

Who's in Charge?

Matthew 21:1-5

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Palm Sunday morning, word spread rapidly that the miracle worker Jesus was entering Jerusalem. The atmosphere was especially electric because, as the Apostle John reported, Jesus had just raised Lazarus to life after three days in the grave. News raced through neighborhoods of Jerusalem and the surrounding hamlets. Crowds swelled along an impromptu parade route. There were human players, but no human planners. A totally-God-thing was unfolding.

The Scriptures reveal that the Jewish Messiah was to ride the colt of a donkey into Jerusalem. Such an entrance signaled the arrival of a ruler-deliverer. The procession would not end at a palace, but at the temple. Israel was not a secular state. Israel was God's nation to the nations. Through Israel, God planned to rescue a world blinded by its unbelief.

When Jesus arrived at the temple, he looked around. He knew this was a God-orchestrated moment. Perhaps, he thought God had something else in store. Jesus was limited in knowledge like the rest of humanity. He relied on the leading of God's Spirit. He relied on the gifts of the Holy Spirit he would later impart to his followers. Jesus had no divine powers except what God makes available to his human children. He did not heal because he was the Son of God. He healed because as the Son of Man he was given dominion like Adam and Eve over the earth, and God was with him, Immanuel. Jesus was anointed with the Spirit of revelation and power. Consequently, a human arrived at the temple on Palm Sunday; and a wonderfully boisterous parade ended with a quiet exit from Jerusalem.

It looked like God was in charge when Jesus had Holy Spirit-given revelation on obtaining the donkey. It looked like God was in charge when crowds swelled along the road and yelled hosannas about the son of David. It looked like God was in charge when palm branches waved, and cloaks and branches were spread before him. However, did it look like God was in charge when Jesus was challenged by religious leaders? Did it look like God was in charge when they snarled at Jesus rebuke your disciples, correct the children? Did it look like God was in charge when no official or dignitary received him at the temple? Did it look like God was in charge when no priest or no prophet received the messiah? Jesus went to the temple, but there was nothing to do.

Palm Sunday was a mixed bag. It was a mixed bag of experiences and emotions. There was heightened joy, and heightened tension. There was heightened hope and heightened fear and frustration. With the parade, God signaled who will bring salvation. Many witnessed it, but who understood it? One thing is clear from the Scriptures. God was in charge. God was working his plan and fulfilling his promises. Prophecy was coming true.

Today you have a mixed bag of experiences and emotions. Your circumstances may vary from a joyous parade, to heated dissension, to puzzlement and lack of direction. One thing is still true. God is in charge. God is in charge whether you're hurting, celebrating or wandering. God is in charge.

In the 29th chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses prepared the people of Israel to enter the Promised Land. He said:

Your eyes have seen all that the Lord did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear.
(Deuteronomy 29:2-4, NIV)

Do you scratch your head with Moses and wonder how the Israelites could see all these amazing feats – the plagues in Egypt, deliverance at the Red Sea, provision in the desert, the defeat of their enemies, even their clothing and sandals not wearing out – and not understand that God was in charge of their circumstance? Let's get more personal. Has God given you a mind that understands how God is working in your circumstance for the redemption of his lost children who suffer the consequences of human rebellion and unbelief? Do your eyes see what the Lord Jesus is doing in your life? Do your ears hear what the Lord is saying?

Years ago, President Abraham Lincoln pondered the tragic toll of the Civil War and spoke these words in his second inauguration.

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained... Each looked for an easier triumph... Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other... The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.' If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'.

President Lincoln pondered the hand and heart of God active in his circumstance. He concluded:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Do you ponder what God is doing in your circumstance and your call in it? Do you consider what God is doing with you? Do you ask for eyes to see? Do you ask for ears to hear? Do you ask for a mind that understands? We face the choice of Jesus and his followers. Will you trust the revelation God has given you and embrace the mercy God offers you? Will you trust the promises you have been given? Will you commune with Jesus as your sovereign to serve and as your savior to cling to? Will you thank him for taking your judgment and restoring to you the authority of a child of God? Will you embrace your call to act and live as his disciple?

Will you walk as a child of God and an ambassador to the nations, understanding that God is at work in your circumstances, calling for your faith? Will you see his hand in your life? Will you hear his word for you? Will you thrill in the parades God orchestrates and also stay faithful in the disputes? Will you believe when you have no direction and your expectations aren't met?

Your choice matters. It matters whether you believe. It matters whether you act in faith and trust. So much depends on what you choose. So many are affected by what you choose. The story of redemption is unfolding as we here turn to Christ and act in faith.