

PALM SUNDAY 05 APRIL 2020-WHY THE HOSANNAS STOP?-

Luke 19:28-44

History is filled with examples of people who started out humbly, rose to great popularity, and came to the end of their lives in utter humiliation. We can think of a few in our own country.

In Luke 19 today, we see an example just like this. Jesus, the son of a carpenter, who, as **Luke 2:52** says, “... *grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.*” He was the one who was cheered and worshipped as He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey. But before long He would be mocked, scorned, and cast aside by the same ones who did the cheering. There’s a saying, “A week is a long time in politics”. Well, it sometimes doesn’t only apply there!

On that Palm Sunday as Jesus approached Jerusalem, there were various things that He was aware of. He knew the conditions surrounding the people, and He knew the condition of the people’s hearts.

The Jews found themselves under heavy Roman oppression. There were heavy taxes, restrictions, numerous executions by

means of crucifixion, and Jesus knew all about those things.

But He also knew the Jewish hearts.

The Jews were in search of someone. They wanted a king like David, a conqueror, someone to set them free from the

Romans, who would boot the Romans out of Israel. They had

seen the powerful works of this man Jesus. They saw Him

restoring sight to the blind. They saw Him healing the lame.

They saw Him feed the multitude with a little boy's lunch, and

had leftovers to spare. They heard about Him raising Lazarus

from the dead. They listened to Him teach with real, powerful

authority. Surely, with power and authority like that, Jesus was

without a doubt the one who would set them free. In today's

terms in our country, He would be the one to sort out poverty

and e-tolling and corruption and unbridled political ambition

and criminality and fear. **So, Jesus came to Jerusalem, and**

the crowds began to cheer.

The timing was perfect. It was approaching the Passover

feast. That was symbolic of the event where the angel of death passed over Israeli families, and Pharaoh let God's children go.

And now, just maybe now, Jesus would somehow lead them

from the huge oppression and cruel treatment of the Roman

government. Jesus knew their hearts. He knew their desires.

The Roman soldiers knew something as well. These soldiers knew that it was Passover. They realized that it was traditionally a time when some Jews got hot-headed and tried to start a revolution. They knew Passover could bring trouble, and so they were ready.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowds waved palm branches, a long-standing symbol of Jewish nationalism. They shouted, “**Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.**” Cheering, praising, applaud, a bit like when the Springboks win the World cup Rugby... but then something happened. The cheering stopped.

Jesus didn't muster any troops. He didn't lead a revolt. He didn't do what they expected. Instead, He drove the moneychangers out of the temple. He told them to pay the taxes due to Caesar (I'm sure Mr. Kieswetter and Tito Mboweni would have approved of that). He taught that giving out of poverty is worth more than giving out of abundance. He taught that in order to be great, you must be a servant. Jesus did and said everything the people didn't want, and so the cheering stopped.

It's amazing that when things go our way, when God does what we want, when Jesus rises to our cause; it's easy to cheer. But what about when He doesn't do things as we expect Him to do? What happens when we face oppression? What happens when we experience troubles, when we experience the dark underbelly of this messed up world, when we experience Total shutdown? After the Second World War many men turned from God after seeing and experiencing the huge brutality and cruelty of war. They said, **“If this happens with a God who is supposed to be in charge, then either He is an evil God, or there is no God”**, not understanding that the war and all that came with it **stemmed from people abusing the freedom of choice that God gives us, which He never takes away from us.**

Too often, the cheering comes to a stop. Words of adoration and praise quickly fade when we face life as it really is. Often our wants and desires blur our vision to our real needs. The same thing happened to the crowds that lined the Streets to cheer Jesus. There were some things that they didn't see, but Jesus did. Look again at verses **41-44**. *“⁴¹ As he approached*

Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

“Why did the cheering stop?”

Why did the cheering stop? First it was because they did not recognize His purpose.

They could not see Jesus’ purpose because they had their eyes on their immediate circumstances instead of their current condition.

We are the same way today. When we experience Lockdown and Covid 19 and we suffer through various difficulties, and lost focus on God, who is Bigger and stronger than any virus or Crisis we face. Our prayer shifts from one place to another, and it becomes, **“Lord, deliver me, help me, fight for me, uplift**

me,” instead of, “Lord, mould me, use me, grow me through these things, change me, may people see how great You are as that happens.” Too often the desire is for God to change the circumstances, instead of God changing the person in those circumstances. And sadly, it has an effect. In time the cheering stops. We can easily lose sight of Holy week and Good Friday, because of the Lockdown, but remember what Christ has Done on the cross can never be reversed. The more reason for us to sing praises to God like Paul and Silas in jail in Acts 16:16-36. A time to praise Him for who He is.

The Jewish people desired deliverance from oppression. Jesus came to deliver them from the bigger problem of sin. In their desire to escape their immediate circumstances, to have their brand of peace, they missed the fact that they walked in the very presence of the Prince of Peace. Don't let that be what causes your cheering for Him to stop. Don't lose sight of the fact that through any circumstance, you are in the presence of the Prince of Peace. **John 16: 33** *“These things have I spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”* It's hard to get peace from the world when it is clear that it is full of trouble. With Jesus, you can have peace, even

in the middle of pain and suffering.

The people in Jerusalem desired peace, but they wanted it to come through conflict. Jesus was offering them peace in conflict. And Jesus said of Jerusalem in **Luke 13:34**, “***O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!***” And the city of Jerusalem, whose name means founded peaceful, refused Jesus’ terms. Why? Because they wanted to set the terms of peace.

There are many who want to set the terms themselves. “**Oh, I’m going to get to Heaven one day, but I’ll get there on my own terms.**” Jesus was clear when He said, “**I am the way and the truth and the life, and no man comes to the Father but by Me.**” When we reject Him and His love and grace and His purpose time and time again we have refused His terms. It might seem right to us, but the end of it is a decision which refuses the solution God has given to us – to be reconciled to Him. Why? It is because we refuse to accept His terms.

Maybe our desires have been self-centred instead of God-centred. Maybe we have been trying to live life on our own terms, even when we have committed our lives to Him.

Then the cheering stops in our lives. And we lose out on the fullness of life Jesus came to bring us. It's my prayer for us all that we will carry on cheering and worshipping and praising this King of kings and Lord of lords for the rest of our living lives, through the good times and the difficult - not because it's a heavy duty, but because we know Jesus' love and it's the greatest thing in the world for us to do to worship Him. Amen.