

Blessed Is He
Psalm 118
4/13/2014

A little boy was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from church with his mother. His father returned from church holding a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked, "Why do you have that palm branch, dad?" "You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved Palm Branches to honor him, so we got Palm Branches today." The little boy replied, "Aw shucks! The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!" Although we laugh at this story, because of his literal interpretation of Jesus' presence in church on Palm Sunday, he actually spoke better than he knew! The whole point of Palm Sunday is "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord." That is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we have every hopeful expectation that He will show up in our worship. Not literally, of course, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus promises to be with us. We come in the name of the Lord to worship the One Who came pre-eminently in the name of the Lord, namely, Jesus. Psalm 118 is the Psalm of Palm Sunday. It is verse 26 that the people shouted on that day before the crucifixion of Jesus. So, what I thought we would look at is this entire Psalm to see why it was so appropriate for the people to be shouting it. It is also instructive to note that, just like the boy in the story, the people of Palm Sunday spoke better than they knew.

Psalm 118 has three main parts to it. Part 1 goes from verse 1 through verse 9. The main point of that passage is the mercy of the Lord. Part 2 extends from verse 10 through verse 18, and speak of the strength of the Lord (which is a reason for why we should trust the Lord's mercy). Part 3 runs from verse 19 through the end of the chapter, and there we hear of the righteous One Who is coming.

In part 1, therefore, we learn of the mercy of the Lord. Another way of translating that word "mercy" is "lovingkindness" or "steadfast love." The word is usually connected to the covenantal relationship that God has with His people. It is God's faithfulness to His promises. Through God's faithfulness He loves us as we surely do not deserve. This chorus is antiphonal, which means that groups of people are responding to each other. First, it is Israel, then it is the priesthood, then it is everyone in verses 2-4. God's mercy lasts forever because God does not change.

In verses 5-9, we see that since the Lord rescued the Psalmist, then it is of the utmost importance to put one's trust in the Lord, and not in princes or any other human being. Presumably princes would have been in the best position to be able to help someone, but their help is nothing compared to what God can give. God can rescue us out of any situation, whereas princes are limited in what they can do.

Speaking of other nations, part 2 starts off with the Psalmist destroying the other nations by the name of God. Verse 10 is almost certainly the reason why the people in Jesus' day spoke the words of verse 26. As we have seen in past Palm Sundays, the people were expecting another kingly Messiah, who would be like Judas Maccabeus, and drive out those who were polluting the temple and the land of Israel. They wanted

someone who would destroy nations. These nations would only be as threatening to the Messiah as bees, as verse 12 says. But in the name of the Lord, the Messiah would come to destroy those nations. Notice here the repeated phrase “the name of the Lord.” It occurs in verse 10, 11, and 12. The name of the Lord is another way of saying the power of the Lord. That is why verse 26 packed such a punch for first-century Jews. The One Who comes in the name of the Lord is the One Who has the power of the Lord at his disposal. That power would be used to get rid of the Romans.

In verses 15-18, we see the right hand of the Lord doing valiantly. The word “valiant” means “bold, strong, gallant.” This is a description of God as a warrior. And, as verse 18 says, even though the Lord has to use that power sometimes on his own people, He is still fighting for His people, and not against them.

Part 3 tells us of the righteous One, who is coming. The implication of having these sections in this order is that mercy (Part 1) and power (Part 2) will be focused on the Coming Righteous One. He will be both merciful to save His people, and powerful to save His people. The power of the coming One has a great deal to do with His righteousness. Since he is the completely righteous One, He will be able to call on His Father, Who will always answer Him. Verses 22-24 are very familiar to us, since they are quoted in the New Testament as a direct prophecy of the Messiah. The point of these verses is that not everyone will see what the true situation is. They will have certain expectations about what the Messiah will look like. They will expect the stone to have a certain shape to it, to use the metaphor of the builders. They will reject the stone because it doesn't fit in with their plans. However, that stone certainly does fit in very well with the plans of God Almighty. As verse 23 assures us, God will overrule the builders. It is God's doing that the rejected stone becomes the cornerstone. These verses in particular should have given the Jews a hint on Palm Sunday that the Jesus they were praising wasn't the Jesus they thought He was. They thought Jesus was going to save them from the nations surrounding them, as verse 10 says. They were very sure that they would be able to recognize the Messiah when He came. However, this Psalm tells us differently. Even those who ought to know what a cornerstone looks like (namely, the builders!) didn't even recognize the cornerstone when it was staring them in the face!

Another verse that should have given the Jews pause to consider is verse 27. There would be a sacrifice that would be on the horns of the altar. Now this Psalm was typically sung at Passover. Palm Sunday does in fact fall during the Passover week. So the Jews would naturally think of this sacrifice as being the Passover Lamb. Little did they know that the One who came in the name of the Lord would also be the final climactic Passover Lamb! He would be bound to the last and final altar, the cross.

This whole Psalm so clearly shows us what Jesus came to do, although we can only understand it as we look back on the Psalm after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The nations of verse 10 become all the demonic powers of this world which Jesus conquers. All of Israel's OT enemies were not merely physical enemies, but were also spiritual enemies. When Jesus came to conquer our enemies, they were all spiritual enemies. So Jesus destroys all those enemies by coming in the name and power of

the Lord.

Jesus is the righteous one who opens the gate that we might go in. He is certainly the stone which the builders rejected, but which has become the chief cornerstone. To work our way backwards through the Psalm, it is better to put our trust in Jesus than in princes. If the Lord Jesus is for us, who can be against us? It is the mercy of Jesus Christ about which we must sing, because it lasts forever.

When considering the practical ramifications of this, we must first examine the difference between Palm Sunday and the rest of Holy Week. Although the crowds were not precisely the same, there must surely have been some overlap between those who were shouting "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord" and those who would shout out "Crucify Him!" They rejected the chief cornerstone, because it didn't look like what they expected. We often do the same. Jesus can be great for us on Sunday, when we look for Him, but not so great during the week, when He asks us to trust in Him, and do His will. It is a bit like the golfer. John and his friend George went golfing together one Saturday morning as they had for 24 years. Later that day, John returned home completely exhausted and plopped down in his easy chair. His wife was quite concerned since he was more exhausted than usual after his Saturday golf game. She asked him if something went wrong with the game. He replied, "No, hon, I had the best game in years! As a matter of fact, I started out the first three holes at 4 under par, including a hole-in-two on the 3rd." "So why are you so worn out?" she asked. "Well, George had a heart attack and died on the 4th hole." "What!?! Are you so exhausted from trying to save him?" He said, "No, honey, it was quick and there was nothing anyone could've done. BUT AFTER THAT, IT WAS JUST HIT THE BALL, DRAG GEORGE, HIT THE BALL, DRAG GEORGE..." On no occasion are we confronted with the importance of living with Jesus all through the week so strongly as we are when we look at Palm Sunday versus the rest of the week. We expect Jesus to show up on Sunday, unlike the boy at the beginning of the sermon, but we don't expect Jesus to show up at work or at home with the children. Why not?

Perhaps it is because we have the wrong ideas about Jesus. We want Him to save us in the crisis, but then leave us alone so that we can comfortably go about committing our sin like always. But Jesus is not like that. If you truly are one of His children, then he is going to show up during the week. He will not leave you alone. Maybe you don't want that. But let me tell you that it is all or nothing with Jesus. He doesn't just want us on Sunday morning. He wants us through the whole week.

There are other ways that we have wrong ideas about Jesus. We sometimes romanticize Him into the cuddly friend. We lay on thick that sentimental idea that Jesus is only gentle and kind, and not also just, powerful, and a warrior. We love it when Jesus tells us that He came to serve. We don't love it quite so much when Jesus tells us that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. We like the Jesus of "turn the other cheek" especially when we are quoting it at someone while striking them on the cheek. We don't like the Jesus of the cord of whips driving out the money-changers from the temple. And, of course, we do like the idea of Jesus the servant, tending to our every needs, as if we were the center of the universe. We don't like it

when Jesus tells us that what we are doing is sinful and wrong. We don't like His discipline of us. We don't like the cross, either, come to that. We don't like the fact that it is bloody, gruesome, hideous, and gory. But then, if He wasn't the biblical Jesus, where would we be? We would have no mercy, no power to help in time of need, and no Righteous One to open the gates that we might go in.

Instead of thinking this way, we should remember that the mercy of the Lord lasts forever. That certainly includes the entire week, and not just Sunday. Verse 24 needs to be sung on every day: "This is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it."