

From Every Nation

Hebrews 8:4-5; Revelation 7:9--10

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, *with palm branches in their hands*,...

Introduction

Every year, except this year, we have a Rally Sunday worship service that is prepared and led by the children and the Youth Groups. It is not spontaneous, but designed and rehearsed in order to go as well as possible when the time comes. Actually every Sunday assembly is itself practice for something great, while having meaning for today. An example of this is the wonderful vision of people from every ethnic group gathering to worship the Lord at the end of the age. John sees them in heaven, and there is a detail to their activity that I'd like to consider because it speaks to what we do on Sunday and why.

Set the stage

When Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph (found in all four gospels. Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19), people laid their coats and cloaks before him as a sort of "red carpet of honor". They also cut down palm branches and laid them before Him, or waved them as He approached. Much later, in John's vision that is the Revelation, we find people engaging in worship in heaven and, like those present when Jesus entered Jerusalem, they have palm branches, which is something we have during worship on Palm Sunday.

the palm branches

The palm branches enjoyed a rich symbolism in the days of Jesus. They represented poverty, because the people using them often did not have a coat to lay before their king. It also represented righteousness, joy and triumph. Victorious soldiers returning home after winning a war found palm branches laid before them. Palm branches also tie into the Old Testament feast of Tabernacles, which remind people of their

dependence upon the Lord and to avoid becoming too attached to this world. There are other examples. The Old Testament speaks of the ark, the tabernacle, altars, lampstands and harps. Earth copied heaven in a variety of ways, including palm branches. When we involve them in worship we reach back to the past in affinity with those who worshipped with palm branches back when the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem, but also toward the future when people would worship with palm branches in heaven.

✚ application: Worship on earth is a sort of rehearsal for worship in heaven

And this brings us to our application for today; that worship on earth is a sort of rehearsal for worship in heaven. Like the practices for special Sunday gatherings, worship today involves ancient practices steeped in symbolism but also practices that are part of our future in heaven as well. Hebrews 8:4-5 tells us that much of what was done in the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) were copies of heavenly realities and practices. For example, Communion is a rehearsal for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. I've mentioned before that when we partake of this Sacrament, we are asking the Lord to save us for that sublime event. There are other examples, but this shows that what we do on Sunday looks back to ancient events in the Bible, but also to our future. In fact, the content of John's ancient vision is our future and palm branches is just one small example of that.

✚ Conclusion

Special services, like Rally Sunday, but also Christmas Eve and Holy Thursday, take practice and preparation. There's an element of that in every Sunday service as well. The use of palm branches (albeit once a year) in worship reminds us of the great entrance of our Lord Jesus in Jerusalem. It also points us to worship in heaven and we copy this on earth to help us to practice for heaven. People all over the world do this, and the day will come when we will join together to use what we do on a regular basis to worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

