

Palm Sunday: Tragedy and Triumph

Seven days changed the world. These seven days are the topic of thousands of publications, countless debates, and hundreds of films. These seven days have inspired painters, architects, and musicians.

On the day we celebrate today, Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to the shouts of Hosanna fulfilling a prophecy from **Zechariah 9:9**, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey." On Monday he cleansed the Temple by overturning the tables of the moneychangers. On Tuesday predicted the Temple's destruction. On Wednesday the Gospels are silent. On Thursday Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. Later that evening he agonized in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he was betrayed and arrested.

On Good Friday following his arrest, illegal trials, desertion, beating and sentencing, Jesus carried his own cross to "The Place of the Skull" where he was crucified between two criminals. On Saturday Jesus lay dead in a tomb bought by a rich man named Joseph. On Easter Sunday the stone was rolled away. Jesus was alive. He appeared to Mary, to Peter and to his disciples gathered in a locked room.

We now enter into Holy Week, seven days that changed the world, the Jewish Passover, the Passion of the Christ. We often have a sanitized version of the crucifixion so we can hang pictures on our walls. In fact the death of Jesus was a horribly violent event. Its great achievement is the triumph of love over hatred and violence. Jesus' body being crushed is not simply an act of violence. Jesus is acting out of a sacrificial love and it makes us want to act sacrificially.

Luke 19:28-44

Palm Sunday Tragedy

- Excitement in Jerusalem was running high due to Passover
- The excitement was escalated due to the strange entourage winding through the streets. A great crowd shouting and singing followed a quiet figure of a man riding on a donkey.
- The jubilant crowd was shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed in he who comes in the name of the Lord." People tore palm branches from trees and threw down their clothes in the path as welcoming a conquering king. Something tremendous was happening.
- The crowd stopped on the plaza in front of the Temple. Jesus dismounted. This was the perfect place for Messiah, the Chosen One, to make his big move to liberate his oppressed people from the yoke of pagan Rome. This is the hope that spurred the faith of the Jewish people for better days ahead. What was Jesus going to do?
 - Jesus entered the Temple. **Mark 11:11**, "And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve."
 - He did absolutely nothing!
 - The crowd must have been stunned. Perhaps no event in history had built up to a greater anti-climax than Palm Sunday. As the people left the Temple their hearts must have sunk.
- The crowds wanted a winner. Jesus had other plans. This is the tragedy of Palm Sunday. It set the tone for the Passion. There were two expectations being played

out. Two storylines occurred simultaneously: the hopes of the people opposed the Passion of the Christ.

- Jesus did not match his actions to their expectations. To pursue a king's crown would defeat the purposes of the cross.
- The Passion refers to the sufferings of a martyr, the Sufferings of the Christ.
- Jesus stood before the throng of people. They just celebrated Christ with a king's reception. He in fact was a king, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Yet, they missed the point all together. He greatly disappointed them, and the crowds began immediately turning against him.
- So began the Passion, the Sufferings of Christ.

Palm Sunday Triumph

- Palm Sunday was a triumph.
- It marked the triumph of love over hatred. The people expected a war, but received a sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice of himself brought victory and freedom to all humanity, if they will receive it.
- Man cannot reach up to God, so in grace God came down to man. He is not above it all but in the midst of it all. His sacrificial presence among us is the triumph of love over violence and hatred, of life over death.
- When Hubert Humphrey, former vice-president of the US, died one shocking person attended the services. Richard Nixon not long before resigned from office due to the shame and infamy of the Watergate scandal. This was his first visit back to Washington. Then a very special thing happened. Current President Jimmy Carter broke the awkward silence. He saw Nixon standing against the wall by himself. He went over to the former president and warmly greeted him by shaking his hand and saying, "Welcome home, Mr. President! Welcome home!" *Newsweek Magazine* asserted, "If there was a turning point in Nixon's long ordeal in the wilderness, it was that moment and that gesture of love and compassion."
- The turning point for us is Palm Sunday. It is our moment of triumph.
- It was a triumph because Jesus ignored the cries and demands stemming from our miserable state and acted on our behalf. He chose to ignore the crowd's version of Palm Sunday and go with his own.
- No matter what we have done: compromised our principles, sold out to the expediency of the moment, given into sin. God comes into our world and welcomes us home. We do not deserve to be there but he welcomes us just the same.
- Palm Sunday was the turning point of our long ordeal in the wilderness.
- God does not always answer the demands of our desperation in the manner we desire. He answers in the way that truly meets our real need permanently.
- If Jesus had allowed the crowd to crown him on the day of his triumphant entry, the Jews would have received a temporary fix to an eternal problem.
- Jesus did not put a bandage on the wound. He healed the source of the problem. **Isaiah 53:10-12**, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put [Him] to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see [His] seed, He shall prolong [His] days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, [and] be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors."
- On Palm Sunday we celebrate Christ's triumph as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- We also remember that God does not always give us what we want. He always provides what we need. Receive him today.