

Between The Palm Branches and The Cross

Matt. 21:1 - 27:26; Mark 11:1 - 15:15; Luke 19:28 - 23:25; John 12:12 - 18:40

How could Jesus have gone so wrong, that in only five days the palm branches and the adulation of “Hosanna to the Son of David” in Matt. 21:9, could deteriorate into the vicious “Crucify Him” of Matt. 27:22? For three years He had healed, delivered and fed them. They had benefitted so much from Him and now this! How could it possibly be?

For openers, would you agree that many who followed Jesus, did so because of what they might get from Him? Didn't they see Him as their deliverer from Roman rule? Weren't they drawn to His healing power and other miracles? Were there apparently some selfish motives in their following Him?

Didn't they turn against Jesus when He called them to get serious? To become His disciples in all of life? To give themselves to His agenda? Wasn't it when He challenged their hypocrisy and superficiality that the shallowness of their professed loyalty to Him was exposed?

The central truths that stand out as I read about these five days are, “be real” and “be alert.” What stern words would Jesus speak today if He were here in person? In what ways would he confront Christians in America; or your denomination; or your church? What would He say to *you*? Or to me? What would it take for *us* to reject Him as they did in Matthew 27?

Cleansing the Temple

The first thing Jesus did after the Triumphal Entry was to cleanse the temple. Not a good P.R. move!

Look across the church and consider how Jesus might “cleanse the temple” today. Do we pollute it with sermons that appeal to the selfish side of humanity, instead of preaching the truth of “life” through surrender to God? Do we merchandise teachings that make preachers famous and rich but produce little real change in us? Do we use our pulpits to “market” separatist doctrines rather than uniting around the foundational beliefs of Christianity? Would Jesus be as straightforward with us as He was with them? Would institutional religion welcome Him today any better than back then?

Hard Questions

Which of the two sons of [21:28-32](#) are we? How well have we followed through on our “I will, Lord”?

In the parable of the tenants in [21:33-46](#), Jesus says that those who truly represent the Kingdom of God will bear its fruit. If the Church in America qualifies, why is it that we have so little influence on our nation – and on our local community and even our own children?

Have we come to the banquet of [22:1-14](#) and are we appropriately clothed in righteousness?

What have we done with “The Greatest Commandment” of [22:36-40](#)? Do we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind? Could we look Jesus in the eye and deny that our love for the world and the things of the world ([I John 2:15-17](#)) has diminished our love for Him? And how about the second commandment? Can the world tell that we are disciples of Jesus by the way we love each other?

The Woes and - -

The confrontations of [Matt. 23](#) are not just historical! Consider legalism; the desire to appear spiritual (many options); the desire for positional power and recognition; and the hypocrisy of [v23](#) and following. Are we satisfied to have met our own conditions for spirituality - - to have tithed our mint and dill and cummin - - while missing the weightier (more costly to the flesh) definitions of walking with Jesus?

And consider what Jesus says about prophets. Many Christians today flock to “prophets” who promise prosperity, power, healing and spiritual fireworks, but what do we do with persons who warn us of our love for the world and who point out the certainty of false prophets in our day?

How do we read [Matt. 24](#)? Will we take seriously the day we live in, or will we go on “[as in the days of Noah](#)”? Are we awake or asleep as we await the bridegroom of [25:1-13](#)? What are we doing with our talents, as in [25:14-30](#)? (God has entrusted unprecedented opportunity to Americans so that we can take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, but what have we done with it?) In what measure do we qualify to be the sheep of [25:31-46](#)? How would Jesus apply His words in Matthew, to us?

Conclusion

Many articles on this site speak to the tension between love for God and love for the world. Between finding “life” through surrendering to Him, or by pleasing our soul-driven desires (those of the mind, will and emotions). And between being more concerned about the temporal than the eternal. Those are core issues that Jesus would speak to today, and the book “[The True Worshipers](#)” addresses them at length.

The two areas where we are most likely to turn against Jesus are: 1) When He confronts our false spirituality, that is, the beliefs, attitudes and practices that help us justify and rationalize superficiality and hypocrisy, and; 2) When He confronts the unrighteousness that is woven into the fabric of our culture, and which we have become accustomed to as a way of life. Our response to His challenges would depend a lot on whether we follow Him out of selfish motives, or because of love for Him and a desire to make Him known to others.

The world is watching us. We are not only to be good enough to go to heaven when we die. We are to live in such a way that others are drawn to Jesus through His presence in us. Consider I Peter 2:12; *Live an exemplary life among the natives so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.* (The Message)

That, I believe, is the standard that Jesus would communicate to us if He literally walked among us today, and it is a norm that messes with present American Christian expectations. If Jesus spoke to us as He did in the days between the palm branches and the cross, would we say “Hosanna, Hosanna”, or “crucify Him!”? But hasn’t He spoken?!

This is #7 in the “Thots for Today’s Church” series and is one of many short articles on www.John2031.com. © 2011, Ken Stoltzfus, P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636 USA. May be printed for personal use and may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes without further permission as long as source is acknowledged. Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the New International Version. Posted: March 31, 2011