**1] When the Cheering Stopped**

Some years ago, a book was written by a noted American historian entitled “When The Cheering Stopped.” It was the story of President Woodrow Wilson and the events leading up to and following WWI. When that war was over Wilson was an international hero, there was a great spirit of optimism abroad, and people actually believed that the last war had been fought and the world had been made safe for democracy.

On his first visit to Paris after the war Wilson was greeted by cheering mobs. He was actually more popular than their own heroes. The same thing was true in England and Italy.

The cheering lasted about a year. Then it gradually began to stop. It turned out that after the war the political leaders in Europe were more concerned with their own agendas than they were a lasting peace.

At home Woodrow Wilson ran into opposition in the United States Senate and his League of Nations was not ratified. Under the strain of it all the President’s health began to break. He suffered a stroke and in the next election his party was defeated. So it was that Woodrow Wilson, a man who barely a year earlier had been heralded as the new world Messiah, came to the end of his days a broken and defeated man.

It’s a sad story, but one that is not altogether unfamiliar. The ultimate reward for someone who tries to translate ideals into reality is apt to be frustration and defeat. There are some exceptions, of course, but not too many.

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Jesus had his opposition. But his following was growing to a critical point.

***Matthew 21:1-11: Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5  “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’ ”***

***6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. 8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.***

***2] 9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” 10 And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” 11 And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”***

The shouts of Hosanna to the Son of David rang out.

* Jesus was their hope and Savior, but not as they imagined.

Why did the masses so radically turn against him? How did the shouts of Hosanna on Sunday transform into the shouts of crucify him on Friday?

* Corruption of the flesh.
* Corruption and abuse of His words.
* A mob mentality.

Even more personal, why does our fervor for Him dwindle? Why does our passion wane?

* Revelation 2 remarks…”you have abandoned your first love”.
* Why do our shouts of praise become groans and murmurs of complaining, like the Israelites in the wilderness? We are all prone to this.

Today…in the scope of this Palm Sunday…we ask…*Why did the cheering stop*?

1. **3]** Call to Commitment

One reason why the cheering stopped is that Jesus began to talk more and more about commitment. Just before Palm Sunday, a very interesting scene occurred.

The rich young ruler had it altogether. He knew the commands to follow. But his heart was not in full surrender.

***4] Matthew 20:21-22: Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.***

Their measure of success and religiosity was challenged. Rich = Success, Honor, Value

It was no longer about what they brought to the table, but about whether they were willing to accept the cross that Jesus was about to endure.

**5]** A second challenging part of Christ’s message at this point…Jesus is preparing them to not just be followers, but to lead.

* When the 5,000 were hungry he feed them.
* When they brought their sick to him, he healed them.
* When a woman is caught in adultery and is about to be stoned, it is Jesus who comes to her rescue and saves her.

His time on earth was not much longer…and the need for committed leaders was now.

The triumphant entry of Jesus was quite a spectacle, but the events, and the message that followed in that next week was challenging.

Hungry one morning, Jesus stops by a fig tree and finds no figs. He withers the tree because it is producing no fruit. Jesus demands fruitful committed lives. **(Matthew 21:18-22)**

A Parable is told: Who is more committed? The son who says, “I will work” and then does not or the son who says, “I will not work,” repents, and gets the work done? It is the son who does the work. He’s looking for workers who will gather the harvest. **(v. 28-32)**

The greatest commandment is given: Love God and Love your neighbor; again, a call to commitment. **(Matthew 22:37-38)**

His teachings, “be watchful for we do not know the day or hour of his return,” is also here. **(Matt. 24)**

Kenneth Carder wrote recently: “Oftentimes, in Christianity, marketing techniques have replaced response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the means of membership enlistment. The basic appeal is to self-defined needs rather than a call to radical discipleship. The church’s mission all too often is to meet its members perceived needs rather than to serve God’s need for a redeemed, reconciled, and healed world.”

* The basic message can easily become…”Look what God can do for you!”

**6]** If you’re simply looking for God to please you, in this life, you are going to be sorely disappointed. If you’re looking to please God, then Heaven is your reward.

Discipleship means knowing Jesus Christ. Commitment means after the shouts of Hosanna we walk to Golgotha carrying his cross of suffering.

When the rich young ruler walked away, he didn’t walk alone. There were others who found the cost of commitment to be too great.

Jesus was no longer talking only grace. He was now speaking about the message of spiritual commitment that rests with a person who has accepted God’s grace. The cheering began to stop when Jesus began to speak of commitment.

1. **7]** Call to Sacrificial Love

Secondly, the cheering stopped when Jesus dared to suggest that all people are worth loving.

Just after his triumphant entry…Jesus goes to the temple and drives the moneychangers out.

After the temple has been emptied, however, he then invites in the lame, the poor, the sick, the outcasts of society (in Matthew 21).

Those aren’t the people that we want to market. Those aren’t the faces that we want to attract people to our church.

Jesus is for EVERYONE.

All people have access to God. Jesus is saying that this is what the Kingdom of God is going to be like.

I cannot help but notice the chain of events as Jesus comes to Jerusalem. The ones who are constantly making reference to Jesus’ Messiahship are the disenfranchised of society. On the way to the capital city a poor blind beggar cries out: “Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.” And what was the response of the crowd? They rebuked him and told him to shut up.

Look at the children in Matthew 21, who are worshiping Jesus. who are getting under the skin of the Pharisees. They ask Jesus, “Do you hear what these children are saying? Are you going to allow this Jesus? Do you not deny this?”

Jesus says: If I tried to quiet them the very stones would still scream it out. The point is that time and again it is the ones who are powerless in society who recognize Jesus’ Messiahship. Those who have power resist it.

Why did the cheering stop? Because on Palm Sunday, Jesus opened the doors of the church to everyone. Are we okay with that?

1. **8]** Call to the Cross

Finally, I would suggest to you that the cheering stopped because Jesus began to talk more and more about a cross. In the early part of his ministry Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God. This they wanted to hear about, especially since they misunderstood this kingdom to be a restoration of Israel to the days of King David’s glory. But increasingly Jesus began to talk about sacrifice—even giving up your life.

The story is told of a pee-wee baseball game. When the young boy got up to the plate he looked over to the coach, and he saw him give the signal to sacrifice bunt. He then promptly proceeded to take three big swings and strike out. The coach ran up to him and said: Didn’t you see me give you the signal to sacrifice? Yes, the boy replied. But I didn’t really think that you meant it.

Isn’t that what we so often say to God? Yes, lord, I heard that talk about sacrifice but I didn’t really think that you meant it. The cross says emphatically that he did mean it.

**9]** "Why did the cheering stop?" It stopped because Jesus more and more began to talk about commitment; it stopped because Jesus opened up the doors of the church and invited people to come in. But most importantly of all, it stopped because Jesus began to talk about a cross.

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***Mark 14:22-25: And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”***