

April 10th 2011: Palm Sunday #2—The Day Jesus Needed His Followers Praised: Luke 19:28-40

This story about Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem that we started to look at last Sunday, is very well documented in the New Testament. It's found in each of the four Gospels which gives it a sense of importance that other stories about Jesus do not have. It's one of those accounts that God obviously wanted us to notice and to think about.

The question that we do well to ask because of that is 'why'? Why is the story of what we call Palm Sunday, so important as far as Jesus and His followers is concerned.

One answer relates to the importance of the 'hosannas' that were uttered that day. Matthew 21:9 tells us:-

***The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,
"Hosanna to the Son of David!"
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
"Hosanna in the highest!"***

The interesting thing is that the word hosanna means save or save us, yet because it was normally used in the context of crying out to a Saviour who had won the victory and was just about to rescue them, it took on the meaning of Praise. An excited acclamation of joy because the knight on his white charger had arrived! That it is used this way here is obvious by the reaction of the Jewish leaders. Luke tells us in 19:39:-

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

These men recognized that what Jesus' disciples were calling out was a revolutionary statement and they became scared about the reaction of the Romans if they heard it. It was people power gone crazy as far as they were concerned, and they wanted Jesus to stop it before it affected a political situation that they were reasonably happy with. Jesus responded in v40:-

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Matthew goes on to inform us that even after the procession, when Jesus was in the Temple, the children were still shouting out the words, 'Hosanna to the Son of David' and the chief priests got very indignant about this. And in Matthew 21:16 we find them saying to Jesus:-

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,

"From the lips of children and infants

you have ordained praise?"

So in both these examples we see Jesus affirming the hosannas that were uttered that day and in so doing He reveals how necessary they were to His mission. That's why I've given this message the title—"The Day Jesus Needed His Followers Praises".

Jesus as the Son of Man needed to hear these praises. He knew what was ahead of Him. That on the Thursday night of that same week he would be arrested, tried, and on the Friday crucified. That such caused Him some inner agony is revealed by His prayers a little later in the Garden of Gethsemene. Consequently we can sense that Jesus needed the declaration of His status as King by His followers before it was written on a notice and pinned to a cross. Though He was truly God He was also truly man, and He was blessed by the encouragement of those praises despite the fact that he recognized how shallow many of them were.

But especially, Jesus as the Son of God needed those praises from those who believed in Him, for they affirmed Him as the Messiah. As God the Son come into this world with deliverance in His hand and Salvation by His side.

On that day many would have proclaimed what they did not truly believe or understand because they were caught up in the moment. But many others were His followers, and they were prepared to take off their coats and lay them in the dirt beneath a donkey's hoofs because they believed that this Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

It was their hosannas that God used to let the world know that He had come, and that nothing man or spirit could do would prevent His total triumph over sin and death. Even death by crucifixion would be powerless to stop this Messiah from bringing salvation and deliverance to His people—indeed to creation itself. And this message was so vital that if His followers had not cried out then the stones would have done the job for them.

This is confirmed by what was actually shouted out, because the words were a direct quote from Psalm 118, which is a very interesting psalm. For it was this Psalm that, during the time of Jesus, was recited by the people and the priests at the feast of tabernacles, to commemorate their deliverance from Egypt. And at a certain moment in that recitation there would be the waving

of palm and willow branches. Indeed, the last day of the feast was called "the great Hosanna", and the boughs were called hosannas.

So this psalm has a very strong connection to all that happened on Palm Sunday, but even more than that it speaks directly about Jesus.

Turn with me to Psalm 118:19-24

***Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
20 This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.
21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.***

***22 The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
23 the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
24 This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.***

Now I'm certain you would recognize some of those verses, and especially v22. Jesus quotes this verse about himself in Matthew 21:42 on the very next day. Peter quoted it after Pentecost in Acts 4 and then wrote it down in the second chapter of his first letter.

And here on the Sunday before His death, Jesus, the stone that the Jewish leaders had already rejected, is proclaimed as the foundation stone of God's Kingdom.

The verses that follow are the ones that the people cried out. Verses 25-26

***O LORD, save us;
O LORD, grant us success.
26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.***

Indeed, the words 'save us' are the Hebrew word 'hosanna'. But even more exciting than that if what the Psalm then goes on to say in the last 3 verses.

***The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine upon us.***

***With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.***

***²⁸ You are my God, and I will give you thanks;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.***

***²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.***

Or as the CEV translates it:

***²⁷The LORD is our God,
and he has given us light!
Start the celebration!
March with palm branches
all the way to the altar. ²⁸The LORD is my God!
I will praise him and tell him
how thankful I am.
²⁹Tell the LORD
how thankful you are,
because he is kind
and always merciful.***

The hosannas of Palm Sunday and their relationship to Psalm 118 confirm the coming victory that Good Friday and Easter Sunday would declare. God already knew that the battle was won. He is God and no force can triumph over Him. And He needed His followers then and now to be able to look back on Palm Sunday and realize that they were able to celebrate the victory before they saw it, because God is undefeatable.

No power on earth or in heaven is able to thwart God's purposes. It couldn't then and it can't today. That's why we can and should always praise God.

God knew that His disciples would have to go through the agony of His death before the joy of His resurrection, but when they looked back they would see that His victory had been declared on the Sunday beforehand.

From that time on they would know, and us too, that whatever times of seeming defeat a believer may have to go through, the victory has already been preordained. So even on the darkest days we have reason for praise. Reason to be thankful. Reason for Hosannas. For God is in control and in Him we always have the final victory, and it is through the sincerity of our praise that we let Him know and those around us, that such is our Trust.

