

This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet: '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.'" Matthew 21.4-5.

We know this account of Palm Sunday so well. It's one of the most dramatic events in the life of Christ, and yet it is one of the most intriguing. Here on Palm Sunday they cheered Jesus to the skies with their Hosannas. 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' they cried as they strewed his way with palm leaves. And yet only five days later the very same crowd shouted 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' When Pontius Pilate gave them the choice as to which prisoner they wanted released - Jesus or Barabbas - they chose the terrorist. Why?

Did the Jewish crowd simply misunderstand Jesus? They were so fed up with living under Roman occupation that they were longing for another great warrior King like David to come and kick the Romans out. Was this Jesus the one? Perhaps by Friday they realised that this Prince of Peace was not the one. Or had the Pharisees who really hated Jesus wound up the mob from Palm Sunday to Good Friday to turn on Jesus?

All these things could be true, but I think the gospels want us to see something much deeper than mere historical causes. The fatal confrontation between Pilate and Jesus on that balcony represents the clash between two worlds. They both used the words 'king' and 'kingdom' but could not understand each other, for they each had completely different notions of what 'power' meant. Let's examine this.

We all live in the world, and, without our realising, we soak in the values and priorities of the world. When we read the Bible, we are being taken into a strange new world of

quite different thought-forms. As we soak ourselves in the Bible we are being led into *God's* way of thinking.

All four gospels tell us that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, but only St Matthew makes the significance of that donkey absolutely clear, 21.4-5... NIV translates the Gk *praüs* as 'gentle'. Most other translations have 'humble' or 'meek' (AV). The original OT prophecy of Zechariah (9.9) has 'lowly' (AV) or 'humble. This idea of Jesus coming into Jerusalem, not as a mighty warrior on a white stallion, but as lowly on a humble donkey is the key. This is not an isolated idea. It is the main theme of the gospels. Let's turn back in *Matthew* to, say, ch15 on p982. It begins with what is clean and unclean. Then v21 we read about Jesus talking to the Canaanite woman. The point is that she is *unclean*. And so are the gentiles in v29 when Jesus feeds the 4000. Turn over to 16.21ff where Jesus predicts his death and talks in upside-down language about denying yourself and losing your life to save it, vv24... Then ch18 is about silly disciples worrying about status, and being the greatest, v1... He points to a child, vv2... 18.10 talks about things that are lost, vv10... 19.16ff is about riches, and how they can't save you, vv23...

Turn to p1049, to see how *Luke* builds up to Jesus entering Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. Ch15 is again about *lost* things: a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son. Didn't Jesus come to seek the lost, what society rejects? Then 16.19 is about the rich man and Lazarus, but at death the first becomes last and the last first, vv22-3... Now 17.11 Jesus heals outcast lepers. He gives hope 18.1 to widows. The Pharisee who was so

sure he was up there and the tax-collector down there gets a shock, 18.13-4... In ch19 the hated tax-collector who finally repents is welcomed by Jesus, vv8-9...

Sorry about the whistle-stop tour of the gospels, but can you see what is happening here? Scripture is taking us into a way of thinking quite different from the world's? The point is made in *Lk* 16.15b: 'what is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight'. So the first shall be last and the last first. Might is *not* right. Self is *not* the greatest thing in your life. It's the poor who are blessed.

We need to soak ourselves in the Bible to get away from the world's values and to re-order our lives according to *his* priorities. Basically our priorities are wrong, and they don't work. What do we value? Money, promotion, position, fame. How much of our money are we really giving to God's work in the church? How much of our time are we giving to the poor?

Of course, every responsible parent wants to do their best for their children, but do we not go a little over the top sometimes? I absolutely hate this terrible school selection process, but what's *really* behind it? Are we not hoping that by getting into the right school our child will get 13 GCSEs, 5 'A' levels, Grade 8 on piano and violin, play football for Yorkshire schools, and then get to Oxbridge? Why do we think that the higher the achievement the better? I actually think that it is better to be kind than clever.

And do we fret as much about whether our children know the Lord Jesus and have *him* as the foundation of their lives? Again, it all comes down to priorities, doesn't it? It all

comes down to what we think is success and what is failure.

Do you know, by our worldly standards Jesus was a complete failure. He wasn't rich. He didn't go to university. The people listened to him enthusiastically at first, but soon got fed up. On Palm Sunday, as I say, they shouted out hosanna to the son of David, but by Friday they wanted him dead. He picked some incredibly dozy men to be his disciples; they couldn't even stay awake for him when he was in such mental torment in the Garden of Gethsemane. And finally the authorities caught up with him and had him crucified. Jesus had failed. Pilate and Caiaphas had triumphed.

And yet *today*, Jesus is known throughout the world, and Pontius Pilate is a footnote. Today men and women's lives are still being changed by Christ. Easter reminds us that God raised him from the dead. He's still alive, still powerful, but it isn't the power of the sword or money, but the power of love. What the world thinks is success doesn't work. Look at our own godless society: it's falling apart. People are still slugging it out to be on top, and look at all the wars - just to win! As Jesus entered Jerusalem, he wept over the city. 2000 years on we're still weeping over Jerusalem as people fight it out to be on top, to be first, to 'win'.

The world's way of money, power, self, assertion, doesn't work. Jesus has shewn the world the only way that works, but no-one's listening. 'If only you had known', said Jesus, 'what belongs to your peace'. The lowly way of the donkey led to the sacrificial way of the Cross, but it alone led to the triumph of Easter. When will the world wake up to God's truth?