

### Palm Branches

Usually when we think of palm branches, places like Hawaii, southern California and Florida come to mind. But in the story of Easter, palm branches are not swaying on trees. They are laid out as a carpet for Jesus, the King of kings, to travel upon. This manner of showing respect may seem odd to us, but it made sense to those who were there. This week we will look closely at some of the events of the days leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection. As we do so, we will see what it means to follow the Son of God. We will discover what it means to follow the one who is worthy of all the praise they gave him then, all we can give him now, and all praise for all eternity.

#### Monday – The Triumphal Entry

*"I will place no value on anything I have or may possess except in relation to the kingdom of Christ."*

David Livingstone, 19<sup>th</sup> c. Scottish missionary and physician

1. Please read Matthew 21:1-11. According to verses 1-5, Jesus apparently anticipated the reaction of the crowd to his arrival. What leads us to that conclusion?
2. Imagine for a moment that you are one of the two disciples whom Jesus sent upon this strange errand. What do you think was going through their minds? What would you have been thinking if he had sent you?
3. Turn to and read Zechariah 9:9. According to Zechariah, who is on the donkey? How were the people exhorted to respond when this occurred?

**Making it Personal:** From today's reading we discover several things about who Christ is and what he is capable of. Take some time to praise him for who he is and what he has done.

#### Tuesday – Who is this Man?

*"There were many who saw the babe, but did not see the salvation."* Anonymous

1. Please read Matthew 21:10-11. What was the crowd asking? Why do you think they wanted to know?
2. Let's consider John 1:43-49, an episode from earlier in Jesus' ministry. What impression do you get about Nazareth from Nathaniel's comment in verse 46? Can you think of any modern place that we might consider our equivalent of "Nazareth"? Upon seeing Jesus, Nathaniel's mind was changed. What do you think he saw that led to such a drastic change?

**Text Insight:** Nazareth was a small town in the north of Israel far from Jerusalem, the big city.

3. Compare the welcome of the crowd in Jerusalem with the reception Jesus received a couple years earlier in his own home town in Matthew 13:53-58. According to verse 58, what did the people there miss out on?

**Making it Personal:** Have you ever realized you've missed out on God's blessing because of how you reacted to his movement in your life? When? Talk to him about this and thank him for the opportunities that lie in the future.

#### Wednesday – Clearing the Temple

*"He casts out the abuses, but does not forbid the duties of the temple. He whips out the merchants, but not the ministers of the house of God; overthrows the tables of the money-changers, but ransacks not the treasury of the temple."* Ralph Brownrigg, 17<sup>th</sup> c. Anglican Bishop

1. Please read Matthew 21:12-13. Why do you think Jesus felt so strongly about the way business was being conducted in the temple?

**Text Insight:** This business activity took place in the outer courts of the temple, where non-Jews were allowed to worship. Only Jews could enter beyond that point to the inner courts.

2. Please read Isaiah 56:1-8, paying particular attention to verses 6-7. How does this help you understand Jesus' strong reaction to the business activity taking place in the area where non-Jews were allowed to worship?
3. Jeremiah 7:1-12 warns the people of God about the misuse of God's house of worship. What does it say? Note God's heart for those who were considered outsiders. How does this help you understand your responsibility to those who may be new to the church?

**Prayer Focus:** Jeremiah makes plain our responsibility to those who are often considered outsiders (the powerless, the stranger, widows and orphans). Pray for God's church (FBC and all believers everywhere) to carry out that responsibility.

#### Thursday – Party Poopers

*"Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom."* Psalm 145:3

1. Please read Matthew 21:14-17. Why do you think the religious leaders were indignant?
2. See Psalm 8:1-2. Why do you think Jesus chose to quote this psalm to those who questioned him?
3. Who is to receive the praise in Psalm 8? What might have gone through the minds of the religious leaders when they heard Jesus appropriate this to himself? For further insight into the minds of Jesus' accusers, read Mark 11:18.

**Making it personal:** How do you feel about the notion that God receives praise? Pray, asking him to release you from any opposition to giving him all the praise that is due to him as our God, Lord and Savior.

#### Friday – Authority

*"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me."* John 17:25

1. Please read Matthew 21:23-27, where we find another account of Jesus at the temple. What did the religious leaders want from Jesus?
2. How did Jesus answer their question? Why do you think he responded this way? As you consider his response in verse 27, do you think he believed them when they said they did not know?
3. See Matthew 28:16-20 where Jesus plainly affirms his authority. Why was it essential for his disciples to be sure of his authority if they were to be counted on to carry out his commission in verses 19-20?

**Prayer Focus:** Ask God to show you how you can rely on his authority in facing whatever he puts in your life today.

**For the Weekend:** Re-read Matthew 21:1-10, along with Psalm 96:1-13. Spend time praising Jesus for who he is and what he has done, whether in prayer or song or meditation.