

The Reason People Shouted Acclaim



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**Fifth Avenue at 29th Street,
New York**

Published by
FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING
Pawling, New York

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Scripture: Mark 13:31

STANDING solitary and alone, like some impregnable Everest, Jesus Christ towers over the landscape of human life and history. In every time, in every era, men have gazed in admiration and awe at the colossal figure of the Nazarene. He is the sensation of the ages.

On Palm Sunday each year we celebrate an incident in the long ago when Jesus enjoyed a brief earthly triumph. We do this gladly because deep in our hearts we all love Jesus. Most of us first met Him in childhood. We were introduced to Him in godly homes. "To Him the first fond prayers are said the lips of childhood frame. The last low whispers of our dead are burdened with His name." From childhood's glorious hour to the time when we go down into the valley of the shadow, it is to Him that we speak in the deeper moments of this life.

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This is a recorded transcription of a sermon delivered extemporaneously by Dr. Peale at Marble Collegiate Church.

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The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem depicted in the Scriptures has a remarkable skill and artlessness about it. God knows how to do things. When, for example, He wanted to bring up the greatest man in all the long history of the American people, where did He have him born? In one of the great and wealthy homes of the nation? Not at all! He had him born in Kentucky, in a mud-plastered, windowless cabin, the beams of which were hewn out of the forest. And when He wanted to bring the Prince of Peace to earth, where did He give Him birth? In some glittering palace on the Tiber? Not at all! He had Him first see the light of day not in a dwelling made by hands, but in a cave where were kept the cattle and the sheep. The first sound the Babe heard, probably, was the bleating of lambs or the soft nuzzling of the cattle. Nobody but God would think of that.

So, when Jesus had His great moment of earthly triumph, how was that done? In the usual manner, with promotion agents preceding Him, with trumpeters blowing martial music and followed by men with spears who roughly shoved aside the populace? Not at all. The multitudes gathered — the simple, humble poor. They heard that He was coming and they went out to meet Him.

Did He ride on a white horse, caparisoned in splendor, Himself clad in armor? Not at all. Instead, He rode on an ass, a donkey. The donkeys of the Holy Land are little, almost miniature donkeys, with very small hoofs. They are scarcely larger than a big dog. I wanted to bring one home with me from the Holy Land, but my wife thought otherwise. A man would normally have to double up his legs to sit astride one of them else his feet would drag on the ground.

Jesus, we know, had a strong physique; He had to

have. The way they portray Jesus in stained-glass windows as a nice, soft-looking figure is a blasphemy, if you ask me. For how could anybody do as He did and not be a strong man? For example, they put Him through a trial that lasted one whole long night. They were double-crossing Him, and He knew it. And when you know it, that drains you of energy. Then the next morning they took Him into the courtyard, put a crown of thorns on His head, jammed it down so that the blood ran over His face and neck, and He lost a lot of blood. That takes the strength out of you. Then they beat Him with whips; they spit on Him; they laughed at Him. That takes it out of you too. Then they made a great, big, heavy cross, an enormous cross-beam of wood, and told Him to carry it. And He did; He carried it a long, long way.

Don't tell me any weak man could act that way. The depiction of Jesus as an ethereal, feminine kind of a character is nonsense. I have the firm belief that if He went into a church this twentieth-century morning He could handle any man in the congregation, no matter how tough he was. The Saviour of the world is not a weakling. He is a man's man. And the whole world loves a man's man.

THERE is a great opportunity for men's men in this day and age. Those who stay that way will rule this country, for there is a process going on here that isn't good. The men are becoming more like women and women more like men. Some of the manly women that I've seen are a lot more admirable than some of the feminine men. Only that nation lives that has womanly women and manly men. Every time you see one of these long-haired characters with the slim pants you can say to yourself, "There goes

the degradation of the United States."

Well, Jesus Christ, the great head of the Christian Church, was a man-sized man. And real men and real women go for Him. So when He came into Jerusalem that day they threw palm branches in the way. They were excited. They shouted for Him. They shouted acclaim.

This in itself indicates that there has since been a departure from the great days. You see, when a powerful movement begins it captures people. It gets hold of them. They go for it. They are so excited that they shout. But after a while it settles down into rigid forms; it has traditions and accepted appurtenances; the life is crushed out of it; and it becomes finally just a nice, beautiful thing. People who want to do something for the world find no life in it — so they go out and they shout for something else.

In every city in the world today you will find people out on the streets shouting for something, especially the student population. What are you shouting for? I tell you, friends, what we need to do is to turn the churches inside out and upside down and start shouting for the fact that Jesus Christ has the only answer to our time; really get worked up about it and start a new, vital movement, a movement on fire with vitality and power. Dull, nice, formalistic sweetness-and-light religiosity has no impact on the life of our time.

So they shouted acclaim to Him. Why did they shout for Jesus? Why do we shout for Him now? Because He gets hold of you. There is something about Him, some indefinable quality that grips a person.

I read somewhere about a young pilot, flying alone, who got off course and found himself in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Suddenly he seemed to see a face through

the mists. He couldn't believe his eyes. But there it was, a huge face. He came nearer and saw not one face, but four faces, carved in the eternal granite of the Black Hills, the faces of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt — the work of Borglum, the great sculptor. The young American pilot was fascinated. He made several turns to come back and see those faces again and again. And as he flew away he looked back until the faces were lost in the mists of gathering evening.

Thus it is that each of us on his flight across the years has seen a face and been fascinated by it. Browning expressed it for us, "That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows . . ." What is in that face? Love for us, understanding for us, forgiveness for us, kindness for us. Many a boy dying on a battlefield in the mists of his fading life has looked up and seen that face. And as we have laid our dead away we've seen that face, that face full of love and compassion.

An, yes, He grips people, even the roughest. Sometimes I think He especially grips the roughest, for some such men I've known come the most readily to Him. What do you think could be the rapport between Jesus and some rough-tough character? The answer is: reality. He who is real, no matter how rough he may be, he goes for Jesus, because He too is real. An illustration of that — one I'll never forget — is the following:

I was making a speech one evening in a swanky hotel ballroom in Boston at a dinner for the participants in a big industrial convention. There were about fifteen hundred people present, mostly men. Before the dinner meeting they had a cocktail party, but even so there were two tables where the men had drinks served to them

during dinner. This was contrary to the rules of the convention, and the secretary of the meeting was upset about it. But it sometimes happens that a few smart-alecks defy the rules. These fellows went on consuming whiskey and they were pretty drunk, or at least they thought they were.

Now there is nothing so distracting to a public speaker as to have some little group in his audience having a party while he is trying to make a speech. I said to the chairman of the meeting, "Look. I can get a plane back to New York, so let's forget my speech. There is no use my trying to talk with those people carrying on this way."

"Oh," the chairman pleaded, "Dr. Peale, we advertised that you were going to speak. You've just got to speak. If you don't, we have no program."

"Well," I replied, "no speaker can overcome this resistance. If you can't control them, how do you expect me to control them?"

He then went over and spoke to the men, but he couldn't bring them to order. However, this became a challenge to me, to see if I could handle the situation. And I prayed a powerful prayer. "Lord, help me to get those characters under control." Finally I got up and told one of the best jokes I knew. It went over pretty well and these men joined in the general laughter. They too thought it was funny, I guess. I tried another one, which likewise got over fairly well. Then I got down to what was rather more serious. Still the heavy-drinking group were making a hubbub. Presently I paused — not intentionally, but just in the course of my talk — and dead silence fell, even among them.

Then there rang out, from some man who was pretty drunk (for you could tell from his voice and enunciation), there rang out over that vast silent ballroom, so that every-

one distinctly heard, the profane use of the name Jesus Christ. There was a shocked silence. I hadn't any idea what to say, but the Lord helps you in such circumstances. "Yes, my friend, that is right. You have just mentioned your best friend. I'll guess that you met Him when you were a little child. Your mother introduced you to Him, and over all the years He has never let you down. Probably the last name you will name when you die will be the name you just mentioned, Jesus Christ."

There is silence here now as I tell of this. There was silence there all through that big meeting. The men who had been so uproarious were suddenly cold sober. And from then on — well, I never had such a reception from an audience.

Later, after the meeting, a big, tough-looking character came up to me and grabbed me by the hand. There was a mist in his eyes as he said, "It was I who called on His name. I love Him the same as you do. I'm ashamed of myself. I guess maybe I'll never speak His name that way again."

Once again I saw the amazing power of Jesus, a strong man loved by a strong man. Here was just the kind of fellow who would have been somewhere along that road-way to Jerusalem, shouting for Him — shouting acclaim.

JESUS grips people. Why is it that He grips them? Because He understands them and He loves them and He believes in them, no matter what they do. He follows them until they turn around and take Him to themselves. That is why His influence upon human history has survived while other influences have faded away.

Another reason they shouted acclaim for Him is that among all men who have ever lived Jesus has the truth.

Truth is not an opinion; truth is not a point of view. There have been many great men with opinions — and they have been creative. There have been many great men with points of view — and they have been creative. But as one deeply perceptive American writer, James Russell Lowell, observed a century ago, "Time makes ancient good uncouth . . ." — and you have to have new opinions and new points of view.

Jesus didn't have an opinion, nor a point of view. He had and has the truth about human nature and about God and about life. He taught the basic truth that the universe is founded not upon hate, prejudice, pride or force, but upon love — love of God, love of man, belief in God, belief in man under God. He was always talking about love and telling people to love one another.

Everywhere people gave Him the laugh. I can imagine the first time those Roman soldiers heard Him say that to people — big fellows standing there with spears, sneering with laughter. "What's this?" they mocked, "what are You telling them? Love? Whoever heard of such a thing? You don't get anywhere with love. The spear is what does it, or the sword. Our army, that's what does it." And they laughed. Ever since, the stupid people have laughed. But they have passed away, while Jesus has stayed. He is here. They're not.

One day Jesus said an amazing thing: "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." Meaning, "I have the truth. How can it pass away? The truth lives; the truth is eternal."

What did the Roman soldiers say to that? "Why," they said, "listen to the man talk. Does He think Rome is going to pass away? Does He think the palaces on the banks of the Tiber are going to decay? Does He think the Roman

legions are going to pass away?"

Well, they did. And great Athens of ancient days passed away. The great philosophers who spoke in the Agora have all gone. I myself have been there where in times past stood probably the most glittering city in all the history of civilization. In fact, they referred to it as "that great Babylon" on the banks of the Euphrates. I've wandered around there, picked up a few bricks and at evening time heard the frogs croak in the tall grasses. Those civilizations have all gone. Where did they go? Where is He? His words have never passed away. Why? Because He has the truth.

I remember a poem by Shelley:

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Who was this Ozymandias? He must have been quite a man to have such a big statue in this place that must have been his capital city. Now it is below the shifting sands of the desert.

ISN'T it interesting how they come and how they go? You remember that little fellow in Berlin, the paper-hanger? He used to shout and scream that his empire would last a thousand years. And you remember that fat man in Rome? He used to shout from a balcony. He said he was going to reconstruct the empire of the Caesars. Well, he died one day too, and they strung his body up by the heels, alongside that of his mistress.

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." So get yourself a better opinion of Jesus. He is somebody, I tell you.

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does His successive journeys run;

There has never been anybody like Him in all the history of mankind. He is incomparable because He had the truth and has it now. He has love for people and a strange, mysterious power to change men—to take the bad out of them and put the good in, to take weakness out of them and put strength in, to take hate out of them and put love in, to take dishonesty from them and make them honest. Jesus can change anybody. Because all of us, wistfully down in our hearts, want to be better than we are, we continue to follow Him, hoping, praying, dreaming. One day we meet Him and are changed.

One night I was at a dinner meeting, sitting beside the chairman, when a man came in and passed among the diners, speaking to people here and there as he came through, and made his way to the speakers' table. As he approached, the chairman said to me, "You know, whenever I see that man he reminds me of Jesus Christ."

"That's an enormous compliment!" I exclaimed. "Is he so good as all that?"

"He's good, all right," the chairman replied, "but the thing is, there was a time when he was positively the worst man in this town. He was a phony, he was a double-dealer, he was dishonest. He was bad, and I mean really bad. Then," he said, "somebody got hold of him and put him in touch with Jesus, and Jesus changed him. I would say today that he is the best man in this town—so much so that whenever I see him it reminds me of Jesus Christ."

There is nobody who ever lived who could do that for a person save Jesus of Nazareth. It is for this reason that today untold millions around the world shout acclaim to Him. "Heaven and earth shall pass away . . ." You shall pass away, I shall pass away. But if we are in Him, none of us will ever pass away. We will be immortalized in His truth, which is deathless.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, how great Thou art. And the greatest thing You've ever done for us was to give us Thy Son Jesus, who came to this earth and took the form of a man, that He might live with the humble poor and the downtrodden and the mixed-up and the sinful of this earth, amongst whom we must include ourselves. When we have looked into our hearts and seen our weakness and then looked into His face and seen the strength we can have, we have fallen in love with Him. Bring us finally to Him, that we may be like Him. This we ask in His holy name. Amen.