

The World's King

Because of our Palm Sunday traditions, we often miss the meaning of this great event. Jesus had until this point carefully avoided the limelight. (Cf. John 6:15; 7:1). Why is He now presenting Himself in such a dramatic fashion?

First, He orchestrates it all.

Secondly, He orchestrates it against the wills of the players in this scene. Orchestras consist of many different instruments and instrumentalists who are all cooperating with the composer and the director. Jesus' orchestra includes some amazingly uncooperative players and discordant instruments.

Thirdly, He does this because He now resolutely chooses to lay His life down. Jesus orchestrates all things for our salvation, and He does so by stirring up the opposition of the scribes and Pharisees through the testimony of Lazarus and the crowds.

JESUS ORCHESTRATES EVERYTHING IN THIS WORLD TO BRING ABOUT SALVATION FOR HIS PEOPLE.

A. He uses Lazarus' resurrection (v. 9)

9 When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

Lazarus wasn't looking to be a celebrity, but he became a testimony to the power and grace of Jesus Christ. He became a powerful sign and evidence — is your life? His life had been miraculously healed, and he consistently pointed to Jesus as the cause. We, too, have been miraculously transformed (Gal. 2:20, II Cor. 5:17).

Because of Lazarus, many were coming to faith (cf. 11:45). One would think this would lead the leaders to question their previous opposition to Jesus. But just the opposite occurred.

B. He uses the Sadducees' wickedness (vv. 10-11)

10 So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

Verses ten and eleven take your breath away. Lazarus' irrefutable life as evidence of Jesus' deity caused those who had much to lose to want to eliminate him. (Cf. Mk.6:6; Lk. 16:31).

They had their reasons. In fact, they had two reasons to want to kill Lazarus: political and theological. They denied the notion of resurrection, and they wanted no disturbance that would threaten their favor with the Roman occupiers.

This lesson is being taught on our "commitment Sunday." This was Jesus' commitment Sunday!

C. He uses the crowd's misguided enthusiasm (vv. 12-18)

12 The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" 14 And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

15 "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming,

sitting on a donkey's colt!"

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. **17** The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. **18** The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.

One might think by looking at this scene that Jesus was finally receiving the acclaim He deserved. Or, at least, for a short moment the crowds had an insight to His true royal nature. Just the opposite. The crowds were excited about Lazarus for all the wrong reasons. Jesus was just one big item on their political agenda. They believed Jesus would be able to deliver them from both the Roman oppressors and the Jewish Sanhedrin who cooperated with them. Don't expect the crowds to understand you! The crowds thought their greatest enemies were the Roman oppressors and their Jewish collaborators. Jesus knew better. He came to destroy their true enemies—Satan, sin, and death—by the Cross.

Notice how determined Jesus is to fulfill the Scriptures (Zech. 9:9; Ps. 118:26-26). He initiated and planned everything regarding Palm Sunday and Passover. And the people spoke truly, even if they didn't understand what they were saying (as with Caiaphas, 11:49-52).

D. He uses the Pharisees' cowardice (v. 19)

19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

For the Pharisees, Jesus' gain is their loss. These were religious people who believed in resurrections! But they were so committed to their viewpoints and their lifestyles that they denied clear evidence put before them in order to defend their preferences through their political alliances.

But notice the amazing irony in the words of the Pharisees: "the world has gone after him." Indeed!

Revelation 19 teaches us that one day He will ride not on a donkey, but on a beautiful white horse with all His enemies at His feet, surrounded by those, like Lazarus, who know His grace and power, and His disciples will come from all nations to share in His rule.

E. He uses the disciples' confusion (v. 16)

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

In verse 16 we learn that even the disciples don't get it until after the Resurrection. They thought the crowds were honoring Him with proper motives.

But Jesus used it all. For what? For His gracious purpose to shed His blood on our account. His royal blood. For He is a true King. He always has been. He is a King far greater than the crowds that day imagined. Far greater in His Majesty than His disciples' wildest dreams.

One day He'll be surrounded by true worshipers, and we shall see it with our own eyes.

Discussion Questions

1. How do our Palm Sunday traditions sometimes cause us to miss the deeper meaning of this text?

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2. Why did Jesus orchestrate things as He did?

 3. Where do you see religious people today exhibiting the same irrational behavior as the Sadducees did in this text? Why do they do that?

 4. In what ways today do you see people's economic and political interests coopting their religious teachings? How can we avoid doing that?

 5. Describe the kingship of Jesus Christ (look at Westminster Shorter Catechism question 26). Describe His future kingship.

Going Deeper

1. How have you allowed Christ's Kingdom agenda for your life to be coopted by other personal interests?

2. How can you best express your gratitude to God because Jesus has orchestrated everything in this world to bring about your salvation?