

'Palm Sunday' – SJD (8am) – 9/4/17 - Matthew 21: 1-11

Winston Churchill famously said after the victory at El Alamein¹, '**Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. but it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning**'. It is interesting to see how people viewed Jesus's entry into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday.

It is clear that there is a great sense of hope among the crowds gathered. We see this displayed both in their words and their actions on that first Palm Sunday. Their action of waving Palm leaves and singing 'Hosanna' has strong links with the Maccabean feast of the rededication of the Temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. He had offered, to the Greek God Zeus, pig's flesh on the altar and turned the temple cubicles into a brothel.² The Festival for the rededication of the Temple marked the throwing off of an invader's yoke, something that would not have gone unnoticed as Jesus entered the city in triumph. Was this the beginning of the end for the Roman rule of Israel?

Jesus appears somewhat ambivalent about the crowd. He however makes his own statement by choosing to enter Jerusalem, not riding on a white stallion, the sign of a warrior, but rather on a donkey. It is Matthew who reminds us that this fulfils an old prophecy in Zechariah which has as its context the arrival of the king of Zion. The donkey signifies humility rather than majesty. It is no coincidence that the Zechariah passage is set in the context of a king bringing righteousness and salvation.³ Jesus's entry is symbolically important but not as many hoped. Not that everyone was of the same belief, even then. We see at the end of Matthew's account that the wider crowds gathered for the coming Passover, perhaps saw Jesus in a slightly different light. Their reply to the question who this person was is, '**Jesus, the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee**'.⁴ Their belief did not extend to messiahship and perhaps explains how the crowd was able to turn against Jesus just a few days later, condemning him to the Cross.

But what of Jesus – was this the end? or the beginning of the end? Or even the end of the beginning? Well it was to be the end of his earthly life – it was also to be the beginning of the last week of his 3 year mission of teaching and preaching but most especially it was to be the end of the beginning. His death would herald something very new – both for him and all who followed him. The world was about to change for ever – and Jesus on the donkey, symbolised the change that was to come – one which brought in righteousness and salvation for many but ultimately judgment for others. The irony is that the judgment was to fall not on the Romans but on all who rejected Jesus – Jew and Gentile alike and equally a new eternal future lay ahead for all – Jew and Gentile alike – who understood and received the true role of the 'Son of David'⁵. Few, if any, saw this at the time of his arrival on the donkey. We though, through hindsight, can see the significance of that day and how it transforms everyone's life for ever. Amen

¹ The Lord Mayor's Luncheon, Mansion House "**The End of the Beginning**" November 10, 1942. Quoted on website WWW.churchill-society-london.org.uk/EndoBegn.html

² See Michael Green (1988) 'Matthew for Today' Hodder & Stoughton p. 198

³ See Zechariah 9 v 9 (and heading of passage).

⁴ Matthew 21:11

⁵ See Matthew 21 v 9.