

Palm Sunday - Fickle or Focused

One of the engaging things about the Easter season is that it spans a number of very significant events. In our area, Christmas is a one day event (even though we like to surround it with other festivities), Thanksgiving and New Years are typically celebrated for one day. But, Easter includes Palm Sunday, Maundy Tuesday (when Christ gave His new *mandatum*, or new commandment to love one another), Good Wednesday, and the Resurrection occurred over the course of a whole week.¹ Their commemoration lends itself for contemplation of the significance of the greatest event in all eternity that secured the redemption of all creation and our justification. So, on Palm Sunday, it is good to take a moment to set ourselves to prepare for the week to come.

This reminds me of a casual remark I overheard in a Christian bookstore. A lady talking to her friend about a preacher described him as an anointed speaker. Does that possibly suggest that the power of the message depends only on the one who is sharing the message? Jesus had the power of the Spirit without measure, and yet people could and *did* resist *Him*. It made me think of how people should then be just as expected to have anointed *ears*. Just as we might count on a preacher being prayed up and prepared to preach, people should be prayed up and prepared to listen for God's Word. That is something like how we might think of Palm Sunday. It is a time for us to start building up momentum to appreciate the significance of the rest of the Easter season.

1. The call for salvation -

David wrote in Psalm 118:19-26 this prophetic description of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday before His crucifixion –

¹The world knows these as Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Ps 118:19-26 Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, *and* I will praise the LORD:

20This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.

21I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.

22The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head *stone* of the corner.

23This is the LORD'S doing; it *is* marvellous in our eyes.

24This *is* the day *which* the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

25Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.

26Blessed *be* he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.

The [worshipful] cry of the multitudes as they thronged in our Lord's triumphal procession into Jerusalem was taken from this Psalm, from which they were accustomed to recite Ps 118:25-26 at the Feast of Tabernacles. On that occasion the great Hallel [or praise], consisting of Psalms 113-118 was chanted by one of the priests, and at certain intervals the multitudes joined in the responses, waving their branches of willow and palm, and shouting as they waved them, Hallelujah, or Hosannah, or, "O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity." This was done at the recitation of Ps 118:1,29 ...On each of the seven days during which the feast lasted the people thronged the court of the temple, and went in procession about the altar, setting their boughs bending towards it; the trumpets sounding as they shouted Hosannah. But on the seventh day they marched seven times

round the altar, [while shouting] the great Hosannah to the sound of the trumpets of the Levites (Lightfoot, Temple Service, 16. 2). [Every child] who could wave the palm branches were expected to take part in the solemnity...William Aldis Wright, in "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible," 1863.

— Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*

We might use the exclamation *hallelujah*, but we don't really use *hosanna*. We recognize *hosanna* as a religious word, but unless you got it in a Bible lesson you wouldn't know that what it specifically means is *save us now*, or, *please save us*. When you go to preachers' conferences, depending on where the preachers are coming from, you might hear someone say "Amen, that's right," or "come on, now." But when David wrote, he knew the people were going to call out to Jesus for salvation and deliverance when the King of kings was going to enter the Holy city.

Opening the gates of righteousness, Jesus, the Stone which would be rejected, would become the Chief Cornerstone. He would enter Jerusalem to present Himself as the King of Israel and the people would shout out "Save now...O LORD... O LORD...send now prosperity." They would shout their prayer to God to save them *now*. Save now, or Hosanna, was a cry of expectation. Send now was a request to God to expedite that salvation.

John 12:12-15 On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,
13Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed *is* the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

14And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written,

15Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting

on an ass's colt.

Matt 21:9-11 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

10And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

11And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Mark 11:9-10 And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord:

10Blessed *be* the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.

According to the Psalm, they were supposed to shout, "Blessed *be* he that cometh in the name of the LORD"

John records them adding the words, "Blessed ***is the King of Israel*** that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Matthew records them adding the words, "Hosanna **to the Son of David**: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Ps 132:11 The LORD hath sworn *in* truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.

Mark records the added words, "Hosanna **to the Son of David**: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" and also "**Blessed *be* the kingdom of our father David**, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.

By adding on the words, *King of Israel, Son of David, kingdom of our father David*, they are indicating that their intent was to recognize *Jesus* as the fulfillment of the promise for a king from the line of David, a restoration of His

throne.

Christ's entry into Jerusalem is commonly known as The Triumphal Entry.

“Triumphal entries” were common in the ancient world. A conquering hero or king would return to his city, bringing the spoils of his battles and stories of conquest. This imagery would not be missed. When John says that the crowd “went out to meet him,” this is a common expression used for cities meeting their triumphant, returning king. In a Jewish context, “Hosanna” was used to greet such incoming kings (2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26). In fact, Jewish culture adopted these forms of “royal welcomes.”

— Gary Burge, NIV Application Commentary

As triumphs went, this was almost like calling a children's play a Broadway production. Christ was indeed presenting Himself to be King for Israel in the full knowledge that He would be rejected, but it would be *after* His triumphal entry that He would actually secure the triumph. He did present himself as the world would expect a king to come. But, just as His birth was humble so was His presentation humble.

Jesus was walking a dangerous path, and he knew it. There were other Palm Sundays. On one occasion Theodus of Jordan marched into Jerusalem and led hundreds of followers out into the hills where he claimed he would repeat the miracles of Elijah. On that occasion the soldiers rode out and slaughtered 400 of Theodus' followers. They brought back his head and stuck it on the Garrison wall as a lesson to all would-be Messiahs. Jesus knew he was walking a dangerous path. The crowd knew it too. They chanted, "Hosannah

! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." This psalm was always used at the feast of Tabernacles and the feast of Passover. At both these festivals the Jews praised God for setting them free from slavery in Egypt. After they had been conquered by other nations, these festivals became times of prayer for freedom. Prayer that God would act again in a mighty and spectacular way - plagues, pillars of fire and smoke, parting of the sea, miraculous food in the desert, water from a rock - and set them free again. In Jesus' day, the fervent prayer was for freedom from the Roman empire, the occupying power. Freedom from crippling taxes and all kinds of oppression.

For contemporary Roman observers, the procession would have [reminded] them of the Roman triumph, when the triumphator lay down his arms and wore the toga, the civilian garment of peace that might be ornamented with emblems of the palm. A triumph was a very specific religious and civil ritual that only the Roman senate could bestow on a general after a great victory where he would ascend the Capitoline hill and offer a sacrifice to Jupiter.

Christian author Philip Yancey, in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, described Palm Sunday this way: "The triumphal entry has about it an aura of ambivalence, and as I read all the accounts together, [as] I imagine a Roman officer galloping up to check on the disturbance. He has attended processions in Rome, where they do it right. The conquering general sits in a chariot of gold, with stallions straining at the reins and wheel spikes flashing in the sunlight. Behind him, officers in polished armor display banners captured

from vanquished armies. At the rear comes a ragtag procession of slaves and prisoners in chains, living proof of what happens to those who defy Rome. "In Jesus' triumphal entry, the adoring crowd makes up the ragtag procession: the lame, the blind, the children, the peasants from Galilee and Bethany. When the officer looks for the object of their attention he spies a forlorn figure, weeping, riding on no stallion or chariot but on the back of a baby donkey, a borrowed coat draped across its backbone serving as his saddle."

— What the Master Needs sermon by Pat Cook, Luke 19:28-19:38 - SermonCentral.com

This procession was founded on an attitude of desperation for a king. The followers of Herod and the Sadducees would see this as a threat to the Roman backed peace. The Pharisees could have seen this as an opportunity to throw off the power of Rome, Herod, and the Sadducees. The zealots would see this as an opportunity to restore the independence of Israel. Where was His army? Where were the captives? If the word triumph could be applied to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, it would be because of the victory He was about to have in leading captivity captive. Instead of the Roman senate choosing Him, it would be God the Father choosing Him. Instead of a sacrifice to the Roman gods, Jesus would present Himself as the sacrifice to God. Instead of a powerful army, Jesus would come with a kingdom of redeemed sinners. Instead of being victorious in a great war, Jesus would be victorious over death.

2. The fickleness of the masses -

The mass reception of Jesus was making the Pharisees' plans to kill Jesus impossible. They were becoming increasingly apprehensive. They feared He would begin leading a band of

freedom fighters to free the people from their present authorities and leaders, both Roman and Jewish. They were anxious because their previous attempts to stop Him had meet with failure and their time to stop Him was getting nearly gone. So they continued "looking for some crafty way to arrest Jesus and kill Him. But not during the Feast, they said, or the people may riot (Mark 14:1-2). Pessimistically they acknowledged, "the whole world has gone after Him." Though they thought He was winning over the world, the irony is, most of those people did not really believe in Jesus. The dark background of hate in the hearts of the unscrupulous leaders makes the Palm Sunday spectacle all the more dramatic. It also indicates the gulf dug by those who should have been the most ready to receive Jesus.

[People are fickle, they change their minds and hearts so easily.]

[Gene Smith wrote a book called], *When The Cheering Stopped*. The book told of Woodrow Wilson, and the events surrounding WWI. Upon the end of the war, people were optimistic. They believed that the last war had been fought. The dream was that the world had at last been made safe, and the way had been paved for democracy and freedom everywhere. When Woodrow Wilson paid his first visit to Europe, he was greeted by large crowds, and he was cheered every place he went. In many people's eyes he was more popular than the greatest war heroes throughout the land. He was viewed as an icon of hope. In all, the cheering lasted for about a year. Then it began to stop. The political leaders throughout Europe were interested more in their own agendas than a lasting

peace, and the people slowly lost hope. On the home front, Wilson met opposition in the Senate, and his League of Nations was never ratified. Under tremendous stress, his health began to fail. In the next election, his party lost. Woodrow Wilson, who almost two years earlier was heralded as a hero, came to his last days as a broken and defeated man.

— Why Did The Cheering Stop sermon, Why Did The Cheering Stop sermon by David Taylor, Luke 19:29-19:44 - SermonCentral.com

John 19:12-15 And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.

13When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.

14And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!

15But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

The people were right to call out Hosanna, but they were anything but sincere. This was a moment of convenience for them. The same people who shouted Hosanna on Sunday were crying out Crucify him on Wednesday.

3. The focus of the faithful -

At this point, we need to turn to consider the focus of the faithful. In contrast to the fickle faithless, *we*, as a people of faith, have to be ready to do better. Jesus' purpose in riding into Jerusalem was to make public His claim

to be their Messiah and King of Israel in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Matthew says that the King coming on the foal of a donkey was an exact fulfillment of Zechariah

Zech 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Jesus rode into His capital city as a conquering King and was hailed by the people as such, in the manner of the day. The streets of Jerusalem, the royal city, were open to Him, and like a king He ascended to His palace, not a temporal palace but the temple, because *His* is a spiritual kingdom. No longer does He tell His disciples to be quiet about Him. At one point, before it was time to present Himself completely, Jesus told His disciples at times to not reveal Him.

Matt 16:20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

But now things are different.

Luke 19:39-40 And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.

40And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

We can see the call for salvation the people were looking for. We can see how the same people were fickle and turned on Jesus. But the focus of the faithful does not appear on that first Palm Sunday. Where *does* it appear? It is for here and now, in *our* day, that we think of the focus of the faithful. Jesus came as King but was not received as such.

The story of the triumphal entry

is one of contrasts, and those contrasts contain applications to believers. It is the story of the King who came as a lowly servant on a donkey, not a prancing steed, not in royal robes, but on the clothes of the poor and humble. Jesus Christ comes not to conquer by force as earthly kings but by love, grace, mercy, and His own sacrifice for His people. His is not a kingdom of armies and splendor but of lowliness and servanthood. He conquers not nations but hearts and minds. His message is one of peace with God, not of temporal peace. If Jesus has made a triumphal entry into our hearts, He reigns there in peace and love. As His followers, we exhibit those same qualities, and the world sees the true King living and reigning in triumph in us.

<http://www.gotquestions.org/triumphal-entry.html>

Matt 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.

Rev 3:20-22 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Is our exercise of Christianity only for the moment while it seems to get us what we want, or are we in it for the long haul? Are we fickle, or focused and faithful? Are we ready to stand with

Christ serving Him, or are we chasing the world, grabbing for all we can get? Is Jesus the *Lord* of your life?

1. The call for salvation - Ps 118:19-26, John 12:12-15, Matt 21:9-11, Mark 11:9-10, Ps 132:11
2. The fickleness of the masses - John 19:12-15
3. The focus of the faithful - Zech 9:9, Matt 16:20, Luke 19:39-40, Matt 15:8, Rev 3:20-22