

Palm Branches of Victory

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Lent

Revelation 7:9-17 ⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *Be* to our God forever and ever. Amen." ¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. ¹⁶ "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The Palm branches that you hold in your hands are a reminder that Jesus is king. They are a reminder that he is victorious, and that therefore you are victorious. The palm fronds remind us of victory, joy, life and peace through Jesus who lives and reigns in all eternity.

The book of Revelation begins with Jesus sitting on the throne. It begins with the protagonist already achieving victory. This is not the way a good story usually begins. But Revelations isn't a story. The Holy Spirit wants us to know right from the beginning how all things end. Jesus sitting on the throne. The reason the Holy Spirit does this isn't because he is spoiling the story but because it isn't just some story about some guy, this is about our lives here. If you are going to jump out of airplane you don't want to be surprised about what is in your backpack. You want to know that there is a parachute in that backpack. Revelation begins with Jesus sitting on the throne so that when it goes on to describe all the trials and tribulations that will happen, we will know how it ends. It ends not only with Jesus' victory but ours as well.

The same thing is true on Palm Sunday. Before the garden and the betrayal, before the trial and the beatings and the crucifixion, before any of that, Jesus enters Jerusalem and is hailed as king. The palm branches are lifted and his victory is proclaimed. When we lift the palm branches tonight, we also know not only that Jesus is victorious but that through him we will be also. Just as that great multitude in our sermon text lifted their palm branches in victory, so also do we.

We lift them up to our king. We lift them up in victory because Jesus is our king.

The job of a king was to care for his people. A king was to provide his people with safety, food and clothing. The palm branches remind us that our king Jesus provides all this and more for us.

John 7:37-38 37 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

The great feast that John refers to here is the feast of tabernacles, also called the feast of booths or tents. The feast of tents took place in the fall. All the people were supposed to come to Jerusalem and make tents out of leafy boughs and palms. During the festival they lived in these tents all around and inside Jerusalem. This was a reminder of how they lived in tents in the wilderness. It was also a reminder that through all the 40 years of wandering the LORD their king took care of them and provided for them. Their sandals never wore out. They received bread from heaven. The Lord opened the rock and water came out.

It was during this feast that Jesus stood up and told them, "Come to me and I will give you living water." Through Moses the Lord gave them water in the wilderness, but Jesus would give them something better. He would give them spiritual living water. Jesus is the greater rock. Just as the rock was split open to give water, so Jesus was split open on the cross, and from him came water to heal our souls and forgive our sins.

God not only provided water and food during those 40 years in the wilderness, but he also provided something far more important. He poured out his grace on his people. No matter how many times they complained and rebelled God did not destroy them. Instead, he responded to their sin with more of his grace.

The palms remind us that Jesus is our king. He has provided all that we need for this life. He has poured out upon us every good thing, but more important he has poured out his grace upon us. No matter how often we sin against him, he forgives us. He has poured out his grace upon us. The palm branches remind us that he cares for us as a king should.

The Palm branches mean rest. The job of king was not just to provide for his people but also to keep them safe and give them rest. The palm branches remind us of the rest we have through Jesus Christ.

In first kings the doors of the temple that Solomon built are described for us.

1 Kings 6:32 The two doors were of olive wood; and he carved on them figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold; and he spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees.

Not only were palm trees on the doors, but they were also on the walls of the temple, along with animals and fruits. They were also on the walls of the tabernacle. These decorations were a reminder that to come into the temple was in a sense to return into the Garden of Eden from which man had been excluded because of his sin. The temple was a picture of Jesus. Through Jesus we are able to return to the peace of the trees of Eden.

In Psalm 84 even the sparrow finds rest in the house of God.

Psalm 84:3 Even the sparrow has found a home, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young-- Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God.

Because of their sin Adam and Eve were cast out of the gates of the garden and the rest that garden offered. But Jesus our king rode into the gates of Jerusalem to face death, and through his death we receive rest from our sins. The palm branches we hold remind us that Jesus our king has given us rest.

Psalm 92:12-13 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God.

Jesus our king rides in victory. Before the battle even begins the outcome is certain. Jesus rides into Jerusalem surrounded by the reminder of his victory.

The great multitude in our text came **"out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Revelation 7:14**

Jesus still had to ride through death, but the victory was already his. We don't know what we might have to ride through in the days or years ahead, but the palm branches remind us that Jesus is our king and through him we have victory.

Our text reminds us that those waving the palm branches came out of "the great tribulation." They persevered and gained victory because they washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Many of us still have many trials and tribulations through which we still have to ride, just as Jesus still had the crucifixion ahead of him. But our victory is certain because we have been washed in his blood.

We wave our palm branches to reminds us of the victory that is ours through Jesus Christ.

Even if your life drastically turns upside down from the thrill of victory to the agony of defeat, remember who always holds the ultimate victory for you! Jesus Christ is why we hold palms, and in Jesus, you are baptized and given white robes washed by His blood. Never lose heart! You are always His child, protected under His heavenly wings. That is a promise. So, celebrate the thrill of victory this day, knowing that the agony of defeat never lasts. Amen.