

Hosanna in the Highest

As we continue on in our reading of Mark's Gospel entering into Holy Week, we'll read afresh the story of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem - with the full knowledge of the rejection that will follow AND the ultimate good news of Jesus' forgiveness and victory over death. But let's not rush our way to the cross and the empty tomb, because there is more still to be learned on the way.

This week, on Palm Sunday, we are beginning the last major section of Mark's Gospel - as everything we've read so far comes to a head in Christ's final leg of his journey to Jerusalem.

In our first week in the Gospel of Mark, we read about John the Baptist fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah - calling as one in the wilderness "Prepare the Way of the Lord." That Sunday, we explored how God

1. **Prepares the way in the wilderness** - drawing us out to remove distractions so that we might hear His voice.
2. **Prepares us through repentance** - calling us to put aside our sin and turn toward Him in faithful expectation.
3. **And prepares us for the Holy Spirit** - inviting us to receive an outpouring of His presence that would transform our hearts.

In our text this morning, we see a different kind of proclamation. It's not a voice in the wilderness. It's a voice right outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem. It's not a call for preparation. It's a celebration because the time has arrived. And it's not an invitation to receive the Holy Spirit, it's an announcement that He's here whether we're ready or not.

READING

Mark 11:¹ As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples,² 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."³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

¹⁰ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

I. JESUS CLAIMS THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES (1-8).

On June 4, 1783 at the market square of a French village of Annonay, not far from Paris, a smoky bonfire on a raised platform was fed by wet straw and old wool rags. Tethered above, straining its lines, was a huge taffeta bag 33 feet in diameter. This was to be the first public flight of a hot air balloon. The first step in the history of human flight.

In the presence of what history notes as "a respectable assembly and a great many other people," and accompanied by great cheering, the balloon was cut from its moorings and set free to rise majestically into the noon sky. Six thousand feet into the air.

It came back down to earth several miles away in a field, where it was promptly attacked by pitchfork-waving peasants and torn to pieces, thinking it an instrument of evil!

Just goes to show that what some rightly regard as incredibly good news, many will reject in their fear of the unknown.

That same tension is born out in Jesus final to to Jerusalem - as we see his celebrated entry into the city, but we also know what will happen in just a few day's time.

Jesus is acting strange here. I don't mean strange because he's asking the disciples to go "borrow" a colt with a curious set of directions; NOR is it strange that he's providing a sort of dramatic show.

As we've read through the Gospel so far, we've gotten used to Jesus doing strange things like healing folks with mud-made-of-his-spit, directing his disciples to feed large crowds with just a few loaves and fish - and it miraculously working, and even walking on water in a display of his power over all creation.

What's out of the ordinary here is that so far in this Gospel, Jesus seems to go out of his way to quiet people down after he does miracles. Even as he's dramatically demonstrated His power and authority, he never seems to want that news spread very far.

But today, as he approaches Jerusalem for Passover accompanied by fellow travellers from Bethany and Bethpage, he makes no effort to quiet down their songs of Messianic hope.

Instead, he seems to encourage it with his dramatic entrance. It was typical practice for Jews to make the last leg of their pilgrimage into Jerusalem on foot. This is what Jesus would have done every other year when he made this same trip. Not this year. This year, he rides a colt - the foal of a donkey.

Why ride this year? And why a young donkey? Matthew and Luke tell us that it's specifically to fulfill prophecy from Zechariah 9:9.

Zech 9:⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

It's really a striking visual, because usually a king returning from a victorious campaign would come riding in on a large war horse to accentuate his power and prestige. Instead, Zechariah pictures a coming king who would bring triumph and victory from oppression, but would return to reign with compassion and humility.

To come riding in on a war horse is a sign of domination and rule. To ride in on a donkey is a symbol of peace and compassion.

Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem in the most dramatic way possible, visually declaring that he's the one the people have been waiting for.

Way back in the beginning of Mark, John called out preparing a way in the wilderness - repent and prepare the way for the Lord.

Well, the preparation time is over. Jesus is here at the doorstep.

God prepares the way in the wilderness, but JESUS' GOAL IS THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES (1-8)

The Lord often begins by meeting us in the far-off corners of our heart where the distractions are few and our fears and anxieties are great. God asks us to leave our busyness, our comfort, our regular routine, and to go out and meet Him so that we can be saved.

But God doesn't just want you in the far off places. He doesn't just want your affection at church camps, worship services, or special retreats. Jesus's goal is to be the center of your life - for your busy schedule, your routine, your comfort, your everyday life to be reoriented with Him at the center.

Do you want him there? The people in Bethany were excited, at least at the time.

II. JESUS BRINGS TRUE SALVATION (9-10).

It ways they came out spreading cloaks and branches on the road - essentially laying out the red carpet for Jesus - and they sang a song:

⁹ "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Our English word "hosanna" comes from a Greek word "hosanna" which comes from a Hebrew phrase ***hoshiya na***.

And that Hebrew phrase is found one solitary place in the whole Old Testament, Psalm 118:25:

Psalm 118:²⁵ "Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success!

Here it literally means "Save us, please!" It is a cry for help. Like when somebody pushes you off the diving board before you can swim and you come up hollering: "Help, save me . . . Hoshiyana!"

But the meaning has changed over the years. In the Psalm itself, it's immediately followed by the announcement:

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you."

It's as if the cry for help is answered before it even comes out of the psalmists mouth. And over the years, the phrase became so associated with the Psalm and with the expectation of God's deliverance that it came to mean "Salvation is Here! Help has arrived!"

It's the difference between plea and praise, between cry and confidence.

The Jewish people have been waiting for salvation, and now in Jesus they are confident that it has arrived.

It's popular to point out the stark contrast between the praise we see here and the cries we'll hear from the crowd later in that same week - "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

The point usually made is how fickle our hearts can be - so quickly turning from praise to bitter rejection. But that may not neatly apply here. There's actually little reason to believe that it's the same crowd at all. This crowd praising Jesus is a group of fellow pilgrims in Bethany - a town where Jesus has some pretty strong connections.

The crowd in Jerusalem is a diverse mix of Jews from all over who have showed up to the city for the festival of Passover. Prominent in the group are the Pharisees and religious teachers who have been against him virtually since Day 1 of his ministry.

While, yes, our hearts can be fickle, perhaps the deeper lesson for reflection here is just how much resistance our hopes for salvation may be met with hostility from others.

Kind of like in that Pixar Movie, the Incredibles - anyone remember that movie? The basic premise is that there used to be all these superheroes, but they ended up having to go into hiding because they were getting sued for saving people who didn't want to be saved.

With Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, Salvation has indeed arrived. But not everyone is happy about that. Because salvation for the weak and broken would mean disruption for those content with the way things were.

In John's baptism, God had already been preparing the way through repentance. But JESUS' GOAL IS OUR TRUE SALVATION (9-10)

Salvation isn't just about repentance and forgiveness - that's part of it. But true Salvation is about liberation from all the powers of sin and death that keep us enslaved to everything BUT Jesus. It's about breaking the bonds of shame and fear that keep us returning to sinful, unhealthy behaviors because they're safe and comfortable to us.

Jesus entry into Jerusalem this way challenged the religious leaders who relied on the small protections they got from Rome, even though it meant oppression for their people.

In the same way, when Jesus stands knocking at the door of our hearts, He challenges our allegiance to our sins - small and large.

- Will you let him in? Or will you cling to your self-interest?
- Will you trust him to provide in your need? Or will you cheat and steal? Will you withhold your generosity from others and take care of yourself first?
- Will you trust him to protect you? Or will you lash out at any threat to prove your dominance?
- Will you trust him to guide you in vulnerability to your spouse? Or will you nurse that porn addiction in secret?

What's keeping you from trusting him fully? Where do you even now feel yourself saying, "Don't go there."

Jesus is standing at the door knocking, will you let him in?

Most of us would say yes, but what do you feel the need to clean in your house before you do?

III. JESUS CLEARS HOUSE FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT (11).

This passage ends on a curious note as Jesus enters the temple courts in Jerusalem, but doesn't do anything because it's late. Instead, he and the disciples return to Bethany, resolving to come back the next day. That's a curious detail because of what happens in the temple when he does arrive the next day. Does anyone remember what that is?

Yes, Jesus clears out the Temple, turns over tables.

Thinking about that this week, I was reminded of two stories my friend Nate told me:

1. Bristol, England (not Indiana) - a gentleman would sneak out in the middle of the night to correct grammar mistakes on signs. They called him the "Grammar Vigilante." He'd go throughout the city, and anytime he found an apostrophe that wasn't supposed to be there or one that should be, he'd sneak out at night (I'm assuming with a ski mask or

something) and use little stickers to cover up incorrect apostrophes or add one where they should be. They also called him “the Apostrophizer.” It’s just so ridiculous - you almost imagine him humming the mission impossible theme song - it literally keeps him up at night.

2. The second story is from Detroit, MI, where a lady trained a pack of squirrels to attack her ex boyfriend...That’s really all there is to the story. This lady just got so mad at her ex that she took the time to train these squirrels to attack him. At that point, it’s like - I’m not even mad, I’m just impressed.

What do these stories share in common? These people were so incensed by what they perceived to be an injustice that they went to some pretty extraordinary lengths to do something about it. It’s not just a heat of the moment thing, there’s some planning that goes into it.

That’s kind of like what we see with Jesus in the Temple. I’d always read that passage with the idea that Jesus had arrived to find the money changers and whatnot and been so overcome with righteous emotion and zeal that he turned over tables drove folks out.

But he showed up and saw everything the night before. It wasn’t a sudden emotion coming over him. Jesus had been brooding over that all night. He didn’t respond out of some violent emotional outburst. But that also doesn’t mean He wasn’t angry. He took in the scene, and came in with a very intentional action plan the next day.

Jesus was zealous for righteousness, but he was not ruled by his emotions. And the motivations that He did have were much better than correcting grammar mistakes or getting revenge from a relationship gone sour. He was guided by his ultimate purpose, which was to expose and put to shame all the powers of sin and death SO THAT we can come fully alive in the power of the Holy Spirit.

John’s baptism was about repentance as preparation for the Spirit. JESUS’ prepares us by CLEARING HOUSE in our hearts for the HOLY SPIRIT to come in fullness and power.

When Jesus claims his rightful place at the center of our lives, it means that things are going to have to change. We can’t just say a prayer, and give some vague notion that we have nice feelings about Jesus and all. We’ve got to turn out all the sinful idolatrous junk that’s inside.

Sometimes that comes in a sweet, gentle conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes it’s not so gentle. Sometimes Jesus has to turn over some tables in our hearts.

And the difference is generally made in the level of our willingness to hand it all over to Him.

You may have had this experience with your kids, or maybe you remember it happening to you: Your kid’s room is a mess and you give tell them several times that it’s time to clean up. They don’t do it. What happens next?

If you don't clean it, I'm gonna clean it, and I'm just gonna take a trash bag and throw everything in there.

Now, that's a poor analogy, because we're all imperfect parents with limited patience. But the principle is what matters here. It bears out over and over again throughout the Gospels. Jesus has infinite patience for the sinful seekers who come to Him in humility.

But Jesus has little grace for those who stubbornly hold onto the reins thinking they've got it figured out - whether they're caught in blatant, lewd sin like King Herod or entrenched in self-serving religiosity like the Pharisees.

Jesus clears house for the LORD whether we're ready for it or not.

CONCLUSION

Next week is Resurrection Sunday. In the span of a week's time, Jesus goes from triumphant entry, to rocky reception, to straight up accusation/betrayal/arrest/and sentence to death. Then, finally, after 3 days down, to glorious vindication and victory in the Empty Tomb.

As we remember and relive that crazy week, I invite you to reflect upon your response to Jesus in your life. Do you greet Him with shouts and praises? Do you greet Him with bitter suspicion? Or maybe somewhere in between depending on your mood and the circumstances?

May we all with glad hearts open up the gates and let the King come in. Salvation is here.