

It's not about the Palms

Matthew 21:1-11 (NLT) As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. ²“Go into the village over there,” he said. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will immediately let you take them.” ⁴This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,

⁵“Tell the people of Jerusalem, ‘Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey riding on a donkey’s colt.’” ⁶The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it.

⁸Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, “Praise God for the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD! Praise God in highest heaven!”

¹⁰The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. “Who is this?” they asked. ¹¹And the crowds replied, “It’s Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Introduction: Going to church on Palm Sunday was always something I looked forward to as a child. Not because of the sermon or even the worship, but because we got palm branches that my parents would weave into a cross for us that we kept until they dried up and were thrown away.

It wasn't until many years later that I realized Palm Sunday was more about worship and proclaiming Jesus as Messiah and King than it was about palms.

It's so easy to get caught up in an event and not understand what's going on.

It was no different on the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Many of the people were caught up in the electrifying atmosphere of proclamation and worship but had no idea what was going on.

It appears that the entire scene in Matthew 21 begins with excitement and fades just as quickly as it began. Perhaps we can take away from this brief display of zeal that we should never confuse emotion for devotion or enthusiasm for faith.

Jesus was well aware that the majority of those shouting were simply caught up in a wave

they didn't understand.

They were calling him the triumphant messiah/king, but they didn't realize He didn't come to be crowned King of sinners; He came to be crucified in the place of sinners.

They didn't realize that what they desired was not what they required.

They desired a messiah, a savior King who would liberate them from the rule of man, but Jesus came to liberate us from the rule of sin and death.

Their misunderstanding explains why, in the space of one week, Jesus went from appearing to be the most popular person in Jerusalem to public enemy number one.

Many of the same people who proclaimed Jesus as the messiah would be swayed a week later to call for His death.

Matthew 27:20-23 (NLT) Meanwhile, the leading priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be put to death. ²¹So the governor asked again, "Which of these two do you want me to release to you?"

The crowd shouted back, "Barabbas!" ²² Pilate responded, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" ²³ "Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?" But the mob roared even louder, "Crucify him!"

How could they do such a thing? How could the people in the crowd, many of whom had heard about Him and the amazing things he had done, be so easily swayed to demand His death?

Let me start with three observations and then go over each one individually.

- Jesus had captured their attention, but not their hearts.
- They were interested in him because of what he could do, not because of who he was.
- They sought outward deliverance but remained inwardly bound

Jesus had captured their attention, but not their hearts.

Matthew 21:8 (NLT) Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Because it was Passover, there were probably around 2 million people in and around Jerusalem.

With this many people in town crowding the already narrow streets of Jerusalem, you can imagine that not everyone throwing down Palm branches was a devout follower of Christ. They were just another face in the crowd.

When something interesting is going on, there is always a crowd that gathers. The issue with crowds is that they are easily swayed. This is why the Pharisees were able to persuade them to demand Barabbas' release and Jesus' execution.

Even this prisoner exchange pointed to Jesus' mission that they didn't understand.

Barabbas was imprisoned alongside rebels who had committed murder during an insurgency against the Roman occupiers. Because of the crowd's demand, He was released and pardoned by the governor, and Jesus was sentenced to death instead.

They were interested in him because of what he could do, not because of who he was.

John 6:26 (NLT) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs."

Some people seek God for what He can do for them rather than for who He is. Some people do not seek a genuine and obedient relationship with God; rather, they seek to use Him as a means to greater material wealth.

When Jesus entered the city for the final week of his life, he did not perform any more public miracles.

- He cleansed the temple courts of shady money changers, overturning the tables.
- He cursed the fig tree for failing to bear fruit.
- He chastised the scribes and Pharisees who tried to trap him.

Matthew 23:23-24 (NLT) "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. ²⁴ Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!

- He told His disciples about future events such as the destruction of Jerusalem, the end times, His second coming, and the final judgment.

- He washed the disciples' feet and instituted the Lord's Supper, also known as holy communion.

All of Jesus' actions pointed not only to the fulfillment of His mission on the cross, but also to the call to surrender to Him as Lord.

They sought outward deliverance but remained inwardly bound

Matthew 21:9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!"

Hosanna doesn't mean "praise God" it actually means "Save Now" or "Deliver Now".

Too many people seek Christ only for relief from the pain of a personal crisis, but once the season is over and the pain appears to have subsided or improved, they quickly forget their pledge and profession and return to their old way of life.

They proclaim Jesus as King and Messiah, but only for a day or a season, and it ends as quickly as it began.

Jesus does not want to be King for a day. This is not a prom night where you crown someone and then forget about them for the rest of your life.

This is a day of genuine worship and surrender.

Although not fully understood at the time, the events of Palm Sunday were a triumphant entry of God's redemptive plan to save mankind through Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus' triumphant entry was the catalyst for His arrest, trial, judgment, and execution, culminating in His triumphant defeat of sin and death.

Colossians 2:15 (NIV) And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

When we know the truth, our worship becomes genuine and pure. We move from emotion for devotion or enthusiasm for faith.

This day is not about palms, it is about worship and surrender to the King of kings who triumphed on the cross over sin and death to lead us to freedom.

Let Him capture your heart, surrender for who He is and receive what you truly need, forgiveness and freedom from sin.