

"The Switch and the Dimmer"

Text: Luke 19:28-40

1 Timothy 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

I'm sure you've all seen dimmer switches before. Most of you probably have them connected to lights in your homes. We have a couple on the back wall of the church. Unlike their ancestors (rheostats and potentiometers), today's dimmers are actually rather sophisticated electrical devices. Without getting into how modern dimmers use TRIACS to clip sine waves, we focus this morning on the two functions with which all are familiar: the switch function can turn your lights on and off, the dimmer function can adjust or vary them.

There is application in these little devices to life itself. Many things in life are binary; that is, they are either on or off, good or bad, right or wrong, yes or no. There are other elements of life that just aren't that way. They aren't good or bad, but good, better, best – too little, too much, or just right. Just as you wouldn't want a simple on/off switch to regulate the volume on your stereo (all or nothing), so in life there is a place for regulation and moderation. A simple example would be the difference between a glass of wine and a keg of wine.

This distinction also has extensive and profound application within the Christian religion, and it is often just here that the godless mount their most seductive attacks. They routinely try to turn the switch into the dimmer (the binary into the variable) and vice versa. In other words, where God has established a clear right or wrong, yes or no, good or bad, they install one of their sliding dimmer switches. Where God calls for moderation and Christian judgment, they opt for the on/off switch. Biblical doctrine is mostly binary – true/false, yes/no. The Bible teaches that Jesus rose from the dead. The godless maintain it's not that simple. It's good enough to dim that down and believe he rose symbolically in the hearts of those who knew him. The Bible says that God created the universe in six days. The devil's dimmer allows for theistic evolution, even outright rejection of God's creation account. The Bible says Christ was born of a virgin. Install the dimmer and now maybe it was just a young maiden.

This is the phenomenon we will examine of the basis of our text for this morning, the difference between the switch and the dimmer approach to

God's Word. Our text is the familiar account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and it is found in the Gospel of Luke, the Nineteenth Chapter:

ESV Luke 19:28-40 *And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" ³² So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "The Lord has need of it." ³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was drawing near--already on the way down the Mount of Olives--the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."*

These are God's words. In humble awe and thanksgiving for such a gift, and asking him to bless us through the study of these holy and perfect words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Our text quite obviously describes the event we have come to know as Palm Sunday, the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. Since we typically therefore use this text in Lent, at the beginning of Holy Week, it may come as something of a surprise to find it here at the beginning of Advent. Here, though, it is used as a reminder of Jesus' final return on Judgment Day – when all of creation will see him coming in unimaginable power, strength, and glory. It reminds us to look forward to that day when a much different Jesus will return to gather his children in his arms and carry us into the sublime presence of his heavenly Father.

Jesus wanted absolutely no one (either in the world of his day or in the generations who would follow) to have any doubt whatsoever

regarding who he really was and what he was actually doing. You will recall that up until this point in his ministry Jesus had forbidden his followers from shouting his praises or retelling the private miracles he had performed. Now, as he entered Jerusalem, he not only allowed his followers to praise him as a king, he defied the order of the Pharisees to make them stop. His answer to them was most powerful: **"I tell you if these were silent, the stones would cry out."** Since God himself had decreed it, nothing on earth could prevent the message from being told: This was no ordinary king. This was the Promised Messiah. Nothing more and nothing less.

Consider the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day described in our text. What was the conflict? On the one hand we hear Jesus' followers shouting out their songs of praise and worship: **"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"** On the other hand we hear the Pharisees demanding of Jesus: **"Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."** Just what was happening in our text? What was the underlying point of conflict and, more importantly, what can and should you and I learn from this confrontation 2000 years later?

Clearly the people were welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem as a king. Spreading palm branches and various articles of clothing on the road was an act reserved for royalty. Interestingly enough there is no indication that the scribes and Pharisees had much of a problem with Jesus as king – as an earthly ruler. In fact early in his ministry they tried to reach out to him on this basis. There is little doubt that had Jesus acknowledged and accepted the ongoing role of the scribes and Pharisees as the *religious* leaders, they would have been content to allow him to pursue whatever *political* or *secular* goals he wanted to achieve. What they objected to was the inclusion of religion: **"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"**

Their solution was to install a dimmer switch. The indication that they gave was that they believed that the people just went too far; that they got carried away in their enthusiasm. They therefore appealed to Jesus to dial down their enthusiasm. Yet the situation didn't call for a dimmer, it called for an on/off switch. The Pharisees had the terrible power to reject Jesus as the Messiah, but Jesus would not allow them to pretend that he was something other than what he claimed to be. He insisted on the on/off, yes/no switch. He was the Messiah or he wasn't. There was no third option. The Pharisees were either absolutely right or they were absolutely wrong.

The distinction here – together with the lessons we need to learn – could not possibly be more important.

Popular thought in our day is that there is no binary on/off – right/wrong switch. Today's society, for example, would declare that the Jewish leaders were right according to their beliefs, and the followers of Jesus were right according to their beliefs. Worse yet, our society would imagine that that would settle the matter. Their logic is mind numbing. There is such a thing as objective truth. That's not to say that everyone agrees as to what the truth is, but that doesn't change the fact that there is a reality that cannot be changed by popular opinion. The earth, for example, cannot be both round and flat at the same time. Those who believe it is flat don't just have "an alternate opinion." They are flat wrong.

Here is where the lesson of our text becomes so important to us today. Either the Jewish leaders were right in their beliefs about Jesus, or they were wrong. More to the point, either you and I are right about our beliefs concerning Jesus, or we are wrong. There is no "dimmer option" here. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Savior of the world, and the one and only path to heaven, or he is not. That's binary, not dimmable – which is exactly what the world does with Jesus. They accept a dialed back version of Jesus that casts him in the dim light of a good guy and moral example. Jesus himself, together with the whole of God's Word, does not allow for that option. He is what he himself claimed to be, or he is a liar and a fraud. He entered Jerusalem as the Son of God and Promised Messiah, or as a pretender and blasphemer.

The ramifications of this could not be more serious. You and I, together with every other man, woman, and child, will be right or wrong on Judgment Day. The result of being right will be an eternity in heaven. The result of being wrong will be an eternity of unimaginable terror and agony. And what exactly will "right" look like? Again, no dimmer here. "Right with God" means perfect, sinless. Anything less is wrong, and therefore damnable. To put it another way, dimmed down perfect (or "pretty good") = wrong. Better than most = wrong. Not as bad as some = wrong. Since we have all sinned, we have already failed the perfect test, so our one chance to be right is through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Such faith does not mean that we believe only that Jesus once existed or that he was a good guy. It means we believe that he made us right, made us perfect, by paying our sin debt and by crediting us with his perfection.

There are, in fact, many on/off, right/wrong switches in the Christian religion. Each of us will stand before a holy, righteous God, or we will not. Each of us will be saved by our works, or we will not. Each of us will be saved by God's grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ, or we will not. In fact *saving* faith itself is yes or no, on or off. Saving faith is not dimmable. You have it or you do not. Faith may be dimmed, but even the faintest glow of a dimmed faith is still *saving* faith.

To the godless it's all about sloppy sliders and dimmers. No absolute good and bad. No absolute right and wrong. No absolute truth and error.

With this in mind, have you ever stopped to ask yourself, "*What if I'm wrong?*" The key is to go to the right place for your answers. Our text, for example, is a great place to start. Note well how Jesus responded to the objection of the Pharisees. Jesus knew full well that to say the things his followers were saying to anyone other than the one true Savior God would indeed have been blasphemy of the highest order. Yet Jesus not only refused to rebuke his disciples, he informed his critics of the God-ordained *necessity* of their proclamation: "***I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.***" By this statement, not only was Jesus declaring that his disciples were absolutely right – both in what they said and in what they believed concerning Jesus – he is also telling *you* that *you* are absolutely right in also believing what you do about Jesus. The time had come to declare to the world the truth about who Jesus was. That truth would be told by Jesus' followers, or by the very rocks if those followers were silenced. God had decreed it.

The great lesson for you and me? We are NOT wrong. The Promised Messiah was and is Jesus Christ, and no man can be saved by any other means. The man, woman, child who trusts the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus Christ as the full payment for all of his sins has it exactly right, and the declaration of that fact will be made on Judgment Day. Every other path can lead only to eternal damnation. "***Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.***" (Mk. 16:16 ESV) So says our God, who is himself the very essence and definition of truth and life eternal. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 33:14-16** "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'"

^{ESV} **1 Thessalonians 3:9-13** For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? ¹¹ ¶ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

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The First Sunday in Advent – December 2, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 705 (Brown Hymnal)

"Come, O Long-Expected Jesus"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Jeremiah 33:14-16) We have entered a new church year, as well as the season of Advent. This is the time we celebrate the fulfillment of what was long ago foretold in our Old Testament Lesson by the Prophet Jeremiah. The promise made by God the Father has been honored. The promised Savior has been given as a gift to the world. What a privilege to know and believe this life-giving truth.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 24 (Supplement Page 25)

The New Testament Lesson: (1 Thessalonians 3:9-13) In our second reading Paul prays that those who read his letter might express their love for their God by showing their love for each other. While we know that such charitable feelings and actions do not represent the sum and substance of the holiday season we begin this morning, it is certainly right that Christians demonstrate their love for their Lord in their treatment of one another.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 63 (Red Hymnal)

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 19:28-40 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Switch and the Dimmer"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 528 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"If God Himself Be for Me"

The Prayers of the Day followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 56 (Stanzas 1 & 5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (40) Average (41) Wednesday (21)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Monday	-7:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Aaron Ude has returned the call to Trinity of Spokane. Our Redeemer's of Red Wing has called Pastor Ed Starkey. The Annual Christmas Concert at Immanuel College is scheduled for December 14.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet Tomorrow evening at 7pm.

Confirmation Class and Advent Service – Confirmation parents please note that Confirmation Class start time is again 5:45 for the next two Wednesdays, followed by our Advent Services at 7pm.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town from December 6-10. Next week's service will be conducted by laymen. Please note there will be Sunday School, but no Bible Class. Also, see the note below on the communion schedule for December.

Communion Schedule – Holy Communion is scheduled to be offered here at St Paul on Sunday, December 16 and Sunday, December 30.

Annual Meeting – Our Annual Voters Meeting is scheduled for two weeks from this morning, on December 16. The Women's Fellowship will also meet on that date. As is our custom, a fellowship meal is scheduled for after the worship service and prior to the meetings. This is the most important meeting of the year, as budgets are set and elections are held. Please make plans to attend.