

Matthew 21:10-17  
"Out of the Mouth of Babes"  
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It was the Monday of Jesus' Passion week. Four days later on Friday, Jesus would die on a Roman cross just outside the walls of Jerusalem. In our text, we read that the chief priests and scribes were indignant. They were vexed, annoyed, irritated. The King James Version reads, "they were sore displeased." They were so upset that they couldn't contain it. They had to speak up and voice their grievance. The incident that caused them to lose control was their hearing some children there in the temple repeating what many adults in Jerusalem had said just the day before.

In order to understand the anger of these chief priests and scribes, we need to review a little bit. During His three and one half years of public ministry, Jesus had been preaching His gospel and training his disciples, but He had largely been avoiding any public confrontations with the religious authorities and any public demonstrations that He was the Messiah, the prophesied Son of David. He had conducted much of His ministry in Galilee and even remoter places. He sometimes told people He healed not to tell others about it. After feeding the 5000, He withdrew to a mountain when the crowd wanted to make Him a king.

Now all of that has changed because Jesus believed His time had come, the time for Him to die as the sacrifice for the sins of His people. So now instead of avoiding demonstration and confrontation, He planned it and sought it out. He went to Bethany, which is not far from Jerusalem, and there publicly raised His friend Lazarus from the dead for all to see. The news of this public miracle quickly reached Jerusalem. Then not long after that, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover. He traveled not secretly but openly, riding on a donkey in obvious fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9:

9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; he is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Crowds followed Him from Bethany and other places. Crowds came out of Jerusalem to meet Him and to wave palm branches before Him. This is Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. When the crowds began to acclaim Him as the long awaited Messiah, He did not argue with them or try to restrain them. He tacitly accepted what they were saying as correct. The multitudes accompanying Him cried out,

"Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!"

The word "hosanna" is taken from Psalm 118, verse 25, and it literally means "save now, I pray." The word "hosanna" is literally a prayer for salvation, but over the years it had come

also to be a word of praise to the One who saves. Thus in Revelation 7:10 where the people of God in heaven stand before God's throne with palm branches in their hands, they cry out, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" "Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb" is another way of saying, "Hosanna to our God and to the Lamb." "Hosanna" is another way of saying, "Praise the Savior!"

So when the multitudes on Palm Sunday cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were acknowledging Jesus as the long prophesied Messiah who would bring salvation and deliverance to Israel.

That happened on Sunday. On Monday, Jesus returned and cleansed the temple. He "went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves."

As word spread that Jesus was there in the temple, the blind and the lame flocked into its courts, for they knew Jesus to be the Great Physician. They knew that where Jesus is, "the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." So they came to the temple, and He healed them.

Back in 1982, I heard Francis Schaeffer speak at the PCA General Assembly in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He challenged us to strive to have a ministry characterized by both truth and love. That is difficult because truth by its very nature is

exclusive and love by its very nature is inclusive. Truth judges, and love overlooks. Truth rejects, and love accepts. Truth draws lines, and love erases them. Conservatives stress truth and they become the fighting fundies. Liberals stress love, and they become worldly sentimentalists. It is easy to have a ministry that stresses truth without love, and it is easy to have a ministry that stresses love without truth. But to have a ministry that stresses both truth and love, a ministry that is simultaneously consistent with both truth and love, that is be like Christ. And we can be like Christ only in the power of Christ. Only in the power of Christ can we maintain our zeal for holiness and our compassion for people.

We see both truth and love in Christ's ministry here at the temple. What a wondrous scene! First, some were expelled from the temple, and then others were welcomed in. First, we see Jesus flashing with the fire of holy indignation, and then we see him filled with the warmth of tender compassion.

Then we read about the children. Among those who were attracted to the spectacle at the temple were some children. These youth in Israel saw this Jesus who had with such jealous firmness driven out those who polluted the temple, quickly reach out with tender compassion to those in need. These young children responded to this scene by crying out the words they had heard from the adults the day before: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" As this Children's Hosanna rang through the porches and courts of the temple, the chief priests and scribes lost control. They were intimidated by the Person of Jesus and by the crowds which acknowledged Him, and so they had kept

quiet. But hearing the Children's Hosanna was the straw that broke the camel's back. They were now so filled with inner rage that they could no longer contain themselves. They said to Jesus, "Do you hear what these children are saying?" Of course, Jesus heard the words of the children as they rang from the rafters. The point of their question was not whether Jesus had good hearing. You have to read between the lines. They were implying that Jesus should be offended by the children's words and so should rebuke the children and stop them.

These chief priests and scribes found the Children's Hosannas offensive because these words of Messianic praise were addressed to Jesus. They had not been offended when the temple had been turned into a stockyard and a house of merchandise, but the words of these children offended their twisted and distorted hearts.

Jesus responded to this implied criticism and complaint. He was not going to rebuke the children and stop their praise because their words were canonical, covenantal, and consistent.

Let's now quickly examine these three points.

First, the Children's Hosanna was **canonical**, by which I mean Scriptural or Biblical. Jesus responded to their question with His own question. He asked, "Have you not read?" Here too we must read between the lines. The scribes were professional students of Scripture who were constantly studying the Old Testament, and yet they read them with a veil over their eyes. Jesus with His question was implying that the scribes, these

professional students of Scripture, did not really know the Scriptures.

Jesus referred them to the 8th Psalm, which says, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants [God has ] perfected praise."

Let me read you a little more from the 8th Psalm; verses 3 and 4 ask another question,

- 3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
- 4 What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of  
man that You visit him?

Here is the point. Nature in all its glory sings praise to God, its Creator. Think about the glories of the heavens with the sun that rules the day and the moon that rules the night and the infinite multitude of stars that fill the heavens. And yet these are not the crown of God's creation. The crown of creation is humanity, because God created humanity in His own image. For that reason, praise to God from the lips of the least of humans, even praise from babes and nursing infants, means more to God than all the mute testimony to God's greatness that comes from all the rest of creation in its immense splendor and intricate wonder. I think that is the main point in the opening words of the 8th Psalm:

- 1 O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the  
earth, who set Your glory above the heavens!

2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

Jesus is here giving a proof text to prove that it is appropriate for these children to mimic their parents and to sing His praise. It is canonical in the sense of Biblical and Scriptural. It is in accordance with the revealed will of God.

Secondly, it is **covenantal** in the sense that the children of believers are a valid part of the covenant community. They are sprouting branches on the olive tree of Israel, and from their earliest days, they should be bearing the fruit of praise. Church membership and church attendance are not for adults only. Children also are a part of the covenant people.

Christ's own disciples at one point did not want to allow some mothers to bring their children to Jesus for a blessing, but Jesus rebuked His disciples and said, Let the little children come. These scribes did not want these children in the temple singing Hosannas to Jesus, but Jesus said, Let the children sing.

The Greek word translated "perfected" in the statement, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise," is interesting. It is a word elsewhere used to refer to the mending of nets. In our father Adam, humanity first was created in the image of God and then fell into sin. We are damaged goods. And yet God is working to mend and restore us through the grace of the covenant so that we can sing His praises. And God performs this work of grace not only in adults but also in the babes and nursing infants of His covenant people.

I see in this incident an illustration of how the covenant is supposed to work. On one day, the children of Jerusalem hear their parents singing hosannas to Jesus. Then the next day, the children mimic the adults and sing their own hosannas to Jesus. God uses the parents' example of faith and devotion in the lives of their children as a means of grace. Paul said that the genuine faith that was in Timothy had first dwelt in his grandmother Lois and in his mother Eunice.

Beloved, this is a sobering thought. If our children are mimicking us, copying us, does that mean they are singing Hosannas to Jesus? Does that mean that we will find them in the house of God singing Jesus' praise? That is the way it is supposed to be.

The Children's Hosannas are canonical, covenantal and **consistent**. By consistent, I mean consistent with the way Jesus works and consistent with the kingdom Jesus established. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey as opposed to a war steed to symbolize that He came as the Prince of Peace. He came not as a military conqueror who was going to overthrow the pagan Roman oppressor with military force. Many of the adults who sang Hosannas to Jesus had not understood this. They were still looking for a political Messiah. The children in their simplicity probably sang their hosannas with greater understanding. They had more of that simple, uncomplicated trust which Christ referred to when he said that one must become as a little child to enter the kingdom of God.

Also, the children were weak and helpless compared to the adults. God uses the weak to confound the strong and the foolish to confound the wise so that God will receive all the glory. These children of the covenant with their simple faith and in their physical weakness were better representatives of the kingdom that conquers by spiritual means and apart from worldly power. God, for His own greater glory, chooses to use praise out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants to silence the enemy and the avenger.

Jesus did not silence the Children's Hosannas because they were canonical, covenantal and consistent.

The chief priests and the scribes were indignant when they heard the children singing praise to Jesus. Let us instead rejoice when God perfects praise out of the mouths of our covenant children. Let us pray that God will work His saving grace in all our hearts, both young and old, that we may all together as the people of recognize Jesus as our Savior, look to Him alone for our salvation, and sing Hosannas to the Son of David.