

When Jesus Comes to Town – *Mark 11:1-26*

Palm Sunday – 2009

Introduction – What happens when Jesus comes to town? What happens when Jesus comes in our midst? Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the most world-transforming event ever in the history of humanity.

The Cheers of Hosanna (Mark 11:1-11) – The three year ministry of Jesus Christ was all leading to this week we call Holy Week, from Palm Sunday to the day of Resurrection. Fulfilling prophecy, Jesus sends His disciples ahead that He might ride in on a colt (v1-2). When asked, the disciples were to assert the Lordship of Jesus (v3), which they did (v6). Jesus was declaring His Kingship over Jerusalem and coming riding on a donkey of peace, humility, and victory (v7, Zech 9:9-10). As He comes into Jerusalem, the crowds lay down their garments (an act of submission which was done as Jehu rode in as king in 2 Kings 9:11-13). Singing Psalm 118, a psalm of victory and deliverance, they laid down palm branches as well (Psalm 118:22-26). And so what is happening? The Messiah comes to the home, the capitol of His covenant people and is rightly greeted with worship, adoration, humility, and love.

The Cheers to Crucify Him (Mark 15:6-15) – All of the gospels tell us about that first crowd; and each one tells us of a second crowd as well, just a few days later. Verse seven indicates that Barabbas was a political prisoner of sorts. The chief priests stir up the crowd to choose the one who would seek to kill pagans rather than to choose the One who would die for pagans, rebels, kings, and the Jews themselves. Even Pilate knew that the chief priests had handed Jesus over because of envy (v10) and wanting to be no friend to them, he asks the crowd (v9). Jesus had stirred up the first crowd, but the unbelieving chief priests (remember, these are not faithful Jews) stir up the crowd to call for the crucifixion of Jesus. Pilate, wanting to appease the crowd, released Barabbas to them and delivered Jesus to be crucified. And so what is happening here? The Messiah in the midst of the home, the capitol of His covenant people is openly scorned and rejected by upstanding religious people and the crowd they incite.

When Jesus Came to Town (Mark 11:12-21) – Let's return to our first passage and consider why this change occurs. Jesus enters the temple and looks around, not only as conquering king but as the true priest of God, inspecting the temple for uncleanness (Lev 14:33-53). What He saw is made clear in the interchange of the story of the fig tree and His actions the next day in the temple. Jesus sees a good looking fig tree that has no fruit and He condemns it. He then enters into a good looking temple and finds no fruit and condemns it. Both are pictures of hypocrisy. When Jesus comes in to inspect His covenant peoples' home, He looks under the leaves, under the outer beauty and finds the heart of the matter.

Taking Care of the Matter (Mark 11:22-26) – But Jesus does not simply leave angry. He is going to do something about it. As He said elsewhere, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Speaking about His own body and His own resurrection, Jesus also is identifying Himself with the Temple in which He stands and with His people. For He, and His people, would say to this mountain, "be removed and be cast into the sea," and that is certainly what happened to that Temple. Jesus then instructs His disciples as they pray such imprecatory prayers, that it must not be with as self-righteous anger. The disciples must pray with faith, but also with their hearts free of bitterness and hatred against those who wrong us (Acts 7:60). The point of cleansing the temple is to restore; it is to provide forgiveness and resurrection.

When Jesus Comes to Town – Now what are we to learn from these stories? Jesus comes to us, His living temple, every Lord's Day as we enter into our covenant time of worship and renewal. He comes in the power of His Holy Spirit and as the Prince of Peace. But He comes to inspect as well. He comes to cause trouble and stir things up (Matt 10:34-39) looking for true fruit, not just outer leaves or religious activity. In His inspection, He finds branches to be cut out and others to be pruned (John 15:1-8). In other words, as He comes to us, an honest but uncomfortable time of inspection and cleansing is to take place. He does this as He brings His Word through His preaching (Rom 10:14-17) and again we see that faith is required to cause this great work. Jesus refuses to share His throne or His temple with any other "lord" (Ex 20:1-3, 34:13-14, Isaiah 42:8).

Forgiveness and Resurrection Life – Jesus comes looking for fruit; and it is interesting that the one obvious fruit brought out in Mark is the fruit of forgiveness. He expects to find deep loyalty to Himself and His ways – a zeal for righteousness. But His righteousness is demonstrated by serving, by forgiving one another as He has forgiven us – for that is how this temple has been constructed. The message of Palm Sunday is not only a message about the coming conquering King, or the power of prayer over God's enemies; but about the power of God to forgive sins as we forgive others.

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