

April 1st 2012: "What God Needed To Fulfill His Plan" Palm Sunday
Matthew 21:1-11

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday and from what the Bible says there is no doubt that it was God's plan for Jesus to ride as He did that day into Jerusalem. We know that because God Himself announced it to His people some 500 years earlier, just after they had returned from 70 years of exile to a broken down city and a ruined Temple. Many cried when they saw the Temple destroyed and the walls in ruins. Others despaired of Zion, as they called Jerusalem, ever being restored to its former glory. Yet the prophet Zechariah preached about the Messiah who was to come and the glorious future that awaits the people of God. He predicted amongst other things that this Messiah would be rejected and betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, put to death, and then return in glory. He also prophesized that day when He would ride into Jerusalem as king.

Zechariah 9:9 proclaims:

⁹ 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.

We can, I'm sure, imagine the longing the Jews would have had for such an event to take place, and for the next 500 years such a longing never abated. From restoration and rebuilding they went once again into subjugation, until by the time of Christ they were firmly under the iron rule of the Roman Empire, and still they longed for the day that God had told them would definitely take place. And on those occasions when this passage would have been read aloud in the synagogues they would have turned to one another and said, "What an incredible day of rejoicing that will be." "We will shout a mighty shout; we will indeed greatly rejoice; we will weep tears of joy together because our king would have come to us with salvation in his hands."

In this present age we can look back through the Gospel records and see that such a day did come for Jerusalem. And sadly, though at first they greeted it and their king with shouts of hosanna and proclamations of joy, before the week was over the hosannas were replaced with crucify him. Is it

any wonder that when Jesus approached Jerusalem Luke tells us that He stopped and said(19:42-44 CEV):-

It is too bad that today your people don't know what will bring them peace! Now it is hidden from them. ⁴³Jerusalem, the time will come when your enemies will build walls around you to attack you. Armies will surround you and close in on you from every side. ⁴⁴They will level you to the ground and kill your people. Not one stone in your buildings will be left on top of another. This will happen because you did not see that God had come to save you.

To long for something for so many years, and then not to recognize it when it came, must be one of the saddest stories found in the history of the Jews. It also stands as a warning for people today who cling on to this life with a vengeance. Doing all they can to preserve it through sickness and ageing with the hope that something good will follow it for them, once death takes it's unavoidable toll. Yet at the same time disregarding, to a great extent the only One who promises a life eternal that will be infinitely better than this one.

Not knowing what brings them peace they will one day face the unbelievable forces of judgment with no rescuer and no Saviour. For such we must pray and seek to convince them of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, while they still have time.

Returning to the subject of Palm Sunday however, we can see in this story three things that God needed to fulfill His plan.

First He needed a Special Place. The impact of the Messiah riding into any other town would have been negligible compared to the impact of Him riding into Jerusalem. Jerusalem or Zion was so special to God for that was where He commissioned Solomon to build a Temple where He would meet with His people, and right up to the time of Christ everything in the city revolved around that Temple. When Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem His glorious procession ended at the Temple. In Ps 87 the Psalmist says of Jerusalem: ¹ ***He has set his foundation on the holy mountain;***
² ***the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.***
³ ***Glorious things are said of you, O city of God:***

God still chooses to enter special places bringing salvation with Him, but no longer are these places cities or Temples. God the Holy Spirit enters into the

hearts of human beings like you and me. That is the special place where He loves to dwell. For He enters not on a temporary visit but to set up His throne. And when He enters our hearts He doesn't just want a small area, He desires to be totally in control. His majestic presence is not satisfied with sharing with that sin, that habit, that attitude. Paul states in **1 Cor 6:19** ***Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;***

Do we who are believers truly realize that this morning. That Almighty God has entered into our hearts and that all we are now belongs to Him. We are the ones who have reason today to shout out hosanna, for the Saviour of the world lives within our hearts

Second He needed a King. A righteous King in whom there was no sin. A king who was not tainted by the bias towards wrong doing that exists in every human being since Adam. A King that could bring salvation to the sinner because He was able to lay down His own life to pay the penalty of their sins. A King who was God Himself, who chose to be born as a man in order to rescue us from the just penalty of our wrong doing.

As Hebrews 2:9 says:-

⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

There is indeed no greater King than Jesus. He is indeed the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. 2,000 years later His name is still powerful to save all who call upon Him.

The postcard that we are distributing to houses in our community contains the words of the poem, One Solitary Life which is all about our King. And part of that poem reads:-

19 centuries have come and gone and today Jesus is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, all the kings that have ever reigned put together, have not affected the life of mankind on earth as powerfully as that One Solitary Life.

Yet how gentle our King is. How loving and kind. How compassionate towards us in our sinfulness and need. How willing to forgive, to heal, and to cleanse.

Finally, God Needed A Donkey. To go from needing a King to needing a donkey is like going from needing a Rolls Royce to needing a push bike. But in the plans of God that donkey was really important. And just as important as the donkey was the donkey's owner who made it available for the King to use.

I really like the intrigue of this story. Jesus needed the donkey and colt for his entrance into Jerusalem but He knew that He could not just go into that village and get it Himself. He was constantly being watched and the Jewish leaders could have prevented the whole event, if they had connected the donkey with Jesus earlier than on the Mount of Olives surrounded by His supporters. So Jesus sent just two disciples into the village ahead of them and told them to look for a donkey and colt tied up. Now it is Mark who tells us that the donkey was tied at a doorway of a house on the one main street through the village, suggesting that they had been placed in a spot where the disciples could not miss seeing them. All this leads us to believe that Jesus had made arrangements to use the donkey and her colt beforehand with one of His many followers.

And this becomes even more likely when we read the words that Jesus spoke to the two disciples before He sent them off on their errand. Matt 21:2-3

“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

Jesus was supremely confident that when the words, 'The Lord needs them' were spoken, the donkeys would be sent straight away. And they were. And the owner of those donkeys had the special joy of knowing that his act of obedience had enabled the King to ride into such a special place.

Every believer in this place today has their donkeys that the Lord wishes to use as he journeys into the hearts of those He is calling to Himself.

Years ago the donkeys the Lord asked me to give, were the years of my life in full time ministry for Him. I wasn't very keen to give them to Him when

He first asked, but he persevered till I said 'Yes', and many years later I can assure you that such was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

Your donkey may be months or weeks as a part time Mission worker. It may be giving a sacrificial amount of money, or setting yourself to do a task that you know God really wants you to do. Something that will, in some way enable Jesus to journey into the hearts of those He is calling unto Himself.

In his book, "And the Angels Were Silent", Max Lucado tells this story about a lady he met while going door to door in Hawaii inviting people to some meetings he was involved in: (And The Angels Were Silent, Max Lucado, Multnomah Books, USA 1992) page 56-57.....

Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode a donkey into a very special place, is a good day to think about the donkeys that we have that he wants to use on His journey into the special places around us. The hearts of those that need Him so much. How willing have we been and how ready are we now, on this triumphant day to say to the King, Here I am and all that I have, use me on your journey.