

The Odd King

Luke 19:28-40, *After telling this story, Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of His disciples. As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, He sent two disciples ahead. "Go into that village over there," He told them. "As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying that colt?' just say, 'The Lord needs it.'" So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, "Why are you untying that colt?" And the disciples simply replied, "The Lord needs it." So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for Him to ride on.*

As He rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of Him. When He reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of His followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!" But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!" He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!"

If you listen intently, you can hear the crowd. Off in the distance, a muffled roar, indistinguishable words, then a cheer, and then a chant: *"Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!"* You can sense the excitement in the air. You find yourself climbing a tree to cut off a palm branch. Soon, you start straining to see through all the other waving palm branches. You may even find yourself shouting *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"* And if you are the kind of person who thinks about such matters, you may even wonder what all this is about. Who is this man on the donkey that the people are treating like a king? What kind of king is this? But one thing's for sure, when this odd king arrives, the political and religious higher echelon were going to be challenged.

Luke's gospel is very clear in making the point that Jesus is coming as a king who will lay claim to Jerusalem. He enters from the main gate with a procession welcoming Him as the new king. Clothes and palm branches are waved, and Jesus rides into the city like a victor. With His followers crying out;

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

After years of Roman occupation, the Jewish people long for change. And while for much of Jesus' ministry He has exercised His authority and power within segments of society (amongst the poor, the out-cast, the lepers, and the sinners), now He arrives at the political and religious capital with an entry that will not go unnoticed. Indeed, His entry is provocative. We hear the Pharisees saying, *"Teacher, rebuke your disciples,"* because His disciples are proclaiming Him king, and not just any king, but the Messiah. To this Jesus responds, *"I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will burst into cheers."* Whether they understood what He had said or not, Jesus "ups the ante", He amplifies His claim to power and authority, not just over Jerusalem, but over creation itself. Indeed, what He was doing had significant importance for not just the people of Israel but "all of creation."

It seems an obvious question, but did the people who had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem know that His end would come soon - hanging on a cross outside the very walls of the Jerusalem? No, off cause they didn't! **Luke 24:18-24**... *They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked Him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him; but we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find His body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said He was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see Him."*

Two disciples, one named Cleopas and his wife, walking on the road to Emmaus, suddenly encounter the risen Christ, who they do not recognise until later when they invite Him into their home and break bread with Him. Jesus said to them, *"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His **glory**?"* (Verses 25, 26) What was Christ's glory? What kingship awaited Jesus upon the cross? These words were written above Jesus on the cross, **"The king of the Jews."** I sometimes wonder what the sign on the cross really signified. And who wrote it. Who decided to write that title in a couple languages, so no one could mistake that this man was the One who called Himself **king**, and Who died for such claims?

Whether this statement was meant to be religious or just political, it doesn't matter. We know it was both. What double irony lay in that sign! Of course, the Romans were trying to be facetious because they didn't write, "He claimed to be king of the Jews" but in mockery of the Jews they wrote, "King of the Jews."

It is very paradoxical, since just 388 years later, the Roman Emperor Constantine would make Christianity the religion of all the Romans. Indeed, the Emperor himself would kneel before this **"King of the Jews."** Surely, it was the irony of ironies when Jesus stepped onto the world's stage (that day in Jerusalem), and where His kingship is foreshadowed by Him arriving on a young donkey. Yes, I find much irony in this - the triumphal entry of the 'odd King' of the Universe. The One who will soon take upon Himself the sins of the world, and redeem not only Israel, and not only all of humanity, but the whole of creation! Yes, I find it ironic that He arrives on a young donkey.

The Master of the Universe came to fulfil His mission riding on a borrowed donkey! So, if the Master of the Universe was prepared to give up everything and hang on the cross (giving Himself up in place of you and me); then this same King who rules from a rugged cross and rises from an empty tomb, has made way for His citizens to **rule** and **reign** with Him. I believe, this is how the glory of God expressed itself in its fullness. Therefore, we should all be crying out *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"* What's more, if you listen intently, amid the cracked rocks and worn stones, creation itself is probably crying out, *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*

Notice, while the cloaks and the palm branches made this a very royal procession, the cheers of the people are even more significant. **"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"** The word "hosanna" is a Latinised trans-literation of a Hebrew phrase that means "please save" or "help from above!" It occurs in **Psalm 118:25**, just before the other phrase used here, *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"* Both of these quotations were used in the liturgy of the Jewish feast of tabernacles, when the people would commonly wave branches in the air and pray for God's help (their salvation).

"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" was a popular greeting shared between pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the festival. Here it is adapted to pronounce a blessing on the **king** who comes in the name of the Lord. **Matthew 21:5** and **John 12:15** remember that Zechariah had prophesied something very much like this: *"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)

As we imagine this scene, we must remember that the story never ends. When the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem, all the people took notice. Matthew tells us that the whole city was stirred and asked *"Who is this?"* The crowds answered, *"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."* The problem with palms is that once you cut the branches from the tree, they don't live long. The problem with Palm Sunday is that the excitement of that crowd soon faded, and when Good Friday rolled around, many of the same voices who shouted "Hosanna!" were also shouting "Crucify Him!"

Their love for the Lord was shallow and based entirely on their hope of what exciting things He could do for them. However, this day in Jesus' life was significant in many ways. Jesus knew that the end of His earthly ministry was near. It was time to do what He had come to accomplish. It was now or never! This was Jesus' opportunity to be obedient to the will of God, and to fulfil the purpose set out for Him. It's a day in history that should speak to Christians of every age.

Are you also so shallow that you wave palms in worship on Sunday, but refuse to obey the Servant King during the week? There is an abundant life ahead of you, and a purpose for your life. But this can only be established as you cry, **"Hosannah."** This word comes from the Hebrew phrase *hōshi `āh nnā* *"save now, we pray."* **Hosannah** literally means, **"Save me now, I pray!"**

If you want to experience the supernatural life, you must know where your salvation comes from (every moment of every day). Because your salvation is an ongoing necessity! It started when you were born again, but you need to be **saved** day by day, moment by moment! **Psalm 62:1** says, *"Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him alone comes my salvation."* **2 Samuel 22:3** declares, *"The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, My stronghold and my refuge; My Saviour, You save me from disaster."*

1 Corinthians 1:18 is very interesting, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."* Someone once said, "You need to be 'being

saved' daily!"

Hosannah, Hosannah.... "Save me now, save me now - I pray!"