

As we look at the events of Palm Sunday & Good Friday-days of Triumph & Disaster for the Lord, I'm reminded of a couplet from Kipling's 'If..' " If you can meet with triumph & disaster

And treat these two imposters just the same..."

Perhaps, in some ways that's what He did, though at a terrible cost, as shown by His Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. There was the apparent Triumph, when much of Jerusalem accepted Him as Messiah & King on Palm Sunday followed by the Disaster of His arrest, rigged trial, desertion by His followers & the terrible & unique separation from His Father. Of course, this was followed by the real Triumph of Easter-the Resurrection & Ascension back to glory.

Matthew's account of His entry into Jerusalem as Messiah & King echoes parts of the victory hymn of Ps. 118. This celebrated the return of the king, victorious through God's help. Verse 19 shows the procession to the Temple-verse 20 is the response of the Levites at the gate. The king gives thanks in verses 21-22, whereupon the chorus raises Hosannas 23-25, after which the priest blesses the king-"blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" 26 & to conclude everyone sings with joy about the procession 27-29. Similarly, Zechariah's prophecy (9: 9) contains details of the entry of a triumphant king sent by God, which explains the Lord's use of a donkey.

The Lord's entry has many important symbols, which, though recognized at the time, may seem strange to us. They tell of His character as a gracious King & of the peaceful nature of His Kingdom.

First, there is the ass-this was a sign of royal power & peace, whereas a horse was the mark of a military conqueror or a political revolutionary. In 1917, after the Ottomans in Palestine surrendered General Allenby, I think, entered Jerusalem on foot to make a somewhat similar point. The foal, on which no one had ridden before, hints that the rider was someone special, who was worth more than a second hand mount.

