



Ring Out the Palm Sunday Cry: “Hosanna ~ Save Us Now!”



Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna to Jesus – Amen.

Our English language doesn't quite catch it. To us, the name *Jesus* and the Hebrew word *Hosanna* sound completely unrelated, but in their original language, there is a beautiful harmony between them. Let me explain. When the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of the very Son of God, he also gave her God's command: “*You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*” (Mt 1:21). “You will call him *Yeshua* (Joshua),” which literally means “the Lord saves.” Years later, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the cry “Hosanna” filled the air. *Hoshianna*—from the very same verbal root as Jesus' name. *Hoshianna* literally means “save us now!”

So, you see how fitting this shout, this cry, was as our Savior rode into Jerusalem. Hosanna! Just one word in Hebrew that relates to his name, but in English it is three words; three words of truth that summarized everything Jesus came into this world to do: “**Save us now!**” God, in his grace, has brought us to the beginning of Holy Week once again this year. It is our prayer that this cry - “Hosanna!” - may be on our lips and in our hearts. There is no word more appropriate as **It is a cry to a king** and **It is a motto for a kingdom.**

I. It's a cry to a king.

We can almost pinpoint the very day: A Sunday in early spring, 30 a.d., Jesus set out with his disciples from Bethany, a little village only about 3 miles from the temple, just on the ridge of the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. How ironic that he was going to a city named Jerusalem, which means “house of peace.” By the end of this Passover festival week, the “house of peace”—Jerusalem—would be shaking with hatred and violence; with crowds rioting nonstop, until this prophet from Nazareth was captured, tortured, and, finally, executed. That's where this Palm Sunday road would lead. No matter how joyful the procession was that afternoon—with colorful garments and pungent palms paving the way—it would bring darkness and death.

And Jesus knew it. But his disciples were still in the dark, as was this exuberant crowd. All of them, catching sight of Herod's temple with its solid gold-plated façade, were much too caught up in the excitement of the moment. Their heads were filled with happy, patriotic thoughts of celebrating Passover in the Holy City of God. It was a special time to celebrate their heritage. Even Jews around the world today often close their modern Passover celebrations with the longing prayer, “Next year, in Jerusalem.”

The words they sang from Psalm 118, “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*”—that was basically the Hymn of the Day to begin the Passover week. It recalled the very first Passover and God's miraculous deliverance from Egypt. What could be more appropriate? What could have been more traditional or more inspiring? *Nothing!* But that's exactly where we sense a bit of emptiness in this entire festive scene.

By the end of the week, the crowd's mood will have changed. By the end of the week, the disciples will have abandoned Jesus to face his enemies alone and to die alone. The sad reality is that most in the crowd probably cried “Hosanna” with their voices - but not with the voice of faith.

Is it really any different today? There is so much talk about “faith” and “spirituality” in this country. Just about everybody claims to have it, but what is “faith”? What does it mean to be “religious”? How do you define being “spiritual”? Sad to say, the prevailing attitude today is that *I* get to define what *my* faith is. *I* get to decide *my* personal beliefs. *I'm* looking for a church that teaches what *I* believe, that lets *me* live how *I* want to live.

That type of thinking can even affect God's people too. Look right here in the gospel. In one sense the cheering crowd had “faith,” but it became apparent that for many people “faith” was only “custom,” “tradition,” “ritual,” “observance.” For many, faith was merely crying *at* the King, not crying *to* the King. The real problem here, and in our world today, is that people don't understand that faith needs an object. It's not just a “feeling” or a “positive vibe.” You don't just “believe”; you don't just “have faith”; you need to have faith in some-thing or some-one.

By God's grace, the Spirit has led you and me to put our faith *in* Christ. We believe *in* Jesus—who he is and what he did. We need to always remember that - so our faith doesn't become the faith of the Palm Sunday crowd. Holy Week is an excellent time to remind ourselves of this—with all our special worship services and special liturgies and special decorations in the church. Yet we don't come on Maundy Thursday just to watch the altar stripped bare. We don't come on Good Friday just because we really like the way the church lights dim until everything is dark. It's way more than just hearing the loud noise at the end of the service. We come to stand at the

foot of the cross in fearful awe mixed with solemn peace that God chose to do this for us. In the same way, we don't come to Easter worship just because we *should* at least go to church on Easter, or because of the breakfast or the children's egg hunt... If it's all about customs and traditions, then what God said through Isaiah about his people of old becomes true of us: "*These people . . . honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me*" (Isa 29:13).

We come in true faith, crying "Hosanna" *to* the King, not just *at* the King... and there is a big s a difference. For to cry "Hosanna" *to* the King means to confess that he is your only hope of salvation, and that without him you are eternally lost. To cry "Hosanna" *to* the King means to confess our sins and recognize the punishment they deserve, to abandon all hope of saving ourselves or finding some assurance of heaven in our good behavior. It means to come to him spiritually broken and poor, looking to him for true healing and restoration. To cry "Hosanna" *to* the King in faith means to come to him and plead, "Save me now! There is no other way!"

And those who, by God's grace, cry *to* the King in true faith are heard by him. "*I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain,*" Psalm 3:4 says. In David's day, the "holy mountain" was where the ark of the covenant was kept, on the future site of the temple. But now God's holy mountain is Calvary. How loudly and clearly he answers us from there when we cry to him, "Hosanna—save us!" There on the cross hangs the only answer for our problem of sin. There hangs Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews - crowned with thorns then, crowned with glory and honor now. He rode into Jerusalem to go to that hill and die for you.

To him alone, we cry; we cry with our pains, our hurts, our problems, our fears, our sorrows, our doubts about his love for us. And his answer comes back time and again: I am your King. I am the proof of God's forgiveness and love. I am the Lord who saves you. Jesus is the proof that God *will* help you, comfort you, encourage you, strengthen you, and equip you for every good work. "*Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy*" (Ps 28:6). Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to Jesus, for he HAS saved us!

II. It's a motto for a kingdom.

"Hosanna!" is also a great motto for his kingdom. Matthew records that the crowd sang, "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" People and nations choose mottoes to reflect who they are and what they stand for. Think of America's motto: *E pluribus unum*, "Out of many, one." It reflects how America is that great "melting pot."

"Hosanna!" is a fitting motto for the kingdom of Christ which is about one thing: **salvation**—eternal release from the bondage of sin, eternal life in indescribable bliss and joy. This is the goal of our faith in Christ: the eternal salvation of our souls. This is the reason he is King and the reason he has brought us into his kingdom.

But who understood that on Palm Sunday or during the rest of Holy Week? The crowd didn't. They thought Jesus had come in riding on a donkey to set up a political dynasty, just as David had used donkeys as royal mounts. Might Israel be once again as politically and financially great as it had been under David? Would Jesus drive out the Romans? They knew he could heal their diseases and multiply fish and bread. Perhaps now was his time to usher in worldly peace and prosperity. We know many were expecting that, because Mark's gospel records that the crowd also shouted, "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*" (Mk 11:10).

But Jesus would say to Pilate later that week, "*My kingdom is from another place*" (Jn 18:36). Jesus' kingdom is about eternal salvation; not international peace treaties. His kingdom was not about winning against Rome - but about winning *over* Romans—and Greeks—and Jews—and Gentiles all over the world, so that they too would cry "Hosanna!" to the King in true faith.

As members of His kingdom, we want to keep this motto as our mission mindset and focus. Christ has called each of us to preach "the good news of the kingdom" (Lk 16:16)—that salvation is free and already won for us by Jesus and through faith in him, everyone who believes will inherit an eternal kingdom in heaven. That is a beautiful and powerful motto to proclaim, a motto that gives true hope, true joy, true peace to a world that so desperately needs these things.

So, while others—yes, even some Christian churches—look for a golden-age Christian millennium here on earth, brothers and sisters, especially this Holy Week, let us shout "Hosanna!"—it's the motto of the kingdom. Proclaim with joy what John heard all heaven say in Revelation: "*Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb*" (Rev 7:10).

"*Hoshianna! Save us now!*" **Yes**, that's what our King Jesus—*Yeshua*—rides into Jerusalem to do. "*Hoshianna! Save us now!*" **Yes**, that's what the cross assures us he did do. "*Hoshianna! Save us now!*" **Yes**, that's what the empty Easter tomb guarantees he will also come back to do. That's what the King is all about. That's what the kingdom is all about. Amen.