

“Turmoil or Triumph --- Who Is This”
Zechariah 9:9-12 & Matthew 21:1-11
“When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’”
Matthew 21:10

Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

This is Palm Sunday! Hosanna --- Glory to God in the Highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna! Hosanna!

One Palm Sunday a little 5-year-old sat on her mother's lap as everyone was intently listening to the pastor's sermon. He described Jesus' approach to Jerusalem and how the crowds cried, "Hosanna, Hosanna!" At the sound of those words the little 5-year-old perked up and began to sing, "Oh, Hosanna, now don't you cry for me!"ⁱ

Today we begin HOLY WEEK--the final week of Jesus' life and ministry. This truly is one of the most important weeks in the Christian year. Jesus lived thirty-three years and His actual ministry lasted three years, yet the Gospel writers write extensively about the last week of Jesus' life. Matthew devotes one-fourth of his Gospel (chapters 21-28). Mark devotes one-third of his Gospel (chapters 11-16). Luke gives a fifth of his writings to the last week of Christ's life (chapters 19:28-24). What is most remarkable is that John devotes half of His Gospel to recount the story of Jesus' last week of His life (chapters 12-21). If you think about it for a minute, there are a total of eighty-nine chapters in the four Gospels and over a third of them are given to telling the story of Jesus' last week of His life! A third of the Gospels, twenty-nine and half chapters, are dedicated to telling the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, his arrest, persecution, crucifixion, death and resurrection!

This morning let us turn to the Gospel of Matthew and listen once again to Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. As we read, close your eyes and try to hear the story for the first time. Enter into the story. Listen as if you are one of the disciples walking beside the Messiah, or the owner of the donkey and colt, or a member of the crowd or maybe you might be standing at a distance--like one of the religious leaders-- trying to take all of the triumphant entry in.

Before we listen for God's word for us today, let us pray. Messiah Jesus, blessed are you! We come to hear your word for us today. May your word be alive and redemptive for us today. May your Word bring new life as we hear and sing and shout, "Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" Amen

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵ “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” ¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” ¹¹ The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”ⁱⁱⁱ

As I read, prayed, prayed some more and read some more in preparation for this message, I found it very hard to narrow this message down. There is a wealth of information here that applies to our lives today!

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF DOUBT

We could talk about how Jesus knows the future, not only His but ours. He told His disciples to go to a certain place in a certain city at a certain time and they would “*find a donkey tied there with her colt.*” Having a Savior who knows the future --- his and ours -- is such a comfort. Do some of you feel as if God has forgotten you? Do some here today feel that where you are at is a mistake? A promise found in this story is that Jesus knows the future and He will be with you. We can have hope in the midst of all our circumstances because Jesus has been there and knows what we are going through.

We could talk about the significance of fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah. Our king comes to us gentle and riding a donkey. What kind of king comes riding a donkey? Is that the kind of king you are looking for?

SUBMISSION & SURRENDER

How about the meaning of the crowd throwing their cloaks, coats and clothes on the donkey and on the ground so that the donkey would walk all over them? Would you be willing to throw your coat on the ground so that someone riding a donkey could walk on it? What is that all about? I have been to plenty of parades in my life and I have never seen anyone throw their coats on the ground so the animals or people could walk on them. In Jesus’ day, when a king came riding into town the citizens would throw their cloaks onto the path of the king, symbolizing their respect for him and their submission to his authority. It was as if they were saying, “We place ourselves at your feet, even for you to walk over us if necessary.”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ What a powerful image of submission and surrender. What’s our success percentage on submitting and surrendering our lives to God?

MARCH MADNESS

March Madness is upon us! How many of you are basketball fans? I have to admit, I don’t normally watch basketball until March. Is your team in the elite eight? Have you lost your voice

shouting and cheering at the TV? Our son drove over to Houston this weekend to watch Baylor play in their first “Sweet Sixteen” game. He called from the stadium shouting, “the seats weren’t the best, but it was electrifying in the gym to see and hear the people and the players.” March Madness! Maybe, that is what was happening when Jesus entered Jerusalem the Sunday before Passover.

There was a report taken ten years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. They recorded that there were 260,000 lambs slain on the Passover night. The law required one lamb for every ten individuals. That would mean that there were over 2.6 million worshipers in Jerusalem the week of that Passover. Ten years prior (when Jesus was entering Jerusalem) there could have been over 2 million worshippers crowding into Jerusalem that week. Now imagine the scene again, Jesus comes riding into town on the donkey and the crowds going before and after Him start shouting. The actual Greek word in verse nine literally means that they were screaming and crying out. It is also an imperfect active verb and that means that they cried out, screamed and shouted continually. Just say, ten percent of the 2 million gathered in the city are at this parade - -- the parade of one! Ten percent would be over 200, 000 people screaming, shouting, crying out --- *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”* To give you a little image --- the stadium down here in Austin that hosts the Longhorns holds close to 105, 000 people. Now double that and they are not shouting “Texas --- UT --- Hookem Horns!” They are screaming at the top of their lungs, they are shouting from the bottom of their toes, they are crying out from the deepest recesses of their hearts --- “Hosanna --- Hosanna --- Hosanna!” March Madness has taken over Jerusalem!

“Hosanna” is a Hebrew word that literally means “save us we pray,” “save now,” “save us we beseech you.” This word was used as more of a form of praise. It was part of the Hallel Psalms --- the Psalms of praise, Psalms 113-118. Hosanna was sung at the Feast of Tabernacles and the last day of the Feast was called the “Great Hosanna.” What an image, 200, 000 people shouting, screaming, crying out “Hosanna” over and over and over and over again. The noise must have been deafening!

Do you remember watching the Olympic hockey game when the USA team beat the Russians? The crowds were waving American flags and they were standing and shouting, “USA, USA, USA,USA!” This scene is exactly the same! March Madness to the extreme. The Palm branches were symbolic, representing salvation, joy and loyalty to the new king. The people were looking for salvation from their oppressive, Roman authorities. They wanted freedom from their slaveholders-- like their ancestors received when Moses led them out of Egypt. They were looking for a conquering king!

The first day of the Passover week was the day that families selected their lamb for the Passover meal on Thursday. This lamb was to be spotless, without blemish. This lamb was to be selected and brought into the family’s home and kept for four days before it was slaughtered and offered up as a sacrifice for the Passover. This is the day Jesus, the Messiah, the Lamb of God, comes riding into town. Three years earlier, John the Baptist saw Jesus walking along the shores of the Jordan river, coming to be baptized. Do you remember what he shouted? He shouted, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The conquering king that rode into town, gentle and humble, that day came not to conquer armies, political parties, religious leaders or religiosity! Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, came to conquer the power of sin, death, and the grave.

“Hosanna --- Hosanna --- save us we beseech you!” Jesus came triumphantly as a conquering king to conquer the power of sin and death in our lives.

WHO IS THIS?

As I reflected on all that was going on that day. I was impressed by the Holy Spirit to pause, ponder and journal on verse ten --- *“When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’”* “Who is this” is a powerful question, but what captured my attention was this--- *“the whole city was in turmoil, asking...”* I tried to imagine the scene! I tried to put myself in the picture. The Greek word used for “turmoil” is “seismos” meaning “to move to and fro,” “to disturb,” “to shake.”^{iv} The noun usually meant “earthquake.” We get words in our English language like “seismic,” “seismograph,” “seismology.” This word is used several times in the New Testament and in reference to Christ. It is used on the day of his entrance into Jerusalem, on the day of his death when the curtain in the temple was torn in two, and it is used by Matthew to describe the opening of the tomb that frightened the guards.

The triumphant entry has been turned into turmoil! Triumph to turmoil! It is like watching your favorite team lose in the last seconds! Shouts of victory, acts of submission, and gestures of loyalty have been shaken out of the crowd. The whole city now begins to ask, “Who is this?” I found it really interesting that one minute the crowds are shouting “Hosanna --- Hosanna!” They are crying out that Jesus is the Messiah! They are screaming that Jesus is the Blessed One who comes in the name of the Lord! One minute Jesus is the one who comes to save them, and the next minute (two verses later) Jesus is just a prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.

SO WHAT --- WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?

How about you and me? What is your answer to the question presented in verse ten --- “Who is this?” Is Jesus the Messiah, the one who knows the future, the one who provides hope in the midst of doubt? Is Jesus the conquering King? Is Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Exactly who do you say Jesus is? C.S. Lewis is famous for the following quote, “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something else. You can shut him up for a fool; you can spit at him and kill him for a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. Lewis says we each must decide if Jesus is lunatic, liar, or Lord.”^v

Clarence Jordan was the founder of the Koinonia Farm near Americus, Georgia. It was set up to be an interracial community before anyone knew what civil rights were all about. Jordan was a pacifist as well as an integrationist and was not a popular figure in Georgia, even though he came from a prominent family. The Koinonia Farm was controversial and it was in trouble. In the early '50s Clarence approached his brother, Robert (later a State Senator and Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court) to ask him to represent the Koinonia Farm. They were having trouble getting LP gas delivered for heating during the winter even though it was against the law not to deliver gas.

Clarence thought Robert could help. Robert responded to Clarence's request:

"Clarence, I can't do that. You know my political aspirations. Why, if I represented you, I might lose my job, my house, everything I've got."

"We might lose everything, too, Bob."

"It's different for you."

"Why is it different? I remember, it seems to me, that you and I joined the church on the same Sunday, as boys. I expect when we came forward the preacher asked me the same question he did you. He asked me, 'Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?' And I said, 'Yes.' What did you say?"

"I follow Jesus, Clarence, up to a point."

"Could that point by any chance be — the cross?"

"That's right. I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I'm not getting myself crucified."

"Then I don't believe you're a disciple. You're an admirer of Jesus, but not a disciple of his. I think you ought to go back to the church you belong to, and tell them you're an admirer, not a disciple."^{vi}

Here's the "so what" for Palm Sunday. It's in two simple questions.

1. Regarding Jesus: Is He lunatic, liar or Lord?
2. Regarding me: Am I a disciple or an admirer?

Let me share with you my answers: Jesus Christ is Lord, and I am His disciple.

Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!

Round Rock Presbyterian Church
Round Rock, Texas 78681
March 28, 2010 Palm Sunday
Reverend David Peters

ⁱ Brenda Fossum, *Duluth, MN. Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart."*

ⁱⁱ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Matthew 16-23*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1988.

^{iv} Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1995, c1985). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*.

Translation of: *Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. (1014). Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans.

^v C.S.Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York: Macmillan, 1958.

^{vi} Stanley Hauerwas, "When we don't 'carry' Jesus far enough," *Odyssey Web Site*, June 21, 2004.