

HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST

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The world presently is suffering a pandemic disease, and the response of the governing authorities is unprecedented in the history of the world. Governors of some of the United States have issued proclamations ordering people to stay at home. All agree that the effect of these orders will be devastating, although the extent of the devastation is incalculable. Governors have deemed some businesses to be non-essential, and have ordered them closed. Some governors have judged church services to be non-essential, and have forbidden them from meeting. The governors have not forbidden churches as such to close, and have assured Christians that the order is temporary. This is not persecution. Yet, it is a sad commentary on the state of the church in the United States, and in other parts of the world, that civil authorities judge church services to be unnecessary. From one point of view, this is worse than persecution. If a state persecutes the church, it is because it perceives the church to be a threat to its dominion. To regard the church as non-essential is to regard it as insignificant; it is to regard it as impotent, and no threat to its own claims to ultimate authority. The founders of the United States believed that God, not the state, has the highest authority, and that God has given rights to men, of which rights the state may not deprive them without due process. The state is not the ultimate authority in the world. Jesus Christ is, and Palm Sunday is a recognition of the fact.

After the Exodus, God led the children of Israel to Mount Sinai. There He gave Moses the law, including feasts that they should observe. One of those feasts is the Feast of Booths, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles. God said to the people:

And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 23:40-43)

God would lead His people to the land He promised their forefathers, and He would supply their every need along the way. In recognition of God's provision, the Israelites were every year to observe this feast. During their journey, God did supply all their needs. When they finally arrived at the border of the promised land, God reminded them of the providential care that He gave them on their journey. He said to them:

And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink: that ye might know that I am the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 29:5, 6)

God told them that over the course of forty years, He always met their needs. The journey was not an easy one, but He always supplied them with food and water, clothing, and shelter. He miraculously gave them bread from heaven, water from a rock, and clothes that did not wear out. (Nehemiah 9:21)

After the death of Moses, Joshua led the people into the promised land to conquer it. After the death of Joshua, the people were caught in a vicious cycle of rebellion, punishment, and repentance. They would go after false god, because of their rebellion God would cause them to become captives of their enemies, and, when they would repent, God would raise up someone to deliver them. This was the age of the Judges. Samuel was the last of those Judges, because during his rule the people demanded a king. When Samuel prayed to God about their demand, God told him that they had rejected Him. Not content to have God rule over them, they wished to be like the pagan nations, which were ruled by kings. God told Samuel to give them what they asked for, but to warn them what a king would be like. Samuel told the people that a king would steal from them and enslave them. They would cry out to God for deliverance, but God would not answer. (1 Samuel 8; compare Hosea 13:11)

God gave the people Saul. Saul began his reign well, but it was not long before Saul departed from God and the interests of the people, and was concerned only with his own interests. So God replaced Saul with David. David was a man after God's own heart, and God gave him a great kingdom. (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) God had, since the Exodus, dwelt among the people in a tabernacle, but David wished to build for God a great temple. God told David that, not he, but his son would build a temple for Him He promised David a dynasty, and that one of his sons would reign forever. God said to him:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. (2 samuel 7:12-14)

David was succeeded by his son, Solomon, and Solomon did build the temple, but he did not reign forever. He died, and after his death the kingdom divided into northern and southern. The people of Israel became so wicked that God sent the Assyrian army to conquer the north, and carry the people away into exile, and He sent the Babylonian army to conquer the south, and carry the people away into exile in Babylon. The Babylonians, in their conquest of the south, destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and the temple also. Some years later, the Persians conquered the Babylonian empire, and Cyrus, king of Persia, issued a decree that the Jews should return to their homeland to rebuild the temple and the city. Led by Haggai and Zechariah, the Jews did return. After they secured the city, they gathered in the street, and called Ezra the scribe to read out the law of Moses which they had not heard for some time. (Nehemiah 8:1-8) On the second day, they learned of the Feast of Booths. Nehemiah records what they people did after they heard this law:

And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. (Nehemiah 8:17)

The people had not properly observed the feast for many years. According to tradition, it was at this time the people with great joy sang the One-hundred and Eighteenth Psalm, which begins and ends with the words, "O

give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.” In it the psalmist writes, “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes. (Psalm 118:8, 9) He asks God to deliver him from his adversaries, and to open the gates so that he might enter and worship Him. He writes:

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. (Psalm 118:21-26)

Sometime after this Psalm was written, Zechariah the prophet prophesied of the coming Christ, the Son of God, who would subdue His enemies, and bring peace to the world. He said:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9, 10)

About two centuries after the temple was rebuilt, Alexander the Great conquered the Persian empire, and the region of Judea came under the control of the Greeks. After the death of Alexander III of Macedon, the Macedonian empire fell apart, and the Seleucids took control of Judea. The Seleucid emperor, Antiochus, had disdain for the Jews, and would not allow them to practice their religion. Knowing that the law of Moses forbade the Jews to eat pork, Antiochus sacrificed a pig in their temple, thereby desecrating it. Naturally, this act drew the ire of the Jews, and Judah, son of Mattathias the Hasmonean, and a priest, led them in a revolt against their oppressor, and they took possession of the city of Jerusalem. Judah, who came to be called Maccabee, meaning *hammer*, along with his men, triumphantly entered into the city of Jerusalem, to the great acclaim of the people, and he ordered that the temple be cleansed. In the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees, it says of Simon, Judah's brother:

He cleansed the tower from pollutions: And entered into it the three and twentieth day of the second month in the hundred seventy and first year, with thanksgiving, and branches of palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and with viols, and hymns, and songs: because there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel. (1 Maccabees 13:50, 51)

The Jews then celebrated the Feast of Booths. It is recorded in 2 Maccabees:

And they kept the eight days with gladness, as in the feast of the tabernacles, remembering that not long afore they had held the feast of the tabernacles, when as they wandered in the mountains and dens like beasts. Therefore they bare branches, and fair boughs, and palms also, and sang psalms unto him that had given them good success in cleansing his place. (2 Maccabees 10:5, 6)

Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah, who said, “When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.” (Zechariah 9:13) Judah allied the Jews with Rome against the Seleucids, and Judea came under the control of the Jews. The Jews were oppressed the Romans, however, and they again looked for someone to deliver them.

About a week before Jesus was crucified, He entered Jerusalem for the final time. Before He entered, He sent two disciples, telling them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.” (Matthew 21:2, 3) Saint Matthew writes that this was to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah, who said, “Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.” (Matthew 21:5) The disciples did as Jesus told them. They brought the donkey and the colt, they laid their clothes on them, and they sat Jesus upon the colt. Then Jesus, like Judah Maccabee, entered into the city of Jerusalem as the savior of the people, but He entered as the Christ, the Son of God, the savior of the world. Matthew writes, “And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.” (Matthew 21:8, 9) Saint Mark records that the people said, “Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” (Mark 11:9, 10) Saint Luke records that they said, “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.” (Luke 19:38) Saint John records that they said, “Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” (John 12:13) According to Saint Matthew, the people cried out, saying, “Hosanna.” This word, used in the One-hundred Eighteenth Psalm, means, “Save, I pray,” and came to be an expression of praise to God. (Psalm 118:25) The people lay their garments on his path, just as the officers of the army of Israel had lain down their garments before Jehu after the prophet Elijah anointed him king over Israel. (2 Kings 9:13) Saint Matthew and Saint Mark relate that the people cut down branches of trees, and lay them across Jesus’s path, just as the people had done for the Judah Maccabee. (Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8) Saint John tells that they lay before Him branches of the palm tree. (John 12:13) The people recognized that Jesus was the promised Christ, the son of God, heir to the throne of His father David, the one who would reign forever, and they asked Him to deliver them, and they gave praise to God.

After Jesus entered Jerusalem, He, like Judah Maccabee, cleansed the temple. There is an important difference between them, however: Judah Macabee cleansed the temple from the defilement of the Greeks; Jesus cleansed it from the defilement of the Jews, and would open it to Greeks. Jesus said to the Jews in the temple, “It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.” (Luke 19:46) Here Jesus cites a line from the prophecy of Isaiah, which reads:

Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. (Isaiah 56:6, 7)

Immediately after Jesus's Triumphal Entry, some Greeks who were in Jerusalem to worship at the passover feast said to Philip, Jesus's disciple, "Sir, we would see Jesus." (John 12:20, 21) Philip told Andrew, and the two of them told Jesus. Jesus knew that it was time for Him to die, so that the world might be saved. He said:

The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. (John 12:23-26)

In the One-hundred Eighteenth Psalm, it says, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." (Psalm 118:22) Shortly after Jesus cleansed the temple, he told the chief priests and elders the Parable of the wicked Tenants, and then said to them, "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (Matthew 21:42-44) They knew He spoke of them, and so they sought to kill Him. (Matthew 21:33-45) David would have built for God a temple, but God is building a spiritual temple, a temple that comprises, not only Jews, but people of all nations, and of which Jesus, although once rejected by the Jews, is the chief cornerstone.

Today, the church celebrates Palm Sunday. On this day the Church commemorates Jesus's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem as the Christ, the Son of living God. Although many people around the world pretend to authority, Christ is the true authority, and every person, including civil authorities, ought to recognize him as such. The final line of the Second Psalm tells the rulers of the world, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." (Psalm 2:12)

Let us always remember that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, heir to the throne of David. Let us recognize that even now He rules the world in righteousness. Let us take comfort in that truth, and let us proclaim it to the world.

Now unto the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.