

Where Did They All Go?

Matthew 21:1-11

Here Jesus is at the height of His earthy fame. An entire city watching His entrance in awe. We see that Jerusalem was packed as the annual Passover festivities approached.

Now there were 3 great annual religious festivals in Jerusalem: Passover, Pentecost (which came 50 days after Passover), and the Feast of Tabernacles.

At Passover time, Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the region, and indeed, the world. It was and is today every Jew's desire to observe at least one Passover in Jerusalem. Historical documents record during one such feast, over 250,000 lambs had been slain, at approximately 10 people per lamb, over 2.5 million people had been present for that observance.

Matthew's record of this Passover shows Jerusalem once again was packed with people. However, this year there was an additional attraction... A man named Jesus.

Rumor had spread that He had raised a man, Lazarus of Bethany from the dead and it was being said that this very Jesus was coming to the Temple on the road from the Mount of Olives. It all sounded very Messianic and the word spread quickly, "The King is coming! The King is coming!"

Imagine the crowds on that day, thronging for just a glimpse of this Jesus. Then, there He came, riding a donkey, His deliberate claim to being the long-awaited Messiah. For the prophet Zechariah had long ago written,

Zechariah 9:9 (NKJV)

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey."

The road Jesus was traveling, led through a garden known as Gethsemane.

Jesus' thoughts must have saddened as He rode slowly through the olive trees of that place, knowing that today He had the crowds of worshipers around Him but only four nights from now, He would face Suffering and Anguish alone. There would be no crowds then. No cheering people. No Hosannas, No palm branches, No worship. Only a bitter cup as the scriptures say... filled with the sins of the world.

He knew there would be no one with Him then, deserted in His greatest hour of need.

The question is as relevant now as it was then:

Where were all the thousands of followers on Thursday night when he was betrayed, who had been so vocal in support on the previous Sunday?

You see, everyone loves the triumphant entry part and the Worship but Gethsemane has to do with the Cross and Suffering and that's a different matter altogether.

Now, let me make it very clear that a follower of Christ *must* worship.

Who wouldn't have been excited about Jesus on that day of triumphant entry into Jerusalem? Lazarus had been raised from a grave. Miracles and Healings were occurring everywhere Jesus was. Now Jesus was riding into the Holy City at Passover. Who wouldn't be excited about that? Who wouldn't want to wave palm branches and cry hosanna on such an occasion?

And there can be little doubt that Jesus was moved by such praises from the multitudes. The Bible declares that God inhabits the praises of His people. The Scriptures encourage us to praise the Lord.

Psalm 150:1-6 (NKJV)

It is obvious that praise and worship are vital parts of the Christian experience. Yet there is more to being a Christian than *THAT* experience.

What do YOU do when following Jesus comes to Gethsemane and the Cross? You've been there for the triumphant entry and excited worship; but what about the rest of the Christian experience?

You see, Jesus didn't come to this earth to ride triumphant into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey while crowds cheered. He came to endure suffering and die on the Cross. Jesus life on earth was always heading toward an encounter on the Cross.

A songwriter of old penned:

*Must Jesus bear the cross alone?
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone,
And there's a cross for me.*

You see the bible says we are to be followers of Christ and to be a follower we must be dedicated to the same business as the one we are following.

Jesus was in the redemption business. Are we?

Is that our primary business?

Is this church shouldering its part of the burden of the cross of our Lord?

Are we a factor in people being saved out of the sin that is a deadly plague in our city?

Are these altars being used by those seeking salvation?

Are your missions' offerings enough so we can obey the mandate of our Lord "to go into all the world to preach the gospel?"

Are young people leaving our congregation to be commissioned missionaries?

Are we raising up new young pastors to disciple these new converts?

Are we offering any hope to the struggling of our community?

Are we clothing the cold and naked? Sheltering the homeless? Feeding the hungry?
Are we praying? Interceding for the lost?

Let me make this personal... You enjoy lifting your hands with the congregation and singing the praise choruses on Sunday; but are you impacting your family, your friends, your neighborhood, your place of work with your strong Christian life and witness the rest of your week?

As a pastor, I understand that no one needs to be very spiritual to attend Sunday morning worship service, sing the uplifting songs, clap your hands, put a few bucks in the offering (glad that you have money) listen to a message of God's love. That's all "triumphant entry" stuff. Yes, it's exciting. Sure, most want to be a part of it.

The question is where are YOU on Thursday night when Jesus agonizes praying in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Jesus was alone that night, His disciples sleeping even as the torches of the arresting guards could be seen marching across the Kidron Valley. And the next day, when Jesus' hands and feet were nailed into the wooden cross, only John and a couple of women, including Jesus' mother, showed up for the most important event in human history.

There were great multitudes of followers present the previous Sunday, but just a few of the faithful on Friday morning.

It is my fear as a Pastor that the church has forgotten why Jesus came in the first place.

He didn't come just to be the recipient of our worship with hosannas and palm branch waving. He came for three specific reasons - none of which tend to draw crowds

(1) JESUS CAME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST. - Luke 19:10

Working with the lost is hard, dirty and sometimes discouraging work. Yet we like Jesus, must be about the lost.

That's the one-on-one encounter with your fellowman who is desperate and needs help today. In compassion we help in every way we can (physical and spiritual)

(2) JESUS CAME TO BUILD HIS CHURCH.

His words found in Matthew 16:18: *"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

It takes more than the exciting Sunday morning worship to build the Church. It takes a lot more than singing choruses of Jesus magnificence to build a spiritual army. There's more to it than lifting your hands and your voice.

There is more to building the Church than bricks and mortar or property.

The Church is the body of Christ, the blood-washed redeemed of the Lamb, those who have committed their very lives to the disseminating of the gospel. These are the saints who would risk death if need be, that Christ be lifted up throughout the world.

(3) JESUS CAME TO PREPARE US FOR ETERNITY.

1 Corinthians 3:11-14 (NKJV)

Heavenly Reward comes from man's work not worship. Scripture doesn't say that Jesus' riding on a donkey was His work. The work came out of Gethsemane and Calvary and it is that redemptive process that will decide what if any rewards we will get.

I've been a Christian for most of my life, and I love the Lord more now, than I ever have before. I really believe I am more committed to His work now than ever. And the deep and lasting challenge of my heart has very little to do with the worship.

It has to do with Gethsemane and Calvary where "on a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame, and I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain. "

On that horrendous morning, as the sound of the hammer was heard outside the city walls, even as the sky darkened and the winds started to howl, a tiny group of weeping mourners gathered. A young disciple named John and several women. That's all.

They were the only followers left from the multitudes that saw Jesus die. Five days before, the streets had been packed with the followers singing praises but now it was Friday morning and they were gone in search of something easier.

So, you're here on Palm Sunday morning? Singing, praising, giving...That's all good but.... The question' remains, "Where will you be, come Thursday night in the garden (work in prayer) and Friday morning (work even unto death)?"

I'm still in admiration at those 21 Coptic Christian's in orange jumpsuits who were beheaded by Islamic followers for not denying Jesus. **That** is Friday at the Cross with Jesus living.

BY THE SPIRIT AT WORK in us, We Live.

2 Corinthians 3:5-18 (NKJV)

Personally, we are transformed: Corporately we are transformed. As we are changed, the Church will be changed.

We are called to be holy, different from the world, people of prayer, poured out for the sake of the gospel.

Have you committed your all to Jesus today?

This morning Jesus has called you.

Will you follow even though the crowds have deserted?

Will you suffer with and for Him?

Testify with the Apostle Paul;

Philippians 1:21 (NKJV) *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*