



THE NEW SHOFAR

JESUS - THE MESSIAH GOD KNOWS WE NEED

Holy Week Begins

PALM SUNDAY

Setting the scene:

The Mount of Olives was important in Jewish thinking about the End Time. It was the mountain on which God would stand as the Judge of all peoples... **Zechariah 14:4**... *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.* For Mark, this Day has now arrived, and it is through this Jesus divine judgment is being delivered and all peoples set free from sin. It is also mentioned by Ezekiel as a resting place for God. As God leaves the Temple and later when he returns from Babylon he will travel via that mountain... *The glory of the LORD went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it (Ezekiel 11:23).* And then, in the Acts of the Apostles Jesus ascends to heaven from the Mount of Olives. What Palm Sunday does for Easter is remind Christians of what is happening. It is in these events God's saving works are to be fulfilled and in what happens to this man Jesus of Nazareth, all men and women are set free.

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord God

From our vantage point today it is a little difficult to appreciate the way Mark has put together his account of that first Sunday of the palms. Importantly, there are the numerous allusions to the Hebrew scriptures. When Simon Maccabeus (142 BC) freed Jerusalem from the control of Israel's enemies *he (and the Jews) entered Jerusalem with praise and palm branches and with harps and cymbals, with stringed instruments and with hymns and songs..(1 Maccabees 13:51).* Then there is the anointing and coronation of Solomon as king. He enters Jerusalem on the mule belonging to David his father amidst great music and dancing (1 Kings 1:32ff). When Jehu is anointed king of Israel by Elisha, the people spread their cloaks on the ground under his feet (2 Kings 9:1-13).

The Gospel recounts how the disciples placed their cloaks onto the donkey's back and Jesus then sat on it. As they travelled towards the city people placed their own clothes onto the road while others cut off branches and set them on the road. This is the only time Jesus is shown riding a beast and it is very unusual as pilgrims always walked to Jerusalem. The point being made is how Jesus is fulfilling the prophesy of Zechariah 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.* Singing, changing and dancing were all traditional parts of these pilgrimages and it appears as though Jesus is in the middle of just such a pilgrimage.

The crucial point for the evangelist is the way the people leading the group were all singing *Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest.* These words form the first two verses of Psalm 118:26 which was a psalm normally used at the Feast of the Passover and celebrated their arrival

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

anathoth.hough@gmail.com - www.houghgod.com

at the Temple. It was a psalm of worship and praise. The *one who comes in the name of the Lord* was to be the Messiah and here Mark is clarifying how Jesus is now the one about whom they are singing. However, as with so much of the Gospel, what the people think God is doing and what God is actually doing turn out to be very different things indeed!

What they think is happening has nothing to do with what Jesus is planning. He has come to Jerusalem *in order to be crucified* but they are celebrating his immanent military victory over the armies of Rome. Jesus is thus being presented as the one who has been sent by God to re-establish the throne of David in Jerusalem but his rule will be different. What Jesus is doing is in no way a military action, nor is it political or revolutionary in nature. It is a purely religious act by God.

The purpose and meaning of Easter

Easter is not meant to be a mere re-enactment of historical events that happened in the distant past. It calls for a response from Christians and without a life altering response in the present, it misses the point. In our Easter liturgies, Jesus is presented to us as *God-among-us*. Our participation calls forth from us a commitment to faith in Jesus as The Living Christ, as our Saviour and the Saviour of the world. There is no neutrality permitted. We are committed to him as the dead and Risen Messiah or our faith remains empty. Here is the question with which we are being challenged: Do we want a Saviour, need a Saviour? Do we feel the need to be set free and prepared to follow Christ to that freedom? Without these, Easter remains a thing of the past and we fail to engage with the *Living-Christ*, to *God-among-us*.

All of the evangelists want to make sure we all understand a very important element of this divine call to life in the Kingdom of God. The power of this King of Kings is a very different kind of power to that exercised by the Roman Caesar. Peace across the Roman Empire was enforced by a ruthless application of military and political power. It was peace at the end of a sword and was best characterized by oppression and devastation. The Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is a peace upon the earth that is achieved not by crushing one's enemies but through laying down his life for them. It is a peace that is established through reconciliation and restoration. Jesus is a Servant Messiah and not a valiant warrior riding on a war horse to take his place in the royal courts. He came to serve and not to be served and serve he did. He is a very different kind of king to the leaders of the nations around Israel.

The people here in Jerusalem are filled with joy and give Jesus praise and honour as he rides into the City. They do this because they can almost feel that Rome's time has now come to an end. They have their new king, and all will be well. But this is not the way of Jesus and so the crowds quickly abandon him. True peace will come to the world only through his death on the cross, through his willingness to lay down his life for the reconciliation of all people with God. What Mark is highlighting here is how a genuine peace comes about through faith in Jesus Christ the *crucified* Messiah. Peace is what happens when people are united to God and so to each other in Jesus. There is no other way to achieve universal and lasting peace on earth except through Jesus.

As is blindingly obvious from the world around us today, politics, nationalism, religion and military power are never going to bring peace and goodwill to all nations. Violence, injustice, hatred, arrogance, greed, selfishness and discrimination will always prosper where Jesus is absent. However, the same call he announced during his ministry is proclaimed to us today. He calls for repentance, humility and servanthood, a genuine and active service of others that goes as far as a willingness to die for others. Then will peace rule on earth. Peace will once again be restored to the earth only when the world allows Jesus to be their servant Messiah. That is why we celebrate Easter.