

“Hero to Zero” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Palm Sunday April 2, 2023

- I. **Matthew 27:24-26** – ²⁴So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.”
²⁵And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”
²⁶Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to be crucified.
- II. **Why is there a home field advantage?**
 - a. Sports fans around the world can rely on one fact about their sport: the home team wins more often than the visiting team.
 - i. A Sports Illustrated article concludes: “Home field advantage is no myth. Indisputably, it exists Across all sports and at all levels, from Japanese baseball to Brazilian soccer to the NFL, the team hosting a game wins more often than not.”
 - ii. After studying all the theories behind this phenomenon, researchers could say that the following things do not give an advantage:
 - 1. Thousands of cheering or jeering fans didn’t change a team’s performance.
 - 2. Traveling long distances didn’t make a difference either.
 - 3. Finally, being familiar with the home field, court, or rink didn’t add any statistical advantage.
 - iii. So what the research did find, was “Officials’ bias is the most significant contribution to home field advantage.”
 - 1. In short, the refs don’t like to get booed.
 - 2. So when the game gets close, they call fewer fouls or penalties against the home team; or they call more strikes against visiting batters.
 - 3. Larger and louder fans really do influence the calls from the officials.
 - 4. The refs naturally (and often unconsciously) respond to the pressure from the crowd.
 - 5. Then they try to please the angry fans and make the calls that will lessen the pain of crowd disapproval.
 - 6. In the end, the refs’ people-pleasing response can have an impact on the final result of the game.¹
 - b. The crowds are always a factor for leadership and those who make decisions... because the energy that they bring with their approval or their anger can have major consequences.

- i. If you look at the uprisings that take place in history – many started with crowds that were unhappy and began to riot and put together a rebellion that gained momentum throughout the land.
- ii. The Roman Empire was constantly quashing these uprisings – and maybe the best way to keep them at bay, besides brutality, was simply to give the crowd what they wanted – even if it was wrong.
- c. The story of our Savior Jesus coming into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is a story of the crowds – a story of irony, as Jesus is welcomed as a hero but within a few short days He was a zero.

III. **Jesus came into Jerusalem riding a donkey.**

- a. It wasn't that He was trying to be humble, but it goes back to King David, who told his son Solomon to ride his (David's) donkey so that everyone would know Solomon was the chosen king – not Adonijah. (1 Kgs 1:38-40)
- b. Riding into a city on a donkey goes back to the prophecy of Zechariah as well – where he says to rejoice, because your King is coming, riding on a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)
- c. The crowds went out to meet Jesus as He rode into the city of Jerusalem – and they would escort Him, celebrate Him, and welcome into the city in order to take His rightful place as King.
 - i. However, the crown Jesus would wear was not gold and jewels, but thorns... and His throne would not be in a palace, but on a cross.
- d. The crowds that saw Jesus as a prophet who raised Lazarus from the dead, among many other signs, was probably seeing Jesus more as an earthly deliverer than the true Messiah who would go much farther than just setting up a new government.
 - i. So they cry out “hosanna!” or “save us” – yet, within 5 days' time, the crowd will be screaming, “crucify Him!”
- e. The religious leaders were so fearful of the crowds, they hatched a plan to arrest Jesus by night so that it wouldn't cause an uproar or a riot. (Mt. 26:5)
 - i. However, by the time these leaders had arrested Jesus and put Him before Pontius Pilate, they stirred up the crowd to sway the decision – would it be fair? – or would it be an injustice... or a bad call?
 - ii. We know the rest of the story, as Pontius Pilate sees an angry crowd, and he releases a criminal named Barabbas and sentences Jesus to die by crucifixion.
- f. Now, the interesting part is Pilate attempting to wash his hands of the matter – when he is the one who is in charge of the sentence!
 - i. And not only that, but the crowd says, “Let His blood be on us and our children!” (vs 25)

IV. **Today's readings are full of irony.**

- a. Earthly leaders put to death the King of kings... the crowd welcoming Jesus as their Savior and King, then screaming for His death five days later... The

- blood of Jesus would be the cleansing power for those people and on their children to come... and of course the crown of thorns, the purple robe representing royalty, and the raising up of our King... on a cross.
- b. In the same way this big crowd would be so fickle – just as the disciples would run away from Jesus when the going got tough – and just as the leaders operated on fear... we are the same.
 - i. One day we are shouting Jesus' name from the roof tops, letting everyone know the saving power of our King – and the next day we are ashamed of Him and won't say a word to those around us.
 - ii. One day we are welcoming Jesus with open arms, reading the Scriptures and diligently and acting out His love for others – and the next day we are idolizing drugs and alcohol – pornography and money – and hating people around us for their views.
 - c. What does Jesus say about all these things?
 - i. I know who you are, and I want you to come home to Me...
 - ii. As the many Jews who put Jesus to death would hear from the Apostle Peter in Acts chapter 2 – You are the ones who murdered the Messiah! And at that moment they were cut to the heart – so they asked what they should do... to which Peter says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children.” (Acts 2:38-39)
 - 1. Do you see the blessing of what Jesus did as He turned the curse of His blood into the cleansing forgiveness for all generations?
 - d. Jesus, our Savior, went from hero on Palm Sunday to zero on Good Friday with the fickle crowds.
 - i. Yet, God's goal was not to have a hero that conquered a government – but a humble servant who would suffer and die to save us from our sins.
 - ii. In this most Holy Week, take some time to consider our Suffering Servant, and the great cost to Him as He freed us from the curse of sin.
 - e. The King of kings did enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday – and was delivered up for all of us so that His blood might not be a curse, but give us forgiveness and life eternal. Amen.

¹ Source: Tobias Moskowitz & L. John Wertheim, "What's Really Behind Home Field Advantage," Sports Illustrated (1-17-11)