

1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples² and said to them, Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it.³ If anyone says to you, Why are you doing this? say, The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.⁴ And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it.⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, What are you doing, untying the colt?⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go.⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.⁸ And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields.⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest! ¹¹ And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. ESV.

Jesus mounts the animal in Bethany and rides the miles to Jerusalem. He is followed by the men who have been with him for the last nine months. This group also includes the people who have gone there to look for him, and the crowds who leave their homes at the roadside and walk behind him on the way. Christ wears no special regal clothes; no crown on his head, and as he enters Jerusalem there is no official delegation of priests and Pharisees and Romans to welcome him. The city made no effort to receive him.

For the last stretch of the journey, as the road sweeps down to the valley of the Kidron, the crowds were large. The whole city rang with the shouts announcing that Jesus of Nazareth had arrived there. "The Lord Jesus had come to Jerusalem to die, and he desired that all Jerusalem should know it . . . he made a public entry into Jerusalem. He drew the attention of the rulers, and priests, and elders, and Scribes, and Greeks, and Romans to himself. He knew that the most awesome event that would ever happen in this world was about to take place. The eternal Son of God was about to suffer in the stead of sinful men; the great sacrifice for sin was about to be offered up; the great Passover Lamb about to be slain; the great atonement for a world's sin about to be made. He therefore ordered it so that his death was eminently a public death. He overruled things in such a way that the eyes of all Jerusalem were fixed on him, and when he died, he died before many witnesses" (J.C.Ryle, "Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Mark," p. 227). These things weren't done in a corner, said the apostles.

How it all began we can't tell, but for the final mile Jesus was overwhelmed by the surge of his enthusiastic followers. As the procession grew it took on a real festival character. The excited people, especially the thousands from Galilee present, took palms off the trees and the long grass from the fields. They waved them in the air and they threw them on the road in front of his donkey. Then they even took their cloaks off and threw them down carpeting the road ahead with them - just as when Jesus started the journey in Bethany the disciples had thrown their coats on the back of the beast as a makeshift saddle for Jesus. The whole road was filled with excitement.

To cast flowers, or garlands, or evergreens, before a warrior returning from victory, or a king entering into his kingdom, was a common way of testifying joyful and triumphant feeling. Thus Josephus says, that Alexander and Agrippa were received at Jerusalem. So in our own land, some of the most acceptable tokens of rejoicing ever bestowed upon Washington were garlands of roses scattered in his path by children. So the path of Lafayette was often strewn with flowers, as a mark of respect and of a nation's gratitude. John says, Jn 12:13, that these branches were branches of the palm-tree. The palm was an emblem of joy and victory. It was used by the Roman soldiers as well as the Jews, as a symbol of peace.

Strictly speaking, the palm-tree has no branches; but at the summit, from forty to eighty twigs, or leaf-stalks, spring forth. The leaves are set around the trunk in circles of about six. The lower row is of great length, and the vast leaves bend themselves in a curve towards the earth; as the circle ascend, the leaves are shorter. In the month of February, there sprout from between the junctures of the lower stalks and the trunk little scales, which develop a kind of bud, the germ of the coming fruit. These germs are contained in a thick and tough skin, not unlike leather. According to one account, a single tree in Barbary and Egypt bears from fifteen to twenty large clusters of dates, weighing from fifteen to twenty pounds each. The palm-tree lives more than two hundred years, and is most productive from the thirtieth until the eightieth year. The

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Arabs speak of two hundred and sixty uses to which the different parts of the palm-tree are applied.

Jesus did nothing to silence the crowds. He who had spoken and the storm and sea had obeyed him, uttered not a word to tone down these cheers. In fact he said, "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." It was a stirring sight. The mighty deeds of the Lord Jesus which had brought health and happiness to so many homes were being publicly praised. Yet this account is not in the Bible in order to make you feel glad that Jesus, just before he was crucified, did at least receive a little honor. This is not an interesting story that has been recorded for our entertainment. We are not supposed to look back and say, "Well, even though they finally killed him, they did make him King for a day. That must have been some consolation for him."

This was the beginning of a week which would end in terrible torment and death, and the entry into Jerusalem makes its own contribution to Jesus' suffering. Where do we see this? In two places in particular

1. It must have pained the Lord to see how ignorant these people were concerning the Scriptures.

The crowds knew that one day someone great would enter Jerusalem, but they had little understanding of who and why. So they quoted the Scriptures; they took psalm and prophet and shouted it out as Jesus passed by, but only in so far as the words were compatible with their own notions. They cried three phrases; the first was "Hosanna" and "Hosanna in the highest" - the word means "Save, I pray . . . from the highest heaven," but the Lord Jesus is the only man who because of his perfection needed no salvation. They were certainly not crying for their own salvation. This was religion used to express nationalistic excitement. We find it on great state occasions when at all other times Almighty God and his law and grace are ignored. The second phrase they shouted was, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" That is a quotation from Psalm 118, verses 25&26. Those words do not refer to the Messiah but to the pilgrim who has journeyed up to Jerusalem and has entered the temple. "May he

be blessed in God's name," is the meaning, but Jesus is not a pilgrim; he is the one who guides us pilgrims through this barren land to our home. The third phrase they shouted out was, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" and that is no part of Psalm 118 or of any psalm. The reference to 'our father David' isn't found anywhere in the Bible. What the Lord Jesus preached about was the kingdom of God, not about the "coming kingdom of our father David." The mob was longing for deliverance from Roman oppression; it was muddled in its understanding of Jesus and his mission. The general impression the crowd gave was this; they saw Jesus joining them in coming to a feast in their wonderful temple and city Jerusalem. He was with them on pilgrimage. They didn't see his entry as that of the Messianic king they were not connecting the biblical dots as we have so often mentioned.

These crowds took from the Bible what pleased them and ignored the rest, and you can't do that because the Scriptures are one woven whole. They are one piece and seamless. If you dismember them then Jesus' own soul suffers. It is the same as tearing him apart. "A rent in the body of the Bible, which is God's Word made Scripture, is equivalent to a dismemberment of Christ's body, which is the Word of God made flesh" (Klaas Schilder). Yet religion in our land, in days when a hundred times more people attended church than they do today, has been characterized by this heresy.

Jesus said that the Scripture cannot be broken. He triumphed in temptation by saying of passages of the book of Deuteronomy, "It is written." That was enough. He said, "Your word is truth." He corrected religious fallacies of his day but never the pervasive view that the Scriptures were God-breathed, not that they contained the words of God but that they were the Word of God.

The mob in Jerusalem as every other mob would have bouts of excitement and enthusiasm about religion. This was one such occasion, but they didn't know what the Scripture taught, and they didn't know why Jesus had come into Jerusalem, and their shouts of Scriptures in this demonstration of carnal zeal grieved the Saviour.

2. It must have pained the Lord to see the cause for their praise.

Luke tells us, that "the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen" (Lk. 19:37). Their admiration was based on the miracles. They accepted them for their face value and not for their real meaning. They enjoyed the benefits they brought but not the implications of the deity of the one who brought them. Of course Christ had shown great power in healing the sick and raising the dead but that power was not basic neither was it primary. The miracles were not the all important thing; they were signs that confirmed who Jesus was and that his claims were true. They weren't ends in themselves; they were prophecies pointing away from the visible sign to the living Word. "This is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Bow to him. Trust in him. Love and serve him. Live for him." That is what these signs are saying. They were intended to lead people's thoughts from the primitive sign to the vision of faith. Remember Doubting Thomas? When he finally saw the miracle of the resurrected Lord he wasn't interested in touching the nail marks in the hands of Jesus. Thomas fell before him and cried, "My Lord and my God!"

Whoever glories in the wonder of the sign without relating it to its internal meaning is like someone gazing at a signpost and refusing to go where it's pointing. A miracle can become like Sodom. It is attractive, and entrancing, and exciting but for the person who looks back at it. A friend was knocking on doors talking to people. At one house he met an old lady who was keen to tell him of her experience in a healing crusade many years ago when she had been delivered from some sickness. She was full of praise for the faith-healer who'd done that for her. How she admired him, and how grateful she was but she hadn't gone to church for years. Deliverances are designed to beckon us to look ahead, not look back. But this is not what the multitude in Jerusalem were doing. They stopped at the wonders themselves, and they did this in the presence of the Son of God himself.

The mob thought that Jesus' humility and silence was a temporary phase. It was just a transition. He would be poor for the poor today, but tomorrow, they hoped, he would be rich. He would turn against Rome and strip the coffers of Pilate and use it for Israel's glory. He would drive the Romans into the Med.! Jesus on a donkey, empty-handed, was but a stage on his progress to riches. Today a donkey, tomorrow a war-stallion. "How mighty is Jesus," the people from Galilee especially were crying. Yes, Christ is mighty but he didn't come into the world to flex his muscles as Mr. Universe. He came to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for many. He came to be the lamb of God. He came to satisfy the law of God and lay a perfect foundation of righteousness on which all his elect could stand blameless in the great day. Only when he has redeemed us by his death can our praise be accepted in heaven. But the crowds in Jerusalem didn't see it. They read the Scriptures and all they saw was a Messiah who did miracles, not one who obtained salvation from sin, who reconciled a holy God to ourselves by the cross. So they exalted the might of Jesus, but they did not magnify the rights of God. So we are not surprised that within a week 'Hosanna' had been replaced by 'Crucify him.' Because they misappropriated the praises of Scripture, and because they were thrilled by the miracles and did not bow before the one who performed the miracles, 'Crucify him!' had to replace 'Hosanna!' That is the logic of sin.

What crowds are here cheering for Jesus. Look at the countless numbers! But their faith does not keep pace with their fervor. Their godliness falls short of their enthusiasm. They are a confident group aren't they? All cheering crowds believe they're smart to be following the greatest. He is great . . . and so are they to know it! They were not singing, "my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride." Power and numbers were their delight. The dynamic, not the duties of service, was their delight. While the Lord was raising Lazarus, feeding 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes, calming the storms, then this people honored him, but a few days later

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when he is as dumb as a lamb before its shearer, bowing his head to the death of the cross then it will be ashamed of its meek and lowly King. Its Hosannas came from its admiration of the miraculous not from saving faith in Christ. The mob with their enthusiasm were really the allies of the chief priests and Sanhedrin. All of them rejected Jesus' calling to make atonement for sinners by laying down his life. The priests looked different from the mob as they paid Judas and the lying witnesses and schemed on Jesus' arrest. The mob were throwing their garments in the dust, but essentially the plotting priests and the cheering mob were both united in their unbelief. Sin is sin and unbelief is always unbelief. Mark is telling us that popularity is not discipleship. Enthusiasm is not faith. Numbers are no safe guide to truth. Jesus is confessed by our taking up our crosses and following him, not by pomp and circumstance

So what an anticlimax when Jesus enters Jerusalem. No great speech from the temple steps. Not a miracle is performed. Yes, he does go to the temple; "He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve" (v.11). He retraced the entire route of that morning, over the debris, the little group of twelve disciples walking back to their house in Bethany with him, wondering, "What was that all about?" There is no report of any conversations, but they would have found it difficult to speak to him because of two things, the first being the fact that Jesus had been crying a lot (Lk. 19:41). They were not tears of joy for the welcome he was getting, and they were not tears of self-pity. They were tears of grief for the shouting crowds and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then there was something he'd said to the city; "If you, even you, had only known what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you" (Lk. 19:42-44).

Rejection of God the Son coming to them brings judgment. Jesus saw this. He knew that the day would soon come when the armies of Rome would sweep into the city of Jerusalem and turn it into a desolation. That did happen, not long afterwards. Jerusalem was touched with a little bit of hell. The cries of its writhing people rent the night air. The smoldering coals of its ruins lit up the darkness with a grim glow. That's the way it always is when men reject this Jesus. For after all, not only Jerusalem was guilty of rejecting Jesus Christ. Down through the centuries there've been hoards of men who have turned their backs on Jesus Christ and who have perished in their unbelief. It was the awful reality of unbelief and the terrible horror of the judgment that follows it that brought the tears to Jesus' eyes and made him shudder with sobs.

In Luke's gospel we have an additional observation. Jesus wept.

“When He approached *Jerusalem*, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. “For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.””
Luke 19:41-44, NAS95.

He saw that the very people who were cheering were precisely the same people who'd have nothing to do with him the moment they discovered the kind of person he really was. They wanted Christ to be their King, but they also wanted Jesus to shape up to what they thought a king should be and do. They were in no mood whatever to believe that his kingship would become a reality only along the road of suffering. They weren't willing to admit that they could receive the benefits of his kingship only if they'd bow before him in confession of sin.

Jesus in tears - while the adoring crowd continues to shout "Hosanna" - doesn't this

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make it imperative that every one of you examine your claims to adore the Savior?

You join in bringing praise to Jesus Christ, but what does the Son of God see when he looks at you ? It's not enough to sing and shout with the crowd marching to the holy city. Are we willing to accept Jesus as the kind of King he really is, the one who humbled himself to the death of the cross, that precise horrible death, without which we cannot get to heaven? To bring sinners to glory the crucified King, as the Son of God and as the Son of Man, must give himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all those who believe in him. We don't honor him by singing songs about him for an hour, or two hours, and feeling good, or feeling religious, and expressing nice sentiments about him in our choruses. We honor Christ only when we plead his cross as the grounds of our hope, and seek his power to live meekly like him in the midst of an uncomprehending world.

If someone does not truly believe what the Bible says about this Jesus, and his cross as the only way of salvation, then you may be sure he sees through the sham of false faith and he knows that some day you will receive the fruits of your rejection. Examine yourself very carefully right now, repent of hollow religion, and carnal enthusiasm, and believe upon him. Receive that glorious salvation Jesus has earned for all those whose trust is in him alone.