

WHO WAS JESUS?

Matthew 27:11-54 Text vs. 54 “*When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely He was the Son of God!”*”

A centurion was the highest-ranking professional noncommissioned officer in the Roman army. He had charge over 100 legionnaires. The centurion in our lesson today oversaw the crucifixion of a Man who was regarded as a rabble-rouser. A troublemaker. Roman officials probably expected a riot, so this centurion was put in charge of overseeing an execution, as well as crowd control. But don't forget, he was a battle-hardened warrior who had neither fear nor pity. And on the cross that day he saw a Man who was not an enemy of the Roman Empire and it caused him to have a change of attitude. A change of mind. A change of heart. What was it that Roman soldier saw during those few short hours on Golgatha's Hill that caused him to declare “*this Man was the son of God?*” That Roman Centurion had heard what Jesus said while He was being crucified, and it became a salvation message for him. It caused him to look up at the Man on that cross, differently. It was a powerful testimony! It caused a ruthless man of power to become a changed man of God when he looked up and heard Jesus on the cross that day. He saw what was happening.

Listen, it took 174 years to build the leaning Tower of Pisa. During that time, many things were done to try and offset its "tilt." The foundation was shored up. The upper levels of the Tower were built at an angle to try to make the top of the tower look straight. Nothing worked! The tower has stood leaning like that for over 800 years. And it still leans 18 feet away from vertical. 10 degrees from being vertical. Experts say, one day it will fall because it wasn't built on the right foundation. That's going to happen to this world. Things do crumble in life. Especially, if they don't have the right foundation. But what that Roman soldier saw in just a few short hours shored up the foundation of his life. It caused him to declare, “*this Man was the son of God!*”

So, it raises the question, **WHO WAS JESUS?** Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia was one of that country's greatest leaders. He ruled Ethiopia for 20 years as King and Emperor from 1889 to 1913. He was a powerful ruler. He transformed Ethiopia from a collection of semi-independent states into a united nation. One of his efforts to modernize his country and reduce its crime was when he ordered three electric chairs to be shipped from New York. But when they arrived, there was a problem. Ethiopia didn't have electricity! So, he had three electric chairs he couldn't use! How would he solve his problem? He built a stage. A raised platform. Then, he had one of the electric chairs secured to it. And he used it as his throne! In his kingdom then, his symbol of power was an instrument of death.

Look at the cross behind me. It's a symbol. It's, also, an instrument of death. Jesus' death! But it's the symbol of the power of His Kingdom! George Frideric Handel, a German-British composer, famous for his operas, oratorios, anthems, and organ concertos composed the *The Messiah*. In it, he expressed the power of God's Kingdom through the words and music of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. “*The kingdom of this world; is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.*”

It all began at the cross. The cross of Jesus. And Palm Sunday, the time of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, was very much more than a victory march. The palm fronds, the massive crowd. The enthusiasm. But when Jesus approached and saw the city of Jerusalem. “*41 He drew near, and He wept over it, 42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you, and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.*” (Luke 19:41-44)

It happened in 70 A.D. The Roman Army destroyed Jerusalem! Clearly, there was a sense of purpose that drove Jesus toward Jerusalem. But the tragedy of it all was the faithlessness of the people. At one moment they were cheering the Lord Jesus as the long-expected Messiah. Then, a few days later they were shouting for His death! The same people who had been throwing their coats on the ground before Him were now yelling, “*Crucify Him!*” Surely, there were some in the crowd whom Jesus had healed. Maybe He had fed some with just five loaves of bread and a few of fish. Perhaps some had seen the miracles Jesus had performed. They may have heard Jesus preach and teach. Some had listened to Jesus and their lives had been changed. But apparently, some didn't feel that way when just a few short days later that same crowd that had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with a hero's welcome would demand His crucifixion.

So, at the heart of Palm Sunday was, on the one hand, Jesus' desire to bring peace into peoples' lives. And on the other hand, there was their refusal to accept it. His willingness to carry whatever burdens that were weighing them down was refused. Instead, they burdened Him with His death on a cross. But the only way Jesus can help you is for you to allow

Him to march into your life and take it over. Have you ever told God, *“You can march over there, but don’t come over here. Don’t come near me! I’m not ready to surrender.”*

Listen, if Jesus is not fully welcome into your life, there’s going to be a real battle for your soul. And it will be between Jesus and Satan. You may hope to find some kind of peace in your life, but God’s saying to you, until you get your attitude right, you will never have My peace.

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch watchmaker who later became a Christian writer and famous public speaker who had worked with her father Casper, her sister Betsie, and other family members to help many Jewish people escape the Nazis during the Holocaust in World War II. They hid Jews in their home. But they were caught. She was arrested and sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, the largest concentration camp for women in the German Reich. After she was freed, and years later had become a famous person, she was asked if it was difficult for her to remain humble? Her reply was, *“When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments onto the road, and singing praises, do you think for one moment that it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that was for him? If I could have been that donkey, on which Jesus Christ rode in His glory, I would have given Jesus all the praise and all the honor.”*

So, today is Palm Sunday. The day when we give *Jesus all the praise and all the honor due His Holy Name*. It’s the day people were looking for an earthy kingdom. It’s the day they wanted Jesus to become their king and get rid of Rome. But they failed to understand the spiritual nature of Jesus’ Kingdom. The parade that day had been predicted thousands of years earlier by the prophet Zechariah when he said, *“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you righteous and victorious, lowly, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”* (Zechariah 9:9) David prophesied, *“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”* (Psalm 118:25-26) And there is going to be, at the end of time, another fulfillment to this prophecy. John spoke of it in Revelation 7:9, *“There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”*

At the great white throne, the redeemed will wave palm branches and give praise, thanksgiving, and glory to God for their victory over death. He gave eternal life to them by His sacrifice on the cross. It was His free gift! Should Palm Sunday be important to you today? Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem signaled the start of the last week of His earthly ministry. Over a few days, He would be betrayed, scourged, mocked, and nailed to the cross. He would die. Then, He would rise again on the third day after His death.

You should remember this during Holy Week. You should remember your sinless Savior took the punishment of sin from you so that you would receive forgiveness for your sin. This is the week you should remember, that while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you! This is the week when you should remember that you can’t save yourself. You should remember that Christ made a way to save you for eternity!

Why is Palm Sunday important? It’s important because your King and Savior, Jesus Christ came to save you through His sacrificial death upon the cross and was resurrected to life by God. Palm Sunday reminds you of that! Palm Sunday is to remind you who Jesus was. Palm Sunday is to remind you who Jesus is now. And Palm Sunday is to remind you that Jesus will be forever! That Roman soldier got it right. *“This Man was the son of God!”* AMEN