

The Jerusalem Road

5. The Triumphal Entry

Luke 19:29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" tell him, "The Lord needs it." 32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They replied, "The Lord needs it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 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: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" 40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (NIV)

People saw Jesus - but they all saw Him in different ways - they saw what they wanted to see and they heard what they wanted to hear. People will hear someone say something or see them do something and will draw their own conclusions based on what they think of the person.

A Professor called Scott Armstrong once did an experiment in which an actor posed as a Dr. Myron R. Fox an "eminent scientist" and delivered a lecture to an audience of scientists patching raw material from a Scientific American article into incorrect and contradictory statements interspersed with jokes and meaningless references to unrelated topics. "The audience of professionals on anonymous questionnaires reported that "they found the lecture clear and stimulating." Why? He was a scientist and obviously knew what he was talking about!! They saw the man and drew their own conclusions even the evidence was to the contrary.

I've the same experience as a minister, where my words have been used to support other people's points of view - ones I don't hold!

And here was Jesus in this familiar story entering Jerusalem. It's a story that's full of meaning and some if it is less obvious to us, looking with the hindsight of two millennia. So let's try and see it through the eyes of some of the people of the day.

The Disciples

The first people involved in the action of the day were the disciples. They had this very odd command. *30 "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" tell him, "The Lord needs it."*

A strange command and they were challenged and they were allowed to take it. But perhaps it wasn't that surprising as such as perhaps this had already been arranged or the owners knew Jesus and were quite happy to let them walk off with the animal. The colt we understand from Matthew's version was the colt of a donkey.

This was good news for the disciples as they could see from the manner in which Jesus entered Jerusalem that He was proclaiming Himself king. Now if you're thinking that it was a bit weird that Jesus would desire to ride a donkey, then it wasn't. Donkeys were the main form of transport of ordinary people, but kings were not unaccustomed to riding them too. King David had his own special mule and Solomon was shown to be his choice by his riding

the king's mule in Jerusalem (1 Kings 1:32-40). So if they were looking for a king - here he was, riding a donkey. The disciples knew the prophecy in Zechariah too which said *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 (Zechariah 9:9).*

This was not lost on the disciples who knew their Messianic prophecies. If you have been following this series in the evenings then you will know that the disciples heard what they wanted to hear when Jesus spoke to them. They wanted a King. They wanted a Messiah who would conquer then - and they had Jesus!. He said He was going to die and be raised again, but all they heard was a king who was going to be exalted. And to them this was the prophecy and Jesus was openly proclaiming His kingship. This entry in to Jerusalem was the King coming into Jerusalem to proclaim salvation - like Solomon - riding on the donkey. There is a rabbinical tradition that no one should use the animal on which a king rides. Here was Jesus proclaiming His kingship by riding on a donkey that had never been ridden by anyone else.

Here was their king and they had all the words *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: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*

For them He was coming to claim His throne - but for those of us following the Jerusalem Road in the past few weeks know that although Jesus knew of His claim to kingship, He was a king who was going to die, rise again and enter another land to receive His title and return at a later date. He made this clear - but it was wasted on them. He said one thing - they did another.

To their credit, they testified of what they had seen and praised God. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I know that sometimes my motives are suspect and my understanding of the things of God is a little incomplete but I testify of what I have seen Him do and I worship Him. Never mind who we are, we are all called to be His witnesses - to testify what He has done and praise Him. But how often we don't do that. We don't wave our palms, we don't throw our coats into the road to show our submission to Him.

What sort of Jesus do we have this morning - is He the King, is He our Saviour, is He our Lord - then let us shout it around Swaffham. Let's praise him for His miracles. Let's exalt His authority in our lives.

The saddest thing for many Christians is that they have lost that joy of salvation, that reality that His presence brings into their lives, the works that He has wrought in their lives.

Are we celebrating Jesus this morning. we've got much to thank Him for and celebrate in this morning.

The Crowd

We already know from the passages immediately preceding that the crowd were already starting to see Jesus in terms of kingship. In the passage we looked at last Sunday, they were expecting the kingdom immediately and Jesus had to make clear it wasn't - but that made no difference as this passage shows. There they are by the side of the road watching as the disciples come in shouting *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*. Matthew records that the crowds shouted the same thing, including this word Hosanna, which is an Aramaic word - the language they spoke - which means Save. And they see Jesus, riding on this colt - the colt of a donkey. To them that was it - Jesus was proclaiming Himself as king. They threw their cloaks on the ground and shouted Hosanna! This was it. Hosanna! Hosanna! Save! Save!

At least they were right - He was coming to save. And each time we sing and shout the word Hosanna we call out on the Lord to save. And He did Just that. The only problem was that the crowd thought that He was Jesus of Nazareth, the dynamic prophet but a few enlightened ones knew He was the son of David - and had a right to the throne. They expected a king - they got one but not the one they were expecting.

What sort of Jesus have you got? The sort of Jesus you have will determine the sort of person you turn out to be. The trouble is, that our Jesus is so often the man of the Bible - a story from long ago. A Lord who is in heaven. Yet that some Jesus is the one who is alive and wants to be dynamically involved in people's lives. He's alive. And as we found on the Jerusalem Road, He ministers into the lives of real people who suffer the real stresses and strains of life. His presence is transforming - but how is it that so often we show no signs of the transforming power of Jesus in our lives - because we've been looking for the wrong sort of king. He's not the king of long ago, or the king reigning in heaven - but He's that King that through His Spirit resides in each of our lives - always present, always available, willing to hear us, ready to speak to us. Is He distant, or is He close to you this morning?

What else can we learn about the crowd? A crowd is a crowd. Look at the recent events in Iraq. One day people are out on the streets proclaiming Saddam, the next they are on the streets welcoming the Americans and pulling down Saddam's statue. Then they are back out complaining about the Americans!

In 2000 years things don't change. There's nothing new under the sun. Those same people who were shouting Hosanna! Were the next week shouting Crucify Him!

Yet it is easy to be a person who follows the crowd. We do things because everybody else does it. Advertisers rely on crowd mentality. If you don't believe me, look around your houses. Does anyone have a bread maker? Good aren't they. They were the housewives' fad of 2002. The marketing men sold it well so that loads of people have one. Crowd mentality, peer pressure. I remember someone telling me that they voted Conservative because they lived in a safe Tory seat and as they would win anyway they voted Tory. They seemed taken aback when I suggested that the idea was that you voted according to your conscience!

Following the crowd. Being a Christian in 2003 means that you don't follow the crowd. It isn't popular being a Christian. We're just weirdos who brainwash people and deceive people. We say, no we don't! We are in the business of seeing people's lives transformed, bringing hope, meaning, purpose. We have a simple and revolutionary message. But it is comfortable to live in the crowd and live in misery than know the peace, purpose and hope that Jesus brings!

We live in the society of the crowd, but God wants us to be people who stand out from it - we're different and we've got something that others don't have. What sort of Jesus do you have this morning - one you are ashamed of? Or one whom you will always put the palm branch up for whatever the situation, come rain or shine and shout Hosanna! Save!

The Pharisees

The last in out little group were the Pharisees. Let's face it, they were not believers. *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: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" 40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."*

How dare your disciple speak out and tell people what God has done! How dare you make claims about Jesus. There are plenty of them still around. People who would want to tell us

how inadequate our faith is. People who stop us making the claims that we do. If that's you this morning, then may I ask you what you are relying on to explain the vital issues of life and death? Last Sunday morning we saw that for most people on this planet, they are kept going because they are supported by a crutch of one kind or the other - drink, drugs, false hope, excitement, trust in things, sex and the like. And they accuse Christianity of being a crutch - it's the reverse - it's the only way of living life without a crutch!

The Pharisees didn't see any of it. Yet Jesus rode into town and as He predicted, he rode to death. He rode to suffering on the cross. He rode in to resurrection. Why did Jesus die? For you and for me. The biggest thing achieved was a way by which your sins and mine could be forgiven. This morning God offers you forgiveness, eternal life and His presence in your life day by day.

The issue is - are you going to be like the Pharisees and just try and shut your ears to it all? or maybe you'll be like the crowd and quickly forget it. Jesus wants you to be like His disciples because one day they did understand what Jesus meant and what they had been deaf to. He is God's eternal Son. In Him is life. In Him is peace with God?

If you've never trusted Jesus before, He is the living risen Lord who wants to be part of your life, who wants you to come to God and find forgiveness, to live life a new way - God's way. To know His transforming power in your life.