

Reading: John 12:12-26

Theme: Reactions on Palm Sunday.

Just imagine for a moment that Doncaster Rovers were to get to the FA Cup final in 2022 and then win it! What excitement, celebration there would be in Doncaster! Imagine the homecoming of the team, the parade through the town with the cup on display – all the chanting crowds and celebrations. We may imagine, dream, even understand something like that. Perhaps our imagination is not the great! Yet many of us have seen footage of celebrations around Buckingham Palace on VE Day; the excitement and joy that day. Yet we could fail to catch the anticipation, celebration and excitement there would have been in Jerusalem that 1st Palm Sunday – if not at the start, then by the end of that day. If we'd have been there, say getting on with our work or at home, then we'd hear in the distance cheering, shouting, people passing by all excited, people running and some carrying palm branches.

We'd stop someone, stick our head out of the window to find out what was happening and going on “*Jesus the prophet from Nazareth is coming. Do you know what He did the other day? He raised someone from the dead...*” Off they go and we go with them, join the others going out of the city to see Him. As we got to where He is, we'd see another huge crowd who'd come in with Him from Bethany. There He was riding on a donkey colt; people are all excited and so are we. As we and the crowd coming out of Jerusalem and the crowd coming in from Bethany meet up, so another large crowd joins you – the ones up for the feast of the Passover, as they'd also heard Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. There's a buzz, an excitement and then a chant starts – **v13** - everyone seems to be chanting and waving palm branches. What a time and an event to be part of; we'd remember it all our lives.

We may be so used to the accounts of this Triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and we fail to see its importance – so important that all 4 of the gospels record it for us. There are many lessons we could learn from it:

- Jesus shows He is deliberately laying down His life;
- by it He forced the Jewish leaders to come in line with the Divine timetable, as they didn't want Him taken at the feast;
- Jesus sets Himself forth as the Messiah by fulfilling scripture and does not deny what the crowds are saying;
- He shows what kind of Messiah He would be – not one of earthly pomp and glory, but the Prince of Peace.

All those areas and more beside would be worthwhile to look at, but I want us to look at the reactions that day to this event to see if we can identify with any of them. I'm noting 4 reactions that 1st Palm Sunday:

1. The Envious Enemies

The Jewish rulers were there and as they saw the crowds, heard their shouting and cheering, they wanted Jesus to rebuke the crowds (Luke 19:39ff) to stop them. Jesus says *"I tell you, if they keep quiet the stones would cry out!"* The situation was so right, that even inanimate, non-living objects like stones would have joined in the praise! Yet the Jewish leaders didn't! What does it tell us of the hardness of their hearts? The Jewish rulers were full of envy and viewed Jesus as their enemy. Even the report by eyewitnesses of Him raising Lazarus from the dead, caused them to plot to kill both Lazarus and Jesus! What of us? Are we those who would join in praising Jesus or would we have hard hearts which would criticise and resent any praise of this Jesus?

Some people would not believe on the Lord Jesus even if they had been there and witnessed Jesus' life and miracles 1st hand. These Jewish rulers did, yet they had envy and hatred towards Him. We

are not to be surprised if people are against us as believers, as we live godly lives and speak of our Saviour. People will mock; will resent us; our lives; what we stand for and our Saviour.

The world is anti-God, which is being shown more and more. It is not just a question of intellectual doubts, but deep down inside of them, they do not want there to be a God, so they can then live as they want. If God were to work in an amazing and mighty way here and the area, then we could expect opposition and it would surprise us that some of such would come from religious people. Things would be said publically and privately to dissuade people from getting involved!

Jesus' opposition came from the religious establishment of the day – those who said they were believers in God, in God's word and were looking for the Messiah! Yet these were the very ones who rejected the Son of God, the Messiah and had Him crucified.

Being very religious, knowing religious things and having religious things done to us is no guarantee we are right with God and we may even be rejecting God's way of salvation. Those who are good, moral and even religious are sometimes, humanly speaking, the most difficult ones to point to the Saviour, because they think they are good enough, or it doesn't apply to them. Being brought up in a Christian home can cause us to be too familiar with the things of God and we may not bother with making the Lord Jesus our own Saviour, because we can feel OK. Anyone listening like that?

2. The Pulsating People

The disciples must have felt on top of the world – all the crowd cheering, praising God for Jesus and hailing Him as the One who had come in the name of Lord, who was the king of Israel. They

were among the excited crowds, who were pulsating with expectation because of the miracles and things He had done. It seemed to the Jewish rulers, and no doubt to the disciples, that “*the whole world has gone after Him!*” (v19) What an exciting time – such expectations by the crowds - the shouts, praise, cheering – everyone so willing to praise Him; BUT we know what happened a few days later “*Crucify Him, away with Him... we will not have **this man** rule over us!*”

We need to realise that crowds, even large, excited, buzzing, pulsating, loud, praising crowds are no measure of success, but then neither are small, unmoved meetings! A large number in a meeting can mean nothing even if they were impressed by miracles, by signs and wonders. It went on in Jesus’ day and they did not believe on Him or follow Him.

Sadly many in our age mistake crowds for success. Marketing techniques are used, gimmicks, some latest idea or fad, churches can bend over backwards to attract the crowds, they become “*seeker driven*” (as opposed to seeker sensitive) and the gospel can be so easily compromised, because there is an offence in the gospel message. Yes, we are not to offend people by our attitudes and insensitivity, but the offence of the cross and the word of God is to be proclaimed. It is the preaching and gossiping of the cross that people will not like and it is not to be dressed up in fancy clothes to entertain. We cannot compete with TV, the arts, entertainment venues etc. yet some churches try to do that and it would seem anything goes except clear, Holy Spirit anointed preaching.

There used to be a saying “*Give me that old time religion*” – all the truths were preached, but a lot say in essence “*Give me that **show-time** religion!*” – where services are choreographed,

designed and structured to pull in the punters. We need to keep the word of God central taught and preached in a Holy Spirit anointed way, for believe it or not, I am against frigid, stodgy and cold preaching. Then and only then will things of lasting, eternally lasting worth be accomplished. I'm not against big or mega churches – I pray for and want to see the church here grow and develop numerically, but especially spiritually and I would love to see pulsating crowds of people coming to actively worship our Saviour from true hearts. Join together in praying for such a work of God here among us – so pray for me and all who preach here.

3. The Sincere Seekers

Some among all the pulsating crowds were not content with only the excitement. At Christmas we often speak of the wise men from the east that came seeking the new born king, but here we have **wise men from the west** who came seeking the shortly-to-die king! These Greeks weren't too sure if they could approach Jesus directly – were probably converts to Judaism from pagan Greek religion and they would have been told many times that they were not worthy to be a true Jew. They felt unworthy to approach Rabbi Jesus – to see Him, speak to Him, even to follow Him, so they ask one of His disciples – Philip - who at least had a Greek name and may be sympathetic to them. Philip found this a problem as these were Gentiles and so he asked Andrew, both were stumped as what to do and they both asked Jesus. (v22)

Realise we may all be more or less approachable to people around us. Some people may relate to us better than another Christian and so they'll ask us questions, even questions that may stump us and we can't answer; if that is the case; then tell them you'll find out and ask another believer for help with the answers. We are not to be miffed or put out because people didn't come to us as the fount

of all knowledge or wisdom in the 1st place! (*Pride is such an invasive thing!*) It may be we are a bit intimidating, or people can't relate to us as well as they can to others or feel we don't talk on their level.

It would seem Jesus knew what their desire to see Him centred on and so He showed them the way of salvation and its success among ones like the Greeks – His work would produce many seeds and fruit of success. No doubt these Greeks had their heart questions answered as Jesus pointed them to Himself, His work, His death and He points them on to the cost of being a believer.

We need to point people to the Lord Jesus and all He has done and the salvation He has accomplished for us and that there is a cost in following Him. We need to be honest and point out that in being a follower of the Lord Jesus we cannot live as we want – to have Him as our Saviour means He is to be both Lord and Saviour – the NT never separates the two.

The Lord Jesus in **v25 & 26** shows us that we are to serve and follow Him wherever He may lead us – even though it may cost us in terms of reputation, social standing, contentment, ease, even happiness. It may cause us to lose our life – literally, or a career, or large wages or.... The Lord wants and expects those who trust Him as their Lord and Saviour to do as He wants and He is such a kind and gentle Saviour. The Lord gently leads us and causes His will to become desirable to us.

Ordinarily there will be those who will be seeking and sometimes seriously seeking to see Jesus, we are to pray that the Lord would bring such ones across our paths and that we can be used to bring them to the Lord Jesus. We should have no difficulty about should we or could we – as Philip and Andrew had about presenting

Gentiles to Jesus! We have the privilege of telling whosoever that they can trust the Lord Jesus and be welcomed by Him.

We know the Lord is sovereign, but He uses means and people to draw others to Himself and so in disappointing situations, in exciting situations too, we can be expecting Him to be drawing to Himself those sincere seekers after God. Let's pray we will see many seeking and finding Him as their Saviour.

4. The Discerning Disciples

We can be so up and down; little things can so easily alter our state. The disciples would have a roller coaster ride of ups and downs – seeing the pulsating people and their excitement; they saw the betrayal and ran away; they saw the perverse people – away with Him, crucify Him; knew of His death, burial, also thankfully His resurrection and His ascension. It was then they understood, discerned “*these things were written about Him*” (v16).

This must have really encouraged them – God's word is true, these things were written about centuries beforehand. As they thought on that, they came to see, realise, discern Jesus did die and rise again and so He would produce much fruit/seed and they were encouraged to proclaim the gospel. They saw, understood that they were not wasting their time and lives in serving and following this Jesus, nor were they losing their lives, but were serving the risen, living Lord Jesus, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. I suspect none of them ever regretted serving Jesus all their days. Such ones can expect to be honoured by the Lord Jesus only as good and faithful servants.

We are to realise and discern as those who love this same Jesus, that His word and promises are still true – as true as when they

were 1st said and written. He is still able, more than able in ways more than we could ask or imagine to save the most unlikely of people, to even welcome and save you if you are not a believer, to save whosoever will go to Him.

We are to have, along with such discernment and realisation, a growing expectation, encouragement and anticipation of gospel success here; to pray the Lord would be drawing people to Himself and to encourage us on in the work here – 1 Corinthians 15:58 *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”* Or as The Message says *“With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don’t hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, **confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.**”*

I hope and pray that the reactions we’ve briefly looked at this morning would encourage us on in our lives – to find the Lord Jesus for ourselves and if that is where we are at, that we would be encouraged to serve Him from a heart of love and expectation – so that He would get the glory 1st and foremost.