

Palm Sunday

Ranters or Ravers?

Matthew 21:1-11

RAVER OR RANTER?

Do you know the difference? Now before you point it out to me, the word “raver” has a number of meanings. I realised this when I googled the word and got a series of pictures of flirty looking young ladies. Bearing in mind that I’m addressing a mixed audience of all ages in a church, I’m using the word in the much broader sense.

RAVERS Therefore party ravers are people who go to parties and nightclubs where the music and level of energy is high. Even more broader, if you rave about something, you’re going over the top saying how great something is. You may therefore want to rave over the latest film, your new car or some other amazing experience that probably leaves others non-plussed. That’s the meaning of “raver” in the context of what I’m talking about this morning – just so you’re not confused!

VICTOR MELDREW. There’s no guessing what a ranter is – someone who goes over the top complaining!

Everyone loves a party. You’ve all heard the saying, but it’s just not true is it?. There are always those who don’t get an invite who are not loving the party. I can remember when we lived in London that it was common for people in some communities who would have parties, or should I say raves, for days.

TUBE PARTY 1

In London, people will have parties anywhere – even on the Tube. Great idea, but would you find half dressed, half sober males intimidating? **TUBE PARTY 2** Many ordinary travellers did so the Police acted.

HOUSE PARTY

Then there are house parties. I remember them from when we lived there. Loud music would blare day and night. **POLICE** Eventually the Police and Council noise abatement officials would arrive to break it up. Of course, those at the party would complain about the neighbours being grumpy ranters, and the neighbours would complain about the inconsiderate ravers!

PALM LEAF PARTY

Easter Week – starts with a party and ends with one. On Palm Sunday we remember that triumphant entry into Jerusalem. However, by the end of the week, Jesus was no longer on a donkey, but on a cross. From the high of welcoming the coming King, we are going to move to the Service of Darkness as we remember the cross. Next Sunday though, we are going to have much more of a party as we remember His resurrection.

RAVERS AND RANTERS

So we have this scene where Jesus enters Jerusalem. But as we realised from our reading this morning, there were those cheering and celebrating Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and then there were those speaking words of doubt. Who is this? Or was it more along the lines of “who does He think He is?” That was the beginning of the week.

Contrast these words with how each are described by the end of the week.

RAVERS AND RANTERS 2

The problem is with ravers and ranters is that each have a destructiveness about them. Ravers are self-destructive. Ranters are worse; they destroy both themselves and others.

At the end of the week, those who were speaking superlatives at the start of the week were nowhere to be seen. The crowd had evaporated. The disciples ran off. Why? They were happy to support Jesus when the going was good, but when things got tough they were off. The disciples were much more committed, but when they were faced with their own mortality, they fled.

Of course the ranters were worse. They complained a lot, and when they saw their chance they put to death that which they didn’t like, whether Jesus came from God or not. They were there to protect

themselves and their interests. They came first. Tough on Jesus if they had to stitch Him up. He was expendable.

Let me ask you a question this morning:

ARE YOU A RANTER OR A RAVER?

Just as in the Palm Sunday scene, you'll find both both sorts of person in any church congregation.

RAVER

Ravers tend to be people who engage with Jesus when it suits. If it feels good, if they think God is blessing them, then they will follow Jesus enthusiastically. But when the going gets tough in their lives, or something "more important" comes up they are gone - taking time out, not spending time with God. Or maybe they hear some new doctrine or idea, or someone discourages them in their faith and they're gone. All are characteristic of believers that have never matured in their faith.

VERSE We need to grow up. Here's what Paul says: *We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.*

Ephesians 14:4

How do we grow up? How did the disciples change from spiritual shallowness and immaturity? By having that amazing encounter with a risen Saviour we are going to celebrate next week. By allowing the Spirit to work in them and through them.

Perhaps God is challenging you this morning. You know you are running. You know there are aspects of your faith that are lukewarm. You know there are issues in your life you need to deal with. Find the power to overcome in Jesus this morning. He wants to change us. Recognise where you are, find forgiveness and ask Jesus to fill you with His Spirit. Ask for a move of God in your life.

RANTERS

Ranters on the other hand are those who have heard the message, possibly time and time again, but rather than see all that God wants to do in them, resist Him, reject Him or are just confused. I've often met people who are pretty grumpy about God. Mention that you're a Christian and they're off about how bad Christians are, and what a load of rubbish the Christian faith. Of course there is the very modern response: "it's OK for you to believe it, but don't pester me with them".

Maybe you're fed up of people like me saying this but have you accepted Jesus this morning, or are between two opinions? Here's a few words from Jesus:

As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day John 12:47-48

I often find people who aren't Christians feel intimidated by Christians, particularly if they start talking about faith. They feel condemned because they don't believe. Actually we reflect the words of Jesus - we are only doing His word - not to condemn it but to save it. But in the end you are still responsible to God. Therefore you're not answerable to me for your life and your words - you are answerable to God. How are you going to explain yourself? I know what I'm going to say - I've accepted the words of Jesus, I've found forgiveness. In Jesus, I'm right with God.

VERSE Here's some more words from the Bible that sums up what I'm going to say when I stand before God: *God .. wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.* 1 Tim 2:4-6

In following Jesus, I have one who I know will speak up for me because He died for me. He was the ransom that brought me back to God. God wants everyone to have this benefit. But the choice is ours.

So ranter or raver? Actually God wants us to be Neither

NEITHER VERSE

He wants us to be one of His, and to be someone who understands just how amazing He truly is.

Here's Paul's prayer which applies as much to us as the Ephesians: *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts*

through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
Ephesians 3:16-19

These are amazing verses. How do we get that depth of faith that makes a difference. Look at some of the superlatives in this verse. I've listed four of them. Prays for them:

To have inner strength through the Holy Spirit

To know an indwelling Saviour

To be rooted in love

To be filled with God

It's all about strength, a deep personal experience of God, to be filled with His Spirit, to understand the depths of His love for us.

The churches of Felixstowe are beset with many issues today this one included - lack of the younger generation, lack of people willing to take responsibility in the church, little commitment to sharing the Good news, few willing to serve. What will make the difference?

What turned the disciples from ravers who jumped ship when the heat was turned up on them? They had a living experience with the living Jesus.

Maybe it's been a while since we had a dynamic experience of the presence and power of God. Perhaps we've never had such an experience. The message of Easter is that Jesus has died and rose again so that each man and woman may know the life-transforming power of God. How do we get it?

Simple. Ask. Just that. Ask. This prayer isn't about some of the saints getting all these blessings. It's for everyone who has trusted Jesus. God wants us to be full of Him. Filled with His Spirit. Ask.

In Palm Sunday, we remember a Saviour who came, to transform people's lives. Is God calling you from the shallowness of raving, or the confusion of ranting this morning? Do you need to have a fresh dynamic encounter with Jesus? Or maybe just have one. Then ASK.

Prayer

PS

*Preached by Mark Reid
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Ride On

Mark 11:1-25

We have considered today the events of Palm Sunday. This morning I looked specifically at the triumphal entry, but there was more to the day than that as Jesus moved to the temple and caused a ruckus and then there was the strange tale of the fig tree that withered. All of them tell us something about who Jesus was and is. Let's have a brief look at these events.

- Entry into the City

Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph - not as a general on his white charger with an army, but on a donkey surrounded by his cheering followers shouting Hosanna which means "Save now". If Jesus was to be doing any conquering, it was not going to be your normal conquest! A General showed his authority in conquest by military power. So how could a man on a donkey with a load of peasants waving palm branches show authority?

Consider first what He was sitting on. It was a young donkey - a colt on which no-one had ever ridden. Do you know what a donkey that has ever been ridden on will do when someone sits on? It will do one of two things - probably both. Firstly it will become a bucking bronco. Donkeys are really good shakers and kickers. Normally one would have expected Jesus to have landed in a heap on the floor. If not, then the donkey simply would not have gone anywhere. Donkeys, like horses, need to be trained before they obey commands and their behaviour is more cat-like than dog-like: they have a mind of their own and will let you know it!

But here was Jesus, sitting on the donkey riding into Jerusalem. Impossible. It was an amazing spectacle and it was not missed on the people waving palm branches. How did He get away with it? The white charger would have been a symbol of human authority, but for Jesus to ride on this colt showed His authority over creation. That's who He was Lord of and this confirmed it.

- The cleansing of the Temple

If you think that's amazing, then what about his trip to the temple. Let's say you are in Manning's on a Sunday afternoon and an angry man starts turning over the stalls. He's shouting that the whole purpose of Manning's was a funfair, not a market! What would you do? Call the Police, try to restrain him, help the stallholders get him out of the market?

Here's Jesus, disgusted by the fact that the place that should be the world's premier religious shrine - a place of prayer and worship, should be a den of thieves as He called it - and He's so disgusted that he overturns the tables. There was a reason for the tables. People wanted to buy animals for sacrifices and doing business in the temple courts was convenient. But in doing that they lost something. The sacrifices should have been a product of their own farms - the best they could produce - and yards, not just a commodity they could barter the cheapest price on. They had turned the devotion of sacrifice into just another commodity.

Jesus wasn't just complaining about the way trade was debasing the Temple, but on the whole system that was designed to cheapen worship. You can imagine the chaos he caused. He's making a statement - that in the Temple the authority of God is supremely important, not business, or the cheapest deal on sacrifices.

He claims that authority there – He said “don’t you know that my Father’s house is a house of prayer” What does that mean? The Jews knew. Every time Jesus referred to His Father He claimed equality with God. He was God, living on Earth as a human being. It was that claim to authority that they picked up on later in the week.

- The Fig Tree

Next is the bizarre story of the fig tree that withered. Why kill it? Because Jesus has authority over creation and He wanted to let people know that He did. But why do something trivial with that power and authority as kill a fig tree when there are plenty of other beneficial things He could have done? To show that if He can use His power to do something as trivial as kill off a tree, how much more willing and able he will be to deal with all the important things in life He had the power and the authority to do as He pleased, whether spectacular or trivial. But the significant thing was that He laid aside all those rights to allow Himself to be taken and crucified. The greatest act in history was one where the Son of God laid aside His power and laid aside His life. Who for? Romans 5: *6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

What was the purpose of His death? To die for us. Of course, the whole focus of our evening today, is to remember that Jesus, the Son of God, the One who had power over creation, the One with authority from the Father, laid down His life for us. His body was broken for us, His blood was shed for our sins that we might have forgiveness, freedom, sonship, eternal life. He became powerless to save the powerless. And we remember and celebrate that this evening. He opened a way of forgiveness to us even though He was the one that was wronged, such is His love and grace. And we remember that as we take the bread and wine this evening.

I know we are at the start of Holy Week but we know the end of the story we’ll celebrate next week: John 10:17 *The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.*

He had the authority to lay His life down, and He did. The ultimate show of authority is that He triumphed over death. The very thing that humans have no control over, He now shows that He has complete authority over it. And He’s glorified, powerful and empowering.

As you know, I have recently been encouraging us to start to recognise that we have a Saviour who is immensely powerful. It is His Spirit inside each of us and it is time to embrace the notion that God’s Spirit desires to work through each of us in power. How does that happen?

How do we embrace the power of God. It starts in the same place as Jesus. It starts with humility and offering, even facilitating forgiveness. Why? Because that’s exactly what Jesus did for us. Want to know God’s power? Ask but remember that power is borne from humility. Let’s bear that in mind as we come aside for communion this evening.