

The events of Palm Sunday are embedded in the Christian imagination, for good reason. Everyone understands the dynamics of a parade. The crowds go out to welcome the conquering heroes. It wasn't that long ago that the streets of Cleveland were flooded with people celebrating a basketball championship. A parade is a way to participate in the victory and honor the ones who brought it home.

So, on the surface, we see Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a colt, and everyone down to the youngest person understands what's going on. We see this powerful image of Jesus receiving a hero's welcome, and it's exciting! Jesus deserves this reception. He's worthy of the acclaim. It's no accident that a lot of the things that were said by the crowds that day have passed into worship use in the church. Hosanna, indeed.

But underneath the triumph is a current of dread; a sense of tragic irony. Since we know the rest of the story, we know that it will take Jesus less than a week to go from being celebrated to being crucified. Jesus is most definitely a conquering hero. But who and what He is going to conquer, and how He is going to do it, is far beyond anyone's expectations. And what I would like to show you today is how the Palm Sunday Incident is drenched in prophecy, from top to bottom, and the way God fulfills his promises always has a way of busting our expectations.

Now, you can't talk about Palm Sunday without mentioning Zechariah 9. You heard it as today's Old Testament Reading. It sets the prophetic precedent that Jerusalem's great king will come riding on a colt. Even with all the study that's been done on this passage, I don't think we can quite grasp just how weird this would've seemed to the ancient person. Simply put, Kings didn't ride little colts. They either rode mighty war horses or were borne along in armored chariots, flanked by guards that were prepared to defend their monarch with lethal force. And yet, the King that Zechariah sees in his prophetic vision is unlike any other, coming up to Zion on his little colt, with his legs pulled up because the animal is so small, and still, he will somehow speak peace to the nations and rule from sea to sea. From our vantage point, we see how precisely Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah, and it is very clear that Jesus did so intentionally, giving his disciples detailed directions about where to find the necessary colt, as well as to whom it should be returned when the parade was over. Also from our vantage point, we see that Zechariah's prophecy about this King speaking peace to the nations is not just poetic exaggeration. The good news of King Jesus is being proclaimed to nations around the world today. Everything unfolded according to God's careful design, which is jaw-dropping, seeing as how the prophet Zechariah predated this parade by 500 years or so.

There is also prophetic power in the words that were used to cheer Jesus on that day. Mark records them saying the following, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the Highest!" There is

sometimes an assumption that people just pulled these words out of the air and started a spontaneous chant, but the evidence suggests something else.

The phrases that the people shouted—or possibly sang—as Jesus came riding up on his tiny mount are taken directly from the Psalms, the hymnal of the Old Testament. Specifically, these phrases are ripped from Psalms 113 through 118, which happen to be the six psalms that are sung before and after Passover. That is, of course, what all these people were doing in Jerusalem at the very moment the King came in; they were getting ready for Passover. They respond to Him by using God’s own Word! Things really start to explode when you get to Psalm 118, where we hear, in verse 26: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.” And just one verse prior, in verse 25, it says, “Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!” It may interest you to know that the phrase “save us,” in the original Hebrew, is ‘hoshi’ah na.’ Hosanna. Save us. The people on Palm Sunday were using the Word of God that they knew—many of them knew by heart—to communicate their hopes to Jesus. But what were those hopes?

They are revealed in the phrase, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.” Everyone on the Palm Sunday Parade route knew that the glory days of Israel were in the distant past. The golden era was nothing but a memory. But the fervent hope was that when the Messiah came, he would restore the fortunes of Zion to something that looked like the era of King David’s reign. A huge portion of what that meant was independence from Roman occupation. So it is safe to say that many of the people shouting ‘hoshi’ah na’ were asking to be saved from these dreadful Roman occupiers; hopes were rising that Jesus’ miracle power would usher in a new age of prosperity, and the solution would primarily be political.

Jesus purpose, though, was in the praise. What I mean is, in the same Psalm—Psalm 118—where “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” comes from and “Hosanna” comes from, it says this: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” Like most prophecy, there are layers of meaning here, but what the Psalm is setting up is the idea that the Messiah, when he comes, will be rejected. He is compared to a stone that builders judged as not good enough to be used. Here again we see how precisely Jesus fulfills the prediction. He will be rejected by the leaders of the very religious system His Father had established. He will be utterly cast aside, because He’s not their ideal candidate. It’s all there in the Psalm they were referencing that Palm Sunday. But the verse continues.

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.” The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone—the most important stone in the building, the stone without which the building falls apart. The people cried out, “hoshi’ah na,” and Jesus comes to answer that very prayer. He comes to save. But he comes to save from something far more threatening than a Roman soldier. He comes not with a political solution, but a solution of the spirit. Jesus comes to set up a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom without borders, a kingdom without soldiers, a kingdom where the King lets everybody in

because he is gracious like that. And to set up that kingdom, he doesn't need a throne. He needs a cross. First, he has to provide a ransom payment for his people, who are held captive by self-centeredness and a vision of the kingdom that is too small. He comes to save; to save humanity from having to pay for their own sins; to save humanity from thinking we *can* pay for our sins. By sacrificing himself, he lays the foundation, and becomes the cornerstone. He becomes the basis for a relationship to God that is founded on grace; that depends not on your performance, but his. The purpose is in the praise; it's all there in the Psalms that were being shouted and sung as he rode up towards the Temple. From top to bottom, all kinds of ancient words of prophecy were coming true that day.

I see a lot of myself in that crowd. They knew the right words to say, and the right person to whom to say them, and they thought that they were asking for the right things. I have a tendency to think that I know what Jesus ought to do for me. I ask him for things and qualities instead of asking him for more him. I ask him to bless my plan, instead of asking what His plan might be, because I'm probably afraid to know the answer. Maybe you can relate to this?

But do you know what Jesus didn't do? Do you know what he doesn't do? My stupid hosannas ought to make him turn his colt around and retreat. But he doesn't turn around. He keeps coming. He keeps entering. He keeps moving towards people like me who just don't understand what He's up to. He hears my silly requests and it doesn't stop him, because he knows he has something far better in store for me. Think of the patience and love that you have to have for someone who asks for all the wrong things, and has all the wrong expectations, and you still come in and do what has to be done to bring about the greatest blessing. That's the King on the colt. Dear Jesus, thank you for never turning around on us.