

Online service sheet during the coronavirus

Hosanna

Reading Psalm 118 (page 616)

Reading Matthew 21:1-11 (page 988)

Also found at Mt 21:1-12, Mr 11:1-11, Lu 19:28-45, Joh 12:12-16

Title: The Champion

Listen to today's sermon by clicking on link at [www.knbc.org](http://www.knbc.org).

The audio file is [20\\_04\\_05\\_palm\\_sunday.mp3](#) in the sermons directory

### Exordium

Today is Palm Sunday, the day many years ago that cheering crowds gathered along a dusty road on the way up to Jerusalem. Find it hard to imagine with our empty roads? Do you now dream of crowds?, and crowded places? Sorry, I don't wish to make you feel more lonely and isolated!

The present Covid-19 virus carries with it a stark reminder to all of us. What do I mean by that? We live in a world of 'conflict'. x2

With sickness and death, we seek a cure, in confusion we seek clarity, in fear we seek relief and hope. But hope for what? That the numbers in the UK and elsewhere will drop?, hope that *I* won't get it?, hope of a vaccine?, hope I'll have enough money to buy food?, hope there'll be food to buy, etc.

There's the **conflict**. A conflict between how things are - and how things should be. we know how things 'should be' – but that's not how they are.

Throughout the history of the world, men and women have lived in hope for something better, things as they 'should be'.

- We often see that at election time here, and particularly across the world. There's the new face, the rising star, the Charismatic leader who promises to be the key to a more prosperous or better future. Tony Blair's slogan of 'New Labour New Britain', John F Kennedy's 1960 US presidential campaign slogan, 'A time for greatness', or remember Barak Obama's mantra "Together we can"

It's always been true; Napoleon, Lenin, Hitler, Charles De Gaulle, Martin Luther King, Gorbachov.... You might think why included those rogues and tyrants, well they didn't look like that before, only afterwards. Before they looked liked saviours!

- Picture the vast crowds gathers outside the Kremlin, or Tiananmen Square with Chairman Mao with his 'Great Leap Forward', or at St Peter's square in Rome looking up to the Pope...

All over the world people gather to those who promise to champion change for a better, brighter future, the hope of a real difference to their lives.

That was true to in first century Israel as the Passover festival approached. A time of the year when you might expect crowds to gather, it was the start of the Passover, the Jewish festival of Pesach. For centuries it is this week, and this week particularly that their hopes are raised. They looked back nostalgically to their escape from slavery in Egypt and the forming of one Nation under God. But look forward longingly for it yet to be fully realised.

✚ This was all about deliverance and hope. Sounds familiar?

This time the gathering is centered on one person, is this the man? Is He the one who will finally bring it all about? Their hopes are set on Him, will he now – at last – bring in a lasting change for their nation?

Let us go back in time to find out a why these Jews felt this way? What is going on? what is their national and historical setting?

Israel in AD33 was a small province in the vast Roman Empire controlled from afar by powerful Rome. Before that the Greeks under Alexander the Great had invaded their land and conquered it (in 332BC, before breakfast as it were) on their way to Egypt where they established the great city of Alexandria. They then returned back through their country. While they left Judaism fairly intact the Greek culture was not to go away. In 165BC a great revolt took place known as the Hasmonean / Maccabean struggle, a struggle for independence from Syrian overlords who tried to stop the temple sacrifice and Hellenise the country. They were distressing days. Very.

- Perhaps they felt a bit like Poland in modern times - if it isn't the Germans it is the Russians - if it isn't the Russians it is the Germans - when would they have their country back?!

✚ Then comes the great day of liberation.

The enemies are defeated to bother us no more. We are finally free. Hurray!

We all understand this, that last payment is made and the debt is gone. That neighbour from hell has finally moved and we need not lie in our beds in fear. Will there be rejoicing when the chief medical officer stands to declare Covid-19 is no more in the UK. Gone is cholera, leprosy, tuberculosis. What a relief, what a time of rejoicing!!

Everybody sees how it should be, and there are many who make it their life's goal to pursue it. Their target is whatever they think will cure the problem. Some pursue medical advance believing we can eradicate all disease. Some pursue increased prosperity or conversely the removal of social inequality, to eradicate poverty. Today it's a virulent liberalism whose proponents seek to throw off the yoke of supposed dogma & religion that has held people back and been the cause of so much division and war.

**Simply put! - The world can see the problem - but cannot see the solution.**

So in its desire to see the end result, it will fall in behind anyone who looks promising.

Here on this Palm Sunday Jesus is seen as a champion of the cause. They had seen the miracles, they had heard the rumours that He is the Messiah that was to come, now they overflow with expectation!

So what of the palm branch? Palm branches were a sign of triumph. From time immemorial in most of the countries where it flourishes the palm has been the symbol of victory.

So here the Jews who greeted Jesus with shouts of acclamation bore palms in their hands, .... or did they?

In Matthew's account we read: **A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.**

21:8 - which branches? And from where? **branches they had cut in the fields.** <sup>Mk 11:8</sup> are they palm branches? Does say, Luke doesn't mention branches at all.

Were they conveniently to hand as we think? No, palms do not grow readily around Jerusalem, and their thorns make them unsuited for a spontaneous demonstration.

So why do we speak of Palm Sunday? The only mention of palms is in John 12:13. John in his account refers not to crowds heading towards the city but those who come out of the city to meet him. They are the ones who have palm branches. And where did they get them from? Probably stored from the feast of Tabernacles <sup>Lev. 23.40</sup> that had taken place sometime before.

However, the mention of the palm had a deep symbolic meaning, it was the signal sign of success, it was the time honoured mark of the conqueror. When the Maccabees had entered Jerusalem in triumph years before, the people had gone out to meet them with palms in their hands, and the palms were intended to typify the glorious conquests that they had made. And so it was with palms that the populace crowded out to meet the Lord Jesus.

Here was someone in their midst with power. And had not God promised all along there would be a great King coming who gain victory for them over their enemies. Jesus had reached the high-water mark of His fame.

Conquering military leaders would parade through the streets on their return from war with spoils and captives in their wake amidst the adoring shouting crowds.

Jesus however, was not returning from the battle - but heading towards it, to the capital where he would be raised up on shoulders by the cheering crowds and paraded through the streets to the acclamation of king "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**" "**Blessed is the King of Israel!**"

And **Hosanna** from Psalm 118 which means “save”

But wait a moment, it is important that they don't get the wrong end of the stick and misunderstand why Jesus came and the kind of Kingdom he is ushering in.

✚ They had this strong idea – but they were wrong!

- I have only been directly involved in one demonstration and people said to me watch out there are those who will want to hijack it, to use it for their purpose.

Jesus knows their thoughts and forces the narrative. He tells his disciples to go and fetch a donkey x2 – the foul of a donkey. He has already prepared it, they just need to pick it up - and quickly. Why? Otherwise the crowds would have a large war horse ready for him.

Jesus kept the symbolism of the conquering king - but it's a different Kingdom, the battle would be different - for the enemy was different.

They couldn't miss the donkey - a bold statement they just couldn't ignore. **“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.”** Zec 9:9

This is the famous quote from Zechariah (and easy for us to remember for it is 9:9) The problem is that is all we remember or consider.

**Salvation** is what they all wanted to hear, but the Jews could not avoid the connection with what the prophet Zechariah had to say.

They are to **shout** but why? They are told to **rejoice** but why? And why **rejoice greatly**? This verse is not to be taken in isolation - more like a web [hyperlink](#) that takes you to a whole page. So when you see an OT quotation in the NT don't just think of it as ONE verse but read the whole section.

This is important.

Jesus on the cross quoted Ps 22:1. He was saying “go and read the whole of Ps 22 and you will understand what is happening to me here”.

Zechariah is not an easy book I appreciate. But do try and understand when and why it is written and then read the chapters around ch 9 ... say Ch. 8-10

What is happening? The banished exiles have return to their land. The hopes are high as they start rebuilding the temple, the city of Jerusalem and its walls. But it hasn't not gone as expected, the nation is still oppressed by its neighbours. Those promises are only partly realised, it had not turned out as they hoped, it was not as it should be.

The prophet Zechariah promises the future prosperity of Jerusalem, making a marked contrast between the present times of the prophet and the times to come. Then with judgment on surrounding nations, the dwelling of God will be in Jerusalem, family life will no longer disrupted by war, nor harvests destroyed by hostile invaders.

The prophecies spoke of the invisible splendour of the Lord in a city which would be faithful to Him. Its new name is 'The city of the truth' as the seat of the God of Truth, and 'The mount of holiness' as the abode of the Holy One of Israel. A sowing of peace and prosperity, where the foreigner declares surely ‘God is with you’, an echo of the Immanuel prophecy. Here's a picture too brilliant for the returned remnant to visualize.

✚ Have you been disappointed again and again. Are there those regrets?

Do you feel despondent, you resist the temptation to be cynical, do you wonder if and when the expected good news will ever come?

The OT is full of disappointed promise. It is one big disappointment! What do I mean by that? It speaks of hope – but the people never saw what they hoped for.

When Jesus came riding towards Jerusalem they had different enemies but they were hopeful, was now finally the time?

Here in Christ is the one who will open the door to a new Jerusalem, a new Kingdom one where there will be no disappointment.

Zechariah had been speaking of another Jerusalem, not a Jerusalem with streets of stone and walls throwing their long shadows but a kingdom of light, perfect and eternal. Jesus is the promised King who will bring it in.

Unlike the crowd watching him head towards Jerusalem and the cross – we can look back and hear his final war cry “it is finished”

*There is a green hill far away, Without a city wall,  
Where the dear Lord was crucified, Who died to save us all.  
Oh, dearly, dearly has He loved, And died our sins to bear;  
We trust in His redeeming blood, And life eternal share.*

✚ You and I have a hidden enemy, not Covid-19, not anything else like that. Covid-19 will kill the body and that is it, the sin virus kills the soul, so that body and soul are destroyed forever.

Not it's much more serious. Jesus warned the people: **But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.** Lu 12:5

The enemy you and I have is the enemy of guilt – and your accuser who accuses you before a just God. Who one day, on that Day **every violation and disobedience will receive its just punishment.** Heb 2:2

The God of Justice is also a God of love. He is warning you and I, He is warning us all of real judgment that will soon come.

Many are at the moment fearful for their lives. Understandably. We are grateful to God for a proactive government, the emergency services, the medical profession, and our great NHS, but they are not our saviours.

What of God? Now is the time to stop and think about your life? What you have done? And ask what should I now do that I might be prepared to come before God?

We have systematically removed God from every area of our public life. There is a wanton refusal to honour God with our tongue, action, lives, instead we live with me at the centre etc, So God is trying to wake us up..

- .. and shake us up... in removing some of those things we love; no more travel, closed are the bars, clubs, places of entertainment, food, recreation, the making of money £

Will we now stop the sexual immorality, the abortion where 20x more than COVID-19 are killed every day. God is watching, He is keeping record. All who have not come to Christ are in a noose and one day it will tighten.

Although now you think you are standing firm, one day your foot will slip. Someone described Judgment as like a stopped up river where the waters build up more and more and more .... until whoosh

Who can save you from that day? Christ the Champion, who through his own shed blood bought the victory at the cross.

**And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.** Col 2:15

Here is the great *triumph* over the invisible enemy of sin and judgment – now for those who are in Christ there is no condemnation.

Who listening to this message - will now listen to Christ and his call to turn to him in repentance and faith?

- There are fifty agencies around the world, more than that, currently working on a vaccine for Covid-19.

- Imagine I had the vaccine in a phial and help it up announcing that here and here along was a potent that could save lives – and we have lives that need saving

Here God holds up his son Jesus as the cure for sin **'See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation.'** He is about to bring that salvation about in a few short days on a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem

*To end - Don't be like the crowd and reject what you see...*

There they are in the crowd, both together. Behind the shout of *Hosanna* is a foreboding of ill. How quickly it is all over! Today they shout for Him. On Friday they will consent to His death. Today it is 'Hosanna': then it will be 'Crucify'. Today it is palms: then it will be thorns. Could anything be more pitiable? He falls from favour so swiftly that you cannot even trace the decline.

On Sunday He is a King: on Friday He is a Criminal. On Sunday He is adored: on Friday He is accursed. On Sunday all the world has gone after Him: on Friday all the world does Him to death.

How swiftly does palm Sunday draw to its close! That is typical of life. The double mindedness of the hearer is like the double side of the coin.

**How foolish it is to reject the Champion, the only one who can save you**

*Look -*

Palm Sunday took place five days before Christ's death. The Passover was on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month, and this was the 10<sup>th</sup> the day law (Ex 12:3) appointed that the lamb to be slain should be set apart and publicly showed. Stop now and think - Gaze upon the one to be slain – who was slain, Christ the Holy Son of God - given up. ....and receive him now

*Victory towards heaven*

Right from the beginning God had promised one victor - and one victory

**“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”** Ge 3:15

Christ the Champion won that victory on the cross - Indeed palm branches are a sign of victory for they will be used as the church is reformed in heaven. Here those bought by Christ and through His victory on the cross will rejoice, **a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.** Re 7:9