

"These Stones Cry Out!"

A sermon for Palm Sunday

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Luke 19:28-40

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After Jesus said this, he continued on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

As Jesus came to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he gave two disciples a task. He said, *"Go into the village over there. When you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying it?' just say, 'Its master needs it.'" Those who had been sent found it exactly as he had said.*

As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, *"Why are you untying the colt?"* They replied, *"Its master needs it."*

They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road.

As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. They said,

*Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord.
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens.*

Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, *"Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!"* He answered, *"I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."*

Common English Bible

Despite the many times I've read this story, and the many times I've celebrated Palm Sunday, I never really noticed it. Did you?

We just watched that video clip from *The Gospel of John* movie. It shows both of them. We listened to that song, *"Palm Sunday: Foolish Knight."* It describes both of them. We sang *"All Glory, Laud, and Honour"* as we began worship. It mentions them. As we were gathering, we heard other songs that talk about them as well.

Palms and hosannas.

Palm branches, waved as victory flags and laid down like a royal red carpet.

"*Hosannas*" shouted and sang. It's a Hebrew phrase. "Save us, please!" "Save us, we pray!" It's their heart-full cry for help.

All 4 Gospels in the Bible tell of that day. Each has palm branches and hosannas. Except in Luke's telling. We just heard that. No mention of palms nor "*Hosannas!*" I'd never noticed.

Instead Luke talks about rocks. Stones, ready to shout.

II

Already, some are worrying that there is too much shouting.

We think of Pharisees as bad guys. Jesus was always tangling with them. "Pharisaical" has come to mean hypocritical and self-serving. Some probably were. Maybe these ones were fretting that Jesus was about to knock them out of their positions and take away their power. . . . Except, few Pharisees had position or power. They were not the elite.

The Pharisees were a grassroots renewal movement. They were about everyday people returning to the practices of holiness and faithfulness. This, they believed, would restore Israel before God and vindicate God's People among the nations. They wanted God's kingdom to finally come!¹

The Pharisees were "of the people." Maybe these ones worried this crying-out-loud crowd was turning political. (It was.) It could become a riot, storm the capital with many hurt and killed. Unlike some populists, these were showing prudence and principle. After all, there already was a king, and an emperor too. But this crowd is shouting about *Jesus: Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord!* That's got to spell trouble

Maybe they were worried *for* Jesus. Some Pharisees were sympathetic to him. They'd already warned him that the king was out to get him.²

¹ For this information about the Pharisees, N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An introduction to the history, literature, and theology of the first Christians* (London, UK: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2019), 124-128.

² Luke 13:31-32. ". . . Jesus had Pharisaic sympathizers like Nicodemus; Jesus received and accepted dinner invitations from Pharisees; some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod Antipas was trying to kill him, and many Pharisees joined the early church." Wright and Bird, 124.

Whatever their reasons, they tell Jesus: *"Stop it! Now!"*

III

"If these people turn silent," Jesus says back, *"these stones will start up!"*

Jerusalem is full of stones. One type is actually called "Jerusalem stone."³ A particular sort of that is *melekeh* or "king's stone." It's quarried pure white, and with time turns into a golden yellow. That was used in the most important structures, like the Temple Mount's Western Wall.⁴ You can't imagine Jerusalem without picturing stones.

"If these walls could talk, . . ." but you know they don't. Stones bear witness, silently.

Suppose they could speak? What would they shout?

The Greek word used here is *krazó*. It's an onomatopoeia (a delightful word itself). An onomatopoeia sounds like it means. *Tick-tock* sounds like a clock. *Meow* sounds like a cat's cry. *Zip* sounds like a zipper. *Krazó* sounds like a raven's cry. It's an urgent scream or shriek.⁵

We're not talking about a well-formed philosophical treatise here. Nor a poetic Shakespearean sonnet. Nor a politician's rehearsed stump speech.

If those stones would speak, what would they shout? The cry of the soul! The hope of the spirit! The ache of the heart!

Krazó! Cries of praise! Shouts of victory! *Blessed is Jesus. He's here! God's messiah!*⁶

Krazó! Cries for rescue! Pleas for help. *Hosanna! God, rescue us. Lord, save us. Jesus, deliver us.*

Krazó! Cries of pain! Weeps of sorrow! *Lord, it's been so long. God's, it's been too much.*

Maybe these are the sort of screams and shouts, shrieks and cries that, if the crowds were to fall silent, would burst from these stones.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem_stone

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meleke>

⁵ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2896.htm>

⁶ My paraphrase of the crowd's words in verse 38a. Messiah is a title that clearly has royal overtones.

IV

It's not going to happen, of course. They're stones. It's hyperbole. Jesus is overstating things. He is exaggerating for effect. He does things like.⁷

Stones don't shout! Stones don't have lungs to gather up air. Stones don't have diaphragms to force it up. Stones don't have vocal chords to shape its sound. Stones don't have mouths to let cries loose. Of course not.

Of course not

Of course the universe's swirl of dust and energy could never come together in exactly the configuration and conditions necessary to form, nurture, protect and sustain life. The physics seems . . . astronomical.

But here you are — Life! — to wonder at such a thing. Thanks be to God.

Of course cells could not form, divide, change, and evolve to create lungs, diaphragms, vocal chords, and lips. The biology seems . . . delusional.

But here you are, set to sing. Even if you're off key, thanks be to God.

Of course a Jewish tradesman in a hick backwater, strung up for sedition and excruciatingly executed, could not by his own sacrifice of pure goodness lift away the guilt of your sinful wrongness. The philosophy seems . . . scandalous.

But here you are, by Jesus saved, made right, and forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Of course this very dead man could not rise to life, this brutalized victim could not rise in power, and his own death could not remove the poisonous stinger from yours. The theology seems . . . unsophisticated.

But he did, all of it. So here you are at the beginning of your eternal life. Thanks be to God.

V

Of course, stones do not cry out. Of course not. . . .

We won't know. That crowd did not stop shouting. So those stones did not have to

⁷ For example, see Matthew 5:29 and Luke 17:33.

start. But if they had stopped. . . .

You! Keep crying out . . . but know that if you cannot cry out any more, God might very well raise up stones to cry for you!

Cry out your joys. Cry out your delights. Cry out your celebrations of what God has done with you, and what God is doing in you, and what God has in store for you. Cry out about who God is. Cry out, because you are a witness. We need to hear from you. . . . But if you cannot cry out. If you're filled with doubt. If you struggle to believe. If your faith is tired. Don't worry. God might raise up stones to cry for you!

Cry out your needs. Cry out your pleas. Cry out to God for help. Cry out for healing. Cry out for restoration. Cry out for justice. Cry out for peace. Cry out for a mending of so much that's been broken. Cry out for others. Cry out for yourself. Cry out for the whole world. You are a witness. We need to hear from you . . . But if you cannot cry out. If words fail. If you don't know what to ask. Don't worry. God might raise up stones to cry for you!

Cry out your tears. Cry out your crushing disappointments. Cry out what has been lost. Cry out what has been taken. Cry out loneliness. Cry out betrayal. Cry out grief. You are a witness. We need to hear from you. . . . But if you cannot cry out. If tears have been drained, sobs exhausted, and you're simply done. Don't worry. God might raise up stones to cry for you!

Actually, that's what we are. Jesus' People. "Living stones," we've been called.⁸ That's what we do. Cry out together. Cry out for those who cannot. Thanks be to God.

⁸ 1 Peter 2:5.