

Devotions with Matt

April 1, 2020

THE KINGDOM IS NEAR

We are coming up on Palm Sunday, the day the people waved palm branches and welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. It was the last week of Jesus's earthly life and ministry. He was entering into The Holy City where the Temple was, but He wasn't going to it to make a sacrifice, He was going past it to become our sacrifice.

While Jesus was teaching and healing for 3 years on His way to the cross, He talked a lot about the coming Kingdom. Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15). Elsewhere, speaking to large crowds, He said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Even though Jesus was clear on what kind of Kingdom He was ushering in with His sacrificial death, the crowds that waved palm branches and welcomed him into Jerusalem that day had another idea.

The palm branch had become the symbol of Jewish nationalism. The Maccabees, before Jesus' birth, had won a great battle against the controlling powers and won some of their freedom back. They used palm branches in the rededication of their Temple. Later, they began to illegally mint their own coins and put pictures of palm branches on them. The powers that be didn't like this at all as it was a subversion and threat to their power. Waving a palm branch in front of Rome, as John Ortberg says, was like waving a red flag in front of a bull.

For years the Jews looked for ways to subvert Rome's power. They knew the promises of God that this was to be their land and their nation. They wanted their freedom back to worship unhindered and live lives out from underneath the shadow of Rome. There were groups who tried to do just that. The Zealots tried to revolt against Rome, but were crushed. The Essenes decided to withdraw to the desert and make up their own community, but had no influence on the rest of society and culture and eventually died off. The Sadducees tried to assimilate with the Romans. Although their clothes looked different, their lives reflected Rome rather than God. It was time for something new and the crowds thought Jesus was the one.

So they waved the palm branches that Sunday as Jesus entered Jerusalem in defiance of Rome and in the hope of Jesus becoming their new king. In their minds Jesus was coming to usher in a new kingdom and a new era of Jewish nationalism. They wanted Rome gone and, in their minds, Jesus was the man to do it. They had an idea of what kingdom meant: Back to the old ways under God's Law and Temple Worship with an earthly king to lead them against any powers that would come to overthrow them again.

But Jesus had told them all that "His kingdom is not of this world." It didn't look like other kingdoms who used force and might to gain power and influence. His kingdom He was ushering in that day was not about military might, violence or sabotage. His Kingdom, although it would affect people's lives and all of the earth, was a spiritual kingdom. It was about healing man's wicked heart, changing man's wrong thinking and healing the brokenness of this world. His kingdom is about peace, hope, joy, forgiveness and love. His kingdom is about salvation, but not just heaven, but salvation into His Kingdom, right now, where He is truly King and where His Will and His Way are done. His Kingdom is about restoring things back to the way they were created, back to the way things are supposed to be, with man's heart oriented back to God as Lord.

But, as Jesus showed that day, He did not entertain their idea of what a king should be and do. His eyes and heart were not focused on an earthly palace and throne, but rather on a heavenly one. He knew the kingdom would not be ushered in through the old ways and the old powers, but by something new. That something new would be the Cross and His death on it became our bridge into His Kingdom. There is no other way. Will you repent and believe this Good News and enter into His Kingdom and receive the life the One True King is offering?

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

In The Kingdom Of God ~ Matt

