

## WHO IS THIS JESUS OF NAZARETH? HOW SHALL WE CALL HIM?

Last month I was in the Holy Land. I saw a lot of palm trees. Palm trees are often associated with an oasis because an oasis has a water source. Things can live there. The palm tree then becomes a sign of vibrant life. When Jesus chooses to make his solemn entrance into the holy city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey, he is making a statement without using words. Five hundred years before Christ Zechariah the prophet spoke of the coming Messiah. Zechariah said: “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O Daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey!” Your king comes to you! Your Messiah! David’s son.

Jesus knew the prophecy. All the Jews knew this prophecy. When Jesus shows up riding that donkey and his followers and disciples see him, they shout out. They rejoice. They lay their cloaks on the path before him. They cut palm branches and lay them on the ground. Their Messiah has come!! There is great rejoicing. Fever pitch! People cannot believe it. They have lived to see their long awaited Messiah. He has come--to release them and rescue them. They are ready to kill the fatted calf and celebrate.

The question in people’s hearts back then is the same question we ask during this coronavirus epidemic: Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? Back then those proclaiming him as Messiah believed he is God’s Holy One. But others saw Jesus only as a threat, as a breaker of the law. They saw him as one who seeks popularity by doing spectacular things. They saw him as one who will so provoke the Roman Empire that it will destroy Israel. These men thought that Jesus must be stopped. At all costs. These men had thought about this. They knew how to get rid of him. They would make it look like it was Rome’s work and not theirs.

Who is this Jesus? And where is He right now in all that is happening around us? Back then they believed that He was the meek one whom Zechariah foretold. But make no mistake, by doing what he did Jesus had chosen to present himself as the Messiah. When? At Passover time in Jerusalem. A time of passionate expectations. He knew that He was pushing the religious authorities. He was challenging them publicly. Either they would believe that he is the Messiah or they would denounce him. There was no other choice. Jesus knew this. He had come for this very reason, to have this moment of confrontation with the abusive, deceitful power that so often rules human lives. But He seemed so ill-prepared, so weak, and

so powerless. All he had was truth, integrity, humility, care and mercy. What are these against the military, political, economic and cultural power of Rome and the Jewish religious authorities? It was like David and Goliath all over again. Jesus is called--son of David. David and Goliath applies today too.

My friends, God the Father has sent his Son on mission to reclaim the earth and its people. The Son of God has come in our flesh. He has already won the most fundamental of spiritual battles on behalf of fallen human beings. He enters Jerusalem that Sunday in acclamation. He leaves Jerusalem that Friday, beaten and carrying his own cross. The Father knows what is going on. Then—and now. The Father also knows what Jesus is about. Then—and now. The passion that Jesus will undergo has been foreseen by the Father. The passion we are undergoing has also been foreseen by the Father. His Son embraced it then and emptied himself, becoming subject to death even death on a cross.” Only to rise from death on the third day. Yes. God knows. And Jesus puts his faith in his Father.

In the end He will die but that will not be the end. No. There was that major surprise coming. Jesus predicted that surprise but no one understood him. Not until it happened. Next Sunday we will see—and believe! There is another surprise coming our way. Wait and see!

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.