

# Why We Gather!

## *Genuine Worship:*

Luke 19:37-40; John 12:12-13, 17-18

March 28, 2010

Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

Wow! What a day! God gathered Jesus a crowd. He used people like you and me.

Here's what happened.

Jesus had special friends in the village of Bethany: Mary, her sister Martha and brother Lazarus. While Jesus was away, Lazarus became very ill. (It is the same thing that happens when our computer guru, Bob Boyson, travels. We get computer problems.) Word was sent, but Jesus delayed in coming. Lazarus died. Four days later, Jesus showed. All that could be expected from the miracle-worker was some comfort; but the disappointment was bitter. Could Jesus have healed Lazarus had he arrived on time? At Lazarus's tomb, Jesus said audibly: "Father, thank you for hearing me." Jesus had been praying. He had interceded for Lazarus. He then shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" Breath returned to his friend's body; and wrapped in grave clothes, Lazarus appeared at the entrance of his tomb. At Jesus' instruction, villagers rushed to Lazarus to unwrap the grave clothes.

That night what do you think people talked about as they gathered in their homes? What dominated the conversation in the marketplace? What interspersed their conversations with relatives and friends? What topic arose as they did their business?

The night before Jesus entered Jerusalem in Palm Sunday procession, Jesus stayed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Mary took a flask of perfume worth about \$75,000 and poured it on

Jesus' feet. Do you think there was talk after that? Her act stirred controversy. The twelve disciples griped. Judas determined to teach Jesus a lesson. The Apostle John writes about the controversial gathering at the house:

***A large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.***  
(John 12:9, NIV)

The next day Jesus entered Jerusalem in the procession that is remembered annually across the world. The Apostle John explains the crowd:

***Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.***  
(John 12:17-18, NIV)

Many lined the parade route because of what they heard about Jesus and Lazarus. They didn't just mysteriously show up (and they don't today). God used the people at Lazarus's tomb to produce the crowd on Palm Sunday. God wanted a crowd there. God wanted a crowd for his Son. His Son was worthy of the parade. God held a parade for his Son Jesus.

Are you aware of what is happening this morning? God is holding a worship celebration for his Son. People don't just mysteriously show up. People stop what they are doing and assemble for something important. They assemble to vote, or honor dignitaries, victors and heroes when they are invited and informed. *God seeks people to honor his Son through people.*

Jesus gave us a key truth about worship. He told a Samaritan woman:

***A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.***  
(John 4:23, NIV)

God seeks worshipers. *He goes after people with invitations from people like you and me. He goes after people because he really wants to connect spiritually with us.*

On Palm Sunday, God sought out worshipers. Some failed to come. Besides the sick and lame, there were three types of people who did not make the parade. *The first group* is largest. They *did not come because they did not know*. People who knew did not tell them. Those who heard or knew about Jesus and Lazarus did not tell them about the parade or what happened with Lazarus. Some of those who witnessed great things of God did not speak up. May God forgive us if we are among them. May God change our hearts and use us in his search for worshipers. The *second group* that did not make the parade *was too busy to come*. Because of their unbelief, they thought *the effort was too much* or what was already on *their schedule was too important*. God sought them. They were notified, but they did not come. The *third group was afraid*. The events were beyond their comfort zone and understanding. They were too invested in maintaining the current situation and their comfort level. They not only chose to stay away, but they also criticized those who participated.

Have you encountered such criticism and discouragement? God assembled the people on Palm Sunday. Do you realize that *God is the one seeking and assembling worshipers today?* Do you realize that *God is looking for a spiritual connection with you?* Are you experiencing a personal connection with God and his love right now? Are you seeing and hearing enough of God to talk about it? Are you excited enough to talk with others?

They gathered on Palm Sunday because of what God did with Lazarus. They gathered on Palm Sunday because God produced witnesses who would talk about it with their neighbors, friends and associates. They gathered on Palm Sunday because God sought an assembly for his Son. They gathered on Palm Sunday because Jesus listened to the Spirit counsel him about the details of a donkey-ride into Jerusalem: where the donkey was, how to acquire it and what to do.

Did you know as this Sunday approached, I prayed asking God to show me in detail what to do to honor his Son? I asked others to pray for me that God direct your worship experience through the counsel of his Spirit. You have gathered here today because God worked through someone to get you here, and God in counseling me and others is directing through his Spirit something for his Son Jesus and something in his love for you. For certain, God wants you to honor his Son, but God also wants to do something for you.

On the parade route some were there in curiosity, but others were encouraged. Their hearts were touched. They spread their cloaks and branches before Jesus. Some cried and wept. Tears streamed down their faces as their hearts leaped with hope. Without realizing they were prophetic, some shouted:

***"Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!"*** (John 12:13, NIV)

Others cried:

***"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*** (Luke 19:38, NIV)

These folk in their words and actions revealed the heart and hand of God. God does that today. God reveals his heart and hand in worship. Only some saw that then, and only some see this now.

While some spoke prophetically, speaking the very word and will of God, some thought this was over-the-top and became frightened. Have you ever been frightened in a worship service? God is bigger than our comfort zone. The Holy Spirit is no tame pigeon. If you truly seek God, there may be times in worship when you are frightened by what moves others. You may not always be able to control your emotions. You may feel like running. Some turnarounds take a big jolt, especially when we are talking about a group.

John Wimber started the large and fast-growing movement of Vineyard Churches that has outpaced most other denominations in the last three decades. It all began in a single congregation he led in Anaheim, California. A young guest spoke at their Sunday night worship. He concluded, “The Holy Spirit has been quenched (resisted – like putting out a candle). Come Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something came on many people. Some trembled and shook. Some cried or laughed. Some began to speak aloud unintelligible sounds. Some collapsed as if they had fainted. There was both joy and fear. John had no control and felt great fear. Reinforcing that fear was some of his friends and parishioners who said they were leaving if he did not rebuke this and stop it from recurring. John stayed up all night searching the Scriptures and reading respected authors. A friend called from another state saying that he did not know what was going on, but that he was impressed to tell John that it is God at work. Over the next few months 700 people would become practicing Christians as a result of what happened that Sunday night.

Later as Jesus’ disciples read the Scriptures, they would realize that God had planned for that Palm Sunday worship. God had called them to worship, and if they hadn’t, as Jesus said, the stones would cry out.

God has gathered us to worship his Son today. He is calling you to connect spiritually with him. *The Scriptures will help you understand. By reading the Bible, you will begin to see how what is unfolding in your life has been planned by God.* Don’t back away. We have been gathered by God to honor his Son. We have been gathered to connect with God and his redeeming love and power. We are being directed into his work of seeking worshipers, so that people will live. Come and worship! Worship your king!