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Luke 19:28-44

Jesus 101: An Introduction to the Depth of Jesus
The Finishing Kick

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Perhaps some of you have run in a race – and I’m particularly thinking of something longer than a sprint – a 1500 meter track race, or a 5k or maybe even a marathon? I am not a distance runner. I think only twice in my life have I run anything longer than a couple miles: once when I was in 5th grade or so I ran in the Nordstrom Fun Run – I’m even not sure how long it was – maybe not even a 5k. Another time I ran the Sound to Narrows 12k run down in Tacoma at Point Defiance Park. I did that one in when I was about 24 and engaged to Gwen. She and her dad were doing it, and I wanted to impress them, which is not a good reason to do a run like that. But I was young and dumb and didn’t know that then. So I gave it a really good try, and was determined not to let either of them beat me, even though both had more running experience and training than I did. And though I finished the race, and I don’t remember who finished first between the three of us, I suffered a foot injury. But Gwen still married me and her dad didn’t think I was too much of a wuss for getting injured in a fun run. Needless to say, since then, I pretty much don’t run anything longer than a football field.

But, as you may know, in a race like that – and it’s true in swimming and cycling and some other sports, too – there’s a thing called “the finishing kick.” **The “finishing kick” is the idea that as you near the finish line, you finish strong: you finish with an extra burst of energy and really push hard to the end, even though you’re exhausted.** It’s not that you’re not giving your all the entire race...but there’s some extra motivation to really push it when you’re down to the last little bit, when the finish line is in sight.

That is a little like where we find Jesus in today’s passage, as we continue our series of message on the depth of Jesus that we’ve been in since the start of the year. And starting today through the rest of this series we will be taking a deep dive into the last week of Jesus’ life – his own “finishing kick”. And this is where we really get to the heart of Jesus’ ministry. **The whole reason Jesus lived, died, and was raised from the dead is, in many ways, centered on this last week or so of his life – His finishing kick.** His final week is what gives meaning to the rest of His public ministry.

And the finishing kick to Jesus' earthly ministry begins with a bang. Jesus comes into Jerusalem with a crowd of people cheering him, waving branches, crying out, singing from Psalm 118, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Luke also tells us that they were singing or chanting, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" The other gospels tell us of the people crying out "Hosanna" in addition to what Luke reports for us here.

This is enough encouragement and support to really give Jesus the energy needed for his final week. And it was a final week that contained a lot of challenges as many of you know: betrayal, intense prayer, loneliness, abandonment by his disciples, he was on trial in a kangaroo court where the verdict was essentially decided before it began, and more. So the events of that original Palm Sunday are what launched him into his finishing kick, his final week of ministering to people, as well as his death and resurrection. By the way, although we're reading this passage today, we will celebrate Palm Sunday in four weeks. Hopefully we will be able to all gather together, in person for it. Maybe we'll be waving palm branches from our living rooms while worshipping together online. Who knows where this Coronavirus is headed. But we'll keep you updated as things progress. So, we're looking at this today, but we'll celebrate it in a few weeks.

And as Jesus comes into Jerusalem, there are a couple things to note here. **First, we Christians need to remember that no one is going to make a big deal about Jesus except his followers.** If the name of Jesus is going to be made known far and wide, it is up to people like you and me. Now, it starts with Jesus. He takes the initiative as he always does. He told the disciples to get the colt and bring it to him. He decides that there needs to be something different about this entrance into Jerusalem. So he tells the disciples to bring him a colt for him to ride on. This is the first time Jesus ever gets a ride anywhere, as far as we know. At least, since he learned to walk. I'm sure when he was an infant his parents carried him around. He may have been God in the flesh, but he was not born with the ability to walk and run. So this is a big change, it signifies something special is happening.

Matthew tells us it was a donkey, which is a slight difference from Luke. The

difference between a colt and a donkey isn't overly important. But the difference between either of those animals and a full-grown horse is significant. And that's the point being made about the animal: Neither a colt nor a donkey are what a king would normally ride. A king would ride a full-grown horse, a more majestic animal. But what Jesus rides in on depicts his humility...he is the humble servant king who comes in not on a horse ready for ward, but on a donkey or a colt, offering himself.

The point here as far as the sermon is concerned, however, is that Jesus takes this initiative. He makes it happen.

Then there are the people who were praising him as he came in to town. **Luke tells us that it was the whole crowd of disciples who began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.** Who did the praising? The disciples. Not just the 12 who we know by name – Andrew, Bartholomew, James, Peter, John – Paul, George and Ringo...ok not those last few...but maybe there was a george and a ringo in the crowd. Who knows? Because the whole crowd of disciples began to cheer and praise him and lay their cloaks down in the road in front of him putting together a makeshift hallway runner...like what a bride walks down the aisle on. Matthew and John tell us that they also waive their palm branches as well. The people doing this were his disciples. All of his disciples who were gathered there did it. It was a whole crowd of them. And it wasn't anyone else. In fact, some Pharisees who happened to be there wanted the crowd of disciples to keep it quiet. Not only are the *not* joining in, they're trying to shut them up.

And it's no different today. **If the name of Jesus is going to be proclaimed - literally and figuratively – for the world to hear, it's only going to happen because of his disciples responding to Jesus' initiative.** No one else is taking up the cause of Christ. No one else is giving him praise and glory. No one else is advocating for His cause. No one else is waving their palm branches in praise of him or laying down their cloaks before him. And this is a huge component when it comes to the depth of Jesus. He did not come for a select few to keep him to themselves...like people hoarding toilet paper and hand sanitizer. Jesus came because God so loved the world – all

people. All people are created in God's image; all people are a part of God's creation. Jesus came for all of them. And God works through his disciples to make that truth known. God works through his disciples to make the name of Jesus known. If we're counting on someone else to take up the cause, then the name of Jesus is not going to be lifted very high. In fact, the response of some will be like the response of the Pharisees here: tone it down, and even stop it.

This doesn't mean we should be insensitive to others. But we live out our faith and cling to the name of Jesus and sing of the name of Jesus and proclaim the name of Jesus each and every moment of our lives.

Sometimes, like in a worship service, that is very literal. Other times, like when we're at work or in the dining hall at our retirement center or the cafeteria at our school, or in the stands at our kids music concert...how we proclaim the name of Jesus is going to be different. Of course lately, with the Coronavirus spreading, many of us aren't at work or in the dining halls or cafeterias and the music concerts are cancelled. Heck, next week even our sanctuary might be silent if public gatherings are banned or some other restrictions are in place and it just is prudent not to gather. We'll sing the name of Jesus in our homes as we worship online.

And that's part of the point Jesus makes here: His people shouldn't stop worshipping. If the don't, he says that the rocks will cry out. I've often wondered if he meant that as a literal statement or not. I think we often interpret it literally, but I don't think the rocks would have actually started chanting and singing had the crowd stopped. I think it was his way of just throwing it back in the Pharisees face: This parade is not gonna be stopped and my people are not going to back down just because you don't like it.

So this is how Jesus begins his finishing kick: with a parade in his honor and by defending the crowds and their adoration of Him. He really sticks up for them as they praise him loudly.

And as I think about this event here at the start of Jesus' last week, it makes me think about the legacy that Jesus leaves. Because the legacy that a person leaves can really be impacted by the end of the race that they've run. Paul

addresses this in 2 Timothy 4:6-7. Paul writes these words: **“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** He’s nearing the end. He sees the finish line of life. But he goes out with a finishing kick and leaves a legacy of faith and encouragement of his fellow Christians. His whole letter to Timothy, in which these verses are found, is a letter encouraging Timothy in his faith.

For instance, in the verses immediately prior, he writes, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (I Timothy 4:1-5)

Those are the words of someone who is finishing with a kick! He wants to leave a legacy of faith, of encouragement, of ensuring that the gospel message carries on. No pity parties here. And no petering out and fading away. He’s fighting for the gospel message to the end, and encouraging Timothy, whom Paul has mentored in the faith. It’s a finishing kick and an incredible legacy.

We see it with Jesus in his final week as well. It starts here with this passage, but as he goes along through his last week on earth, we’re going to see that he finishes with a flourish. There’s no limping into the finish line. And so the legacy Jesus leaves is one of courage and humility, of taking the high road, of continuing to pour himself out for his disciples, of giving everything he’s got – literally down to the last drop of blood.

And as I think about that finishing kick and the legacy he leaves, I can’t help but think about my own life. Not that I think my finishing kick is in sight.

But you never know. That's why it's important to live each day as though it's your last. Live each week, month, year, as though it's your last, as though the finish line is in sight. Because the legacy we leave is not defined as much by how we start as it is by how we finish. **A person can have a bad start or a bad middle – a struggle with drugs, a broken relationship, a job lost – and still make a turnaround and re-shape the legacy that is left; that person can still finish strong and leave a legacy of transformation.**

Perhaps that describes some of you. So the finishing kick of life has more weight than the rest, and can override the bad decisions we've made or the poor way we've lived or if we've walked the straight and narrow path and clung closely to Jesus, then that finishing kick will cement that legacy. That's the case for Jesus. **Jesus lived his life completely in his heavenly father's will, and his finishing kick cemented that and ensured that the legacy he left would be one of faithfulness to the call upon his life.**

And we just never know when we're in the last bit before that finish line. The events of the last week or two with the coronavirus are a reminder of that. Or the tornadoes that struck Nashville. We get reminders like this all the time, that life is short.

So, if you knew that the finish line is just around the corner: **How would you say that your finishing kick has gone? What's the legacy that you leave behind?** How has your life touched people and impacted people? And as we look at the disciples response to Jesus at the start of his finishing kick, as I look at Paul's words to Timothy, as we look at Jesus' own life, I would ask: If our finishing kick were already in progress, would we say we're finishing strong for the cause of Christ and His Kingdom? Are we proclaiming His name so that others will hear it? Does our life point people to Jesus, this humble servant king who rides in on a colt?

Whether we gather here each Sunday together for the next few Sundays, or whether we all have to stay at home and worship happens online, I hope you'll keep following along as we look at the last week of Jesus' life over the next few weeks. This finishing kick is where his legacy is cemented. And it's the same for us, whether our finishing kick has a few months, years, or decades to go. We can live each week like it's our last. I just know that as his

disciples, Jesus invites us to finish strong, and leave a legacy that proclaims his name. Because if we don't do it, no one else will...except maybe the rocks. And I don't know about you, but I don't want to find out about that. So let's follow in Jesus' example, and the one that Paul gives us as well, and that others who have gone before us have given also: and let's leave a legacy that's marked by a life dedicated to Him, and cemented with an incredible finishing kick so that Jesus' name is lifted high. Let's pray...Amen.