

# Life Group Notes 3/29/2026 Mark Warren—Palm Sunday

No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at [tbeachhead@comcast.net](mailto:tbeachhead@comcast.net). Thank you for taking the time.

– Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.

**Remember:** Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our heart and guide our discussions.

**Leaders:** please pre-read these notes and choose the direction that is appropriate for your group. Scan the detailed questions that follow the AI-generated study questions, to see if you want to add any more detailed questions.

Be cognizant of your group's time and be sensitive. *Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.*

**Note:** I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 3/29. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another**

**Important:** At [the very end of these notes](#), I've included passages that were mentioned in this week's message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week.

Footnotes are added to supply detail, and to enhance the study. Use at your discretion, and know any questions are welcomed. This week's footnotes touch:

1. [On the actual dates of Palm Sunday and the resurrection, March 29 and April 5, in the year 33.](#)
2. [On cursing a fig tree and breba figs \(the figs of spring on new growth\).](#)
3. [On Bethany and Bethphage, cities on east side of the Mount of Olives.](#)
4. [On the crowds of Palm Sunday and Holy Week.](#)
5. [On why Jesus chose to come on a donkey.](#)

This format begins with an AI generated [summary of the notes](#), followed by AI generated [study questions](#). This week, [notes in full detail](#) can be found beginning on page 3: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section I: AI Summary

Here's "co-pilot's" AI summary of the Sermon Lifegroup Notes

The message centers on the tension between human expectations and God's deeper purposes. Palm Sunday reveals how easily people can celebrate the right person while misunderstanding what God is actually doing. The crowd welcomed Jesus with excitement and praise, expecting immediate change and visible victory, yet their expectations were shaped by personal hopes rather than spiritual reality.

Disappointment often follows when we pre-write the script for God. When outcomes don't match what we hoped for, emotions such as anger, confusion, and doubt can take

over. The message emphasizes that unmet expectations can blind us to God's work, especially when we focus only on external results instead of internal transformation. Jesus fully understood what lay ahead, yet He continued to trust the Father with the outcome. His journey shows that faith does not mean certainty about results, but confidence in God's character. Even when the path involved suffering and loss, there was a greater purpose unfolding that could not be seen in the moment.

The sermon highlights that God's work often looks different than expected. What appears to be delay, denial, or defeat may actually be protection, development, or redirection. God is less concerned with improving circumstances and more focused on forming hearts and transforming lives.

Ultimately, faith means holding expectations loosely while trusting God completely. The call is to move from demanding outcomes to open-handed trust, recognizing that God's plans are larger, deeper, and more eternal than immediate relief. True peace comes not from getting what we want, but from trusting God with what He is doing.

Highlighted footnotes:

The footnotes provide historical, cultural, and symbolic context that deepens the meaning of Palm Sunday. They explain that the events occurred on a specific historical timeline, emphasizing that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was not symbolic myth but a real moment anchored in history. This grounding reinforces the seriousness of the crowd's response and the weight of what was unfolding.

The discussion of the fig tree clarifies that Jesus' actions were not random or irrational. In the spring, fig trees were expected to show early fruit, and the absence of fruit symbolized disappointed expectations. This becomes a lived metaphor for Israel's spiritual condition and directly mirrors the sermon's theme of outward appearance without inward readiness.

The locations of Bethany and Bethphage add another layer of meaning. Both towns are associated with figs, one representing fruitfulness and the other immaturity. Jesus' movement through these places underscores the contrast between spiritual promise and spiritual barrenness, reinforcing the idea that expectations without substance lead to judgment and grief.

The description of the crowds explains how Jerusalem swelled with pilgrims during the feast season and why emotions ran so high. The same crowds that celebrated Jesus' arrival were easily swayed days later, revealing how quickly enthusiasm rooted in unmet expectations can turn into anger and rejection.

Finally, the symbolism of Jesus riding a donkey highlights the nature of His mission. A donkey signified peace, not war. By choosing it, Jesus was deliberately rejecting violent overthrow and instead offering reconciliation and peace. This choice directly contradicted the crowd's hopes for political liberation and explains why their expectations ultimately collapsed.

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## Section II: Study questions

### Facilitator Study Guide

**Theme:** Expectations, Disappointment, and God's Deeper Work

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Goal:** Help participants recognize how expectations shape faith, how disappointment reveals the heart, and how God works beyond visible outcomes.

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### **1. Welcome & Framing (5 minutes)**

**Facilitator Purpose:**

Set a reflective, safe tone. This is not a debate or a teaching lecture, but a guided discovery.

**Opening Prompt (optional):**

“Today we’re looking beneath the surface of Palm Sunday—at what people expected, what they missed, and how that still happens to us.”

**Ground Rule Reminder:**

Encourage listening, honesty, and grace. Some reflections may touch loss, disappointment, or grief.

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### **2. Historical & Emotional Context (10 minutes)**

**Facilitator Insight:**

The footnotes emphasize that Palm Sunday happened in real time, with real people, real pressure, and real emotional intensity. This matters because disappointment doesn’t happen in theory—it happens in lived moments.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you think it matters that these events happened in a specific historical moment and not “once upon a time”?
- How do large crowds and shared emotions amplify expectations?
- Have you noticed how quickly public excitement can turn into frustration or anger?

**Facilitator Note:**

Gently steer away from politics or modern comparisons unless the group naturally connects them meaningfully.

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### **3. The Fig Tree: Expectations Without Fruit (10 minutes)**

**Facilitator Insight:**

The fig imagery highlights a mismatch between appearance and reality—leaves without fruit. The expectation was reasonable, but the disappointment was revealing.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why do unmet expectations hurt more when we feel justified in having them?
- Where do we see “leaves without fruit” in spiritual life—activity without depth?
- Have you ever realized that your disappointment exposed something about what you were really trusting?

**Facilitator Tip:**

This is a good moment to normalize struggle. Avoid “fixing” responses—listen.

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### **4. Place & Movement: Promise vs. Readiness (10 minutes)**

**Facilitator Insight:**

The locations Jesus passed through symbolized fruitfulness and immaturity. Movement matters—Jesus did not stay where expectations were shallow.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What does it mean to be near spiritual promise but not ready to receive it?
- Can you think of a time when you were close to growth but not prepared for it?
- How does God sometimes move us through disappointment to mature us?

**Facilitator Note:**

If the group feels stuck, reframe: “What helps a person move from surface faith to deeper trust?”

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**5. The Crowd Turn: When Expectations Collapse (10 minutes)****Facilitator Insight:**

The same crowd that celebrated later rejected. The footnotes stress how fast enthusiasm can dissolve when expectations aren't met.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why is disappointment often followed by blame?
- What happens to faith when it is built primarily on outcomes?
- How do we protect our hearts from letting unmet expectations define our view of God?

**Facilitator Caution:**

Some participants may carry deep disappointment with God. Affirm honesty without reinforcing hopelessness.

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**6. The Donkey: Peace vs. Control (10 minutes)****Facilitator Insight:**

The donkey represents peace, humility, and a different kind of victory. The crowd wanted power; Jesus offered transformation.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why do we often prefer control and immediate change over peace and transformation?
- How can peace feel disappointing when we want justice, relief, or rescue?
- Where might God be offering peace when we are demanding resolution?

**Facilitator Prompt:**

“Is it possible to reject peace because it doesn't match our pain?”

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**7. Integration & Application (5 minutes)****Facilitator Wrap-Up Questions:**

- What expectation do you need to hold more loosely right now?
- Where might God be working beneath the surface rather than fixing the situation?
- What would trusting God with the outcome look like this week?

**Optional Closing Prayer Prompt:**

Invite participants to silently name one expectation they are surrendering.

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**Facilitator Summary (for your preparation)**

- Expectations shape interpretation.
- Disappointment reveals attachment.
- God often works deeper than outcomes.

- Peace may arrive disguised as delay or loss.
- Faith grows when expectations are open-handed.

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### Section III: Complete study notes

Pastor Mark began again by saying, “You are not here by accident. Indeed God has drawn you here for a reason.”

1. Do you agree?
2. What brought you to GCC?
3. Do you know the purpose?
4. Can you state one principle that you learned from this message?

Pastor Mark points out that Palm Sunday is an historical event (see [footnote 1 below](#).) History suggests this took place on a specific date. Using our calendar, as it has been corrected to the day, a good guess for the year, some even claim the best guess, is 33 AD.

1. Collectively, recall the events of the day.
2. Where did the donkey come from?
3. Why did the priests complain?
4. How many of the days of Holy Week can you identify by its events?

Pastor opens with this question: Have you ever wanted something so badly, you hoped and wished, you might have even prayed for it, only to be disappointed, because it did not happen? Have you had expectations that were disappointed?

1. Answer him.
2. What happened to your emotional state?
3. Did you get angry?
4. How do you approach misplaced expectations?

Turn to Luke 19:<sup>28</sup>*After Jesus had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup>As He approached Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, He sent out two of His disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’”*

<sup>32</sup>*So those who were sent went out and found it just as Jesus had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked, “Why are you untying the colt?”*

<sup>34</sup>*“The Lord needs it,” they answered. <sup>35</sup>Then they led the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks over it, and put Jesus on it.*

<sup>36</sup>*As He rode along, the people spread their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup>And as He approached the descent from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of disciples began to praise God joyfully in a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen:*

<sup>38</sup>*“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

<sup>39</sup>*But some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!”*

<sup>40</sup>*“I tell you,” He answered, “if they remain silent, the very stones will cry out.”*

<sup>41</sup>*As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it <sup>42</sup>and said, “If only you had known on this day what would bring you peace! But now it is hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup>For the days will come upon you when your enemies will barricade you and surround you and hem you in on every side. <sup>44</sup>They will level you to the ground—you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”*

1. What do you see?

2. Imagine you had been the one to take the donkey. How would you feel, when you got asked why you're taking it?
3. Now look at what the crowds are proclaiming in verses 37 and 38. Put their proclamations in your own words, as if it were today.
4. What is the crowd celebrating?
5. What is the crowd expecting, and why?
6. Mark says, "The crowd is celebrating the right person for the wrong reason." Explain.
7. Examine Jesus' words in verses 42-44. "<sup>42</sup>[Jesus wept] and said, "If only you had known on this day what would bring you peace! But now it is hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup>For the days will come upon you when your enemies will barricade you and surround you and hem you in on every side. <sup>44</sup>They will level you to the ground—you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God." Explain why Jesus wept.
8. What were Jesus' expectations? Explain.
9. (Scribe's note: This is the second time in two weeks Jesus wept...See John 11:35. Why did He weep in Bethany two weeks earlier?)
10. Note the level of emotion in the crowd. Describe that same crowds coming emotions in six days. How did it change so quickly.
11. Review the beginning of Jesus' ministry, as John related it in John 2:<sup>23</sup>*While He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the signs He was doing and believed in His name.*<sup>24</sup>*But Jesus did not entrust Himself to them, for He knew them all.* <sup>25</sup>*He did not need any testimony about man, for He knew what was in a man.* What do you see?
12. How did John foreshadow this His last Sunday? Did He entrust Himself to them this time? Explain.
13. Mark says, "Our expectations can blind us to what God is actually doing." Explain.
14. Do you have a testimony?
15. Look up Zechariah 9:<sup>9</sup>*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* <sup>10</sup>*And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem, and the bow of war will be broken. Then He will proclaim peace to the nations.* What do you see?
16. Look at [footnote 5, below](#). Explain the donkey and not the horse.
17. Is Jesus announcing peace or war?
18. Why is the answer to that question disappointing to expectations of deliverance from Rome?
19. What were their expectations? Why should Zechariah's promise have been a direct contradiction to those expectations for the discerning?
20. To whom is Jesus extending His offer of peace? Why is that disappointing to those enslaved by Rome?
21. Have you ever *not* wanted peace with an adversary who did you or your family harm?
22. Explain how the Jews missed what God was doing through Zechariah and ultimately Jesus.

Pastor says, "When we pre-write the script for God we miss what He is actually doing."

1. Explain.
2. What should we do, instead?
3. Does this remind you of any moment where you were surprised at the turn of events?

4. Describe a time where you prayed concerning an issue and the opposite occurred. What did that do to you and how did it impact your faith?
5. Should we ever stop praying for the impossible? For healing?

Look up Luke 9:<sup>30</sup>*Suddenly two men, Moses and Elijah, began talking with Jesus.* <sup>31</sup>*They appeared in glory and spoke about His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

1. This took place on the Mountain of Transfiguration. What did Jesus know weeks before Holy Week? What were His expectations from this day forward?
2. Explain why God sent Moses and Elijah?
3. Look again at Hebrews 12: <sup>2</sup>*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* When do you suppose that joy might have been set before Him? What/who was that joy?

Luke 22:<sup>41</sup>*And He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, where He knelt down and prayed,* <sup>42</sup> *"Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me. Yet not My will, but Yours be done."* <sup>43</sup>*Then an angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him.*

1. Given what He already knew, what were Jesus' expectations? Then why pray?
2. Explain the presence of angels when He prayed.
3. Do you expect angels when you pray?
4. How many times can you name in the biblical narrative where angels visit people while they are in prayer?

Pastor spoke these words: "It's interesting. We pray for healing, and sometimes it does not look like recovery, but it does look like eternity. We blame God because He did not do what we wanted, but sometimes God does His best work in the things we do not expect." And he related the testimony of a mother who prayed earnestly for her daughter to be healed and not too long ago her daughter passed away. So, Pastor asked, "How is it that you prayed and believed that God would heal her, yet God didn't heal her," and the mother answered, "She experienced her ultimate healing." He explains, there is this dynamic that says, "God CAN and WILL do these things, but we are still going to trust Him with the outcome." The mother had said, "There was something happening in my daughter's heart in the last days of her life that I thought I would never see."

1. Be gentle and mindful in this discussion: What do you see?
2. Does this evoke new thoughts? Do you have a testimony?
3. What does the mother's explanation do for us, who struggle?
4. Pastor says, "External expectations can crowd out spiritual reality." Explain.
5. Relate this to the expectations of the crowds in Jerusalem 1,933 years ago.
6. Relate this to the expectations of His most intimate disciples 1,933 years ago.
7. Is this an apt comparison? Explain.
8. What were the crowds and the disciples missing?
9. Why did the cross look like the defeat of all expectations?
10. What changed that "look?"
11. Think of this: Why were the disciples, especially Peter, James and John, only looking at the externals?
12. What were Peter, James and John doing while Jesus was getting informed by Moses and Elijah on the mountain?
13. Have you ever been caught napping, when you could have been paying attention?
14. What might have been different, had they stayed awake with Jesus?
15. With this perspective, explain why Peter denied that he knew Jesus three times?
16. What was dominating his thinking? Can you relate to Peter here?

17. Have you ever run out of trust, and been ruled by fear?

18. What brings you back into a relationship of trust?

19. Look back at Luke [19:42, above](#), *“If only you had known on this day what would bring you peace! But now it is hidden from your eyes.”* How might they all have known?

20. How was it hidden? Again, what were they looking for?

21. For whose benefit was it hidden from their eyes?

Pastor asks, “What if God closed that door to protect you? What if that delay was to develop you? What if that ‘No,’ was to redirect you to something better?”

1. Answer him.

2. He says, “Sometimes a relationship does not develop. A person doesn’t change. The situation is not what you hoped for.” Do you have a testimony?

3. What steps do you take when this arises?

4. Pastor says, “God’s plans are bigger than our immediate outcome.” Explain.

5. How great can we become, if God is invested in our outcome?

6. Pastor says, “The crowd wanted immediate change, and Jesus was working out the Eternal Plan. They wanted Rome overthrown. Jesus was overthrowing sin and death.” Explain. What does this tell us?

7. “Faith means trusting God with the outcome.” What does this mean?

8. How does it work in practical steps?

9. “God isn’t about improving your situation. He’s about forming and transforming us.” What does this explain?

Pastor begins to conclude, saying, “I would encourage us to begin to walk in faith. Faith means we trust God with the outcomes, not knowing always in advance what the full outcome is. Hopes and dreams are good. Expectations loosely held, inform and train.”

1. Explain pastor’s closed fist/open palms illustration.

2. Which is your tendency? Open palmed faith or closed fist demands?

“We want to come out of today not falling into the trap of the early believers who only saw the world around them. We want to trust God in the deeper things.”

1. Has this helped you?

2. What is your next step?

**Take the time to pray.**

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### Follow up application:

1. Use the [Soap study below](#) to pursue your own understanding.

2. Jot down your expectations for the next five years...make predictions, and save the paper or the document somewhere safe.

3. Jot down your next steps, and what you are preparing yourself for and how.

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### Footnotes:

1. **On the actual dates of Palm Sunday and the Resurrection, March 29 and April 5, in the year of Our Lord 33**—There are many debates and speculations available for the enthusiast on the net as to the actual dates these historic events took place. Dates are fixed according to known events, such as the death of Herod, or the Rise of Augustus. Luke is famous for setting the events he describes with reference to known events, governors and laws. The best I’ve found is the above date, which turns out to be seven years from today, ironically...The dates for Palm Sunday and the resurrection match this year’s dates. People who enjoy the speculation of Young Earth Creationists note with soberness that this time ends the sixth millennium since God said, “Let there be...” All that is left is a seven year

period of unknowns and guesswork, and then a New Millennium where a long looked for Reign could be established. A message like today's will help those who engage in this kind of thinking...unless! Some debate, too, of the actual days of the week. How could the disciples eat the Passover on Thursday, when the gospels tell us that Friday was "the day of preparation?" It turns out with evidence that Galileans could actually have been using a different calendar than that which was followed in Jerusalem, and would therefore have eaten the Passover one day ahead of the priests.

2. **On cursing a fig tree and breba figs (the figs of spring on old growth)**—I One of the events of the week, the Monday following Palm Sunday, in fact, Jesus cursed a fig tree on his way into town to throw the money changers out of the temple. In Mark 11 it looks like this: <sup>12</sup>*The next day, when they had left Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup>Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if there was any fruit on it. But when He reached it, He found nothing on it except leaves, since it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup>Then He said to the tree, "May no one ever eat of your fruit again." And His disciples heard this statement.* Being from New England originally, and never having seen a fig tree, even when I lived in Nazareth, I have never understood why Jesus would want a fig from a tree that bears fruit in the late summer and early fall. It turns out, significantly, that the fig tree actually bears an early crop, called the "breba fig." A breba is a fig that develops in the spring on a common fig tree, on the previous year's shoot growth. In contrast, the main fig crop develops on the current year's shoot growth and ripens in late summer or fall. Jesus was expecting the fig to bear fruit common to the spring, and his expectations were disappointed. Put that in the context of Pastor Mark's message this week.
3. **On Bethany and Bethphage, cities on east side of the Mount of Olives**—There are two towns on the eastern slope of the mouth of olives, over the crest of the hill from Jerusalem. The first, at the base of the eastern slope, is Bethany, where Lazarus and his sisters dwelt, and to where Jesus and the disciples retreated during Holy Week. The Hebrew name, Bethany, means "House of Figs." Further up the hill is Bethphage, where the disciples found the donkey tied. Bethphage, the Hebrew name, means, perhaps significantly, the *House of Unripe Figs*. This is ostensibly where the fig tree Jesus cursed would have been.
4. **On the crowds of Palm Sunday and Holy Week**—The population of Jewish faithful were called to appear before the Lord at the Temple three times a year: Passover, Pentecost and for the fall feasts. As Jesus and His parents did when he was twelve, caravans of pilgrims came early to find room and to set up for the feasts of Passover and of unleavened bread that followed. What is significant about the crowds is the turn of their moods from the triumphal Sunday of their arrival in town, to their anger displayed and so easily manipulated the following Friday.
5. **On why Jesus chose to come on a donkey**—The donkey is significant in Zechariah and in the fulfillment, because a king rides a donkey into the city at a time of peace. The horse is for times of war. Jesus did not come to declare war on Rome, but peace to all who are afar off. In that context, read Zechariah's prophecy again from 9: <sup>9</sup>*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! **Shout in triumph, O Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.** <sup>10</sup>*And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem, and the bow of war will be broken.* The latter are all instruments of war.*

**For further study:**

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP method** (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—Write what God is saying. / **P**ray—Write what your response is.) to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: Mark 11:12-14 (See footnote 2 above)

Tuesday: Mark 11:20-25

Wednesday: Luke 19:41-44

Thursday: Luke 19:38-40

Friday: Luke 9:30-31

Saturday: Luke 22:41-43

Sunday: Hebrews 12:2

Once again, some passages suggested here have more than the usual number of verses. This is not to increase the burden but to provide clarity of context. Pick the verses that speak to you most clearly, and run these through the SOAP steps.