

There was once a cowboy who listened attentively to the story of the first Palm Sunday. After hearing it, . . . he had only one small response to make to the story. In his own straight forward way, . . . the cowboy simply stated, . . . Jesus must have had wonderful hands. But his words only confused the others around him. Out of curiosity they asked, . . . What do you mean by that statement? Well, the cowboy replied, . . . if Jesus could sit on a colt . . . on which no person ever sat, . . . an untried, . . . unbroken animal; . . . if he could soothe it . . . and control it . . . and guide it . . . while people were shrieking hosannas in its ears, . . . waving the branches of palm trees in front of its eyes, . . . and throwing down clothes in front of its feet, . . . Jesus must have had wonderful hands!

The hands of Christ are indeed wonderful hands. Those hands reached out to people from every walk of life. Those hands touched the sick and dying, raised the dead, fed a hungry throng of people. Those hands of Jesus calmed a stormy sea of Galilee. Those hands of Christ are indeed wonderful hands. Let's find out today, the most important reason that Jesus Christ is our "Hands-Down Favorite".

In Bible times, when someone famous came to town after a military victory, the people would gather on the city streets, and use their hands to hold palm branches. As the victorious general went by, the people would wave the branches or use their hands to toss them in front of his path. In 163 B.C. Judas Maccabees or Judas the Hammer, entered Jerusalem riding on a massive stallion, and the people shouted and waved palm branches and cheered, "Hosanna! Judas cleaned out the idols in the Temple, burned incense, offered sacrifices, and lit a huge menorah that burned for eight days. The Jews sang hymns and thanked the Lord for making the temple clean again. Afterwards, everyone decided to make this a yearly festival for the whole nation. Judas was their hero—and many thought he was the Jewish Messiah. To this day the Jews celebrate 8 days of the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah. Not long afterwards, Judas was killed in battle, buried, and that was the end of the Hammer.

Thus, the use of palm branches in Jewish history seem to be related to military victories. Palm branches and throwing out coats demonstrates happiness over a leader has come to save his people. Thus, when Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem about 2000 years ago, the crowds threw out palm branches again. They had the idea that Jesus was going to be their Messiah. "Hosanna to the Son of David". Save us now, Son of David, save us from these blasted Romans that occupy our land. We want you to be Superman! We want you to help us avoid pain. But they did not understand the words of the song they were singing.

It seems that over the years the Jews were looking for a Messiah, but they were looking for someone like King David. They were looking for a political Messiah. Remember how I said some thought Judas Maccabees was their Savior. How can we say Jesus was truly the one that was the Messiah? Well, it is the fingerprints that we find in the Old Testament that identify him to us. Permit an illustration that I pray will help us appreciate this amazing truth. A number of years ago in Bay City, Michigan, after a Monday night service, the usher took the offering in a pouch, and did not put it into the safe, but on my office desk. I was in a meeting, next to my office. A young man from an addiction support group down the hall, was heading to the restroom. He saw what happened. After going to the restroom, he went into my office, sat at my desk, ripped open the offering envelopes and took the cash, left the checks, put the envelopes back into the pouch, zipped up the pouch and left. When I got out of my meeting, I saw the

pouch, took it and locked it up in the safe, not thinking anything amiss. However, the next morning, when the counters, opened the pouch, they discovered the theft. It looked like the suspect would get away with the crime. But the ripped open offering envelopes in the pouch were sent to the Crime lab in Lansing, and a positive palm print on the suspect was identified. The suspect was apprehended and put into jail. Unfortunately he had spent the money on a new stereo system, and we never got the money back. Jesus was no thief, but he did leave finger prints behind that he was indeed the prime suspect to be the Messiah. The finger prints were the hundreds of Old Testament prophecies he fulfilled . Zechariah said the Messiah would come to town riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. An old donkey, a war horse or mule, a fancy chariot, or sedan chair on the shoulders of strong men would not have fulfilled this remarkable prophecy. Some say, well he prearranged that because he knew what the prophet Zechariah said. But many prophecies couldn't have been prearranged. "Jesus could not have arranged in advance where he was going to be born, right? The Prophet Micah foretold that 700years before the fact. Jesus couldn't have arranged in advance that he was going to be betrayed for a specific amount of money, or how he was going to be put to death. Jesus couldn't have arranged that his bones would remain unbroken, even though he was crucified. Jesus couldn't have arranged that they would pierce him with a spear, which they did. He couldn't have arranged that the soldiers would cast lots for his clothing. It goes on and on and on. These events were predicted at least half of a millennium before Jesus even was born. When you put all of these prophecy finger prints together, you see that there is no way they could have been fulfilled by accident. Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

Here you have Jesus of infinite power and absolute perfection who deserves to be the focus of the worship of all creation. Here you have Jesus who is rightfully entitled to all the perks of being the Creator and governor of the entire universe. Here you have Jesus who had every right in the world to angrily sweep into Jerusalem on a stallion, swing a sword and destroy anybody who wasn't bowing down to him. Yet, he chose instead to be the God of a second chance. Jesus decided that he was going to humbly offer himself as a payment for the wrongdoing that separates us from God. He was willing to pave the way himself with his life so that people can have a new beginning that they don't even deserve. Jesus came to bring peace between God and man. Jesus intentionally rode a donkey to let people know He was coming in peace. He was not a revolutionary like the Hammer—He was a Redeemer. A revolutionary is willing to kill others for his cause but a redeemer is willing to die for others.

There's a story about a little boy who lived in a small country town where there had never been a circus. He knew about circuses from his school books, but never had he seen a real, live circus. And then one day there was a poster on the side of a building announcing that a circus was coming to his town. Well, he knew right there and then that he must see that circus, so he began to save up for it, and he started counting the days. On the last night before the great event, he was too excited to sleep. He was up before daylight to get all his chores finished and be down on the main street by nine o'clock. Shortly after nine, the great circus parade came down the street. He saw lions and tigers, beautiful horses, tremendous elephants, jugglers, clowns, acrobats, and the circus band. His eyes were wide with excitement, his feet couldn't stop jumping up and down, and he couldn't stop shouting.

When the parade finally ended, the little boy stepped out of the crowd handed his money

to the last man in the parade, and went back home. He thought to himself that the circus was just about the greatest thing he had ever seen. Not till years later did he discover that he still had never seen a circus, he had only watched the parade and gone home.

The boy saw the parade but missed the circus. The crowds in Jesus day saw a king for a day, but missed what was truly important that Jesus was the Son of God, their Savior From sin. Their only hope for a life in heaven.

So many people in our world just see the parade and miss the circus. They see Jesus as a man who died for a cause. They see themselves as people who live on this earth for a time, and that time is to be spent in having fun, hanging out with friends, and enjoying time with family. These people look at themselves as decent people, people who will surely make it to a heaven, if there is one. These people don't see that their hands are incredibly dirty. That these hands have been used to push and shove others, wave fingers at people who upset us, and hold onto material things as if that is what really matters in life.

The hands of Jesus are so different. These hands are spotlessly clean hands. Hands which were always used to help and heal. Those hands of Jesus in a few days would be clutched in prayer as he prayed in the garden for the strength to follow through with the will of the father. Those hands reached out to the disciples who were with him in the garden and woke them from their sleep as they could not stay awake. Those hands reached out and healed the ear of the man that Peter hurt with his sword as the guards came for Jesus. Those hands of Jesus would have nails pounded through them on the cross of Calvary as he paid for the sins of the world.

On this Palm Sunday I ask you to look at Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem. Look at the determination that is there on his face. He will not leave one stone unturned to save you. Look at the head of Jesus. It will be crowned with a crown of thorns. Look at his hands. They are holding onto the little donkey to keep from falling, and yet these are the hands of God himself. These hands will be nailed to a cross for your sin and the sin of the world. He will keep the nail prints in his hands after he rises from the dead just to prove to you beyond any doubt that he has risen from the dead and that every sin is paid for completely.

Years ago, when a jockey in a horse race came to the finish line, and was well ahead of his competitors, he would put his hands down at this side. This meant that certain victory had taken place. As we look at Jesus, we put our hands down. He is our Victorious Savior. No question, no doubt about it. Jesus is Our Hands Down Favorite.”