

PALM SUNDAY

MARCH 24, 2013

IS THE REAL JESUS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU?

Pastor Jim Dunn

Matthew 21:1-11

The Triumphal Entry

21 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." **4** This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, **5** "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, [a] the foal of a beast of burden.'" **6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. **8** Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" **10** And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" **11** And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

The whole city of Chelyabinsk, Russia was stirred last month. A large meteorite plunged into the city. Amateur videos show an object streaking across the sky, trailing smoke, before it burst into a fireball. It produced a shock wave that blew in doors, smashed glass, and set off fire alarms. The light of the fireball was said to be intense. The sound from the shock wave led some to believe that a bomb had been dropped on the city. One thousand people sought medical attention, mostly for cuts from flying glass. Three thousand buildings were damaged by the blast, which blew a hole in the walls of a metal factory.

Amateur videos show children in one school streaming out of a classroom, screaming. Said one woman, **“We didn’t understand what was happening.”** “We thought an airplane had crashed.” Yet another woman said, “That kind of light doesn’t happen in life, only at the end of the world.”

They clearly did not understand what was happening. Just judging by what they saw, *heard*, and *felt*, just judging by appearances, they ended up getting it all wrong.

Just judging by what they saw, *heard*, and *felt*, just judging by appearances, the great crowd at Jerusalem on Palm Sunday ended up getting it all wrong. They saw the prophet who had performed miracles riding on a donkey, like a king who comes in peace. They *heard* some among them shout, “Hosanna!” They *felt* like rejoicing was in order. So, they spread their cloaks and palm branches on the road and shouted, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Yet, that was not the proper way to welcome Jesus.

In *his* quoting of Zechariah 9:9, Matthew replaces the word “rejoice” with the word “say.” Not “*rejoice*, daughter of Zion,” but “*say* to the daughter of Zion.” Explain to the daughter of Zion. Explain to Jerusalem...why Jesus was coming to the holy city. Explain – because the city doesn’t get it. The crowd doesn’t get it. Or, else, they would *not* rejoice! **They didn’t understand what was happening.** Or, else, they would not have expected glory.

But they did not understand that Jesus had come to die.

They didn't understand that the Son of God had come to Jerusalem to be "betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law, to be condemned to death, to be turned over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified." (Matthew 20:18-19) As they shout their "hosannas" and "blessed is he's," they know not what they do. "Who is this?" the city asks in verse ten. In their answer, the great crowd does not say, "This is God in the flesh, who has come to die." No, the crowd answers, saying, "This is the prophet from Nazareth."

So, when it came down to crunch time, on Good Friday, would the real Jesus be sufficient for them? Or, would they again judge by appearances? (John 19:1-6)

That is the question to us for Palm Sunday. When it comes down to crunch time in our own lives, is the real Jesus sufficient for us? That is, is the Jesus who goes to the cross, suffers, and dies sufficient for us? Is He enough for us?

But you and I still expect a certain measure of glory in this life. We've thought that by following certain steps we would prevent suffering in our life and have a fairly *successful*, independent life. We thought that we would have no problems in our family. We thought that our body would do what we want and look the way we want. That our financial struggles would evaporate, that our church would thrive, that we would live happily ever after.

When these steps have failed, we have not been honest. We have minimized our failures to ourselves. Even denied them. We've told ourselves to just keep trying harder. We have presented a positive front to the world. Trusting that others will judge by appearances, we've put on a smile, put a bold face on.

That is dishonest and phony. **Worse, it gives others the impression that you are dependent on no one. It's telling yourself that you are dependent on no one.** As much as we fear being dependent on others, fearful of being hooked up to life support, fearful of becoming bed-ridden, fearful of losing our faculties, we are almost as fearful of *appearing* dependent on others.

Yet, are we not dependent on Jesus for our salvation? Are we not dependent on the Holy Spirit to create in us faith and to sustain that faith to the end? Isn't utter

dependence our spiritual condition? But the expectation of some glory, some independence, some success, sometimes just for the sake of appearances, still grips you and me.

So, when God came to this earth, He made Himself dependent. Did Jesus look like a god? Was He indestructible? Was he clearly superior? No! The great crowd didn't see it! Judging by appearances, Jesus was not the Son of God.

Consider how He came. Human. He was a baby who was utterly dependent on Mary and Joseph. Then, was everything in His life always glorious? Was He the epitome of a successful, self-sufficient, self-made man? Hardly. His was the kind of life in which He was dependent on friends, on strangers, and on prayer.

He was **disappointed**.

He was **frustrated**.

At times He was **unpopular** and had hardly any followers.

He was **scorned** as a country bumpkin, as a carpenter's son.

He was **homeless**. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Luke 9:58)

He was dependent. Consider how dependent He became the week He came to Jerusalem on a **borrowed** donkey.

He was **betrayed, arrested, accused, rejected, despised, beaten, mocked, and nailed**. Nailed to the cross, He rendered Himself utterly **helpless**.

As St. Paul put it, Jesus "made Himself nothing." (Philippians 2:7) Making Himself nothing at the cross, "a worm, not a man," "with no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him" (Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 53:2), making Himself utterly helpless to save Himself.

He was utterly dependent on God to save Him.

But God left His Son on the cross. He did not save Him, so He could save us.

Jesus remained utterly dependent, utterly helpless under the weight of our sins: dependent on others to prepare His body for burial and on someone to provide a tomb for His grave. But now alive from the grave, His resurrection is proof that the weight of our sins cannot be put back on us. We are **free**. He has freed us to rest in utter dependence on our Savior, Jesus, for our salvation.

Through that same dependence, that same faith, He is freeing us to give up our pretensions of being self-sufficient and dependent on no one.

Jesus frees us to let Him be our **sufficiency**, our **strength**, and our **power**. In our weakness, Jesus frees us to be **honest with ourselves** and with others about the suffering in our life.

Jesus frees us from judging by appearances. For...

“...judging by appearances, we would never have thought that the Jewish carpenter riding on a donkey was **God in the flesh**. His being nailed at Golgotha, judging strictly by appearances, would be a meaningless act of cruelty. We would never guess that it was our salvation and the salvation of the whole world.” (Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, p.69)

Amen? AMEN!