

**"PALM BRANCHES OR FIG LEAVES?" or
"TWO CRUCIAL QUESTIONS"**

TEXT: Mt.21:1-11,18,19

THESIS: To examine the 2 questions asked on Palm Sunday concerning Christ.

INTRO.: A. "Palm Sunday" is followed by "Fig Tree Monday." (v.18,19) Christ spent the night in Bethany & is returning to Jerusalem. There He found a fig tree w/ **"nothing but leaves."** He cursed it & it withered & died! This is a Divine commentary on the events of "Palm Sunday." The acclaim of the crowd was mere empty enthusiasm. They too had **"nothing but leaves."** An empty profession.

ILLUS.: The emblem of the fig tree is established in it's first mention in Gen.3. It portrays self-righteousness w/no fruit to back it up. Adam & Eve's fig leaves were symbolic of their own rebellion & rejection of God's rule in their lives & their own self-righteousness. The result of their "fig leaf religion" was God's curse. So here!

B. But these events are important & **2 CRUCIAL QUESTIONS** emerge:

1) **"Who is this?"** (v.10) and 2) **"By what authority doest thou these things?"** (v.23)

I. THE TWO QUESTIONS ASKED: v.10,23

A. Question #1: "Who Is This?"

1. Asked out of ignorance:

- a. Many had never heard of Him...pilgrims in Jerus. for Passover.
- b. Many never bothered to examine the Scriptures, including the Jewish religious leaders. cf. 4,5

ILLUS.: There is nothing wrong w/being ignorant, unless the opportunity exists for you to become aware. And there is no excuse for remaining ignorant of Him or the Scriptures.

2. Asked out of curiosity:

- a. Some saw & heard the crowd & wondered.
- b. Curiosity can be a step to salvation.
- c. Curiosity w/out action can be disastrous.

ILLUS.: Curiosity leads to a recognition of a necessity...necessity leads to discovery. My own curiosity of what went on in a "tent meeting" led to my conversion. Suppose I had never acted on my curiosity. To be simply curious about death & life hereafter & never take action when truth is discovered is a terrible tragedy. Like lying in bed & smelling smoke, becoming curious & not investigating. You may die!

3. Asked out of selfish interests:

- a. "Who is this to whom you ascribe Messianic titles?" v.9
- b. "If this is the new King, I'd better get on the bandwagon."

4. Asked out of genuine concern:

- a. Some were eagerly seeking the promised Messiah.
- b. The Passover was regarded as the probable time for His appearance.

B. Question #2: ***"By what authority...?"*** v.23

- 1. Everything in life hinges on these 2 questions: is Christ God? Where does He get His authority?

ILLUS.: The questions are appalling. Christ had just cursed a fruitless fig-tree, a work of nature, & caused it to obey Him w/out question. With one sentence it withered & died & here come these black-robed priests asking ***"By what authority...?"***

- 2. Today the answer to these 2 questions is crucial.

ILLUS.: The question of authority is basic. It is being questioned today. ("No Fear") T-shirts, etc.) It stems from a lack of authority in the life. Do we have God's Word & words or not? Is there an authoritative Book? Do you have a copy? Do you know where you can get one?

I have one! It is the AV1611 or King James Bible. Here is my creed:

"I believe the King James Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, indestructible and preserved Word and words of the Living God."

II. THE TWO ANSWERS GIVEN: v.11 & v.24-27

A. An Insufficient Answer to Ques. #1: v.11

1. The **"multitude"** – as usual – doesn't have the right answer.
 - a. Though proclaiming Him King, they didn't really recognize Him.
 - b. In just 5 days this same crowd will become a mob crying: **"Crucify Him!"**
 - c. They were totally ignorant of His true mission.

Zech.9:9 *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*

ILLUS.: All 4 Gospels record this event prophesied by Zech., but leave out the words: **"having salvation"** – proof of inspiration. Cf. Lk.19:40-44

- a. This was Christ's tearful, not triumphant entry.
- b. This was Christ's crucifixion, not coronation time.
- c. This was Christ's rejection, not His reception.

2. The "**multitudes**" answer reveals a lack of understanding. v.10,11

a. There were many men of that day named "Jesus."

2 Cor.5:16 *Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.*

b. There were many "**prophets**" in those days.

ILLUS.: Jesus was indeed a prophet, but also a priest & King! Only one other man held all three offices: David: prophet (Acts 2:30; priest (2 Sam.24:25) & King (2 Sam. 1-12). cf. v.9

3. The "**multitudes**" answer is a tragedy:

a. Lost opportunity: to preach "**Christ Jesus the Lord.**"

b. Lost privilege: of receiving Christ as King & Savior.

ILLUS.: The crowd lost this oppor. due to the absence of the trappings of Kingly glory: no jewels, robes, garments, white stallions, retinue of slaves & soldiers, etc. Just a small band of disciples, a beast of burden & some palm branches. But what they saw proclaimed loudly His message that His kingdom was not of this world. Nevertheless He accepted their acclaim because He would return as a King! "**Who is this King of glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of glory.**" *Ps.24:10*

B. An Incomplete Answer to Question #2: v.23 w.v.24-27

1. They want to classify & categorize Him & explain away His miracles.
2. Jesus, knowing their hearts & their insincerity, evades the ques. & sets a trap for them.
 - a. Here is a loaded question. v.24,25
 - b. Here is a double-barreled question. v.25

ILLUS.: If they answer that John's baptism is from heaven, He will follow-up w/ "why didn't you get baptized, then?" If they say "from men" they will have a rebellion from John's followers! So they take the standard agnostic cop-out: ***"We cannot tell (know)!"***

3. Jesus refused then to answer them:
 - a. He knows they are only pretending ignorance while deliberately hiding from the truth (like many today)!
 - b. He knows they are willfully ignorant & predicts their future. v.43-45

ILLUS.: Oh, yes! He spoke so "harshly" of them & all other "atheists" & "agnostics" who are willful rejecters of a completed authoritative revelation! An "agnostic" is a willful rejecter of any truth which conflicts w/his own ideas (which he learned from other agnostics!). The reasons are self-preservation, hatred for any truth which threatens self, love of man-made authority & an intense hatred for anything which God has revealed **CONTRARY TO THEIR OWN RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING!!!**

CONCL.: There is a 3rd question which I would like to put to you (in v.28). ***"But what think YE?"*** **"Who is this? By what authority does He do these things?"** Do you know? Can you answer?

You had better quit hiding behind **"PALM BRANCHES & FIG LEAVES"** – your self-righteousness & false profession - & come out in the open & confess your sinfulness & proclaim Him your Savior, Lord & King NOW! Don't be barren like the fig-tree & experience God's curse. Accept His imparted life & fruit & gain His favor! Do it now!