

Sermon for Sunday, April 11, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"ROOTING FOR THE WRONG GOD"
St. Matthew 21:1-11

Text: "And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted,
'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be he who comes in the name
of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'" --St. Matthew 21:0

Today is Palm Sunday when we celebrate the beginning of the last week of the earthly life of Jesus. On this day he made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He was greeted with cheers and hosannas as the crowd placed their cloaks in the streets before him. However, by the end of the week, when Friday had come, things had changed considerably. By Friday the crowd was shouting again, but this time the words were different. This time they cried out, "Crucify him."

And what in the world had happened between Palm Sunday with all of its jubilation and adoration and Good Friday with all of its recrimination? Well, in all fairness, I think we have to say that the Jews discovered that they had been rooting for the wrong God.

Please notice our text for this morning. The words are very important. They cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!" What did that mean? Well, dig back in the files of your mind to the Old Testament story of the young boy David. Remember when Samuel came to his father's home? God had sent him there to anoint someone as the next king. David's father, Jesse, brought all of his sons out, but not one of them was the right one. Samuel asked, "Don't you have any other sons?" "Well," said Jesse of Bethlehem, "I have a young son who is keeping the sheep." So Samuel had Jesse send for his young son David and the Lord spoke to Samuel, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." (I Samuel 16) In years to come, when the Jews looked back on the days of David, they began to expect a son of David to come and restore the nation. He would be one anointed of God for this purpose. Now the Hebrew word for "the anointed one" is the word "Messiah". And the Greek word for "the anointed one" is "Christ". Do you remember when Jesus asked his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter responded, "You are the Christ--you are the anointed one--the son of the living God." (Matthew 16:15, 16) And do you remember the story of Jesus and the woman at the well? In the course of their conversation she said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming." Messiah means anointed one, but at that point the writer of St. John inserts a parenthetical statement so the Greek readers will understand and in parenthesis he puts, "(he who is called Christ)"--and of course Christ also means anointed. Then the Bible says, "Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'" (St. John 4:25, 26)

Now, the point I am making is this. First, the Hebrew word "Messiah" and the Greek word "Christ" mean the same thing--they mean the "anointed one". Second, Jesus had begun to make it clear that he was God's anointed one that they had been expecting and looking for all those centuries. And third, that is what the Jews were saying on Palm Sunday when they cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!" On Palm Sunday they were rooting for the Messiah, for the Christ. They were rooting for God who had sent his chosen one, the anointed one, to right all the wrongs done to them and to take care of all their troubles. But by Friday they began to realize either one of two things. Either Jesus wasn't the right person they were looking for or else what they expected from him was wrong. And since they were not willing to give up what they wanted

and expected from God's anointed one, the only choice left was to say that Jesus was the wrong person. That made them so angry they took him out and crucified him.

Are you rooting for the wrong God? Have you lost a lot of your interest in the church? Have you lost a lot of your interest in religion? If so, is it because it isn't doing anything for you? Is it because you don't get out of it what you expected to get? You see, if that is the case, either you have been rooting for the wrong God or else what you expected out of your religion was the wrong thing. And which do you suspect is the real reason?

See how it works! First, the Jews expected Messiah to restore the kingdom of Israel. That is, they expected him to reaffirm their politics. Even after his resurrection, his disciples said to him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) And what they really wanted was for Israel to be great and powerful and prosperous as it had been in the days of David. So that was their expectation. But what did Jesus say? He said, "My kingdom is not of this world..." (St. John 18:36) He said, "the kingdom of God is within you..." (St. Luke 17:21) And that wasn't what they wanted at all. They had been rooting for the wrong God. Do you do that? Do you expect the church and the preacher and the Bible to support your particular political viewpoint? Lots of our liberal brethren do that--they try to twist the Bible and the Gospel and the Church to fit their particular politics. But we conservatives do the same thing. And sometimes I get the feeling that some of you aren't too happy because I don't say enough about the conservative political position--or wave the flag enough. But Jesus says, "My kingdom is in your heart--it is within you." And if we come to church to hear hosannas for our particular brand of politics, either we are rooting for the wrong God or else our expectations are wrong.

See how it works again! The Jews said to Jesus, "Look, we have been poor and in poverty long enough. We want to know what it is to have an abundance of material things. We want to be freed of all our earthly cares." And do you know what Jesus said: He said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal." (St. Matthew 6:19ff) He said things like, "Man shall not live by bread alone." He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." So, by Good Friday the Jews realized Jesus wasn't going to give them the material prosperity, the freedom from earthly cares, that they wanted. They had been rooting for the wrong God.

Are you ever guilty of that? Do you remember the song from "Fiddler On the Roof" entitled, "If I Were a Rich Man"? He wants to know in that song if it would upset some divine plan just to give him a small fortune. And it isn't that God isn't concerned about our well-being. No, it is just that, as Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Maybe that is a question many of us should ask this morning. Some of you are very blessed financially. You have great financial resources laid up. Most of us are more blessed with earthly goods than 95 percent of the people of the world. But the question is this: Where is our heart? If our hearts are with our earthly goods, we are rooting for the wrong God.

But see how it works again! The Jews had always considered themselves privileged people. After all, they were the children of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. They were the chosen people, the children of God. So, they asked Jesus to reassure them.

They wanted him to tell them they were special. And do you know what Jesus said? He said, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Issac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." He said to them; "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." And do you know, that wasn't what they wanted to hear at all! They had been rooting for the wrong God and crucifixion was too good for him.

Who do you think will go to heaven? Well, won't it be the Presbyterians? Won't it be the Presbyterians who have such dignity in their worship, who have supported their church better than most, who have been good, up-standing citizens who paid their taxes and had a good credit rating? Well, those things are all important, but Jesus says that the person who goes to heaven will be the one who does God's will. Does that fit you? And you know, I think most of us are going to be surprised to see who it is that comes from the east and the west and is invited into God's kingdom ahead of us. If we are expecting privilege with God, we may be rooting for the wrong person in Jesus.

But see how it works once more! The Jews said to Jesus, "Affirm our religious life, assure us that our religious practices are all that is required of us; tell us that we are doing enough for God." And do you know what Jesus did? He told them about a religious Pharisee and a poor sinner who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee bragged to God about his religious practices--how he fasted, he tithed. The poor sinner didn't even dare lift his face to heaven but smote his breast and cried out, "Lord, be merciful to me, a poor sinner." And Jesus said he was the one whom God blessed. Jesus did something else. He went into the temple that Palm Sunday and he overturned the tables of the money changers and drove them out. He said that God's house was to be a house of prayer. He pronounced the so-called seven woes against the Scribes and Pharisees, "Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees," he said, "for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (St. Matthew 23:27) He said, "So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

Is all you are doing enough to please God? Is he satisfied with your life? If you invited Jesus into the temple of your heart, would he be pleased with what he found or would he overturn a few tables in your life? Would he find that our hearts are often like whitewashed tombs, outwardly beautiful, but inwardly full of hypocrisy and iniquity? And when he got through examining your life would you feel that maybe you had been rooting for the wrong God?

Well, for most of us in many ways either Jesus is the wrong God or else our expectations are wrong. And what if the Jews were mistaken that holy week? What if Jesus was the right person but their expectations were wrong? If he really was the Christ, God's chosen one, wouldn't they have to change? If Jesus is really who the Bible says he is, and our lives don't measure up, then shouldn't we change, too? So, how do you change?

The answer is that you can't change--you can't rid your soul of even one dark blot. No, you simply have to confess your sins, come to Jesus just as you are, and let him into your heart. You see, he can change you. Charlotte Elliot, one of our great hymn writers of a hundred years ago, made this same discovery. She discovered that she couldn't change her life--she had to come with all of her sins and blots and stains. But she believed that Jesus could change her if she would let him into her heart. So she wrote these words that have been set to music: "Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come. Just as I am and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot; to thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come." Will you let Jesus make a triumphant entry into your heart?