

PALM SUNDAY

Luke 19

As the story of Zacchaeus is a very important and helpful one and is told only in Luke, part of the lesson time should be spent on it in all classes. It points up the preparation we should all make for receiving the Lord as our king, just as the cleansing of the temple shows what actually happens as soon as He has entered our hearts and minds to rule there.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord as king is the divine truth ruling in our lives. The Lord was the only one who ever fully mastered the natural reason.

Even the shortest stories in the Word have meanings which we can study forever.

If we really accept the Lord, we shall want to correct our misdeeds. Humility is the ground of charity.

Notes for Parents

We know that the Sunday before Easter is called Palm Sunday because when the Lord rode into Jerusalem on the first day of the last week of His life on earth, the people cast palm branches before Him, hailing Him as king. He chose to ride that day on an ass's colt because it was customary for kings and judges to ride on asses.

We know also that it was only a few short days before the people crucified Him. What caused such a terrible change in their attitude toward Him?

The ancient Jews interpreted all the prophecies of the Old Testament literally. They believed that they were the Lord's chosen people and that sooner or later the Messiah or "anointed one" would come as a king who would overthrow all their enemies and establish them forever as rulers of the earth. In order to believe this it was necessary to ignore or to explain away many other

things which are said in the Old Testament, but we know how prone we all are to believe what we want to believe, and also how firm a hold the beliefs in which one is brought up have on his mind in directing his reasoning. This belief accounts for much of their history.

It accounted for their treatment of Christ. The people who hailed Him as king when He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday apparently expected Him to put Himself at the head of all the rebellious elements among them and immediately overthrow their Roman rulers. When He did not, they turned against Him, and the scribes and Pharisees, who had been hoping for just such a change in the strength of His support by the people, seized the opportunity to get rid of Him.

The Lord Himself knew just what was going to happen. He had told His apostles about it in advance, but they could not really believe it. His death on the cross was a part of His plan from the beginning, for He came into the world to show us how to live, and if He had not passed through death and appeared afterward unchanged, He could not have proved to us that we go on living forever, so that we would know that it is the things we do to our souls which are really important.

Our whole chapter for today teaches us the difference between humble acknowledgment of our sins and weaknesses like that of Zacchaeus and the stubborn determination to have our own way which was the ruin of the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord did not hate the scribes and Pharisees nor the people who put Him to death. Instead, He wept over Jerusalem because He knew that the people were really destroying themselves. He would have saved all of them if they had only been willing to listen to Him and choose the unselfish life, which is the only possible road to happiness.

This week, which is known by all Christians as “Holy Week,” we should read with our children the story of the last week of the Lord’s life in chapters 20 through 23 of Luke. We should think about this story very seriously as we read it and try to look into our own hearts and minds and find the feelings and thoughts there

which are standing between us and the happiness which the Lord wants us to have. Let us, like Zacchaeus, receive the Lord joyfully and determine to correct our faults and to live as the Lord would have us live.

Primary

The reading should be divided into two parts: first the story of Zacchaeus as an illustration of what the Lord's presence in our lives should mean—always being fair to others, trying to make amends when we have done wrong, and helping other people whenever we can. Then, after the teacher has talked about that with the children, the story of the actual entry into Jerusalem. Begin the lesson with the reason for calling the day Palm Sunday, as the palm branches are not mentioned in Luke.

Today, the Sunday before Easter, is called Palm Sunday because on this day long ago the Lord rode into Jerusalem as a king, and the people broke off palm branches from the trees beside the road and threw them in His path for Him to ride over. In those days in Palestine they did not have many of the ways of riding which we have today—trains, automobiles, airplanes. They did not even have many horses in the Holy Land itself. Most of the people walked wherever they had to go. But it was the custom for kings and judges to ride on asses. The colt the Lord rode on was an ass's colt. The Lord's followers and the people knew that this meant that He was coming as a king. They thought He was going to take command of their fighting men, overthrow the Roman governor, and make them a great nation again. But the Lord did not come to be that kind of king. His kingdom is in heaven, and in the heart and mind of everyone who loves Him and obeys His commandments.

What He really wants to do for us is shown in the story of Zacchaeus.

Where did Zacchaeus live?

What was his occupation?

What was a publican?

Why could not Zacchaeus at first see the Lord?

What did he do in order to see Him?

Why did the Lord tell him to come down?

What did Zacchaeus say which showed his character?

If we receive the Lord into our hearts and minds, we shall all be helped to be unselfish and to help other people.

Junior

The Juniors can get some idea of the meaning of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem as its king, as well as of the story of Zacchaeus and the parable of the pounds. Be sure also that they know in brief what happened during Holy Week.

Next Sunday is Easter Sunday, which we observe every year in memory of the resurrection of the Lord after He had been put to death. As we read about the Lord's life on earth—the wonderful things He said and did, and His gentleness and kindness—it is hard for us to see how the religious leaders could have become so bitter against Him and how the people who had followed Him could have let them have their way. But that is what always happens when selfishness gets control of people. A selfish person hates anyone who interferes with his getting everything he wants, and often the people around him find it easier to let him have his way than to speak up and oppose him.

We remember from other lessons that the scribes and Pharisees had been trying all along to find faults in the Lord which they could point out to the people. Because He always proved them wrong instead, their hatred grew and grew. We all need to see clearly that crimes always begin in selfishness. This is as true in our own world today as it was in Palestine when the Lord was on earth.

On the first day of the last week of the Lord's earthly life He entered Jerusalem in the manner of a king and was received by the people as a king.

On what did he ride?

How did He get the colt?

Was the colt used to being ridden?

What did the disciples put on the colt for the Lord to sit on?

What did they cast in the road before Him?

What did the multitude cry?

This story is told in all four Gospels. Look up John 12:12-13.

Matthew and Mark both speak of their casting branches from the trees in the Lord's path, but only John says that they were palm branches; so it is from John's account that this Sunday before Easter gets its name of "Palm Sunday." We learn from the other Gospels that the colt on which the Lord rode was an ass's colt. Kings and judges rode on asses. The people thought that the Lord had come to overthrow their Roman rulers and set up their own kingdom again. That was the real reason why they welcomed Him. The Lord knew what they thought, but He had no such intention. It is in our hearts and minds that He wants to rule. His kingdom is the kingdom of heaven and He says it is within us. So His riding into Jerusalem as a king is really a picture of His coming into our hearts and minds to rule there.

It is to show us this that our chapter begins with the story of something that happened along the road before the Lord reached Jerusalem. It concerns a little man named Zacchaeus.

Where did Zacchaeus live?

What was his occupation?

What was a publican?

Why couldn't Zacchaeus see the Lord?

How did he manage to see Him?

What did the Lord say to him?

What did Zacchaeus say which showed his character?

What did the Lord tell him?

When the Lord entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He knew that He would be put to death. He had told this to His disciples, but they did not believe Him. It was because He was about to leave them that He told them the parable of the pounds. The word translated *pound* was a sum called a *mina* amounting to about twenty dollars in our money today.

In the parable what did the nobleman give each of his servants?

What did the first make with his pound?

What did his master give him for a reward?

What did the second make?

What was his reward?

What did the third do with his pound?

What did his master call him?

This parable taught the disciples that, after the Lord left them, He would expect them to make good use of all the instruction and training He had given them. It teaches us that the Lord gives each one of us certain abilities and leaves us free to use them as we please, but that if we are wise, we shall make the best possible use of them in His service.

The Lord knew what the people were about to do to Him, but He did not hate them for it. He was sorry for them instead. He grieved because of the great disaster they were bringing upon themselves by their selfishness. Verses 45 and 46 show us that they had even come to use the temple itself as a means of making money. The Lord's prophecy about Jerusalem was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans completely destroyed the city.

Intermediate

Bring out again the contrast between those whose minds are open to receive the Lord's teaching and those whose minds are closed by selfishness. The story of Zacchaeus is an important one for this age group, and they will be interested in its correspondence. In the Palm Sunday story proper, stress the Lord's attitude toward His enemies, as shown in His weeping over Jerusalem.

Today, as we know, is Palm Sunday, celebrated in memory of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on the first day of the last week of His life on earth. The last few lessons we have had have been about things He did and said as He was coming down from Galilee for the last time and about the distinction which was becoming increasingly clear between His disciples and the scribes and Pharisees. Wherever He went, many "publicans and sinners" had joined the disciples who welcomed Him and listened to Him gladly, but this made the scribes and Pharisees hate Him all the more.

The Lord and His apostles were coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He had told them that He was to be put to death and they had tried to persuade Him not to come, although they did not really believe what He said. But the Lord rebuked them. He

came to His death willingly, as a part of the work He had come into the world to do. The Lord is pure, unselfish love.

We should note that the journey the Lord took in our chapter for today is the reverse of the journey taken by the man who fell among thieves in the parable of the Good Samaritan, where the man was going *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. The Lord was going *up* from Jericho to Jerusalem, up from a period of outward ministrations to the period of His deepest teaching and highest victory. The story of Zacchaeus with which the chapter opens may be linked with the parable of the Good Samaritan, for Zacchaeus was one who had spiritually “fallen among thieves.” He pictures all of us little, erring people when we begin to feel our need to see the Lord. Zacchaeus climbed up into a sycamore tree. The Biblical sycamore tree was an inferior type of fig, and figs represent good works. The first thing for any of us to do, if we want to see the Lord, is to begin doing good as best we can. Then the Lord will come into our lives. “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

The parable of the pounds shows us that the important thing for us to do is to use what the Lord has given us as well as possible in His service, however much or little it may be. “He that is faithful in little, is faithful also in much.”

We are all familiar with the Palm Sunday story. The Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass, after the fashion of kings and judges. The ass is a picture of our “natural reason,” our ability to think and judge wisely about worldly matters. The ass is a very sure-footed, but also very stubborn and unwilling to be directed by his master. Do you see how this is true of our natural reason? For instance, isn’t it hard for us to believe that anything is really right and good which does not obviously “get us something”? The colt on which the Lord entered Jerusalem was one “whereon yet never man sat.” That is, the Lord was the first ever to bring this power of the natural reason wholly under subjection to higher principles. The disciples and the multitude cast their garments in front of Him as He rode.

We may remember that garments represent the ideas with which we clothe our affections. The Lord's garments always picture truths of the letter of the Word, but our garments are not always truths, are they?

The people hailed the Lord as king, and the Pharisees objected. The Lord gave them to understand that the people were right, but He was grieved instead of angry with them, and wept over Jerusalem, prophesying its destruction. This prophecy was literally fulfilled some forty years later. But the Lord was really speaking of the ancient Jewish Church. It had the Word, with all the prophecies of Christ's coming, but it refused to recognize Him. So it could no longer be the church through which the Lord could be present in the world. The Christian Church was to take its place. The state of the church was summed up in the condition in the temple, where the very court was used for buying and selling.

In thinking of what Holy Week should mean to us, we should ask ourselves whether we are like those who rejected the Lord and tried to put Him out of their lives or whether we are His faithful disciples. We should welcome Him as our king, submitting all our thoughts and acts to His judgment, just as the disciples cast their garments before Him. We should recognize that to take up our cross and follow the Lord means to try to forget self in service to others. In fact, we should think of the cross as the symbol of victory over selfishness, a victory which each of us can win with the Lord's help.

Basic Correspondences

figs = external good works

the ass = the natural reason

Senior

With the Seniors this lesson offers a good opportunity to stress the importance of using certain periods in the church year, such as Holy Week, for special self-examination and renewal of their dedication to the Lord's service. The chapter contains many practical lessons for young people. Suggest to them that they read chapters 20 through 23 of Luke during the week.

We are all so familiar with the story of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His life on earth that we need only review its meaning. Jerusalem represents the place we have made for the Lord in our minds, and He reigns there as king just so far as we actually accept the rule of divine truth. He enters riding upon an ass when we submit our worldly reasonings to the control of spiritual principles. We cast our garments before Him when we are willing to give up our own ideas if we find that they are contrary to His teaching. Then He can cleanse the inner temple of our souls, driving out false thoughts and selfish desires.

The story of Zacchaeus, which is told only in the Gospel of Luke, is a fitting introduction to the story of the entry into Jerusalem, for the chief among the publicans—or tax-gatherers—represents our affection for worldly success. Zacchaeus was “little of stature.” This affection is not an exalted affection. It is capable of leading us into evil. But it is also capable of a good use. Zacchaeus desired to see the Lord “who he was,” and he “climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him.” Swedenborg says that the Biblical sycamore, which was an inferior type of fig tree, represents “the truths of the external church.” Even such external truths, if we obey them, will lift us high enough above the crowd so that we can see the Lord. When the Lord saw Zacchaeus in the tree, He said, “Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.” In other words, once our interest in worldly success has recognized the Lord, it must immediately be put to use for Him on its own plane. And the result with us, as with Zacchaeus, will be the recognition of our evils, the desire to correct them, and also joy and salvation.

To those who murmured against the Lord for associating with Zacchaeus He spoke the parable of the pounds, teaching that each of us is responsible for the proper use of the place and abilities given him by the Lord. Zacchaeus, when faithful and merciful in his low office, was better than the scribes and Pharisees who failed to use rightly the treasure of the Word.

The Lord's lament for Jerusalem and prophecy of its destruction

referred literally to the earthly city and to the ancient Jewish Church, but spiritually the Lord longs to save all men. He spares no means of pointing out to us the sure ruin which will befall those who know the truth and are faithless to it. From the warning given in the Garden of Eden to the warnings in the messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation the importance of our free choice of good or evil, life or death, is impressed upon us.

The week before Easter is called Holy Week. During this week we should make a special effort to think very seriously about what the Lord did for us in taking on our weak human nature in order that He might meet and overcome all the temptations which we feel, and in this way be forever present with us and help us from day to day. He “bowed the heavens and came down for our salvation.” We should examine ourselves during this week to find our particular faults and weaknesses, and we should ask the Lord to keep us mindful of them and to give us strength to fight them.

Adult

The story of the actual entry into Jerusalem, while it should not be slighted, is so familiar to all the Adults that it need take up little of the class time, while the story and parable with which it is introduced are given only in Luke and therefore should be developed. The teacher will find plenty of discussion material in them.

In our chapter for today the Lord, on His way to Jerusalem for the last time, came to Jericho, that city near the Jordan which Swedenborg tells us represents instruction in the knowledges of good and truth and consequently the good of life, because no one can be instructed in the truths of doctrine who is not in the good of life (AE 700¹⁵). We recall that in the parable of the Good Samaritan to go down from Jerusalem to Jericho meant to try to put spiritual knowledge into practice in outward conduct. The Lord had been teaching and healing in Galilee and in the cross-Jordan country—which represent the outer plane of life—and now He was ascending to Jerusalem for His deepest temptation and His greatest

victory. At Jericho He found Zacchaeus the publican. Zacchaeus was rich in this world's goods, but he was "little of stature." Nevertheless, when He heard that the Lord was passing by, He "sought to see Jesus who he was." That is, he had a sincere desire to know the truth in regard to the Lord. The sycomore tree into which he climbed—an inferior type of fig—represents the external kind of truth and good of which the worldly man is capable (AE 403, 805¹⁰). So we may think of Zacchaeus as a man lacking in spirituality who yet recognizes that external good works are "on the Lord's way," and determines to practice them, not from selfish motives, but to help him gain a better knowledge of the Lord. When he did see the Lord and heard that the Lord wished to enter his house, he received Him joyfully and immediately recognized and determined to correct his past evils. So the Lord could say to him, "This day is salvation come to this house."

The parable of the pounds is similar to the parable of the talents, but it is not identical. The emphasis here is on equality of opportunity. Each man was given a "pound" [actually a *mina*, worth about twenty dollars]. In AE 675⁷⁻⁹ we have a simple statement of the correspondence of this parable: "'The ten servants' whom the nobleman going into a far country called to him, mean all who are in the world, and in particular, all who are of the church . . . 'the ten pounds that he pays to the ten servants to trade with' signify all the knowledges of truth and good from the Word, with the ability to perceive them . . . and 'to trade' signifies by means of these to acquire intelligence and wisdom; those who acquire much are meant by the servant who from a pound gained ten pounds; and those who acquire some are meant by him who from a pound gained five pounds . . . the 'cities which are said to be given them' signifies intelligence and wisdom, and life and happiness therefrom . . . Those who do not acquire spiritual intelligence in the world through the knowledges of truth and good from the Word are evil." This parable is a picture of the way in which the Lord deals with each of us. In DP 210 the reason for this is given and strikingly illustrated: "Man would not be man except for the appearance to

him that he lives from himself, and therefore thinks and wills and speaks and acts as if from himself. From this it follows that unless man, as if from his own prudence, directs all things belonging to his employment and life, he can not be led and directed by the Divine Providence; for he would be like one standing with relaxed hands, opened mouth, closed eyes, and breath indrawn, awaiting influx. Thus he would divest himself of humanity, which he has from the perception and sensation that he lives, thinks, wills, speaks, and acts as if from himself; he would also divest himself of his two faculties, liberty and rationality, by which he is distinguished from the beasts.”

The story of the last week of the Lord’s life on earth is told in Luke in considerable detail, and we should all read and meditate upon it during this coming week, which the whole Christian world recognizes as Holy Week, and accepts as a period of special thoughtfulness and self-examination. The week begins today with Palm Sunday, the commemoration of the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The Lord’s work on earth was almost finished. There remained the final temptation and then the full glorification or union with the Father. Many of the common people and a few of the leaders accepted Him as the Messiah. On Palm Sunday the Lord permitted His disciples to receive Him as their king, entering Jerusalem upon an ass—the beast of judges and kings—amid the worship of the people. He knew the dark days ahead of Him and that the shouting throng would desert Him, but His mission was to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures, and the manner of His entry into Jerusalem had been foretold (Zechariah 9:9). And the letter of the Word was but the outer form of the truth which His life was revealing. Every act and word of His was to serve for the instruction of men for all time. He entered Jerusalem as a king as a symbol that divine truth must enter our hearts and minds as absolute ruler. The acknowledgment of the authority of the Lord’s truth is essential to the Christian life.

Swedenborg tells us that the ass represents the affection for

truth in the natural man and her colt rational truth which springs from this affection, or that the ass and her colt symbolize “the natural man as to good and truth” (AC 2781⁷⁻⁹). The Lord alone completely subjected the natural man; so the ass was one “whereon yet never man sat,” and the Lord’s riding into Jerusalem in this way pictures His subordination of all thoughts which came from the natural. The disciples placed their garments under Him and the throng that came out to meet Him cast their garments in His path. So our garments—the thoughts and ideas which are the expression of our individual personalities—should be submitted to the Lord and made to conform to His way. The palm branches which the multitude brought (John 12:13) were symbols of the recognition that divine truth was present in the Lord (AR 367). And the glorification “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest” represents the true disciple’s acknowledgment that “in Jesus Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” and that by His life on earth He brought the heavens and hells into order, fulfilling the promise made by the angels at His birth. The Lord’s entry into Jerusalem was significant in every detail.

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it.” The Lord’s deepest grief was because men refused to see the things which belonged to their peace. He came into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. On the cross He said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” The Lord had no desire to punish the people for their rejection of Him, but even to the last He longed to open their eyes that they might see the precipice on which they were standing. So, even in the last week of His life on earth the Lord cleansed the temple, driving out those who bought and sold, as a symbol of what His truth must do in the temple of our souls.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 5480: “That weeping is expressive of grief and love, is

well known, and consequently it is expressive of mercy or pity, for mercy is love grieving. The Divine love is therefore called mercy, because the human race is of itself in hell; and when man perceives this in himself, he implores mercy. As weeping is also mercy in the internal sense, therefore in the Word ‘weeping’ is sometimes predicated of Jehovah or the Lord . . . Jerusalem, over which Jesus wept, or which He pitied and over which He grieved, was not only the city Jerusalem, but also the church, the last day of which, when there would no longer be any charity nor consequently any faith, is meant in the internal sense; and hence from pity and grief He wept.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What is today called? Why? *Palm Sunday; people spread palm branches (John 12:13)*
- P. In our chapter, where was the Lord going? *Jerusalem*
- P. What place did He pass through as noted at the beginning of the chapter? *Jericho*
- J. What is the difference between this journey and that of the man in the parable of the Good Samaritan? *going the other way*
- J. Who was Zacchaeus? *a tax collector (publican)*
- P. Why couldn't Zacchaeus see the Lord? *he was short*
- P. What did he do in order to see Him? *climbed a tree*
- J. What did the Lord say to him? *come down . . .*
- J. What did Zacchaeus say which showed his character? *“I give half to poor . . .”*
- J. What did the Lord tell him? *this day is salvation come to this house*
- J. How did the Pharisees feel about it? *murmured against Him*
- J. What did the Lord tell them? *parable*
- J. What parable did He give them? *pounds*
- J. Can you tell this parable? *ten servants, pound apiece . . .*
- I. What does it teach us? *use as well as we can what the Lord has given us*
- P. When the Lord came near Jerusalem, what did He tell two of His disciples to do? *go and untie colt*
- P. What were they to say to the owner of the colt? *the Lord needs him*
- P. Was the colt used to being ridden? *no*
- P. How did the disciples prepare the colt to carry the Lord? *put garments on it*
- P. What did the multitude cast in the road before the Lord? *branches*
- J. What did they cry? *blessed be the king*
- J. What did the Lord tell the Pharisees when they objected? *the stones would cry out*

- I. What did the Lord do and say as He looked at Jerusalem? *wept, "if thou hadst dreamed . . ."*
- J. What did He prophesy? *destruction of Jerusalem*
- S. What did He do when He entered the temple? *cleansed*
- S. What did He say about the temple? *house of prayer*