

# Easter 2024

There are a few thoughts and questions here for either individuals or groups to reflect on over the Easter period. They are centred on Palm Sunday and Easter Day. For reflections on Good Friday you can attend the evenings through Holy Week.

## Palm Sunday (Mt 21:1 to 11, Mk 11:1 to 11, Lk 19:28 to 44, Jn 12:12 to 19)

Clearly a significant event - all the gospel writers recorded it. Try reading the four different accounts to pick up the details recorded by each author. You'll then get the full picture.

It's all been building to this. Jesus has been teaching his disciples that

***'the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priest and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this'.***

Mark 8 v 31 and 32.

The triumphal entry of Palm Sunday may well have confused the disciples. After all it didn't feel like 'suffering' – quite the reverse. Here was Jesus getting a public ovation. Some must have thought he could mount a popular uprising on the strength of this kind of support. But Jesus has had a clear purpose all along. He knows the Jews were always looking for their longed-for Messiah. Their Old Testament scriptures gave them so many signs of the coming Messiah. One was in Zechariah 9:9

***'See your king comes to you righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey'.***

Palm Sunday defines the kind of King he is. He is 'righteous' in direct contrast to existing spiritual leadership of Israel (High Priests etc). He is bringing 'salvation' – the Jews had always wanted their sins to be dealt with and this is what Zechariah meant. In Jesus day, close, on the heels of the Maccabean revolt of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, salvation was linked to nationalism and the return of King David's empire.

And there's more to confirm Jesus' claim to kingship. Kings often returned in triumph after military conquests. When King Jehu has his triumphal ride the people's response was clear.

***'They hurried and took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted 'Jehu is King'.***

2 Kings 9 v 13

When David wanted to make clear that Solomon was to succeed him, he sent him to the Gihon spring on his own mule. Putting Solomon on that animal made it public that Solomon was to be the next King.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was saying to the people, here is your next King. All that symbolism was designed to make a bold statement about what kind of King he would be.

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1. 'This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet'. The quote from Zechariah 9:9 (see also Isaiah 62:11) then follows. Matthew was always keen for his Jewish readers to see how the Old Testament defined and spoke about the coming King.  
See Micah 5:1 to 3; Hosea 11:1; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6 to 7.  
**Do we tend to read our Bibles without looking back to the long-lasting desire for a Saviour that is in the Old Testament? Would that increase our desire to see Jesus known as Saviour in our times?**
  2. The cloaks are a clear symbol of kingship from Jehu's entry. The donkey comes from Zechariah's prophecy and David's appointing of Solomon. The palm branches are more recent. When the triumphant Judas Maccabeus entered Jerusalem in BC 164 having restored the nation, palm branches were cut and laid in his path. All are pictures of kingship.  
**In our desire to proclaim that Jesus is our Saviour (and he is), do we understate that he is our KING. What does it mean for us to live out the fact that Jesus is our King?**
  3. A large crowd gathered. But five days later there was another large crowd shouting 'Crucify him'. It's hard not to believe that some of the same people were at both gatherings.  
**What has changed them – who had influenced them?**
  4. There are three separate quotations in verse 9  
'Hosanna to the Son of David' – a clear statement that this was the Messiah.  
'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' – a chant used at all the great festivals of the Jews. Very natural to chant it at the time of Passover.

'Hosanna' literally means 'save us' and it is 'salvation in the highest'. A statement that God has intervened in his world to save his people.

The crowd's chants reveal they knew what was going on. Jesus has come to save his people from their sins – is that message heard today?

5. Jesus' entry does not go un-noticed. The whole city is stirred and people are questioning who he is. People were talking about Jesus.

So, at this time of crisis in our nation, is it time to get Jesus talked about and how do we do it as individuals and as a community?

Have we wrapped Jesus up in a building?

Has God enabled us to communicate the gospel message in ways which were unthinkable even 20 years ago?

## EASTER DAY

### THE LORD IS RISEN – HE IS RISEN INDEED

That shout has echoed around the church for 2000+ years. The Cross is rightly seen as the centre of our salvation. If Jesus did not die, substituting for the death as our sin deserves, then we are still dead in our sin and without hope.

But as Paul, in his glorious chapter on the resurrection writes

***'If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith'*** 1 Corinthians 15 v 13 & 14.

There are many responses to the events of resurrection day. Some have reacted with incredulity – surely this kind of thing never happens! Others are suspicious – how many dead bodies have you seen walking again. It's good to do a study together as a group but don't forget to wonder and worship as well – the defeat of death by the Son of God should make us drop our jaw in sheer amazement. He that was dead is alive again and, because He is the first, we can follow in that pathway to be raised to life with Him forever.

***'But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead .....***

***..... so in Christ shall all be made alive'*** 1 Corinthians 15 v 20 and 22

The resurrection of Jesus is well recorded by eye witnesses. And Jesus said, quite clearly it would happen. His claims are vindicated which means his promises are too. Death is not final – we have a living hope.

Without the resurrection, there would have been no Christian church. Jesus' death would have been the sad end of a three-year adventure. The disciples were in no state to conquer the world on the day after Good Friday. The fact that Jesus was alive was the catalyst for church growth which continues to this day in many parts of the world.

1. Luke 24 chapter is a full of surprises, new discoveries and wonderment. It is clear the disciples really struggle with this new reality. If it helps, think about your reaction if you met a relative who had died standing on your front porch as large as life. Jesus had often taught the Son of Man must die but will rise again but it hadn't sunk in.

Why didn't they get it? Were they not listening? Was it so incredulous? Did they want to cling on to an earth-bound Jesus?

2. The women arrive at the tomb very early (v1). The 'first day of the week' tells us that they came as soon as they could after the Sabbath 'lock down'. They were only 'doing the right thing' in bringing spices for embalming. They were met with two shocks. The stone was rolled away and the body was missing. Stones that sealed tombs were usually about 2 meters in diameter and would need to be rolled uphill to uncover the tomb. Notice their reaction is not to rejoice that Jesus has risen – it is to note the body has gone.

Is it possible for us to look at a situation and rationally observe the details before us and fail to see the BIG PICTURE?

3. The angel's question (v5) could be seen as insensitive. Two grieving women have come to anoint the body of their Lord. The angels' statement says 'Jesus is alive' because God has intervened just as Jesus promised. There is more than a hint of rebuke in the question – how many times do you need to be told before you believe it?

Are there times when God speaks to us about issues and we are just not listening – be as personal as you can be with each other.

4. The angels repeat the message that Jesus has been teaching his disciples. 'The Son of Man **MUST** .....

tells us that Jesus ending up on a cross is not an unfortunate accident. The plan of betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection was God's way to save His people – it was PLAN A.

Do we sometimes think like Peter and wish that Jesus could have accomplished salvation in a **nicer** way?