
Palm Sunday –

How Jesus' Triumphant entry into Jerusalem turned the world on its head

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday. Churches around the world will mark it by waving Palm crosses, in imitation of the crowds who greeted Jesus on His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Donkeys will lead processions of Christians who often shout 'Hosanna!' following the people welcoming Jesus.

What's the significance of Jesus' actions on Palm Sunday, though? And what does this have to teach us today?...

By the time Jesus entered Jerusalem just a few days before his crucifixion, he'd been in ministry for three years. He'd been healing the sick, casting our demons and preaching with such profound wisdom that he'd begun to drawn huge crowds.

He came from Galilee – the northern area which was regarded with derision by the sophisticated Jerusalem-dwellers. Yet even they had caught the Jesus bug. Maybe it was His miracles? Or maybe the way that He challenged the religious and political authorities with such clarity and conviction? His rebukes of the Pharisees and teachers of the law may have won him favours with ordinary people, but it hadn't gone unnoticed by those authorities.

In John 7: 25 we read that, 'some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?"' The ruling powers already had their eye on Jesus and the social, political and religious ripples He was causing. In John's chronology, He'd already turned over the tables in the Temple and was clearly capable of more disruption.

One of the final straws came when He raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany. Jesus arrived back at Bethany, a town just over the hill from Jerusalem. He was greeted as a returning hero by the people, but in an almost comic sub-plot, the authorities plan to kill Lazarus, because he'd miraculously been raised from the dead! 'When all the people heard of Jesus' arrival,' John 12 tells us, 'they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the

dead. Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.'

The stakes had been raised and the feast of the Passover was imminent. Jesus was in Bethany, just on the other side of the Mount of Olives from the Temple. Anticipation must have been running high, not just from the crowds, but from the disciples too. 'Is this the moment' you can imagine them asking. 'Is the insurrection about to begin?'

Both the Jewish and Roman authorities must have been thinking the same thing. While they were used to dealing with rowdy preachers and the occasional rebel, it had been a few hundred years since the [Maccabees had mounted a serious challenge](#) to an occupying power in Israel.

So when Pilate, the Roman Governor charged with keeping the authority of Rome in tact, came into Jerusalem for the festival, we can be sure that he did so with the full pomp and military authority of Empire. And this is where the genius of Jesus' entry comes into full focus. As the crowds gathered and waved their palm branches, which many of us will replicate with

palm crosses this Sunday, Jesus rode in on a donkey.

Not only was the donkey a fulfillment of scripture, it was also a making a deeply serious point. The Empire's representative rode into town with military splendour. While that was going on across town, Jesus rode in with no weapons, no army and sitting on a donkey – rather than a thoroughbred horse.

But far from undermining Jesus, it actually undercuts the Empire. Viewing the story as we now do, we can see that though the Roman Empire eventually fell, Jesus' kingdom continues to advance. Those people who greeted Jesus during His triumphant entry into Jerusalem with cries of Hosanna may have been expecting a military uprising themselves. What Jesus was telling them was that He was doing something far more subversive. The power of the Roman Empire wouldn't be beaten by military means.

Instead, Jesus entry on a donkey showed that His last week on earth would be marked by the characteristics which had been evident throughout His ministry. He refused to follow expectations and He was a servant rather than a rebel leader. Most of all, He was in the business of confounding and surprising everyone. In that

sense, the events of Palm Sunday wonderfully prefigure the much greater shock that was to come on the first Easter Day.