

The Significance of Palm Sunday

The original event of Palm Sunday is mentioned in all four gospels and foretold in the Old Testament.

Zechariah 9:9 [NIV] *“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Both Matthew and John refer directly to this scripture.

Psalm 118:25 [NIV] *“O LORD, save [Y sha] us; O LORD, grant us success.”*

All four gospel accounts refer to this scripture.

“*Hosanna*” made up of two Hebrew words: “*Y sha*” to be free – to be safe – to preserve, and “*na*” an entreaty for the present and the future.

The word seems to have been an utterance of praise rather than a prayer, though originally a cry for help.

Psalm 113 and **Psalm 118** were both recited at the Feast of Tabernacles in responses with the priest, accompanied with the waving of palm and willow branches. The last great day of the Feast was called the Great Hosanna.

The first Palm Sunday took place five days before the Passover, in that year a Sunday, hence it is called Palm Sunday.

This event that started so promising was to end in despair.

The crowds were convinced that the long-awaited Messiah had come.

The disciples felt vindicated that they had left all to follow Jesus.

John 12:17 [NIV] *“Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word.”*

Many who were present knew about Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead, and considered anyone who could perform such a miracle would have little difficulty in overthrowing Rome.

But by the time the Passover had arrived, everything had changed for the crowd who were shouting Hosanna in praise to Jesus.

a) **John 18:2-3** [NIV] *“Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.”*

Jesus had been betrayed by one of His own disciples.

b) **Matthew 26:56** [NIV] *“But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.”*

All the disciples deserted Jesus and fled.

c) **Matthew 26:65-66** [NIV] *“Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” “He is worthy of death,” they answered.”*

Jesus was condemned by the sanhedrin, the religious leaders of that day.

d) **Matthew 26:69-75** [NIV] *“Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!” After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.” Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.”*

Peter denied knowing Jesus three times.

e) **Matthew 27:26** [NIV] *“Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”*

Pontius Pilate had Jesus flogged then ordered His crucifixion.

f) **Matthew 27:35** [NIV] *“When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”*

Jesus was crucified and murdered.

What then is the significance of Psalm Sunday?

- a) The fact it is foretold in the Old Testament gives it an important status.
- b) The fact that all four gospels give details of this event, add to its significance for us.
- c) Nothing turning out as the people thought and hoped. This helps us to understand the failure of hoped-for events in our own lives.

Romans 8:28 [NIV] *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

If we love God even evil events can in the end bring good.

- d) Jesus ordered the smallest details of this event personally.

Matthew 21:1-3 [NIV] *“As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.””*

Mark 11:4-6 [NIV] *“They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.”*

- e) Prophecy was being fulfilled.

Matthew 21:4 [NIV] *“This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:”*

No hint of what was prophesised in **Zechariah 9:9** was given at the time of this prophetic statement. This shows that the true use and value of prophecy comes when the event has been fulfilled in full, showing that God is Sovereign.

f) **Palm Sunday was God's idea. This is why it was told in advance and given so much attention in the New Testament.**

Jesus was showing He was a servant king.

Jesus came into Jerusalem not in a chariot like Old Testament kings but riding a donkey.

This should have sent the message to the crowd that Jesus was a servant king.

Luke 22:24-27 [NIV] *“Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”*

Just before His death Jesus physically applied His teaching.

John 13:3-5, 15-16 [NIV] *“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” ... “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”*

g) God welcomes praise even if it is for wrong reasons.

The reason the people were so excited was because they thought Jesus was about to overthrow the power Rome had over them, and this entry to Jerusalem was paving the way for this to happen.

This misplaced praise was still acceptable to God.

Matthew 21:15-16 [NIV] *“But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant. “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’?”*

Jesus affirmed this praise.

Luke 19:37-40 [NIV] *“When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”*

God welcomed the praise and the participation of children.

h) **The servant king was a weeping king.**

Luke 19:41-42 [NIV] *“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes.”*

This is how God feels when we miss out on what can be ours.

This is how Jesus feels about a city full of people who do not know Him or want to know Him.

The events of Palm Sunday are the pattern for revival of the church and its witness.

a) **Mark 11:2** [NIV] *“...saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.”*

The Word Jesus gave was to “go” and it started with just two disciples.

Luke 16:10 [NIV] *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”*

These two disciples were given a simple task to do, but not knowing why and they risked misunderstanding by taking a colt that did not belong to them.

When the disciples obeyed this simple command God then became involved.

Mark 11:8-10 [NIV] *“Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!”*

The emphasis was on praise, Jesus and salvation.

Scripture was vindicated as prophecy was fulfilled.

Matthew 21:15 [NIV] *“But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.”*

Everyone was involved, including the children, but with it came opposition from the established church.

Matthew 21:10 [NIV] *“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”*

The whole city was stirred and began to ask about Jesus.

Matthew 21:12 [NIV] *“Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.”*

Jesus cleansed the church, got rid of commercialism and pointed towards the spiritual.

Matthew 21:14 [NIV] *“The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.”*

Signs and wonders drew the attention of people to Jesus Christ.

Palm Sunday was not understood or appreciated at first.

John 12:16 [NIV] *“At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.”*

Many times we fail to capture the significance of a moment that God is in, until after the event when we look back.

Why was this revival type event not appreciated at the time?

It began with two disciples, then presumably the twelve, but then came the crowds, partly as a result of Lazarus being raised from the dead. They enjoyed the event but were not initially involved. Then events did not fit into the pattern that most were comfortable with.

Spontaneous worship broke out that did not follow traditional forms.

John 12:15 [NIV] *“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”*

Some became afraid of what was happening.

Matthew 21:12-13 [NIV] *“Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”*

Notice Jesus called the temple a place of worship, His House of Prayer.

The idea that the place of worship was also a place of prayer did not seem to enter anybody’s mind.

The church building had lost its meaning and purpose. Seeking the supernatural power of God was not considered, it had become a place of ritual and commerce.

A money enterprise is a major church activity today.

The very design of the temple and the sacred items in it were all conducive to prayer.

- a) **The altar** before the Holy of Holies and the blood sacrifice preparing the pathway to God.
- b) **The basin of water** to cleanse our consciences to pray.
- c) **The table of food offerings** depicting our fellowship with Jesus Christ in prayer and study [listening and speaking with God].
- d) **The lampstand** to illuminate where we enjoy fellowship with God.
- e) **The altar of incense**, where the sweet smell of prayer wafted through the curtain that hid God’s Throne.

Revelation 5:8 [NIV] *“And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”*

Any outreach witness for Jesus without prayer is like dynamite without a detonator.

The path Jesus Christ took was not the direction the people expected Him to take.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem through the eastern gate from the Mount of Olives He had two choices.

Turn right towards the Governor’s Palace and confront Rome.

Turn left towards the temple area and confront the religious people.

Jesus turned left.

What does this tell us?

God is more interested in religion than in politics.

God is more interested in saving people than in influencing governments.

God is more interested in prayer than us being part of state legislation.

God is more interested in fulfilling His Word than in the traditions and the expectations of men.

The people had to cope with the disappointment of unrealistic expectations, for the reality is what God actually does.

The truth was disappointing at first but the eventual result was transforming, the cross followed by the resurrection.

One week later Jesus' disciples had no regrets as to what God did.

Conclusion:

The events of Palm Sunday were the fulfilling of Old Testament prophecy, proving the power and sovereignty of God.

Jesus took the initiative and made the arrangements for the day to illustrate His humility. Jesus the Messiah entered Jerusalem riding a donkey, rather than a war horse as a king would have done, for Jesus' Kingship is not of this world. Jesus' entry was however triumphal and He accepted the praise of the crowd. Even when the people praised God with minimal understanding of what they were doing, God accepted it.

The Lord Jesus wept on Palm Sunday, deeply moved by the fact that although He longed to draw the people of Jerusalem to Him to be cared for by Him, because they were unprepared to submit to Him. Such was the compassion of the King of Kings.

Only He among those people on the first Palm Sunday knew what was ahead. Jesus knew that He was absolutely right and that eventually would be appreciated by all mankind.