

A Tale of Three Crowds John 12:12-19

- Charles Dickens wrote a book called 'A Tale of Two Cities',
- A book of high drama and ultimate sacrifice.
- Today I want to tell you a tale of three crowds.
- A tale with just as much drama that also led to a terrible sacrifice.
- Our story starts with a great crowd,
- That had made their journeys from all over Judah and surrounding nations,
- To come to Jerusalem for the highest and holiest day in the Jewish calendar,
- Passover.
- This crowd heard that Jesus was also coming to town.
- Even if they hadn't heard of Jesus in the previous three years,
- They certainly knew about him now.
- It was because of an incident that had occurred in the town of Bethany a few weeks before.
- His sisters Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that his friend Lazarus was sick.
- But Jesus waits four days before he leaves to visit them.
- In that time Lazarus's illness gets worse and he dies.
- When Jesus finally arrives, Martha in her grief,
- Goes out to him on the road and confronts him with his delay.

"Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died." John 11:21

- Martha knew that Jesus could heal her brother.
- He'd done it for untold strangers,
- So why wouldn't he do it for one of his closest friends?
- As he arrives at the house Mary comes out,
- And she repeats the same words that Martha had used,

"Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died." John 11:32

- Jesus is so moved by the grief of his two friends that he also breaks down and cries.
- Some of the Jews who had come to console Mary and Martha are struck by Jesus' love for Lazarus,
- But some of them said;

“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” John 12:37

- Just like the sisters,
- These people know that Jesus has the power to heal the sick,
- Just like the sisters,
- They believe that had he been there earlier he could have saved all this grief,
- He could have healed Lazarus before his illness became terminal.
- But then Jesus does something no-one expects.
- Going to the tomb he gives the command to roll back the stone.
- Martha protests;
- ‘Lord, he’s been dead in there for four days, there’ll be a bad odour.’
- Jesus turns to Martha and says;

“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” John 12:40

- And calling in to the darkness he commands;

“Lazarus come out.” John 12:43

- Can you imagine the expectation that would have been building when Jesus said those words?
- Imagine the suspense as Jesus’ voice echoes around the tomb walls.
- Imagine the shock as out of the grave stumbles a man wrapped from head to foot with strips of linen.
- ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’
- Well that crowd saw it.
- And a few weeks later many of them are in Jerusalem when they hear that Jesus is on his way,
- And they become a part of a worshipping crowd.
- Grabbing the palm branches that had been the roof of their makeshift shelters,
- They run out of the city and line the road leading up to Jerusalem,
- Waving the branches,
- Tossing some of them and their coats on to the dusty road to form a carpet of honour;

- ‘Hosanna’ they sing.
- ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’
- ‘Blessed is the King of Israel!’
- They shout.
- With these words from Psalm 118,
- The worshipping crowd gives expression to the joy and hope they have in Jesus.
- Just like everyone else,
- The disciples get swept along by the enthusiasm of the crowd.
- They don’t understand the real significance of what the people were singing and shouting,
- They would later,
- But for now they’re carried along like everyone else.

- And within this worshipping crowd, praising and honouring Jesus the king,
- Is a telling crowd,
- The crowd who had seen a glimpse of the glory of God just as Jesus had said,
- When out of a grave a dead man walked.
- Now that Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem,
- The seat of power of the old kings of Israel,
- They can’t contain themselves,
- And they tell the story of the resuscitation of Lazarus all through the city.
- They can’t help but proclaim the good news that they know.
- They can’t keep the story in and they tell it to anyone who’ll listen.
- As they go through the city telling people about the great miracle that Jesus did,
- Many more of the city’s residents go out to greet him.
- And they join with the ascending crowd who as Luke says in 19:37;
“ . . . began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,” Luke 19:37
- I wonder how long it took Jesus to make his way up to the city,
- Into its gates,
- And to the Temple where he’d throw out the money changers?

- I'd imagine that as more and more people hear about the miraculous sign of the raising of Lazarus,
- More and more people flock out with palm branches in hand to give honour to Jesus.
- Clearly it was a very impressive number because the Pharisees exclaim in John 12;
"Look how the whole world has gone after him." John 12:19
- The telling crowd,
- Swelled the numbers of the worshipping crowd,
- That became the following crowd.
- Unbeknownst to them the Pharisees were making a rather prophetic statement.
- They may have been using hyperbole when they saw the huge crowd following after Jesus,
- Or maybe it was the observation that Jews from all around the known world,
- Who had come back to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover,
- Were now going out to follow Jesus.
- Regardless of hyperbole or observation,
- The truth they expressed was one that would be fulfilled very shortly.
- The time was coming when it'd not only be the Jews of Jerusalem that would go after Jesus,
- It would be citizens from every nation under the sun that would be followers of the Lord Jesus,
- As those first disciples obeyed Jesus Great Commission;
"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19
- Now clearly seeing the significance of the words of the worshipping crowd;
- 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'
- 'Blessed is the King of Israel!'
- But there was one more act that those Pharisees had to do.
- I said this was a tale of three crowds,

- But maybe it's more correct to say this is a tale of four crowds,
- Because there was one more,
- A crowd of a very different nature to the other three.
- Maybe this crowd is best described as the grumbling crowd.
- Their observation of the following crowd,
- Was not expressed out of the same affection that the worshipping crowd or telling crowd had for Jesus.
- No, this crowd makes a statement that demonstrates they're opposed to Jesus,
- They don't want to worship him,
- Tell anyone about him,
- Or follow him.
- Their comment is;

"Teacher, order your disciples to stop." Luke 19:39

- They want to dampen the enthusiasm for Jesus,
- They want to quell the faith of the people.
- This is the very same crowd who in six days time will be chanting,
- 'Crucify, crucify!'
- These are the Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the Law,
- Who were the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.
- The ones who will say to Pilate;

"Do not write, 'The King of the Jews', but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" John 19:21

- But in a response that echoes God's creative power and Jesus' kingly rule over nature,

-He says;

"I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." Luke 19:39

- Even if no human being acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah,
- The natural world would break out in rapturous praise,
- Reminiscent of the four living creatures in the book of Revelation who perpetually cry out;

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

Revelation 4:8

-It was the crowd chanting on the road to Jerusalem who actually got it right.

-Jesus was the king of the Jews,

-The Messiah the nation had been looking forward to as promised by God.

-But Jesus was not going to be the king they were all expecting,

-In fact he was a King greater than their expectations.

-The prophet Isaiah announced these words from God;

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Isaiah 49:6

-Rather than a conquering king who would ride up to Jerusalem on a war horse,

-And overthrow the Roman invaders and rescue Israel,

-Jesus came as the Prince of Peace riding on a donkey.

-He didn't come with a sword,

-But went to a cross.

-It was his sacrifice of himself that entitled him to a throne,

-Not an earthly one,

-But the one before the myriad angels of heaven where he stands as the risen King,

-Receiving their praise and honour.

-And it's because of that sacrifice that we are able to join with that worshipping crowd,

-That following crowd,

-That telling crowd,

-As we walk towards Easter,

-And share in that same praise as them;

-'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

-'Blessed is Jesus the King of Israel!'

-'Hosanna in the highest.'