



Matthew 21:6–9

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 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 heaven!”

Reflection

It's Sunday. Palm Sunday. Palm branches spread out on the road before Jesus. Palm Sunday. Jesus will be crucified on Friday, the day that Passover begins. The huge crowds that are arriving in Jerusalem are here for the Passover. Jesus is here for the Passover, one of the most holy days on the Jewish religious calendar that celebrates their deliverance from Egypt some 1400 years before. The Passover festival celebrates the day that the angel of death

‘passed over’ the Israelite households and visited death on the Egyptians for their sins. The households who obeyed God and painted the blood of a lamb on their door frames were ‘passed over’ by the angel of death. The lamb’s death exchanged for theirs. This Passover God would visit death on Jesus for the sins of the world. Not the blood of a lamb on wooden doorframes this time, but the blood of the Lamb of God running down a wooden cross. Slain for the sins of the world. Not freedom from the evil of slavery and oppression in Egypt this time. But freedom from the deepest depths of evil; freedom from slavery to Satan, sin and death.

Jesus Christ our Passover Lamb enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Only nothing

could be further from the minds of the people than his body broken on a cross. The crowds following Jesus have been building since Jericho. There he'd healed two blind men, on the way he'd raised Lazarus from the dead. Many amongst the crowds are from Galilee. Stories of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' countless healings, stories of his miracles and the casting out of demons, had no doubt followed him and only grown with the telling. And now the king has finally arrived in Jerusalem, riding a donkey as Zechariah prophesied that he would. Expectations are nearing fever pitch, the large crowds have become huge. James and John and their mother likely had broad smiles of 'I told you so' on their faces. The king has come to claim his own. The son of David has come to the city that David built to cast out these Ro-

mans and reign on David's throne forever.

And so the huge crowds who followed Jesus and others who no doubt had come out of Jerusalem in anticipation of his arrival receive Jesus like a king. From verse 8, a now...

... very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

In the ancient world this was the equivalent of rolling out the red carpet, only not for movie stars whom we treat like royalty, but for genuine royalty. And not a red carpet, but the cloaks off their very backs, most of them would have owned only one. Picture hundreds of cloaks set down

in the mud and dust so that not even the feet of the donkey that Jesus was riding would get dirty. And they cut palm branches and spread them out as well. This is how you welcome an all-conquering king. Like they did in Old Testament times. Like they did for the last king who took up the fight against the Romans, for Judas Maccabeus who 200 years earlier had been welcomed into the city by a crowd waving palm branches after conquering pagan armies that were oppressing Israel. His dynasty had lasted for over a hundred years.

Just a word from Jesus and these palm branches would become swords, these cloaks would be replaced with shields. But this would not do for the Prince of Peace who had come to do battle of a different

kind.

Can you picture the scene? Can you hear the singing? They're singing a psalm. They're shouting out words from Psalm 18, loaded words.

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

These words are loaded because Psalm 18 describes a joyful pilgrimage into the temple led by the king. ‘Hosanna’ had come to be a term of blessing but in the original Hebrew it was a cry for help. The huge crowds in both their actions and words could not express greater accolades for Jesus. And in crying out “Hosanna to the

Son of David!” they might as well be saying ‘Save us son of David’ and urging the rightful king of Jerusalem to reclaim what is his own.

It’s quite the scene isn’t it? Quite the entrance. Cloaks and palm branches in homage to the king. Singing David’s hymn to finally welcome him home. But this hymn will change in a matter of days when they don’t get their way and Jesus refuses to meet their misguided expectations. Soon the crowds will be singing an entirely different song. ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’

The people wanted a prophet but this prophet came to condemn them. The people wanted a Messiah to claim the throne, this Messiah’s throne is his cross. The people wanted to be delivered from

the surface evil of Roman oppression, but Jesus came to deliver them from evil in its deepest depths. And they killed him for it. In love he died for them.

Think & Pray

With what time remains please think back over this passage for yourself. You might like to think about the fickleness of human nature. How quickly we can turn when things stop going our way. And the way that we tend to pray the most when we're in the most trouble. And when things are well again we continue to go our own way.

And on the topic of prayer, no doubt many of these faithful Jews were praying for a saviour. But when God answered their prayers in a way far greater than they

could ever have imagined it, it took many of them a long time to fully realise the significance of what God had done. Answers to prayer can be like that. What are you praying for right now? Are you prepared for God to do something far bigger and far better than what you're asking for as his sovereign plan for your life unfolds? Are you trusting in his wisdom for your life, his plan for your life over your plan for your life? Even if it takes some time for his handiwork to come to light? Look at how much greater and deeper and infinitely better his plan of salvation for the world was over the plans of these first century Jews. It's the same for his plans for you. His plans for you are infinitely better than your plans for you. So give yourself over to him today. You are in the best of hands.

Give yourself over to him right now in prayer. Entrust your day to him. Entrust your whole life to him. Entrust all of eternity to him. And then in joy why not join with this crowd,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”