

...Who Comes in the Name of the Lord

Presented By Scott Walters on 4/14/19
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The first time Jane and I were in Germany I was surprised to discover that most folk greet each other with a hearty “Gross Gott.” Not the “Guten Tag that I was taught – or at least I thought I was taught – in high school.

“Gross Gott” translates roughly to “God’s greeting” or “I greet you in God.”

I imagine people originally said this greeting from the basis of their faith – that this or any meeting can be a holy meeting – that God is somehow present even in the casual encounter of neighbors.

But now, I suspect, Gross Gott is like “Godspeed” or “God bless you,” or “Adios” that we might say when someone sneezes or leaves our presence. All these are once faith-related phrases that have become ritualized, expressions of faith that have become simply expressions of cultural convention.

It has been said that some devout Jews, when they pray the prayer “Lord, have mercy,” they speak the words “have mercy” as quickly as possible after they have said “Lord,” fearing that God would appear before they have asked for mercy.

In our culture, of course, people say, “Lord, have mercy” all the time without fear or even a second thought. “Lord, have mercy, these taxes just keep going up.” “Scott got a date tonight, Lord, have mercy.” No one expects those words to summon up either mercy, or the Lord! It’s just a saying.

One of the over-used phrases that had lost its original meaning in Jesus’ day was “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” is from Psalm 118 and was originally part of a liturgy recited when the king returned victorious in war. As the king approached the temple to engage in thankful worship, the priests in the Temple would say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

But by the time of Jesus, this phrase had become the regular greeting for pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for a festival. Basically, it was like saying, “Welcome to Jerusalem. Enjoy the festival.”

So when Luke tells us that the crowds heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem and went out to meet him shouting, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” we can be confident that he was not the only visitor to the city to hear those words. Pilgrims from the Decapolis, travelers from Alexandria, even trekkers from Rome had been greeted with the same words.

Perhaps, even as the crowds were hailing Jesus, a family from Antioch or Ephesus who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover was hearing the same words, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” It was the conventional greeting. No one really expected anything to come down the road except yet another Passover pilgrim.

If we want to know what the festival crowd was really expecting when they greeted Jesus that day, a better clue could be found in the palm branches they waved than in the words they spoke.

The palm branches were a nationalistic sign, and the waving of palm branches was something like the increased display of American flags in the weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11. It was a patriotic display – a symbolic expression of hope that this young Galilean who had stirred up so much attention might strike a blow for the nation; a blow against Rome and for the homeland.

What we have is a picture of the crowds doing two things: shouting a ceremonial greeting and carrying a nationalistic symbol. The greeting?? Well, that’s just something you say.

The palm branches? Now, that’s what they wanted; national savior. “Blessed is the one who

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comes to free us from Roman rule!”

I heard on the news on Friday that Mick Jagger had a heart bypass surgery. That’s why the Rolling Stones’ tour was mysteriously put on hold last week.

Mick Jagger and The Rolling Stones are famous for singing, “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try some time, you just might find, you get what you need.” And so it was that day when Jesus came to Jerusalem for the Passover.

The crowd did not get what it wanted, but it did receive what they needed – indeed, what all of us need.

To their disappointment, Jesus was not revolutionary; no national freedom fighter. He did not arrive flashing a sword and swaggering in might, but lowly and riding on a donkey. He did not come in the name of the nation, but ironically, he really did come in the name of the Lord.

It happens to us, too, you know. When we least expect our prayers to be answered, they are. When we least expect God to be present, it happens. Like those crowds, we walk week after week through worship, saying the prayers, singing the hymns, beckoning God to come and be present.

“Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest.” But then, just as on that day in Jerusalem, the one we have so casually beckoned, appears! The one who can truly save us, enters our lives.

“Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” “The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” “Lord, have mercy.” “Come, Lord Jesus.” We say these things all the time out there during the week scarcely knowing what we are saying and hardly expecting anything to happen.

And then, at a time we least expect, there coming down the road of our life is indeed the one for whom we have hungered and thirst.

Then we can put down the palm branches of our expectations to small and misguided and shout with all heaven, “BLESSED INDEED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!”