

Palm Sunday and Superlatives

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INTRODUCTION:

There is absolutely no reason to believe that the crowd at the Triumphal Entry was the same crowd that was crying out for Jesus to be crucified just a few days later. *This* crowd was overjoyed to see Jesus, and was giving voice to their overflowing joy. And the kind of joy they experienced *before* Jesus was crucified is a joy that we ought to experience *after* Jesus rose, now that Jesus has long since entered into His eternal resurrection life.

THE TEXT:

“And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:37–40).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

The fervency of the crowd receiving Jesus into Jerusalem was running high. Jesus was met at His first approach to Jerusalem, and He was met by the “whole multitude” of the disciples. We are talking about many thousands of people. They began to rejoice, praising God “with a loud voice,” and they were doing it as eyewitnesses of the “mighty works” that they themselves had seen. They blessed the “King” who came in the “name of the Lord.” Closely following the angels of Luke 2:14, they gave *glory in the highest*, and they declared *peace in heaven*. The angels had pronounced *peace on earth*, and *glory to God in the highest*.

The language of the crowd is saturated with language from Psalm 118, and that includes their blessing on the king who comes in the name of the Lord. But the crowd supplied the word *king*, and some Pharisees in the crowd cried out that Jesus needed to take His disciples in hand. Somebody needed to reel them in. This indicates that the Pharisees were worried actual or potential blasphemy—what was the crowd saying about the *identity* of Jesus? To this complaint, Jesus gave the famous reply that if His disciples were silenced, the stones would immediately cry out. This was a moment that absolutely *demand*ed expression.

SOME FIGURES OF SPEECH:

Saying that the stones would cry out is an example of a figure of speech called *hyperbole*, which is an exaggerated overstatement. But in this case, the overstatement is being used

to point to something that cannot possibly be overstated, and that would be the joy that this multitude was experiencing and participating in. *Peace in heaven* is not overstatement. *Glory in the highest* is not overstatement. Overstatement can help us understand what is going on, but overstatement is not the same thing as overflow. Superlatives are what we use to talk about anything that is simply beyond us. In this sort of context, we should see superlatives as overwhelmed understatement, with that understatement having used up all of its resources.

A STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

In a number of places, the New Testament describes the Christian experience in superlatives. God wants His people to experience ineffable and overwhelming joy, and He wants them to *know* that they have experienced it.

Before looking at some of the ways that God wants us to join in with those saints outside Jerusalem, there are two problems that we should examine first. One kind of Christian recognizes that the New Testament sets this kind of experience before us, realizes that we are supposed to experience it, and so goes on to *pretend* to have experienced it. The other kind of Christian wants theological permission to go on being his duddy and most reasonable self, and so he just ignores certain texts. He straps on his doctrinaire dismissals as though they were a pair of ice skates and then he glides over the superlatives.

THE PLAIN REALITY:

The apostle Peter just assumes this of his readers. “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with *joy unspeakable* and *full of glory*” (1 Pet. 1:8). *Joy unspeakable*—this is what the disciples receiving Jesus into Jerusalem experienced. If they had not given vent to their joy, then the stones along the way would have started shouting. The joy had that much pressure, and with all that they were able to say from the Scriptures, their reception of Jesus was still inadequate to the joy. *Full of glory*. That is what the seraphim say about the earth (Is. 6:3). That is what Ezekiel saw coming from a cherub to the temple (Eze. 10:4).

We conservative Reformed types almost immediately begin muttering that “this will never do.” We don’t want to become spiritual screwballs. We don’t want to fake it. We don’t want to go to meetings where they bark like dogs. Wonderful. Perfect. Just a few verses after Peter assumes joy unspeakable in his readers, who are full of glory, he makes this application. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, *be sober . . .*” (v. 13). So gird up the loins of your mind, and be sober, which should help you understand that the Peter *still* assumes that responsible Christians can rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

What does Paul pray for concerning the Ephesians? “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend

with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:17–19). For starters, he wants us to comprehend the breadth, length, depth and height of the love of God. He wants us to know what passes knowledge. He wants us to be filled with all God’s fullness. When we stagger, what does he say next? “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20). And if God can makes sons of Abraham out of stones (Luke 3:8), then He can certainly make sober mystics out of Presbyterians.



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