

PARABLES OF POWER #6

Not Enough Tears Yet

Read: John 12:12-25

This is a very short parable – one verse

‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit’ (John 12:24)

Once again, it expresses the principle of seed-sowing
 ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like...’ (Mark 4:26)

1. The glory of Jesus

John declares that we see the glory of God in Jesus (John 1:14). In today’s passage he talks of Jesus being glorified. When was Jesus glorified? At his birth? At his baptism? On Palm Sunday? At the resurrection?

On palm Sunday the crowd waved palm branches and shouted –

- ‘Hosanna!’ (= Salvation)
- ‘Hosanna in the highest!’
- ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ (Ps 118:25 – psalm of ascent)
- ‘Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!’
- ‘Blessed is the King of Israel!’
- ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’

2. Shout to the Lord

Shouting praises to God was common in biblical days.

For every reference to being silent before God there are 20 to speaking, singing or shouting his praise (eg Psalm 147, 153)

Remember what Jesus said about the stones...

Imagine you are one of the following—

- a mother whose son has been healed
- a girl raised from the dead
- a man cleansed of leprosy
- a friend of someone set free from demons
- a fisherman who saw the storm calmed
- one who heard the sermon on the mount
- one who hopes in the coming Messiah
- a person downtrodden by the Romans
- someone who saw the greedy money changers lose their profits

Imagine you are in the crowd waiting for Jesus and you are telling the person next to you your story about Jesus. How excited would you be? How animated?

Parables of Power – Not Enough Tears Yet

Then when Jesus appears, imagine you are joining with the crowd by shouting, whistling, cheering, waving your hands... (If you are in an appropriate place, you can actually do it!)

3. Incongruous

Jesus rode on a donkey. This seems incongruous to us – why ride a beast of burden? Why not a great warhorse? There is a hint here of something deeper...

John sees this as a fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9. When we read this verse we would expect the second half to describe Jesus as riding in a chariot or on a powerful steed, but see what it actually says –

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on... a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

In G K Chesterton's poem, the donkey gets it both wrong and right. Wrong because he thinks the cheering is for him; right because when the Lord is honourer, we, too, are blessed.

The Donkey

*When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moments when the moon was blood,
Then surely I was born.*

*With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things*

*The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.*

*Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far, fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears
And palms before my feet.*

Parables of Power – Not Enough Tears Yet

4. Glory in death

Jesus was not glorified in the shouting. After it was all over, he said, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.’

Jesus here points not to His triumphant entry, but to His death. He reminds the disciples that before a grain of wheat can produce fruit it must first die. ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit’ (John 12:24).

It was in his death that he was glorified!

5. Dying to self

There is no resurrection without crucifixion. This is also true for us. It is in dying to self. We all want to live victoriously – but the way to it is through the valley of the shadow of death.

Paul wrote, ‘I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20).

And, ‘always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies’ (2 Corinthians 4:10)

6. An ongoing experience

We live all our lives under the shadow of the cross. Everything is focused through the lens of the cross. It is only through the cross that we see things as they really are.

- Small seeds become great trees
- Not mushrooms but red gums

But before a seed can multiply it must die. This is true of us individually and as a church.

Brian was a young man who was radically converted and had a passion for God. He loved to pray and preach and prophesy. When as a youth I mentioned to my older brother that Brian had a great future in the ministry, he wisely commented, ‘Not enough tears yet...’ He proved right. Brian refused to bring his gifts to the cross and never became a minister of the gospel.

7. Much fruit

What are the things in our lives that are most dear to us that we would find most difficult to put on the cross? Good or bad?

Are we willing to sacrifice them, to bury them in the soil and to let God raise them up if He will?

Parables of Power – Not Enough Tears Yet

Money, career, marriage, calling, sport, music, education, travel, TV, IT, food, clothing, sexuality...

Are we willing to sow them in the dark soil of God's purpose for our lives? To allow Him to do what He will with them?

This is the difference between Frodo and Gollum in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Will we be Frodo or Gollum? (Although the ring is so intensely and powerfully desirable, Frodo is willing to bury it whereas Gollum is not.)

Polycarp was a great Christian martyr who was burned at the stake around AD 155. His name means 'much fruit' (*polus karpos*). When asked to deny Christ and acknowledge Caesar as lord, he replied, '*Eighty and six years have I served Him and He has done me no wrong: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?*' His death is still bearing fruit today – although he himself was willing to die rather than betray his Lord.

If we would bear 'much fruit' we also must remember this great principle, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (John 12:24)

Note: For a modern-day parable about this text see 'The tale of Stumpy and Slick' in B.Chant, *Creative Living* (Tabor College, 1986)

SOMETHING FOR YOU TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Remember: You don't have to answer all the questions: choose those that seem most relevant

Read John 12:12-25

Biblical

1. How did Jesus get the donkey on which he rode? (14). See Mark 11:1-7; Luke 19:28-36.
2. Using Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10 and Luke 19:28-40 compile a narrative of all the things that happened on the first Palm Sunday.
3. Which of the gospel writers actually mentions palm branches?
4. Make a list of the different things people cried out as Jesus came by
5. What two verbs are in stark contrast in v.25? What do we learn from this? What two things are compared and contrasted in 25?
6. What does Jesus promise us? (26).

Personal and practical

7. What can we learn from the question in verse 21?
8. What happens to a seed that does not die? (24). What are the implications for us?
9. From other parables, we know that not all crops are equally productive (eg Matthew 13:8). So how can the phrase 'much fruit' still apply? How does your answer encourage us?
10. It is easy to hold on to precious things to preserve them. What does Jesus tell us to do with them? How could this work out in practice with something precious in your life? (Note: a 'precious thing' can be either material or spiritual.)

Memorise: John 12:24

About Dr Barry Chant

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He was the initiator and former president of Tabor College, Australia.

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