

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 24, 2013

What Are We Doing?

by Dan Trygg

“...they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. ³⁷ As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, ³⁸ shouting: ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’”
Luke 19:35-38

“What do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ ²⁹ And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. ³⁰ The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did *not* go. ³¹ Which of the two *did* the will of his father?”
Matthew 21:28-31a

“...These ones stirring-up the inhabited earth have arrived here also.”

Acts 17:6

Palm Sunday, A.D. 30, was full of excitement. The prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, was coming into Jerusalem from the east, down the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron valley, and up into the city. Crowds of pilgrims were there, and **when people realized who it was that was riding on the colt, they began laying their coats down in the road, as a sign of honor and respect.** Others began cutting leafy branches from trees along the road and nearby fields, and were laying them down, creating a patchwork mat of branches and clothing for the procession coming down the hill toward the city. These pilgrims had heard of, or even seen, Jesus. They knew of His miracles. He had recently raised a dead man, Lazarus, calling him from his tomb after he had been dead *four days!* This was a well-documented case, being just outside Jerusalem, and having been witnessed by many of the Jewish leaders. The report of this miraculous sign had spread quickly, and pilgrims were especially looking forward to seeing Jesus, and maybe even Lazarus himself. **Jesus was riding on a colt, a sign of peace, a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9.** No one could miss the significance of this act, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you. He is just and endowed with salvation; humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Most people were on foot. It was generally the wealthy who rode on donkeys. Jesus did not even possess a donkey of His own; He borrowed the one He was riding. **He was making an intentional statement.** There had been much questioning and disputing who Jesus was, for some time. **There could be no doubt now concerning who Jesus was indicating He was. His actions clearly communicated a claim to be the King of the Jews, the Messiah, the Christ of God.**

The significance of the act was not lost on the crowd. They grasped it right away. That is why **they gave Him the “red carpet treatment”** (or, at least, the coat and branch treatment). **They were preparing a way for the King! They also started to shout in triumph,** as the passage instructed. What did they say? **They quoted from Psalm 118:25,26, “O Lord, do save (in Hebrew, ‘Hosanna!’), we beseech You!... Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”** This is part of the *Egyptian Hallel*, consisting of Psalms 113-118, sung at festive occasions. These praise songs were *always* sung during and after the Passover meal. They commemorated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and looked forward to the coming Messiah.

The next day Jesus quoted the same Psalm to defend His authority to the chief priest and Pharisees for staging His entrance as He did and for teaching in the Temple. “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “**The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;** this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?’” ⁴³ Therefore **I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits”** (Matt. 21:42-43).

Earlier in this same context, Jesus had told the parable of the two sons. In this parable, the one son *said* he would work in the vineyard, but *didn't*. The other one originally declined to work, but later repented and went into the vineyard to work. **Which one did the will of his father? Not the one who just spoke empty words. It was the one who actually did the work his father asked him to do.**

This story was followed by the parable of the wicked tenants. Remember that story? A landowner had prepared a vineyard and rented it out to tenants for an agreed-upon portion of the crop. When it was harvest time, he sent servants and slaves to collect his portion, but the tenants mistreated and killed them. Finally, the owner sent his only son, thinking, “Surely they will respect my son.” But, they did not. Instead, they killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. **When Jesus asked what the landowner would do, the answer was obvious. He will kill those wicked tenants, and give the vineyard to other tenants who will give the fruit in due season.**

The point of these parables? God is looking for obedience and fruit from those who say they are His. It is not enough to talk the talk. **What matters is, “What are you going to do?”** Of course, these parables are even more

powerful in the setting, just following on the heels of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This was what we call Palm Sunday. By Friday morning, Jesus would be rejected by the leaders, tried by the Jewish court, and brought to Pilate. There, a crowd would be calling out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" *Were some of these people from the same group who had cheered Him on, just five days earlier?* Why were they calling out for His death? Jesus was *rocking the boat!* They were afraid that His message, and the attention He was getting, would *threaten their comfortable lives.* He was not only making them look bad, He was a possible threat to their power. They feared that the Romans may see Him as a threat, and that they themselves might become collateral damage of a police action. So, *they rejected Him,* His message, His miracles, His prophetic demonstrations, and everything He stood for. **It seemed to them as though they had a choice: His life, ...or their security and comfort. To them, it was an easy decision.**

Flash forward twenty years. Paul had just left Philippi, and arrived at Thessalonica. He attended the synagogue located there, and had opportunity to preach to the Jews on three successive Sabbath days. He was powerfully demonstrating from the OT scriptures that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead. He asserted that Jesus had fulfilled these prophecies, and was the Christ that God had promised. Many were being persuaded by Paul, and were joining him. The Jews became jealous, formed a mob, and attacked the house where Paul had been staying. Not finding him there, they took Jason, ...Paul's host..., to the city authorities, shouting, "**These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also...**" They went on to charge them with sedition, accusing them of proclaiming that there was another king, Jesus. The authorities were alarmed at this, because the Romans were quick and *brutal* to put down any talk of revolution or sedition. So, they demanded that Jason pay a large sum of money as a bond, insisting that Paul and his associates leave town, which they did.

Isn't it interesting that **these people had heard rumors about Christians, and they were known as people "upsetting the world" or "ones stirring up the whole inhabited earth"**. Of course, the rumors they heard were distorted, but the obvious partial truth contained in this accusation was that **these people were changing things!** The status quo was *not* OK, anymore. **They were not mere idle talkers. They were "doers of the word"** (Jas. 1:22-27). **What was their crime? "Helping orphans and widows in their distress, and keeping themselves unspotted from the sins of the world"**. In Jerusalem, they were feeding widows and helping the sick and the poor (Acts 2:45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6). **They were so radical that there were no poor people among them. They were taught to be zealous for good deeds** (Tit. 3:1,8,14). Paul preached that a key aspect of the expression of their salvation was the good deeds they were prepared by God to do (Eph. 2:10). **This emphasis originated with Jesus. He emphasized that they were to be the light of the world, showing the reality of God working in their lives by the good deeds they did** (Mat. 5:14-16). This would bring praise and glory to God, and credibility and gratitude to the ministry. Peter taught that Christians were to abstain from fleshly lusts and devote themselves to doing good deeds. **This would silence those who would desire to speak evil of the followers of Christ** (I Pet. 2:11,12). The apostle John also spoke of helping the poor, summarizing by saying, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (I Jn. 3:17,18).

In Isaiah 5, God had used the image of a vineyard to describe what kind of fruit He was looking for from His people. He did everything for this vineyard, so that it would produce the best fruit, but it produced only worthless grapes. Like Jesus' parable, what would He do? He will abandon and destroy His vineyard. What was the bad fruit? **He was looking for justice and righteousness, but instead there was oppression and the outcry of the poor!** What was going on? Instead of caring for one another, people were building ostentatious homes and country estates. Instead of honoring God, they gave themselves to drunkenness and carousing late into the night. They loved their music and entertainment, but had no time for God. They had become wise in their own eyes, but had turned a blind eye toward justice. They deprived the innocent and powerless of their rights, and treated them with disdain. They called evil good, and good evil. **Though they were very religious, attending services and offering sacrifices, God rejected their hypocrisy. Instead of their empty show of religion, He exhorted them to "cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow"** (1:11-17).

What are we doing? Are we just *talking* religious *talk* to ourselves, being entertained in our fancy worship centers, while the cry of the lost, hurting and needy reaches the throne room of God? **Are we doing the Father's will, or just talking about doing it?** Are we living to serve *ourselves*, or are we genuinely serving *God* by *serving others*? **Where are the people of God who are "turning the world upside down"?** Are you among them, or are you sitting in your living room? Do you ignore the needs of the homeless, or are you *working* to alleviate their plight? **Where are the world-changers of God in our day? Do we bring a message that is dripping with credibility and radical love that stands out to people,** or are we just another "Blah, blah, blah" voice in a cacophony of irrelevance? **Has the love of God and the power of the Spirit lifted us up above our self-interest and self-limitation, or are we mired in the quiet desperation of fear and mediocrity? Are we willing to truly get radical for God? What are you willing to do?**