# People Of The Fierce Hosanna

In Mark 11:1-11, Jesus is entering the Great Jerusalem, meaning “City of Shalom, City of completeness, wholeness, of God’s all-permeating Peace.” But as the Prince of Peace enters – the Prince of Shalom Himself – a holy mess is about to be made.




Jesus marks the beginning of His Passion week, as crowds before Him, crowds behind Him, and crowds all around Him voice a singular cry: “Hosanna!” – a cry of triumphant praise, that means “Save, now!” But no one is prepared for the kind of saving, the kind of rescue operation, the kind of deliverance mission about to be initiated by the One whose very name, *Y’shua*, means “The Lord saves.”

## SETTING THE SCENE

In Ignatian tradition, imaginatively enter the scene with me as it’s recorded in Mark 11. Choose a spot in the scene as you read below, and imagine yourself to be taking in all the sights, the sounds, the smells of this story:

1 As they approached Jerusalem [City of Shalom, meaning the City of completeness, wholeness, of God’s all-permeating Peace] and came to Bethphage and Bethany [*Authors Note: one set of meanings for these names is “the house of immature figs” and the house of “mature figs,” or ‘immature and mature fruit,’ respectively; Bethany can also mean “the house of misery or affliction”*] at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.
9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

*“Hosanna!”*

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*10 “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”*

*“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

## WHAT DOES “HOSANNA” MEAN?

One of the few words in the Scriptures to remain in our worship vocabulary, after thousands of years – only ever transliterated and never translated – is this remarkable worship word, “Hosanna.”

The cry “Hosanna,” or “Hoshana” literally means *“Save now!”* For the first century Jews, it was an historic shout of raw jubilation, mingled with a cry for deliverance and rescue from their enemies. The word’s early use in Psalm 118 was connected to the Feast of Tabernacles, or *Sukkot,* also known as the Feast of the Ingathering (and that, originally and particularly, to the water-drawing procession).
Sukkot marked the end of harvest time for the Hebrew people (Ex. 34:22), and then became a more expansive festival that commemorated God’s deliverance of His people from the land of Egypt (Lev. 23:42-43).

## SAVE, NOW!

As Jesus enters the City of Peace on this fateful day, the cries of “Hosanna” recall to the mind of every Jew in attendance the faithfulness of God to deliver His people again and again across their shared history. Only this time, the shout is now placed in the context of the politically-charged climate of this tumultuous, first-century, Passover scene. Worship has always been a political act – anytime we declare our allegiance to Christ, we are declaring our allegiance to the powers of this world.

The word ‘Hosanna’ rises as a cry of praise to God from among the people – with the simultaneous tone of a cry for messianic deliverance.

“Hosanna,” shouts the City of Shalom, the City of Peace. “Save us, now.” That request, ringing in the ears of Jesus as he passes into Jerusalem, is about to be answered – by the Prince of Peace, the Prince of God’s Shalom Himself. He Himself is the answer to their cry.

## JESUS TAKES THE TIME IT TAKES

Something fascinating happens next. The Scripture says that Jesus entered the City of Peace, after hearing the loud hosannas, “He looked around….” Why does the Scripture take the time to tell us that Jesus “looked around?”

It’s easy to miss this moment, but as it is has been said of the Bible, what is there and what is not there is there and not there for a *reason*.
One commentary says, “He enters Jerusalem, and especially the temple, and surveys all with keenly observant eye, on the outlook, like St. Paul at Athens, not for the picturesque, but for the moral and religious element. He noted the traffic going on within the sacred precincts….” (Expositor’s Greek Testament).

Here is my theory. In this moment, as in our lives, Jesus is in no particular hurry. He takes the time it takes to see, to know, to consider, and to listen to his dear Abba Father. He is sizing up this supposed City of Peace of around Him, God’s City. He is deciding what people and activities are friends of God’s shalom peace ruling in that city, and what people and activities are enemies of God’s shalom peace ruling in that city.

After observing, he then takes the night to decide what actions he will take to make the friends friendlier, and to make the enemies show themselves and squirm. We know how the story goes.

The next morning, He skips breakfast (the poor fig tree), and He walks through the gates and straight to the church foyer – I mean, the temple courts.

And then? He begins to flip tables. Before Jesus’ enemies can make the first, subtle, secret move, he outs them for all to see. He flips the tables of the greedy money changers who dare to gouge the poor as they come from around the known world to worship, and He makes everyone take sides as He takes the side of the poor, the side of the prayerful, the side of the God of Jerusalem.

## SAVE US FROM OUR ENEMIES?

Your life and mine are like the City of Peace, Jerusalem. The holy city is many things, but one of the gifts it provides is a metaphor for the Christian life. We are imaged to be the true Temple of God, a place where His pervasive shalom peace rules and reigns in all aspects of life – but we simply can’t get there ourselves.

We are under siege, influenced by powers beyond us, complicit in internally destructive activities that are beyond the scope of even our own awareness.

And what do we do with Jesus when He is in the City of Supposed Peace that is our heart? We say "Hosanna!" as a celebration of His presence. We worship with joy at His closeness, and for His indwelling Spirit. But as we shout "Hosanna" in worship, the Lord hears us praying, "Save, now! Save, me! Rescue and deliver me from my enemies – within and without!"

Inviting Jesus to save us is an invitation to a grueling process of transformation that, in my experience, will cost us every ounce of our emotional and spiritual stamina, over decades. Phil. 2:12 tells us we are to work out our salvation daily, with fear and trembling.
When Jesus arrives anywhere, especially a place He plans to live, He immediately sizes up what's a friend in our lives and what is an enemy. And he takes His time dealing with them, each in turn.

And tables *flip* in the process.

## HAS YOUR TABLE BEEN FLIPPED LATELY?

The other day, Jesus saved me. Literally, He saved me – physically, and in new ways, spiritually. I was in my little red truck the other morning, merging onto a highway to head toward the city from our little town south of Nashville. There was a cold mist in the air, and as I began to pick up speed, I hit a patch of black ice.

The truck began to slide out of control at about 50 mph, and I had lost complete control of the vehicle. I intuitively knew to take my hands off the wheel (no, I did not sing *Jesus, Take The Wheel* – though living in Nashville, it's tempting to say that I did).
As soon as it happened, one word escaped my lips. I've almost died approximately 5 times in my life (3 near-drowning incidents and 2 car-out-of-control incidents). The word we first say when a moment of potential harm or death is upon us, as our life flashes before our eyes, shows us where our trust is. Every time I've almost been greatly harmed or killed, or those with me have, I've said,

*"Jesus."*

Sometimes that's been followed with

*"Save me."*

I crashed head first into the guard rail, keeping me from plummeting down a light slope on the side of the highway. My front fender flew onto the road. Miraculously, on that busy sea of a highway, it was like the traffic was parted and there was no one immediately behind me, or in front of me, to take a hit.

However, the worst of it wasn't over yet. I was perpendicular to the highway, with the bed of my track sticking halfway out into the lane, and very little shoulder. I needed to get out of the truck, but I knew I had to move it fast. The truck engine sounded like it was dying, and if it did work, I'd have to back out into oncoming traffic to get off the road.

As I sat there, helpless, waiting for a break in traffic, a large pickup truck coming down the highway began to fishtail on the same patch of ice. The driver course-corrected coming right at me and I was a sitting duck.

I heard myself say, "Jesus, save me," as I knew in a flash I wouldn't be able to get out of my truck in time. At the very last moment, the truck swerved and missed me by inches. Saved again, I thought. "Thank you, Jesus," I said.

I got the truck off the road, just as the engine died. I was quite sure that all the saving that needed done that day was finished. Jesus had done what I had asked, and I was grateful.

*But He wasn't finished.*

## EXPOSING THE ENEMIES WITHIN

My internal City of Peace had been turned on its head. I thought the enemies I needed rescued from were death, pain, and an oncoming threat. But Jesus knew that there were a few others things I had inadvertently prayed for when I offered my silent "Save, now."

The officer arrived, and I felt a sense of foreboding. I had damaged a guard rail. A childhood fear of mine was triggered about being in trouble with authorities that had the power to legally remove my freedom.

*A surge of fear shot through my heart.*

We walked through the process, and all was well. Except that I realized that my wife was working at school and out of text contact, my son was at work and out of text contact, and most of my friends who might be available to get me were at least 40 minutes away.

*A surge of loneliness came over me.*

The office then offered to take me to a local truck stop so I could wait on AAA to send a tow truck. "Sure," I said. I had a cup of coffee and breakfast. It took me 30 minutes to

get through to someone, as many accidents had apparently occurred that morning. Then, they said it would be another hour before a truck could get to me.

*A surge of impatience, anger, and judgement polluted my spirit.*

Then I realized that I was going to be late for a work meeting, and it would be hard to reschedule due to travel schedules.

*A surge of feeling out of control of my entire life swept over me.*

Then I thought about the truck. I couldn't currently afford another truck, and this one's repairs would cost more than the truck was worth.

*A surge of fear for our financial future stirred inside me.*

Finally, I actually felt something so juvenile, so silly, that I'm embarrassed to write it. I thought of what all my friends in Canada (and my wife) would think when they heard I was in an accident on ice. "I know how to drive in ice and snow," I thought, "we always joke about how Southerners don't. They'll think I'm a worse driver than I am."

*A surge of shame took me for a momentary ride.*

As I sat in that truck stop, trying to be thankful that my life and health was spared, I was visited by 9 enemies in the space of 45 minutes:

- Fear of Man
- The Lie of Isolation
- Impatience
- Unholy Anger
- Judgement
- Pride
- The Need to be in Control
- Fear of Lack of Provision
- Shame

My cry, for the Lord to save me, He had taken seriously. My enemies were being exposed with the flip of a table, and I was naming them one by one.

And by addressing them one by one with my Savior, I was also addressing my contributions to the family of God and even society.

- The Fear of Man – leads to systemic sins like complicity in social evil and detachment from our fellow human beings.
- The Lie of Isolation – leads to a disengagement from serving our communities with a generous spirit.
- Impatience – leads to the dehumanization of others as we all get to the amazing places we're going faster.
- Unholy Anger – creates a lack of safety around us for others who will make mistakes.
- Judgement – leads to oppression, and the demonization of those who are not like us.
- Pride – always ends in idolatry and a misuse of power.
- The Need to be in Control – contributes to broken relationships and manipulative family systems.
- Fear of Lack of Provision – creates fear in our own children and others who hear us whining.
- Shame – clothes us in dirty garments not fit for a beautiful, stunning child of God.

## NAMING OUR ENEMIES

As we speak, sing, and say "Hosanna" in our times of our worship, we are not only acclaiming the Lord who comes to save, rescue, and deliver. We are also inviting Him to save us again and again from enemies so familiar to us we think they're friends.

- Maybe you're afraid of what people think right now, and the Savior wants to awaken your confidence.
- Maybe you're listening to the lie that you're isolated and alone, and the Savior wants to reveal the Gift of Himself and your community once again.
- Maybe you're giving in to impatience, and the Savior wants to slow you down for a long wait.
- Maybe you're allowing anger to occupy your thoughts toward another, and the Savior wants to turn that into compassion.
- Maybe you're quietly judging people around you, unaware, and the Savior wants to release you to empathy and love.
- Maybe you're courting pride, and the Savior wants to save you by a great humbling.
- Maybe you're living in fear and it's pressing you to control people and situations around you, and the Savior is allowing your life to spin out of control to save you.

- Maybe you're afraid of not having enough, and the Lord has put you into a holy corner until you trust Him to be your Provision.
- Maybe you're ashamed, maybe of something you did, but maybe about who you are. The Lord has a special saving to do in all of our hearts here.

## PEOPLE OF THE FIERCE HOSANNA

Jesus has come to save you from your enemies, within and without. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us of who, ultimately, our battle is with:

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

**The Fierce Hosanna is for our own spiritual formation.** If we're going to join Jesus in the battle against the enemies of His peace ruling in our hearts and minds, we need to allow Jesus to expose the brokenness in our lives with an intense, heartfelt, and powerful intensity. In other words, if we're going to ask Jesus to "Save, now," again and again, we had better be committed to the fray that will follow.

**The Fierce Hosanna is for the renewal of the Church.** If we want to participate in the fruition of New Creation with our Savior, then the Church had better be about being saved from the enemies within before we wage all our battles on the perceived enemies without. We need to allow Jesus to take our own hearts before we take our cities for Christ.
Worship softens the heart, and reminds us that we are in need of salvation as much as any of the men, women, and children in the neighborhood of our church.

Sing the Fierce Hosanna, and praise the Lord who always, always, always, saves.

Amen, and Amen.

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