

April 17, 2011

THE TEARFUL ENTRY

Jeffery D. Woodhams

Have you ever been in a situation, not realizing the true significance until later? Let me read you a quote from someone in such a situation. Some of you might be able to figure out who is saying this:

And those machine guns were spitting fire and cutting down the undergrowth all around me something awful. And the Germans were yelling orders. You never heard such a racket in all of your life. I didn't have time to dodge behind a tree or dive into the brush... As soon as the machine guns opened fire on me, I began to exchange shots with them. There were over thirty of them in continuous action, and all I could do was touch the Germans off just as fast as I could. I was sharp shooting... All the time I kept yelling at them to come down. I didn't want to kill any more than I had to. But it was they or I. And I was giving them the best I had.¹

Did you guess who said that? If you thought of Sergeant Alvin York, then you're correct!

Alvin York was a semi-literate mountaineer from Tennessee, who left a violent life of alcohol abuse when he became a Christian. His church was strongly against all forms of violence, and he therefore tried to get out of the draft by being a conscientious objector. However, he was drafted anyway, and during training he was found to be a highly skilled marksman. Even though he was promoted due to his skill, he felt he could not kill anyone. One of his superiors took him aside and talked to him about what the Bible actually says about defense and about violence, and then sent York home for ten days to think things over. During those ten days, York became convinced that it was right to defend freedom. He wanted to end the war as quickly as possible with as few casualties as possible.

Fast forward to October, 1918, to the same offensive that we talked about before with the little carrier pigeon. Corporal York is part of a group of 17 men who have been assigned to take out a German gun nest. As they approached, they encountered a group of Germans. While they were struggling to subdue the Germans, machine gun fire from the gun nests above killed six men and injured three, leaving Corporal York in charge. York left the remaining seven behind to guard the captured Germans. He made his way to a vantage point and began to "touch off" the Germans one by one. At one point, six Germans began a bayonet charge, and he picked them off with his revolver—one shot for each! As he was shooting the Germans, he kept calling for them to surrender. Eventually he did manage to capture a German officer who surrendered the unit. York had killed 25 soldiers and captured 132.

While it was happening, in the chaos and the noise, he did not understand the full significance of what was unfolding. He was simply living by his belief that it would be better to capture than to kill, and he made every shot count until the Germans surrendered. In the weeks and months after the battle, York was awarded over fifty medals and citations; but I can assure you that while he was being shot at, he wasn't thinking about getting any medals! He was just involved in the flow of that moment, unaware of the fame that would follow.

¹ Sergeant York Patriotic Foundation, "Sgt. Alvin C. York's Diary: October 8, 1918." Available at <http://www.sgtyork.org/sgtyorkdiary.html>

We find the disciples in that kind of situation on what we call “Palm Sunday” or “The Triumphal Entry.” We’re going to read John 12:12-26 today, but I want to draw your attention before we start to verse 16:

These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.

Did you see that? The disciples didn’t understand what was happening! And I would suggest that even though we are outside of the situation, our understanding has been clouded by tradition. Today, then, I want to take a fresh look at the events of Palm Sunday.

The first thing I want to point out is Jesus’ emphasis of this particular day. In Luke’s account of this triumphal entry, we find Jesus weeping over the city. This is from Luke 19:

⁴¹ *And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,*

⁴² *Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, **at least in this thy day**, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.*

Did you notice that? Jesus, on Palm Sunday, is weeping! And not only that, did you see the little phrase “at least in this thy day”? You will see it as *even at least in this your day* in the Amplified Bible, or as *would that even today* in the Revised Standard Version.² There is a reason for this emphasis: that particular day was an exact fulfillment, to the day, of a prophecy from Daniel chapter 9. I won’t handle it in detail today except to say that Daniel had prophesied that the Messiah would be presented to His people 483 years from the date of the proclamation to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Palm Sunday was that date, down to the exact day.³

As you read through the Gospels, you’ll see something that has been called “The Messianic Mystery”: sometimes when people recognize Jesus as the Messiah, He tells them, “Don’t tell anyone!” and other times He accepts the praise. Why is that? Well, Palm Sunday is the tipping point for that. Up until Palm Sunday, Jesus tells people to keep quiet; but on Palm Sunday, when the Pharisees asked Jesus to tell His followers to be quiet, Jesus totally changes course. He says that if these people were quiet, even the rocks would cry out. That’s the context—this day is the day of prophetic fulfillment, when Jesus is presented as Messiah to the Jewish people, just as Daniel had foretold.

The second thing I want to point out is that we often think of this as something spontaneous—that it took everyone by surprise. But no! We find that Jesus had made preparation for it. The last time He had been in Jerusalem, He had made arrangements for a young donkey to be available. Then when He came for His last visit to Jerusalem, He sent two of His disciples to go get that donkey. The owner was not surprised at all. What *is* surprising is how that little donkey behaved—this young, unbroken donkey allowed Jesus to mount and ride him, which is unheard of. Some of you who come from farm stock know how an animal acts when it’s ridden the first time! But again, this is a fulfillment of prophecy, this time from Zechariah.⁴

² Unfortunately, most modern translations seem to miss the significance of the underlying Greek language here.

³ See Robert Anderson’s “The Fulfillment of Prophecy”: “The interval contained exactly and to the very day 173,880 days, or seven times sixty-nine prophetic years of 360 days, the first sixty-nine weeks of Gabriel’s prophecy.” Available at <http://articles.ochristian.com/article6657.shtml>.

⁴ Zechariah 9:9.

The third thing I'd like to point out is the crowd. You've perhaps heard people say, "One week, they were shouting, 'Hosanna!' and the next week they were shouting, 'Crucify Him!'" With that in mind, let's look at our passage here in John 12:12. We're going to read the whole passage in just a minute, but let's just read verse 12:

On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem

The crowd that had gathered that day was largely not native to Jerusalem. Some had come from other parts of Israel, such as Galilee; others had come from far distant parts of the Roman empire, because, as you know, the Jews had long since been scattered around the world. But many had gathered for the Passover. These Jews had heard of Jesus, and many believed. But, as we shall also read, there were many in Jerusalem who already had it in their hearts to kill Jesus. After they had heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, these men had determined to kill Jesus. In fact, you can read elsewhere that they had determined to kill Jesus *after the Passover* because of the large number of people who were in town. As we read the passage today, I want you to notice how the Pharisees react: essentially, they say among themselves, "We can't wait. The whole world is following Him so we've got to act now." And they accelerated their murderous plot.

So, with all of these things in mind, let's take a fresh look at John's telling of the story. Let's read John 12:12–24:

¹² *On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,*

¹³ *Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

¹⁴ *And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written,*

¹⁵ *Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.*

¹⁶ *These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.*

¹⁷ *The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.*

¹⁸ *For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.*

¹⁹ *The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.*

²⁰ *And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast:*

²¹ *The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.*

²² *Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.*

²³ *And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.*

²⁴ *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

Jesus enters the city to the cheers of the crowds who had come for the feast; but not everyone welcomed the King. Luke's account carries the details about the rocks crying out, and about Jesus weeping over the city. What is apparent is that few truly understood the significance that day as it was happening.

However, at the end of the day, we find a story which almost seems tacked on, but in reality it gives the final perspective that brings the whole thing together. Now, did you notice that bit about the Greeks? A number of Greeks found two of the disciples (who happened to have Greek names, Phillip and Andrew) and said to them those precious words, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Christian, what difference would it make in your life if you kept those words in front of you, believing that the people in your life were saying them to you: "Sir—ma'am—we would see Jesus"?

But this question brings out the truth that no one else understood that day. Remember that Messianic mystery? Well, there's no hiding Jesus as Messiah now! He says, "*The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.*" This is it! And how will the Messiah be glorified? Jesus answers, but not until He says "verily, verily." Now, friends, when you see a "verily, verily," understand that something of immense significance will follow. And that vastly important message from the Messiah, about the Messiah, is this: "*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*" Jesus Himself is that grain of wheat.

This, my friends, is the whole point of the Triumphal Entry, of Jesus' public ministry, of His virgin birth. It is the whole point of His message to both Jew and Greek, slave and free, rich and poor, male and female, young and old. The Messiah must die, because if He doesn't, His life cannot be spread. It cannot grow in others. But if the Messiah dies, His life can be multiplied.

But then Jesus applies this to us in verses 25 and 26:

²⁵ He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

²⁶ If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

So, friends, this is where we are today. Are we, like Jesus, willing to die to ourselves so that others may live? Do we pick up the cross and follow Christ? Beware! Once a man had picked up a cross, there was no turning back. It was a one-way trip.

And so it is today. We are living in a world which is changing so fast and is becoming so dark that we hardly recognize it. We are like those who are in the middle of a situation and don't understand the significance at the time. It is in this day that we have a choice: to follow Christ amid the confusion of this world, or to try to forge our own destiny. We cannot see the end from where we are now; but Jesus has assured us that if we serve Him, His Father will honor us. I urge you, follow Christ, and be the one that people will come to when they want to see Jesus.

"Sir...Ma'am...we want to see Jesus."