

The crowd that lined that 2-mile stretch of road between Bethany and Jerusalem was huge. Tens of thousands of visitors from all over the Roman Empire had come for the Passover, remembering God's rescue of their ancestors from Egypt 1,500 years earlier by Moses. In the middle of this celebration, people began to take off their coats and spread them out on the road and they did the same with palm branches they cut down, while shouting: "**Hosanna!**" as a man on a donkey rode past.

- Did the coats and palms show they recognized royalty riding by?
- Did they shout: "**Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!**" because they looked to him as their Lord, or were they caught up in all the excitement?
- Did they cheer: "**Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!**" because that's how God's Son was welcomed by angels at his birth?

How do you see **THE PEOPLE IN THE PALM SUNDAY CROWD** that we read about together from Luke's Gospel?

Before we look at the people in the crowd – let's take note of 3 things that shows Jesus was in complete control here. First, Jesus' omniscience. He knew a certain man would be at a certain location with a donkey and would ask a certain question. He even knew the answer that would satisfy his question.

Second, Jesus' omnipotence. Riding a donkey which is used to having a rider is hard enough, but a colt that has never been ridden? Something special is going on here.

Third, Jesus' ride. It fulfilled Zechariah's words: "**Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**" Check another box on the Savior's list of prophecies fulfilled.

OK, let's get to **THE PEOPLE IN THE PALM SUNDAY CROWD**. Would it surprise you to know they

weren't much different than the people who make up Palm Sunday crowds in churches today? Let's pick out 4 types.

1) JUDAS was there. You remember Judas. He's the treasurer of the group. But that's not what we remember. He betrayed Jesus. Whatever changed Judas' heart happened long before that final week. By the time Jesus rode into town, Judas had lost his first love, his Savior Jesus.

His true nature was exposed at a dinner given in Jesus' honor by his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Martha is doing what she does best, preparing food and serving guests. Lazarus is answering questions about what it's like to come back from the dead. Mary brings an expensive jar of perfume and pours it on Jesus' feet, then uses her hair as a towel. This wasn't unusual, but someone did object. Judas questions using the perfume on feet, when it should have been sold and the money given to the poor. That wasn't really his concern. As the treasurer, he often helped himself to the money.

Out here ... people saw Judas as a follower of Jesus; but in here ... where it counts, something was wrong. When he cheered: "**Hosanna!**" Judas knew and God knew it's a lie.

In churches today, there are people who ... out here have the look of being a Christian, they sing the songs, pray the prayers and even hold leadership positions. But they know and God knows it's a lie. There's a word for people like that. It's from the Greek for "*to put on an act.*" Hypocrite.

Have you put on an act ... like you're a Christian?

- Was it peer pressure because you wanted to fit in?
- Was it trying to look good in front of others?
- Was it because of what others expected of you?

Whatever the reason, you've done it. I've done it. God has a solution for our sin in the book of James: "**Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts you hypocrites. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.**"

2) The PHARISEES were there. They weren't cheering or tossing their coats or palm branches on the road. But they were sure upset with the people who did. They had no interest in being identified with Jesus. So, at least they were honest. No matter how many miracles they witnessed, or lives they saw changed, they refused to follow Jesus. Arrogance? Jealousy?

Most, but not all of the religious leaders were like that. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Jairus the Synagogue ruler followed Jesus secretly.

Today, some people will tell you that Jesus was a great teacher, a good man or a prophet. But they draw the line at saying he's God. They will resist your efforts to introduce them to Jesus.

There are people like that in churches today. Their parents drag them. They're children beg them to listen to them sing. They don't want to disappoint their grandparents. They're being polite to their spouse. While they may have to be there, they refuse to learn anything or even enjoy themselves while they're there.

Have you acted like a Pharisee? Maybe your heart wasn't into worship that day because someone or something upset you. It may not have kept you away from church, but it did affect your attitude when you got here. Whatever the reason, you've done it. I've done it. God has a solution for our sin in Psalm 32: **"I acknowledged my sin to you, O Lord, and did not cover it up. And you forgave the guilt of my sin."**

3) The CURIOUS were there. They heard the commotion and had to see what it was. Maybe they even got caught up in the excitement and cheered and shouted, waved their palms and tossed their coats on the road. But they weren't convinced Jesus was the Messiah. They hadn't heard him speak. They didn't know anyone who had been healed. They wanted to see for themselves.

You probably know people like that. Most in churches don't know what it's like not to know Jesus. They've believed in him since their baptism. Others came to know Jesus later on. They were introduced

to Jesus by their spouse-to-be, like my dad, or a friend, family member, co-worker or neighbor. Did you know that 75-95% of new members come because someone they knew at that church invited them? Do you know anyone who's curious and needs an invitation?

God promises in Jeremiah: **"For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."** God's plans may include your invitation, or their curiosity to bring them into contact with the power of the Gospel.

50 days after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, he sent his Spirit to his apostles on Pentecost. Peter preached a sermon that same day to many who had been there on Palm Sunday or Good Friday. This is what Acts 2 records: **"Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and were added to the church—about 3,000 in all."**

4) The COMMITTED were there, too. Judas, the Pharisees and the curious were there, but so were the 11 disciples. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were there. Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, Simon the Leper and many more who heard Jesus' message, or his healing words were there, too. To them, Jesus was life-changing. And they were there to express their gratitude, like is says in Psalm 146: **"Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will sing praise to my God as long as I live."**

Jesus has been life-changing for you, too. He's the Lamb of God who took on our humanity to take away your sin. As true man he knows what you're going through because he's been there. As true God he has the grace to forgive your sins and bless your days, along with the wisdom to answer your prayers in the way that is perfect for you.

So when you come on Sunday mornings or Thursday evenings, your faith and your praise are real. Because he's changed your life, you're committed to him. And, these words from Hebrews apply to you: **"Through Jesus, I will continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise."**