

Abide with Us – Part 6

Zechariah 9:9; John 12:19

1. The cheers of the admirers.

- *Luke 19:37*

- Sincere.

- Superficial.

- *John 6:15, 26-27, 12:37*

2. The jeers of the antagonists.

- *Luke 19:39; John 15:22*

3. The tears of the Redeemer.

- *Luke 19:41-44; Matthew 23:37, 23:38-24:2*

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Abide With Us¹

John 12:12-16

Today is Palm Sunday. We call it that because we're told in the Gospels that this day was Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, as the people waved palm branches and shouted "Hosanna! Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord!" But there was much more than a party going on that day. While many in the crowd were praising Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders of the day had grown resentful and angry and were plotting to kill Jesus.

This day – Palm Sunday – was and is in the Jewish season of Passover. Passover is the season that the Jews remembered that God delivered them from slavery in Egypt with the final plague against Pharaoh and the Egyptians. This is found in the book of Exodus with the story of Moses. After nine different plagues brought on Egypt – clear statements from God, Pharaoh still refused to let them go, so God sent the deadliest plague: the killing of all the first born. But God spared the Jews as they did what God told them to do; they ate the Passover meal of a sacrificed lamb, with its blood spread across the door posts. With the entire nation broken, Pharaoh finally set them free.

Fast forward 1300+ years later to that first Palm Sunday and there were hundreds of thousands of Jews in and around the city of Jerusalem, having pilgrimed from all over Canaan and even the Sinai Peninsula to celebrate their annual high holy day. And there is Jesus, in the center of it all, being praised as the long-awaited Messiah. Up until now, Jesus has been careful to avoid any public ovations, because the time wasn't right. Now he is wide out in the open. Why now, and why like this? There are a couple of reasons. One is that Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, which says:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9, niv)

That prophecy was made 550 years earlier, one of several hundred Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus' life.

Another reason for this public demonstration is that for Jesus knew what the religious leaders were planning against him, and the time was finally right. When they saw the way

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Sources include: Manual, Church of the Nazarene, 2023, <https://nazarene.org/manual>

the people were acting toward Jesus, they concluded that Jesus had to be destroyed (John 12:19).

And what about the Romans – this was, after all, Roman territory. What were they thinking as they watched this festive demonstration? You can bet they were on high alert; in case the people planned to rally and make some kind of attempt at a violent overthrow with their so-called Messiah. But the Romans would have also recognized the nature of this parade; they knew their parades well. They were experts at parades, and they would *not* have called this a triumphal event.

When a Roman general came back to Rome after a complete conquest of an enemy, he was welcomed with an elaborate parade. Trailing behind him would be the war prisoners, bound and tied, while the general rode a white horse or a chariot. In order to qualify for a parade, his army would have had to kill at least 5,000 enemy soldiers. Jesus' parade was nothing like that.

Jesus was on a peaceful mission. In those days, when a king rode a donkey into town it symbolized that he was on a peace mission. Jesus was and is on a peace mission to reconcile people to God. But less than a week *after* this event, Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, and rose from the dead. This sealed the deal on our ability to find peace with God and get new life. About three or four months after that, we're told in Acts 4:4 that there were over 5,000 men alone who had been reconciled to God through Christ – they became Christians (that's just the 5,000 *men* – not counting the women and children, so the real number was probably between 12,000-20,000 brand new Christians; again, just three or four months later).

So Jesus' victory was of a different kind than Roman generals; his was peace over chaos, truth over lies and error, servanthood over power, love over hatred, life over death.

When this parade happened, Jesus knew full well the social, political, and religious climate he was riding into. He knew the statement he was making, and he knew that it would hasten his crucifixion and death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus already knew that they had been waiting to arrest him and have him killed, and yet instead of slinking around under cover of darkness, Jesus rides humbly and triumphantly in a way that is bound to reveal him as God's Messiah.

One scholar² said this about what Jesus did that Palm Sunday: "Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way that deliberately set himself in the center of the stage and deliberately riveted every eye upon himself. All through his last days there is in his every action a kind of magnificent and sublime defiance; and here he begins the last act with a flinging down of the gauntlet, a deliberate challenge to the authorities to do their worst." That is the scene as Jesus enters the city, amidst the cheers, the jeers, and the tears. First there were...

1. The cheers of the admirers.

Everyone loves a parade. Some of you know that before we moved here almost 15 years ago to be your pastor, I was the pastor of the Nazarene Church in Mountain Home, Idaho.

² William Barclay, Daily Bible Study Series

Mountain Home back then was literally a potato town 45 miles southeast of Boise in the middle of the Owyhee high desert. When we lived there, the town had a population of around maybe 8,000. There were no other towns around, except for the Mountain Home Air Force Base, which was about ten miles further out of town and had another five or six thousand folks. But every year in August, Mountain Home boasted the largest parade in all of Idaho, on Air Force Appreciation Day. It was the best! The city would serve free barbecue beef sandwiches, chips, and corn on the cob and soda to over 5,000 people. Over 10,000 people would turn out for the parade, with entries from the military, all kinds of first responders, sports teams and cheerleaders, businesses, churches (including ours), and more. Nearly every single float would throw out candy. Everyone, that is, except Costco. Costco had a float in the parade, and they threw out rolls of toilet paper. Our boys always came prepared with lots of grocery bags to carry their candy and Shelly and I would bring them for the toilet paper. We literally cleaned up on that.

The parade lasts for a few hours, and you can count on the base commander, the mayor, politicians, and even the governor to ride through. It was a load of fun and noise and celebration. Multiply that by 300 and that's when Jesus came into town on Palm Sunday. There was a Jewish historian named Josephus, and in about 60AD he recorded that the crowd that day was as high as *three million Jews*. That's a big crowd.

Luke 19:37 says that...

“When (Jesus) came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.” (Luke 19:37, niv)

You could take that huge crowd of cheering admirers and break them into basically one of two groups: one group was the...

– **Sincere**

...followers of Christ. In the crowd, undoubtedly, would be many of those Christ touched during the previous three years of his ministry. These were the individuals who cried, “Hosanna!” as they saw Jesus, their savior, who not only met their physical and material needs but more eternally their spiritual need.

In the crowd that day there was the adulterous woman whom Christ forgave and said in John 8 that her sins were forgiven and that she would no longer walk in darkness but would have the light of life.

In the crowd that day was formerly blind Bartimaeus who had sat begging until Jesus passed by. Christ restored his sight, and Mark 10:52 says that Bartimaeus “immediately received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”

In the crowd that day there was the widow with an only son who had died. Christ had compassion on her when he saw the funeral procession and raised her son from the dead. After raising the dead boy the word spread like wildfire, Luke tells us in chapter seven:

“They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” (Luke 7:16)

But also in the crowd that day was the...

– **Superficial**

...followers of Christ. These were the multitudes of those who cried “Hosanna!” but theirs were empty and hollow words. They were shallow, superficial followers of Christ.

This crowd that cried “Hosanna” was the same ones that in a few days would be shouting “Crucify Him!” Why would they change their cheers to chants so quickly? Why were their praises so shallow? Because they were praising Jesus solely for what he could do for them, not for who he was as God’s Son.

Many of us are familiar with Kanye West, who now goes by the name “Ye.” About a week ago he sat down with Radio host Kurt Alexander, better known as Big Boy, to talk about his new album, entitled “Vultures.”³

You might remember back in 2019 Ye announced that he had committed his life to Jesus. He then began holding gospel music events called “Sunday Service,” singing the music he’d written for his album, “Jesus is King.” At the events, choirs sang worship and preachers told people about Jesus. Some of those who jumped on board were Joel Osteen, Rich Wilkerson, Jamal Bryant, and others. Two years later he released his second Christian album. Those two albums account for over \$7 million in gross sales.

Since then, Ye’s gone through a divorce, which has brought about controversy with his antisemitic statements and so lost lucrative clothing and shoe contracts, has paraded his new wife around Europe in some very revealing outfits, and he’s since gone back to degrading women in his lyrics. In the interview last week he says he has issues with Jesus. Here’s why, in his own words: “There’s a lot of stuff I went through that I prayed [about] and I didn’t see Jesus show up.” He added that he had to take the challenges of his personal and professional life into “my own hands.” He went on to say that someone in the industry wants to kill him, but they can’t because (and again I’m quoting directly), “Because I’m god. And anyone that disagrees I’m the god of me and you can’t tell me who I am. I could tell you all, but it’s you all job to listen.”

Ye repeated, “I’m the god of me. I don’t know if I’m in heaven or not—I got a number one [album]. For all you know, I might be in like a fourth-dimension version of the lifestyle.”

There’s some messed up stuff going on in that man’s head. That man is narcissistically sinful. No doubt he battles who knows how many of his demons, including mental health. He needs our prayers for him to receive God’s love and forgiveness (and probably for deliverance). But here’s the point: up until three years ago he was *leading* the singing of Jesus’ praises, making millions of albums that sang Jesus’ praises, but then when Jesus didn’t do what Ye wanted, Ye “had issues” and began bad mouthing Jesus. Sound familiar? That’s exactly like the superficial Jesus followers in the crowd that day. They sang “Hosanna” and less than five days later they shouted, “Crucify Him!”

³ <https://churchleaders.com/news/473727-i-have-my-issues-with-jesus-kanye-west-calls-out-god-for-not-answering-prayers-while-labeling-himself-a-god.html>

What was it that they were expecting of Jesus? Notice two words in their praise: “King” and “Peace.” While the crowd was acknowledging the claim of Christ to be the Messiah, they were also declaring their expectation that he would free them from Roman oppression and set *them* up as the oppressors. The word used was “hosanna,” which means “Save *now*.” They expected Jesus to lead a violent overthrow of the Roman rulers and take up the throne himself. Their hope was that they would enjoy their own brand of peace, with subjugation of everyone else. Their plan was to enthrone Jesus as the means of their peace. But Jesus wouldn’t be played. On a previous occasion, Jesus knew this about these superficial followers. In John 6, following the miracle when Jesus fed the crowd of well over 5,000, the multitude sought after Jesus. In response we read in John 6:15...

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (John 6:15, niv)

Clearly the motive of the multitude was not in line with the purpose of Jesus. Later in that same story, we see Jesus addressing these self-serving followers when he says this:

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” (John 6:26-27, niv)

It is amazing that they saw Jesus do so many miracles and they only wanted more from him. They had a front row seat to Jesus in his teachings, his interactions, and his miracles. But the Bible says in later in John’s Gospel that...

Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. (John 12:37, niv)

Today – right here in this room – there are two types of followers of Jesus: there are those who follow and worship him for what they can get out of him. Your worship is shallow and superficial. You are full of praise here on Sunday morning because he’s recently done something for you, or because you want him to do something for you; you need something from him. You only come to him when you are in crisis. But when he doesn’t deliver, like Ye, you “have issues with Jesus” and so you take things into your own hands. You might be more subtle about it than Ye, but it’s the exact same brand of superficial followers.

But there are those here today who have worshipped Christ out of sincerity. You have established a personal relationship with Jesus, and you worship him solely *because of who he is* and not what you can get from him.

That’s the two types in the cheering section. Which one are you?

Then there were...

2. The *jeers* of the antagonists.

These are the people who were not shouting “Hosanna.” Instead, they were shouting at Jesus and his disciples to knock it off. Luke 19:39 says:

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”
(Luke 19:39, niv)

The crowd included those who took great offense at the attention and praise that Christ was receiving. Some in the crowd were trying to keep the crowd from cheering. They were antagonists and not supporters. They angrily shouted for Christ to silence the crowd.

Religionists hated Christ. He flew in the face of all that they stood for; he was a threat to their legalistic control of their people, and he freely pointed out their hypocrisy. But Jesus was popular with many people, and they were jealous and threatened by that. So they were deeply offended by Jesus. They were jealous, they were threatened, and they didn’t like being confronted about their sin (they’d rather keep that hidden from people!). The Bible says in John 12:19 that the Pharisees said to each other:

“See this is getting us nowhere! Look how the whole world has gone after him!”
(John 12:19)

It would have been one thing if it were just about Jesus’ popularity, but the things Jesus was saying were not favorable about the religionists and he called out their sin. And they were very unhappy about that. Again, it’s because Jesus threatened their power and pointed out their sin – not the kind of thing that legalistic cult leaders want going on. In fact, Jesus himself knew this, because he said:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. (John 15:22, niv)

So they rejected Jesus. But that shouldn’t be a surprise. Seven hundred years before this, in the Old Testament times Isaiah the prophet said (53:3) about Jesus that “He is despised and rejected by men...” That was yet another fulfillment of prophecy about Jesus. They rejected him, and in the process rejected the One who could help them.

You know, you can’t receive the blessings of God if you reject the Blessor. You can’t get God’s spiritual blessings if you don’t want the God who gives them. You could take a bottle, seal it, and put it in the sea. It might float around in the middle of the ocean for a century, surrounded by shoreless ocean, and it will be as dry and empty inside at the end as it was at the beginning. “So you and I float, live, move, and have our being in the great ocean of God’s love in Christ, but you can cork up your hearts”⁴ and seal them up so that God’s grace can’t get into you. These were the jeers of the antagonists, surrounded by what should have been an illuminated realization of their deliverance and God’s love, and instead they rejected him.

But before we are done with this event, see that there were...

3. The tears of the Redeemer.

There’s an important story told about Jesus just before the parade started. He was across the Kidron Valley, on the Mount of Olives (one of his favorite places to pray). It was only

⁴ A. McLaren

about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away from Jerusalem, and as Jesus looked at the city, in Luke 19 it says this:

As (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 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. 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. 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.” (Luke 19:41-44, niv)

Jesus Christ wept – literally burst into tears, weeping out loud as he looked at the city of Jerusalem. From where Jesus was to the Eastern gate, it was $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile on the road but about a quarter mile looking across. He could see the walled city of Jerusalem, with all the bustle and excitement of the Jewish pilgrims who had journeyed there for Passover.

This holiday was like our Christmas, so why was Jesus weeping? He gives the reason himself for his tears. In Matthew 23:37 Jesus says:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” (Matthew 23:37, niv)

The Jewish leaders had already rejected Jesus. Now the Jewish people were about to reject the *only* way of true and lasting peace – Jesus Christ. They wanted a political peace and sacrificed eternal peace. Their opportunity to know God’s love and grace would slip through their hands, so all that lay ahead for them was judgment. Christ wept for their persistent rejection of his Messiahship, at their passing of their opportunity to embrace his love and salvation, and he wept over the picture of their impending doom and destruction. Jesus knew this.

But his prediction was far more than metaphorical. Jesus, being God’s Son, knew that in less than forty years, Jerusalem would be physically destroyed, her Jewish citizens would be slaughtered, and the Temple would be demolished with not one stone left on top of another.

Earlier that week Jesus had told his disciples:

“Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” (Matthew 23:38-24:2, niv)

Jesus knew that the people of Israel didn’t want a peaceful reconciler; they wanted a political revolutionary. A little over thirty years later from this day, the people got what they wanted. This day they rejected Jesus; on that day they chose a Zealot revolutionary to be their messiah. They joined the Zealots in a violent revolt against the Romans. It’s been called the “First Jewish-Roman War,” and you can Google and read all about the events that led up to it and what happened.

But in February of the year 70 AD, after the Jews had followed a leader who promised the violent overthrow of Rome, the Roman general Titus surrounded Jerusalem with 80,000 soldiers to crush the revolt that had begun some five years earlier. In April of that year, General Titus began the siege in earnest, completely surrounding the city and cutting it off for three months. Conditions became so desperate within the city walls that women resorted to cannibalism of their own children and grown men literally fought to the death with each other over a piece of bird's dropping for food. Finally, in September of that year, the walls were battered down and the slaughter began. When the smoke finally cleared, over a half million Jews lay dead. A number of them had been crucified by Titus. Then the Temple itself was leveled to the ground and the ground under it was plowed up.

You can walk those grounds today, like Shelly and I did twenty-five years ago. Today, two thousand years later, you will see the huge, scattered stones of the Temple – enormous blocks of stone ten to twelve feet long by four to six feet high and tall. *To this day none of it has been restored.* There is literally not one stone left on another, just as Jesus proclaimed. *And the shadow of those ruins is cast still today across the stony hearts of all those who still reject Jesus.* Maybe that's you.

If you are here today and you have not accepted the peace that Jesus brings you; maybe you are cheering superficially, or maybe you are jeering at my words today – you are rejecting Jesus himself. If that's you, *listen:* Jesus is looking over your life and weeping at the destruction that awaits you. Your rejection of Jesus will result in the siege of sin and Satan that will destroy the foundations stones that you've built your false religion and rejection on. Jesus is weeping over you today – over the future that awaits you.

Will you accept Jesus? Or will you chase after other messiahs? The Temple stones that are left scattered to this very day condemn you.

But things can change for you because there is another stone that has also been cast aside – just outside the city of Jerusalem, and to this day it too has not been restored. That stone was used to seal the lifeless body of Jesus in the tomb, but the force of his rising from the dead rolled it away, and that tomb is *still empty!* Palm Sunday always points to Resurrection Sunday – Easter! And because Jesus rose from the dead, your life can be built on the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ himself. Jesus said he is the stone that the builders rejected, and he has become the Chief cornerstone on which you can build peace, abundant life, and reconciliation with a God who loves you and died for you and is waiting for you with open arms.

Prayer

When we worshipped earlier, were you truly cheering Jesus, or was it superficial? Are you a jeering antagonist? Is Jesus weeping over the upcoming ruins of your life?

Trade those broken stones for an empty tomb.

Benediction

2 Corinthians 13:14 – (benediction of love) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.