

"Israel's King and Ours"

It's impossible for us to hear this familiar story as though we didn't know the outcome. You and I who are somewhat familiar with the important events in the life of Christ cannot experience Palm Sunday in the way those original crowds did because, unlike them, we know what follows. In six days Jesus will be crucified and in a week he will rise from the dead. Mark narrates what happened on that first Palm Sunday in the light, or should we say "darkness," of Good Friday. In fact everything that he writes in the Gospel is colored by the fact of the death and resurrection of Christ. When we realise that Mark is describing the first Palm Sunday in the shadow of the cross this narrative will have more meaning for us. It tells us something about who this man was who was crucified.

We begin in a village street with a colt tied at a doorway. Perhaps if you use your imagination you can see that small nervous beast in your mind's eye. It appears somewhat

skittish because it has never been ridden. A group of working class men loiter near-by apparently unconcerned but actually alert as though they are waiting for someone or something to happen. Then two strangers enter the village. They appear to be looking for something. They see the colt, approach and start to untie the beast and lead it away. The loitering men challenge them. "What are you doing?" The strangers reply, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly." The answer seems to satisfy the loitering men and the colt is led out of the village.

"The Lord needs it." It was a kind of royal command, which was immediately obeyed. The greek word "Lord" is $\kappa\upsilon\acute{\rho}\iota\omicron\varsigma$. It signifies sovereignty. And Jesus riding this untamed, unbroken, colt along the road into the royal city was an expression of sovereignty. Have you ever tried to ride an unbroken colt? Not only did the men obey his command, even the

beast was tamed and controlled by Jesus the Lord. Our Scripture lesson says, "When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. This triumphal procession recalled the day centuries before when king Jehu was anointed king and they snatched up their cloaks and spread them under him...and shouted "Jehu is king"'. .

So this is what Palm Sunday says about the figure on the cross on Good Friday. He is the Lord, the sovereign, the king. Dr. Cleverly Ford of London writes, "Palm Sunday was planned to show the world that the crucified was no pathetic victim to be pitied, but a master riding upon the backs of untamed political forces of his day to accomplish a purpose greater than his opponents could ever conceive; indeed, this man on the cross is the Lord of all, he holds us in his hands."

Secondly, the man on the cross is "the coming one". This again is brought out by the crowd crying, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'.

Think how for centuries all the best minds in Israel, all the sensitive minds were looking for a Saviour to come, some one, that is, to save the nation. They looked back for a return to the good old days when David was king. Things had not been the same for Israel since he reigned. Solomon introduced paganism through his wives. After his death the kingdom was rent asunder by civil war and was never reunited. There were kings like Josiah who tried to reform the nation but they all failed. But still Israel never ceased to look for a Saviour. Their eyes were always on the alert for: the coming one, the one who would come to deliver them. And on Palm Sunday Jesus of Nazareth publicly acknowledged that he was the coming one. He accepted the cries of the crowd,

"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

But what did Jesus come to do? Good Friday is the answer that all the Gospel writers give. He came to die. On a number of occasions Jesus forewarned his disciples that he must be betrayed, condemned to death, mocked, spit upon, flogged and finally killed. He had told them that he, the King was coming to Jerusalem to be killed. The cross, therefore, is not some tragic and temporary set back in his ministry. The cross is the throne of Christ. He reigns from the cross. He is most powerful when he dies, because in his death he conquers Satan, sin, and death. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord to reign on the cross.

Thirdly, the man on the cross is the only one who can save us. Go back once more to those pilgrims lining the triumphal route to Jerusalem and hear their chorus, "'Hosanna' Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the

Lord'". It was a refrain from the liturgy of the OT church that was used in public worship. It comes from what is called 'the Great Praise' Psalm, from Psalm 118:25. It would be sung at the Passover Festival while the lambs were being slaughtered for the great temple sacrifice. It would be sung, therefore, while Jesus was being sacrificed on the cross outside the temple. The crowds anticipated that sacrifice unwittingly by chanting it to Jesus as he rode that colt that Sunday into Jerusalem. The word 'Hosanna' means in Hebrew "Save we beseech thee." On the cross, the Lord, the king of Israel and our King, did save his people. The triumphal procession on Palm Sunday was in fact the pathway to his kingdom. The triumphal entry shows us Jesus going up to the royal city to be enthroned on the cross where he would defeat Satan and sin and save his people.

In conclusion, we cannot look at Palm Sunday as Christians except through the

eyes of Good Friday and Easter. We can see so much more clearly than those Palm Sunday pilgrims that Jesus is king; not only ancient Israel's king but ours as well. We live on this side of the resurrection which enables us to see the Palm Sunday entry as his coronation processions to his throne outside the walls of Jerusalem, on the cross. In the light of His resurrection we see him reigning on the cross, sovereign over all the forces of evil that brought about his death, we see him dieing for our sins so that we might cry out to him alone, "Hosanna, Save, we beseech thee. Save me, be my Lord and King. Come into my heart Lord Jesus".

Christ is king. Do not doubt that. We live in an age in which Christ the king has sent out an invitation to those who are serving his defeated enemy, Satan. He offers complete amnesty if they throw down their arms and come over to his side. Anyone who serves anyone other than Christ as their ultimate authority

is serving a defeated captain. You are on the losing side, unless you are on the side of Christ the king. Confess now your rebellion against him and his laws. Kneel before him now as your king. He promises complete amnesty and not only that, he promises us eternal life, he promises to make us kings and priests with him.

Amen.