after our Lord Jesus. As He rode into Jerusalem the crowds celebrated Him enthusiastically, as the people had about two centuries earlier celebrated the triumphant entry of Judas Maccabaeus after he had delivered the people from the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes, he who had defiled the Temple and banned worship of the true God. Once again the people waved palm branches and laid down their cloaks on the road. More than that, they celebrated our Lord Jesus as *He that comes*, that is: as the Saviour God had promised, all through the ages, that He would send to deliver His people, finally and for ever.

It really seemed that they were gaining nothing, the Pharisees. They had failed to convince the people that our Lord Jesus was nothing but a fraud and a false teacher.

As we hear this, though, we also know that in the end they would not fail. They would join forces with their usual enemies, the chief priests, against their chief enemy. And the chief priests would willingly join forces with *their* usual enemies, the Pharisees. For for all their differences, the chief priests and the Pharisees had this in common: their hatred for our Lord Jesus. And together they would indeed succeed in convincing the Roman governor to have our Lord Jesus crucified and killed. And seeing our Lord Jesus humiliated and hung up to die in defeat, the people would abandon their enthusiasm for Him; they would realise that He was not the deliverer they had longed for, the one who would finally fulfil their desire for freedom and deliver the people from foreign oppression and establish instead an independent Jewish kingdom that was to last for ever.

In the end, it would seem, the Pharisees would be successful in their efforts to destroy our Lord Jesus; in spite of the enthusiasm with which the crowds celebrated Him.

So often in history it has seemed that the Kingdom of God was about to prevail in the world, finally and forever; that the whole world was about to be brought into submission to God.

Many of us remember a time when our Lord Jesus was revered in common culture, and the Church respected; when it would cause a common outcry when somebody reviled our Lord Jesus in public, or the Church; or just when a public person behaved in a manner that was considered contrary to common decency. And what was considered common decency would to some degree correspond to Christian morality; it would reflect some particular teachings of Holy Scripture, particularly when it came to marriage and sexuality.

Many of us remember those days, and lament that they seem to be long gone.

The truth is, though, that in those days when what was commonly considered common decency would to a certain degree correspond to Christian teachings, common decency was also commonly confused with what it means to be a Christian. To many, being a Christian, and being Church, came to have little to do with what Holy Scripture teaches as a whole; particularly, it came to have little to do with Christ and His salvation. To be a Christian came to be about being a polite person, rather than about the faith; leading a Christian life came to be about what most polite people considered common decency rather than about actual obedience to the Word and will of God as written in Holy Scripture.

And the popularity and prestige the Church used to enjoy as teacher of morality made many to think that her very purpose was to promote decency and good morals rather than to preach Christ crucified for the salvation of sinners; as if our Lord Jesus had not made it clear that *My Kingdom is not of this world!* And when the Church began to lose popularity and prestige, some panicked and sought to make the Church popular again among unbelievers by accommodating unbelief; as if our Lord Jesus had not asked the question in which itself is the obvious answer: *What does it profit anyone to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*

Whenever in history it seemed that conditions were just right to secure the final victory of the Church of Christ in the world and bring about His Kingdom, reality has proven different, and the truth been proven of the words of our Lord Jesus: *My Kingdom is not of this world!*; just as it has been proven that only He ultimately knows what is good for His Church; that He alone is her Life; that He is alone is Lord, and His servants are not, nor is the world.

God is Lord of history; and most certainly, through those years when the Church was revered and respected, He has made use of this for His own good purposes, to bring His good will about in the lives of those He would save.

And there can be no doubt, either, and should not be among believers, that He will bring His good will about also in the current conditions of common culture; even outright persecution will be made to serve His good purpose, should it ever again come upon His Church in our part of the world, as it has come to seem so likely in these last few years.

*Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul, says our Lord Jesus; rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell. We really have nothing to fear but fear itself; well, that would be the fear that so easily deteriorates into unbelief.*

In the end the Pharisees would be successful in their efforts to have our Lord Jesus crucified, and have the crowds that had celebrated Him so enthusiastically turn away from Him again in unbelief; except that the end would prove not to be the end.

*His disciples did not understand these things at first, Holy Scripture says, as we hear it today, meaning that they did not understand any more than the crowds what it was our Lord Jesus had come to accomplish; they were excited at the enthusiasm of the crowds, delighted at that which was the despair of the Pharisees, that they were gaining nothing, and our Lord Jesus everything, that the whole world has gone after him. And when it came to seem that the Pharisees had been successful against Him, they would despair themselves, the disciples.*

*But when Jesus was glorified, Holy Scripture then goes on to say, they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him. They would remember what was written about Him; and they would remember what He Himself had said: Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon; they will scourge Him and kill Him, and on the third day He will rise.*

They would see, for our Lord Jesus would come to them again, alive, and pronounce His peace to be upon them. And they would learn from Him that He is glorified in this: that the Son of God had suffered for the sin of the world for the salvation of sinners, that sinners might have peace with God and eternal life in the forgiveness of sins which He has won for all sinners in His sufferings and death, and with which He would send them to actually give it to sinners: *As the Father has sent Me, as He said it, so I also am sending you. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*

When they saw our Lord Jesus glorified, they would finally come to see with the eyes of faith, and see that *this* is the glory of God: the salvation of sinners such as ourselves; that in this God is glorified: that He is *that* good; that out of His goodness the Son of God would suffer the harshest humiliation at the hands of sinners, out of love for the very same sinners, and for all sinners, and the most devastating death, and so much more: He would bear the fullness of suffering at the hands of the heavenly Father, eternal death and damnation, the judgement of His own goodness against all evil, His righteous wrath against sin.

God is that good; He is so good that His goodness *is* His glory, the glory He seeks before all other glory. The greatest glory He knew to bestow upon His Beloved was to make Him the Saviour of sinners! This is the glory He bestowed upon the Son from before all things began. So good is God, so great His love. His goodness *is* His glory; His love is His very innermost nature.

After our Lord Jesus was glorified, His disciples would see this. And He would send His servants out into the world, with His Word of salvation, that sinners might come to see, also, with the eyes of faith, that this is the glory of God, and this is what true glory is, and true gain: the salvation of God.

*You see that you are gaining nothing*, the Pharisees said to one another. *Look, the world has gone after him*. And the disciples thought that they had gained everything when they saw the world going after our Lord Jesus, or at least the majority of the people. They thought that the Kingdom of God was at hand, and His final victory in the world. And indeed it was, yet in a completely different sense than what they thought they saw. The Kingdom of God and His final victory they would see only in faith, only after He had been raised from the dead, and *what* the Kingdom of God is, and His final victory.

This is what He will teach us today, also: to see with the eyes of faith what is great and glorious, and what is gain, rather than judge by what our eyes see, what human nature will allow us to see; to see that His Kingdom is not of this world; that His glory is not that unbelievers honour His Church for what they think she is, or even that they honour *Him* for what they think He is, rather than for who He really is. He will make us to see, with the eyes of faith, that His Kingdom *is* our salvation, and His glory; then we will see, in spite of all things else, that when His Kingdom is ours, we have gained all.

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. *Amen*.