

“This strange power” Mat 21:1-9

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, “The Lord needs them,” and he will send them at once.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

Today is the last Sunday before the Easter and we remember the events that took place only one week before Jesus’ death and resurrection. These events were so different from what was going to follow in the next few days.

Imagine if we were trying to find who was the most influential person in the whole history of humanity. Which name would come up? Which person would emerge as radically changing the course of the whole world?

You know the answer. It is Jesus from Nazareth. Even if we would consider this question from purely secular point of view, He is the one who has shaped the world the most. The whole Western civilization is a gift of Jesus to this world.

And, just think about it, how do we count our time? Who, or what event is the reference point to the whole world. Birth of Jesus. Time before and time after Jesus birth. We could also say that the whole world today has seven day week only because of Jesus.

Before that only the Jews observed seven day week, but after Jesus resurrection this seven day week gradually became universally accepted. Not to mention millions and billions of people whose lives have been totally changed by Jesus.

So we can say that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the most influential and the most powerful person in the history of humanity. It holds true even for those who are not Christians and who don’t know Jesus’ true identity.

Today as we reflect on the events that took place on that Palm Sunday, we’ll try to understand what made Jesus the most influential person, how did He become so powerful and what does it mean for us, as His followers and His messengers.

On that Sunday, what were people expecting? What were they longing for? Why were so many of them so excited? The nation of Israel were God's chosen people. To them were given wonderful promises of God Yahweh.

They still remembered the reign of the king David, the golden age of their nation. And to the king David God Yahweh had given the promise that his descendent will rule over Israel forever.

This promise was repeated again and again by the great prophets of Israel, and now it seemed right about time that this long promised descendent of David would finally come to restore the greatness of Israel.

The nation was struggling under the yoke of Romans. They thirsted for freedom and independence. They dreamed about being great and powerful nation again. And for this to happen they needed this leader, the Son of David.

Who could be better a candidate to this role than Jesus from Nazareth? He was a descendant of the king David. And during the last few years He had been raising higher and higher.

So many had witnessed His super-human power; seeing Him healing all the sick that were brought to Him. Casting out demons. Rebuking the nature. Feeding thousands and thousands in miraculous way. Raising people from the dead.

Besides, Jesus had shown that no one was able to compete with Him in His wisdom. Whatever His opponents tried to do, His wisdom was always way above theirs. And even when His opponents tried to attack Him physically, He could easily leave and no one was able to put hands on Him.

Who could be better a candidate to deliver the nation of Israel from all oppressors and to lead them into age of freedom, peace and prosperity? Just a short while ago Jesus had raised from the dead Lazarus, who had spent several days in his grave.

Many witnessed it happening and many came later from Jerusalem to see with their own eyes what Jesus had done. Obviously the fact that Lazarus had been dead for a while and now was alive was something people could see with their eyes.

Several days in the grave probably had left some marks on how he looked. And today, today Jesus is coming to Jerusalem. People have been wondering for a long time whether this Jesus is the One whom God had promised or not.

That day was the day when Jesus began to reveal who He was. We read that Jesus sent His disciple to get for Him a donkey and a colt. Perhaps these animals were prearranged, or perhaps this was just one more of demonstrations of Jesus miraculous powers. But that's not the point.

Jewish people knew the Word of God, probably much better than we do. They read big sections from the scriptures every Sunday and they also tried to memorize them as much as they could.

Therefore every faithful Israelite would be able to make this connection: Jesus from Nazareth was coming to Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Exactly as the prophet Zachariah had prophesized.

“Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.” Have they got it right? Have they understood that Jesus is the promised King, actually the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords?

Yes and no. Jesus was indeed the fulfilment of God’s promise to the king David. However, He was much more, much, much more than His disciples could ever imagine. And He was totally different king than people expected Him to be.

Zachariah the prophet continued: “He shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:9-10). Jesus wasn’t coming as victorious conqueror and destroyer of Israel’s human oppressors.

He was coming as victorious conqueror and destroyer of the ultimate enemies of humanity, that is, devil, sin and death. He wasn’t coming to restore Israel’s kingdom, He was coming to establish the Kingdom of God, and as Zachariah wrote, His rule will be from sea to sea and till the ends of the earth.

He wasn’t coming to give Israel what they wanted, but He was coming to give all people what they truly need. Earthly rulers rule by power and might, Jesus had come to rule by self-sacrificial service and love.

All these people cheered to Him, for they hoped He will fulfill their dreams. Jesus knew that all this shouting and spreading cloaks on branches from the trees on the road didn’t mean much. Only false expectations.

They applauded to a victor, who was coming to take the heads of their enemies off, Jesus had come, instead, to lay down His life, for all of them. For all of us. For each of you as well.

In a few days He will end up hanging on the cross, naked, falsely accused, rejected, beaten, ridiculed. He will hang there accomplishing the greatest victory ever won for the sake of the whole humanity.

Think about the cross. Such a miserable death. Shocking end to so impressive journey. How did then this Jesus become so powerful? The most powerful? Because He showed what the true power is.

Jesus indeed had the power and authority to destroy all His enemies... but instead, He chose to give up His life for them, so that by His sacrifice He could make them His dear friends.

How does this work? You can see that people can achieve a lot by coercion, they can impose their will on others if they have enough power and people have to submit to them.

This is what Marxism and Communism do. This is what Islam does. This is what political correctness does. This is what all totalitarian powers do. They force you to do what they want. This is what Jesus' disciples were hoping for. For the power that will subdue their enemies.

But is this a true power? Sure, partly it is. But why then all the powers and principalities who rule this way come and go and history shows it? Because they can't change your heart. They can force you into outwardly obedience, but they can't change your heart.

Jesus possessed absolute power. He could have subdued every earthly power. And at the end of the times He actually will. When He comes back in His divine glory. But for now, He chose to conquer hearts.

Jesus is the most powerful person in the history, for He did something that gave Him the power to change hearts. He voluntarily gave up His life so that He could save the lives of His enemies. And that's what we all are according to our fallen nature.

We who justly deserved God's wrath, were saved by the Son of God giving His life as a ransom for ours. When you hear these news, when the Holy Spirit persuades you that by our own merits each of us is heading into judgment and condemnation, but Jesus Christ has taken our place and has received what we deserve, and now gives you forgiveness and eternal life, this message changes our hearts.

How can someone love me so much? I don't deserve it. Why would innocent Son of God receive my punishment? What kind of love is this? It changes our hearts. When we are faced with this love, when we face the person who did it for us, we are changed. This is what the true power does.

It takes us, enemies of God, and makes us into His children. Not by force, but by love. We don't want to rebel against our God anymore, we want to give our lives into His hands. If this is how God loves me, let Him take me and do with me what He wills. I am His.

This is why Jesus is the most influential person. He changes hearts. This is why all powers of this world are hostile and fearful before the Gospel. They can't win it,

they can't subdue it. They can force people into obedience, but they can't change their hearts. Jesus can. And He does. You have experienced it firsthand.

What does this mean for us as Jesus' disciples? First we need to check, what do we expect from Jesus? May be we are like people who cheered Jesus as He was approaching Jerusalem? May be we only hope that He will solve our problems?

May be we want Jesus to be our God so that He would struck down our enemies and would give us what we want? Then we are missing the point of what it means to be Jesus' disciples.

Remember, what we may see as enemies, they are people for whom Jesus died, He wants to see us and them in His kingdom, free from sin and evil, restored in divine goodness and beauty.

He has sent us into this world, so that we would continue what He did. So that we would continue to expand His Kingdom. How? Praying for our enemies, praying for those who don't think of us much. Loving those who hate us and wish us evil. Serving those who don't deserve it and who will not even appreciate it.

Sharing the Good News about Jesus Christ with those, who live in rebellion against God. Caring for those who reject the Gospel and us as Jesus messengers. I know, it sounds crazy. Who would do any of this? Why? It doesn't make sense in this world.

Yes, but this is exactly what Jesus Christ did for you. This is how He saved you, not with silver and gold, but with His innocent sufferings and death. He succeeded, now you belong to Him. He has changed you heart and you will be with Him in His Kingdom forever. Nothing can change it.

Now it is our turn. To live this way. To follow our Lord, to take up His power, the power of His cross, this very strange power and to change the lives of others, thinking and praying not for our gains, but for the salvation of those who are still lost.

Don't expect to hear praise and shouts of gratitude when you do this. It may never happen in this life. Quite contrary, as Jesus predicted, like Him also we will be hated by this world.

But be sure about something much greater. The resurrection is coming and you will hear the words of praise not from someone, but from your Lord Jesus Himself, and words of infinite gratitude from those who will be in His kingdom thanks to you.

Leave with this thought. Live with this thought. Pray with this thought. Serve with this thought. Witness with this thought. May the Holy Spirit help you. Amen.