

Palm Sunday 2006 Sermon - King's Centre Church

Responses to Jesus

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Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Background – Jesus has been steadily making his way to Jerusalem over the past few weeks & months (despite prophetic warnings of what would happen to him there). Finally he arrives in Bethany on Friday 6 days before the annual Passover festival (following Thursday) & stays with his friends Mary Martha & Lazarus. After the Sabbath (Saturday), on the Sunday he enters Jerusalem.

Sends a couple of his disciples ahead to get an unriden donkey for him. Doesn't explain why at the time, but after his resurrection the disciples realise it is to fulfil an ancient prophecy of Zech 9:9.

Zechariah 9:9

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.

Jesus rides the donkey up hill from the hamlet of Bethany, thru another called Bethphage, and then down the hillside past the Mount of Olives on his right, down into the Kidron Valley and up the other side into the gates of Jerusalem.

A very large crowd gather (John's gospel records that it included some who had witnessed Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead recently, and put their faith in Jesus as a result (Jn 11:45 + 12:7)). Many spread the cloaks on the road in front of Jesus, others spread palms and branches they cut from the fields alongside the road.

Those walking ahead of Jesus, and those following behind him shouted

"Hosanna to the son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David"

"Hosanna in the highest!"

Lots of symbolism. The people knew the impact & meaning they were shouting.

Crowd welcome Jesus with words of Ps 118:25-26

- ascribing him a Messianic title, as the agent of the Lord, the coming King of Israel
- Hosanna = the Hebrew word means 'save'. As well as a prayer, its also a praise word
- Also one of the Passover praise psalm songs, and fitting to this occasion

Spread cloaks

- An act of homage to royalty (like ir Walter Raleigh & Queen Elizabeth 1st - famously laid his cloak over a muddy puddle for her)

Palm branches – used in the celebration of victory at that time

Donkey – an animal of peace, rather than a war-horse (which some would expect the liberating King to personify). As well as fulfilling the Zech prophecy.

Jesus knew what he was doing!

Jesus knew the symbolism of his actions. He deliberately offers himself as the Messiah during the events of Holy Week, not least bc he knew it would provoke a reaction amongst the Jewish leaders. A lot of the events and sayings of Jesus are chock full of symbolism and prophecy – J was himself a prophet, he knew the scriptures inside out and he knew that he was in the process of fulfilling not only dozens of prophecies about the Messiah, but fulfilling the greatest and most significant event ever to happen on planet earth. So he was bold and uncompromising in his words and actions – because he was in the midst of a massive power-encounter, as the evil in the world was raising its head directly against him – in a desperate backlash because evil itself was soon to come under ultimate judgement and defeat at the hands of Jesus. Hands pierced and bloodied, yet triumphant.

Jesus at the temple

For the first few days of the week, Jesus spent a lot of time in the Temple in Jerusalem, teaching the people, verbally sparring with the religious leaders, and healing the sick.

READ: Matt 21:12-17

“Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. **But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did** and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," **they were indignant.** "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, " 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.”

Here is the famous (scene) where Jesus is filled with righteous anger when he sees what the sacred temple has been reduced to. Money changers and selling doves were there to aid the process of making offerings, and paying the temple tax (in the local currency). Jesus makes his authority quite clear to those around him – he marches into the temple and overturns the stalls, drives the merchants out – makes a massive scene. It would be a bit like you or me ripping up the stalls of the market traders along The Moor, or on Fargate – and shouting at them that they were breaking the law and profaning the city.

He’s acting very boldly, very self-assured. He’s acting with authority. He’s acting as if he was the King! And at the same time, he stays on in the temple, and starts to teach and to heal the people – restoring the true function of the temple – a place to meet with and experience the presence of God.

The next day (Tues).....

READ: Matt 21:23-27

“Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. **"By what authority are you doing these things?"** they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Different reactions to Jesus

What I find fascinating, and what I want to draw our attention to this morning, are the different reactions of people to Jesus in the early events of Holy Week.

Matthew 21 is worth reading for this. It records a few opposing reactions.

The disciples and the donkey – Firstly, you’ve got the disciples who have been travelling with Jesus, perhaps for the last 2 or 3 years. They are getting used to him by now, and some of the strange things he does. So when he asks them to walk ahead of him into the next village, and untie a donkey belonging to someone else, and walk off with it..... they don’t question him, they don’t argue or answer back – they just obey.

- **So we have Jesus’ disciples who are willing to obey his words, even in odd or even illegal circumstances**

The crowds exalt Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem - A very large crowd gather. The reaction is remarkable really. Something sparks off devotion and adulation towards Jesus. They are hopeful, expectant, overawed by his presence. Its like the crowds following the England team bus after we won the Ashes last year! Or perhaps when we win the World Cup this summer?

They catch something, they sense something about Jesus. Many already know about him and the miracles he performs. Others watch him during the week that follows and they hear his teaching and are inspired and overawed. The gospels record that when the crowds hear Jesus’ teaching they were “astonished” because he spoke with such authority.

Perhaps they don’t even fully understand what is afoot, what Jesus is really doing on earth and about to achieve. But many of them believe in Him, and are excited by him and trust that he is good news.

- **So we have the crowds responding in their hearts to Jesus’ authority. They respond extravagantly – shouting, singing, saying he is the Christ – the saviour of the people.**
- **They don’t even understand some of this, but they are up for it and don’t hold back**

The reaction of the Jewish leaders – The most disappointing reaction to Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem is from the religious and political leaders of the Jews. Bear in mind that these are the people with something to lose.

They are the ones in authority – the chief priests, the teachers of the law – they claimed to be from the same line and authority of Moses. They were the wealthy people, the one’s who took the best seats at the festivals. They were the one’s given respect by the average man-in-the-street. They were the men of status in the city.

Matthew records that “The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. **But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did** and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” **they were indignant.**”

What a curious reaction!

- When **they saw** the wonderful things Jesus did, they were indignant.
- When people were **healed**, they were **scornful**.
- When people were **set free**, they were **angry**.
- When the **Son of God** arrives, teaching a new way, an **upside-down kingdom**, they are indignant.

Indignant means ‘scornful anger’. They were angry at what they experienced, and scornful of it. Later, we hear the Jewish leaders reaction direct to Jesus. They question his authority (“By what authority are you doing these things.”) They are cynical of what he is about, and the miracles he is performing.

Finally, they begin plotting together to try and trap Jesus by his own words¹, so that they could arrest him and put a lid on things.

What’s our reaction to Jesus?

There is a tremendous challenge for all of us, in the different reactions of the people to Jesus

So here’s my question for us today. **What is our reaction – what is your reaction – to Jesus?**

What’s your reaction – to the claims, the miracles, the authority, the person of Jesus?

- Most of us here might say “I welcome him” “I’m shouting in the streets”
- Lets reflect a little more on that.....

The disciples obeyed him. The crowds of regular people rose up and welcomed him, they listened to him and followed even without really knowing why perhaps. The leaders were cynical, they went into a huff, they rejected him.

How do you react to Jesus?:

- when we are reminded again at Easter about the power of what he achieved on the cross?
- When we are faced with the brazen authority in which Jesus operated?
- When we are faced with the radical servanthood which he embodied as he washed the disciple’s feet, and allowed himself to be crucified as an innocent man, in order to set the world free from the power of evil.

How do you react to Jesus, when your **vested interests are challenged** by him (like the money changers/Pharisees)?

- When Jesus points the finger at a particular sin in your life, which you were rather enjoying doing
- Or when the Holy Spirit prompts you to let go of an activity which you would much rather keep hold of, keep doing
 - I know a few of us have had to grit our teeth while giving up something during Lent which was close to our heart.
 - I mean, Jesus you can have my tithe, but do you really want me to give up chocolate!?
- When Jesus asks you to lay down your ministry, or your job, or a relationship in order to follow him into something new
- When he shows us something of our heart we don’t really like – rather keep hidden (did that frequently to people in the gospels)

¹ Jesus gets grilled by the Sadducees (Greek philosophy influenced, made up of aristocrats, the ‘temple party’ – small number but lots of power, only accepted the Torah no other writings), the Pharisees (the ‘synagogue party’, reinterpreted the law for modern day Jews, emphasis on personal piety, had a lot of popular support) , Herodians (supported the puppet kings of Herod line), teachers of the law etc. Its the equivalent of facing Paxman on ‘Question Time’!

Our reaction “should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:5-8)

Let’s think again about who is in control

As we begin Holy Week, during which the church world-wide remembers the servant-king, who died so that we might live, **let’s reflect again about who is in control of our lives.**

Who is King? (not Elvis I hope....) **Who is in charge?**

This is about dying to self - just as Jesus died voluntarily. I know that’s not always a popular idea, but there is a promise of Jesus that goes with it.

Mark 8:34-36

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.** What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

Perhaps this week you could read the gospel passages about Jesus’ teaching in his last week. Its all about being humble, not living as hypocrites, its about open-hearted service, its about serving the vulnerable in the world (Sheep & Goats), its about being the least – its all upside down!

Quote - ‘Jesus came to raise the dead. The only qualification for the gift of the gospel is to be dead. You don’t have to be smart. You don’t have to be good. You don’t have to be wise. You don’t have to be wonderful. You don’t have to be anything ... you just have to be dead. That’s it!’ Robert Farrar Capon (Catholic priest & author in New York)

How will you and I react?

How are you going to react to Jesus this week, this Easter, this year? Even as a mature Christian, or as a new follower of Jesus...

- are you going to be like his disciples who obeyed straight away
- are you going to welcome him and find out more, like the crowds in Jerusalem
- or, like the Pharisees and religious leaders, are you going to cling on to your vested interests, are you going to push Jesus away when he comes too close?

Prayer & Summary

Thanks to Jesus

- for going to the cross so that we might live, so that the world could be set free from the power of death and hell
- for the promise of life to us, as we learn to lose our own life and find our true natures hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3)

Pray that this week we will

- be challenged again
- and changed again
- and grasp again something of the magnificence of Easter