

HOSANNAS AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS

by REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Expectations. How many times have your expectations of others gotten you into big trouble and disappointment? You had high expectations of another, yet when that person did not live up to your expectations you grumbled, felt anger, were discouraged, and decided that you would think twice about expecting anything from someone again. Almost everyone becomes disillusioned when we have unmet expectations.

This is even true of our expectations of God. Sometimes, in God's mysterious providence, he does what he knows to be best for us, yet we do not understand. We have expectations that we think God should live up to, but we have yet to begin to understand that God's ways are so much higher than our ways! Remember, as the Apostle Paul teaches, that "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him." We should be cautious of placing high expectations on others, but when it comes to God, I think we need to be reminded that our so-called "high expectations" are not high enough! Today, we shall look at the high expectations of the crowd when Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem in John 12:12-23.

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him." Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Jesus had healed Lazarus. Jesus had truly given back life to a man who had been defeated by death. He had called him forth with the power of a divine command, "Lazarus, Come forth!" and Lazarus came forth alive. Many in the crowd placed their hopes in this life-giver. They had high expectations for what this one could do for God's covenant people. The crowd who had witnessed and heard about Lazarus thought this must be Messiah. This Jesus must be the one we have been awaiting, the One to deliver us from Roman rule and oppression! The crowd had very high, rather political, expectations of Jesus.

So, when the crowd heard Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they went to meet him, proclaiming "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (12:18). If Jesus could raise the dead, heal the sick and give sight to the blind, he must be the long expected Messiah who could deliver the people. And what a wonderful time to do it! It was Passover, and many people had come from miles around for the yearly sacrifice offering for the sins of the people! The people had high expectations of Jesus, so they paved his way with palm branches, singing Psalm 118 to him as he rode on the humble colt of a donkey.

Despite the crowd's expectations however, Jesus was riding the colt of a donkey into Jerusalem so that he might lay down his life for his people, and die as the final Passover sacrifice that year. Even though Jesus had given life to Lazarus, he was now going to offer up himself, to be raised up in a death on a cross. Jesus had come to lay down his life for the sins of his people. Jesus loved his people so much that he was willing to die for sins in Jerusalem, to ride a humble donkey into Zion, so that he might overthrow the great spiritual powers of this world in his being lifted up. Jesus had come to deliver men from bondage to sin rather than those in bondage to Rome.

Although Jesus was going to his death, he described what he was about to do in his laying down his life as the "hour for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23). God-fearing Greeks (in contrast to the Pharisees who are plotting to take his life, 11:45-57) had come to Jesus, revealing to all that the time had now come for all of the world to be drawn to the Son of Man by faith. When the people in the crowd sang "Hosanna!" to the Lord as he rode, and declared him their King, they did not know fully at that time that they were celebrating the True King who was going to be lifted up and crucified in order that he might be glorified in his resurrection and ascension. Jesus would take the throne and receive the glory that belonged to him since the foundation of the world (John 17:3) and he would draw both Jews and Gentiles unto himself. When the Holy Spirit came after Jesus had been glorified, so many things in Jesus' ministry were better understood, as Jesus said that they would be.

Many things I have yet to say to you, but you cannot bear them now (John 16:12).

One of the things that is better understood by us today is that the expectations of the crowd were not too high, but too low. This was indeed the Messiah, the King who would reign over heaven and earth and draw all nations to himself. However, this was the King who loved his people so much as to lay down his life for his servants who did not deserve it. Jesus considered his people worth laying down his life for. Although faced with anxiety and a great deal of anguish knowing he was to face the terrible wrath of God on behalf of sinners, Jesus said, "Not my will, but yours be done."

The expectations of the crowd thought he was a mere political messiah who would deliver them from earthly threats, but Jesus exceeded all expectations! He destroyed the power of death, hell, and the devil so that those who believe upon the Son of Man may be saved, reconciled to God, become a New Creation, and one day inherit the earth, and reign with Jesus the Almighty King! Many of those in the crowd who yelled "Hosanna!" that day as Jesus rode into Jerusalem would later become disillusioned and demand he be put to death. In fact, some of the same people would yell "Crucify Him!" in a matter of days, because Jesus did not live up to their mere earthly expectations and hopes.

The crowd's expectations were not high enough. In fact, they were quite low! Through Jesus' death, he was highly exalted above all rule, power and dominion, and every name that can be named not only in this present age, but also in the age to come (Eph. 1:20-23). We can truly say as Christians: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" because of what Jesus has done for those he loves through his death! With extremely high expectations we can live by His Spirit knowing that He will indeed return for us, but this time on a great white charger (Rev. 19:11-16). Christ's name is "Faithful and True" and he will deliver us completely from sin, death, the devil, and the miseries of this present age. When he returns we shall not escort him into Jerusalem, but he will call us to be with him (1 Thess. 4:16, 17), and he will escort us into the New Jerusalem! God's ways are truly higher than our ways. We should never be demanding of our Gracious God, but should always allow Him to fulfill our expectations in a way that will glorify Him and be for our good.

So, are your expectations too high? Or perhaps, they are too low? With God all things are possible. Believe!