

Palm Sunday

Text: Matthew 21:1-11

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” ⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!” ¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” ¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Theme: Hosanna

Every year on this Sunday, we shout “Hosanna,” but do you know what this word means? It comes from Psalm 118:25, “*Save us.*” It is a cry for God’s help, but this cry also became a shout of praise. In Jeremiah 31:7 the prophet writes, “*Make your praises heard, and say, O Lord, save your people, [hosanna] the remnant of Israel.*” In that section Jeremiah is prophesying the joy that the people would have as they returned home from the exile.

It is somewhat strange that word was used as the people were entering Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It was generally used during the Feast of Tabernacles, which was celebrated in the fall. This feast served two purposes. It was a harvest festival of thanksgiving. It was also a reminder of how God led His people through the wilderness. It was called the Feast of Tabernacles because the people lived in tents like Israel did on the way to the promised land.

In Leviticus 23:40 God said, “*On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.*” Each day for 7 days the priests would make a procession around the altar, waving palm branches and singing Psalm 118. The final day of the Feast of Tabernacles was called, “The Great Hosanna.” There were 7 processions around the altar. When the priest reached verses 25-26, the trumpet sounded, and all the people waved palm branches and shouted with the priest, “O Lord Save, Hosanna!” It became more of a hurrah of joy than the original cry for help. Today during this festival the Jews still encircle their synagogues with palm branches and shouts of Hosanna.

A form of this word is also used in Revelation 7 where John sees a vision of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne of God. They are holding palm branches and shouting, “*Salvation (Hosanna) belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.*” (Rev 7:10)

The word continues to be sung by Christians today in the Sanctus just before communion when we

sing, “Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

Today I would like to look at this word in both aspects, as a cry for help and at the same time thanksgiving for God help in Jesus Christ.

I. Hosanna is a cry for help.

The people of that time were calling on Jesus to save them. There were many people who called on Him to have mercy. Shortly before Jesus entered Jerusalem two blind men shouted as loud as they could, “*Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us.*” Jesus had compassion on them and healed them. The Gospel are full of accounts of people whom He healed. There were sinners, who felt the weight of their sins. Jesus forgave them. The people throughout Israel bore the weight of the extra laws that the pharisees put on them. Jesus came to free them from the bondage of legalism. Jesus rode into Jerusalem as the one who could free the people from sin, death, and all the power of the devil. The people cried out to Him, “O Lord Save us!”

We meet Him with that same cry because we find ourselves in the same predicaments as those people did. At times the troubles of this life have us calling for mercy. We are worry, depressed, and afraid. We feel beaten. We have had enough of suffering and hard times. We call out, “Jesus, have mercy. O Lord, save me!” At other times, it is our own sins that have brought the burden. We know what we should have done, but we failed to do it. We have fallen into temptation. Our faith is weaker than we want it to be. We are like Peter. He thought that he could walk on the water, but when he saw the waves and wind, His faith began to sink. He cried out, “Lord, save me!” Sometimes even religion places burdens on us, and we cry out to Jesus for help. Much of what we hear today is centered on what we should be doing for God, rather than on what God has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ. A lot of churches have a hard time with Good Friday. They see it as a horrific day. For them the cross is a sign of what we did to Jesus by our sins rather than a day when we celebrate how much Jesus loves us by giving His life for us.

II. Jesus hears that cry. He saves us, and that cry becomes an exclamation of praise.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as an answer to the cries for salvation. He came to save the world by giving His innocent life on the cross for the forgiveness of all of our sins. That is why those people shouted “Hosanna,” because their Savior was riding into town to save them.

When we pray for God’s help and forgiveness, we are so confident, that we praise him for that help in the same prayer. In confirmation, I teach the kids about the three p’s of prayer, “Praise, Problem, and Petition.” It is easy to come to God in prayer with the problem, but the Scriptures show us that it is also important to praise God in the same prayer, confident that He will hear us and bring the help that we need. When we ask God for help from our needs, we also praise Him that He has help us in the past and has promised to help in every need. When we pray for forgiveness, we also praise Him that He came into Jerusalem to offer His sinless life for the forgiveness of our sins. Our pleas for help are also combined with a shout of praise because we know that God is faithful. He will save us from all our sins, from death, and from all evil.

One day our hosannas will no longer be a cry for help. They will only be a shout of victory. Earlier I mentioned the verse from Jeremiah. He prophesied that the Israelites would return from exile, shouting "Hosanna." In Revelation John sees the multitude in heaven, waving palm branches, which is the symbol of victory. They are singing, "Salvation belongs to the Lamb." Salvation means "Hosanna." They are shouting His praise that He heard their cries for mercy and brought them His salvation. One day we will be a part of that group. We will look at Jesus. We will see those wounds that are still visible, and we will praise Him for the salvation that He has won for us. I believe that we will also be able to look back at our lives and see how He delivered us from many evils, forgave our many sins, and eventually brought us safe to His heavenly kingdom. We will praise Him for His salvation throughout our lives.

Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Let this word remind you to look to Jesus in times of need and when you sin for the salvation that you need. Cry out to Him, "O Lord, Save me!" But let this cry also be one of praise in confidence, that He does hear you, and that He has come and will come with His help and salvation.

Amen.

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O God, our heavenly Father, You sent Your Son Jesus Christ to be the payment for the sins of the whole world. As our Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem to the shouts of “Hosanna,” so hear our prayers as we bring them before You now.

P O Lord, You do not desire the death of any sinner but that all would turn in repentance to You. Bless the preaching of Your Gospel and the administration of Your Sacraments in mission fields around the world. Open the hearts of those who do not yet know Christ, and sustain those who face danger and opposition for the name of Christ. Bless and protect all missionaries as they proclaim Christ in hostile places and surround their families with Your care. Make them bold to declare Your saving Gospel. Give to us a vision of that great multitude around Your throne, from all nations, tribes, peoples and languages and banish from our hearts all prejudice which may hinder our mission work here in our nation or abroad.

P According to Your gracious will, O Lord, look in mercy on all who suffer illness and physical disability [*especially* _____]. Bless them with what is best for them according to Your good and gracious will, and help them to trust in Your merciful care. Open our hearts to help them so that we may lovingly serve their bodily needs. Take into Your merciful care all those who mourn the death of loved ones [*especially* _____]. Give to them peace and comfort through Your holy Word.

Holy Father, we pray for those who govern our land, for those in the executive branch, our president, governor and mayor, for those in our legislatures, and for our judges. Give them wisdom and humility as they lead this nation. We pray for those who are in the court system, that you will give your aid and peace to those who are victims and a newness of heart and repentance to those who have committed crimes.

P Lord Jesus, as the Suffering Servant You endured falsehood, rejection, mockery, shame, flogging, and finally crucifixion. Sustain all those who suffer persecution for Your name. Grant endurance to all who bear any crosses of body, mind, or soul.

P These prayers we offer through the One who humbly entered into Jerusalem, who cleansed the temple, who taught His disciples, who suffered, was crucified, died and was buried, who rose again, and who will come again to judge—the Holy One, Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,

C Amen.

