

- 25 O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success.**
26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.
27 The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.
28 You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you.
29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Draft day for the NFL is coming soon. The Lions have the 8th pick. I'm sure many hope he will be the next Lem Barney or Barry Sanders to save their franchise and take them to the Superbowl.

When Jesus came riding into Jerusalem, the people cried "Hosanna!" They were hoping for much more than a great ball player. That is the Hebrew way of saying, "Save now!" or "Please save!" They had seen Jesus save many people from sickness and near death with miracles. Some had also witnessed Jesus raise the dead. Many wanted him to save them from the Roman government and to reestablish the Jewish nation. Others probably wanted Jesus to save them from tyranny of sickness and death. They hoped Jesus would be the one.

Hosanna assumes that you are in trouble and need to be saved. What do you need to be saved from? A bad marriage? A sickness or disease? Old age? The measles? The government? MS-13 and illegal immigration? We've been recently warned that the earth only has 12 years until destruction, and people are dying right now due to pollution. Who will find the cure? Who will the next savior be to come riding into politics? Donald Trump? Beto O'Rourke?

Authentic Christianity is not a mere self improvement type of religion. God didn't reveal Himself just to make you a better businessman or money manager. It is a religion that preaches salvation. We talk about the dangers of sin and death. What is even worse is the threat of eternal hell. We need to be saved from ourselves, and we can't save ourselves. It is not mere hype. It is the word of God which has been revealed to us in the Bible. Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 5,

5 Of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Paul also writes in Romans 3:12, "**All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.**" Go back to Jesus' many warnings in the gospels. Think again of what He said in Matthew 7,

13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Jesus spoke of sending people into an eternal fire in Matthew 25. This is what we need to be saved from, God's wrath over our sins: the sins we even commit as Christians.

Ever since the Fall into sin, God offered salvation through the flesh of a future offspring. Later on, He prophesied the Savior would specifically come through the Jews, and that He would indeed be God in the flesh. He would be born in the little town of Bethlehem. Eventually He would be lifted up on the cross and crucified

for the sins of the world. The Jews lived in misery and slavery through much of their Old Testament existence, often times due to their own sins. They were taken captive and put into slavery. They were attacked and harassed. Yet in the midst of their suffering, they were taught to believe that through the Messiah their sins would be paid for and salvation would be theirs.

Our faith is the same. We need to be saved. I go to hospitals and nursing homes on a regular basis. I have seen the battle against death. There is no remedy other than Jesus. I see the trajectory of our country. We are repeating the sins of every other nation, including the Jews. There is no turning back that I can see. I see my own sinful nature. I know that no matter how hard I may try, I daily fall short of what God expects of me. I need to be saved, and so do you. Hosanna will flow from your lips when you see life for what it is.

Psalms 118 reflects a salvation centered faith.

O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. . . .

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

According to the Old Testament Festival of Tabernacles, people would annually make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and camp all around the city for a week. They would break off branches from Palm trees and use them to build makeshift shelters for themselves.

The festal procession would lead to the temple, and at the front and center of the worship area there was a big bronze altar, seven foot square and 4 and ½ feet tall. There were horns on all four corners of the altar. The horn was a symbol of strength. So you might see that the source of strength for the Israelites would be through the sacrifices that were made on the altar: sacrifices of animals for the forgiveness of their sins. When Adonijah feared for his life, he ran to the altar and hung onto the horns of the altar in hopes that he would be shown mercy. When God judged the northern kingdom for their idolatry he had them cut down to the ground to show that there would be no place for them to escape God's judgment.

The people would go in procession to the horns of the altar, because that is where they were promised mercy. The sacrifices were to point forward to the ultimate sacrifice of the Messiah who would come to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world.

So it's fitting that the people of Israel used this Psalm, Psalm 118, as the basis for their praise when Jesus rode into town on Palm Sunday. The rituals of the Festival of Tabernacles fit in well with the ritual they used that day. Instead of breaking off branches and proceeding to the altar, they laid the branches before Jesus. They may not have realized the significance of what they were doing, but He was coming to be their Passover Lamb and the sacrifice for their sins. He was coming to be salvation from something more than the Roman government. He was coming to be salvation from sin and God's wrath in hell.

I found out that the palm branch was a symbol of triumph and victory in Roman times. The Romans rewarded champions of the games with palm branches to celebrate their success. In Judaism the palm branch was said to be representative of peace and prosperity. This fits with why Jesus came into Jerusalem. We call Jesus' entry into Jerusalem the "triumphant entry." He was coming to conquer death and Satan and hell. He was coming to establish peace between God and man. So the people sang, **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.** They were confessing that Jesus was coming in the name of the LORD, with the LORD's blessing, as His representative, as the Messiah.

This was dangerous talk, especially in Jerusalem when the chief priests and the teachers of the law were very jealous for their authority and power. It reminds me of when the people sang songs about David. **“Saul has killed his thousands! David his TENS of thousands.”** Saul became jealous of David and wanted to kill him all the more. The palm branches and the hoopla were all drawing attention to Jesus. They were laid before Him to encourage Him on His journey and promote Him to the citizens of Jerusalem as the One. They wanted Him to rule, but did they know that with all of this glory they were only cheering Him on to die?

Palm Sunday is kind of a strange thing, because we know what Jesus is riding into Jerusalem to do. The people that cheered on Jesus didn't. The disciples should have known, but they were in denial. Perhaps they thought that by cheering Him on that Jesus would finally accept His role as an earthly leader, which He had no intentions of doing. We know better. So it seems strange in a sense to sing this so loudly, “Ride on, ride on, in majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die.” Why would we cheer Him on to death? But we want Him to die. We need Him to die. If He doesn't die, then our sins aren't paid for, and we end up in hell with no payment made for our sins.

I got to thinking about this whole strange phenomenon. This is the only time we can do this or would dare to do this. Who else would we cheer on to die? Death is not a natural thing. It is not a good thing. God didn't create us to die. He didn't make us to be worm food. He made us for eternity. So it is a strange and evil thing what we see happening in our society, as death is being cheered and lauded as a good and noble thing. Women are now shouting their abortions. They want to be heard. They are proud of what they did, because the death of their babies enabled them to live in freedom from raising their children. Death is being touted as honorable and noble when someone has been diagnosed with a terminal illness. “Let him kill himself! Let him die with dignity!” There isn't much fear of death, because many people have no concept of hell. People don't think about having to meet their Maker any more. It reminds me of the old movie Logan's Run where people were encouraged to jump into a huge vacuum and sucked to their deaths when they were only about 30 years old. Why would anyone cheer such a thing? But think about it. If youth and freedom and ability are the gods of our society, then anything that hinders your freedom or your ability would be the enemy. If killing a baby gives me more freedom, then let the child die. If suffering is evil, then let the suffering end through death. This comes from a society that doesn't respect God as the author of life and death and doesn't fear the repercussions of taking life into your own hands. We don't cheer people on to die when they have no hope of salvation. We don't want babies being put to death. It's evil.

But when it comes to Jesus, we cheer Him on, knowing that He is going to die. On Palm Sunday Jesus received the praise. He didn't tell the people to keep quiet, even though He knew what would happen as a result. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to symbolize the humble aspect of His being a King. He came to carry the burden of sin. He came to be crucified. So He received this moment of glory, knowing what the glory would lead to. He wasn't afraid to die. And if Jesus was willing to accept their praise back then, He is also willing to accept our praise even now. After all, we know what happens next Sunday. We also know that if He doesn't suffer and die, then we go to hell. So call it preservation if you will, but we sing Hosanna today!

It always seems a bit contrived when we walk around the church with the palm branches in our hands, trying to recreate the magnificent entry of Christ. Our praises pale in comparison to theirs. We don't feel the need or the urgency. Yes, sure, we might have a few sins here or there. But we all sin. And we already know that Jesus

died for us, so what's the big deal? I would imagine if God opened up a glimpse of hell to us, our praises would be louder and more urgent. We would should it out as loud as we could! Hosanna!

Yet you wouldn't be here if there weren't some Hosannas within. Through the prayers of forgiveness that you pray at night, there's a Hosanna. Through the confession and absolution of the liturgy, you cry out Hosanna. Through through the songs you sing at funerals, maybe a little bit louder, there's a Hosanna. As you witness a world gone wrong, the Hosannas cry out within your soul. The offerings you put towards mission work, these are your Hosannas. When you receive the Lord's Supper, you pray Hosanna. The good news is that it wasn't the hosannas that saved the world, it was Jesus who answered their cries by riding on to die on the cross for all of them, even the ones who were yelling, "Crucify him." Hosanna isn't what saves us, Jesus is. So this doesn't have to be a Hosanna competition, not when Jesus is riding into town to die for the sins of the world.

Chances are that by this time next year, the NFL fans will be waiting on another fresh batch of recruits to fill in the need at safety or quarterback or the line. This years recruits will be either forgotten or projects still in the making. They'll be looking for another savior of the franchise.

We'll be back here again next year too. But we won't be waiting for a new recruit. We'll be praising the same One who recruited Himself to come into Jerusalem and answer the call "Hosanna." It seems strange to praise such a Messiah, but it is the only way.

Hosanna in the highest!

That ancient song we sing, for Christ is our Redeemer, the Lord of heav'n our King.

Oh, may we ever praise him with heart and life and voice
and in his royal presence eternally rejoice. Amen.