

Palm branches? A donkey? Some children at play? Is that what *you* call a grand entrance? Where's the pomp and circumstance? Where's the power and prestige? Where's the military might and kingly command? Sure, we have a big Palm Sunday celebration every year, but it really sounds pretty modest by today's standards. To the ancients, however, it would've been a much different story.

For those in the Roman Empire, who remembered their recent history, Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem would've been packed with meaning. For them, it would've reeked of Julius Caesar. They would've recalled the great military general and Roman dictator only eighty years before. In 49 B.C. he had set his face toward Rome and crossed the Rubicon. By doing so "the die is cast," and Julius Caesar knew there was no turning back. He was now entrenched in a civil war between himself—the champion of the common people—and his adversary Pompey—who represented the political establishment.

When Julius Caesar marched on Rome, he was met with large crowds, waving palm branches as a symbol of victory. Mounted on a great steed, Caesar would've rode past peoples hailing him as their hero, cheering him on and crying out "Save us!" And one of the very first things Caesar did when he paraded into Rome was go to the temple to make a sacrifice. Venus had always been one of his family's patron gods, and he wanted to offer thanks to her in her temple for granting him his many military successes.

Now, compare all that to how the Gospel-writers say, Jesus set *His* face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51, 53). That would've been His "crossing the Rubicon" moment—Our Lord was a man on a mission, with no going back. And today, here He is now entering Jerusalem, the holy city—declaring war on the powers and principalities. Like Julius Caesar on his mount, Jesus also rides in on a valiant animal. In Israel's history, it was the donkey which was the animal of choice for kings in grand processions. He's even met by a great throng of pilgrims—like what happened for Caesar before Him, they also triumphantly wave palm branches for Jesus, even shouting "Hosanna," which by the way means "Save us!"

And check out the first thing *Jesus* does when He comes into town. Jesus heads straight for the temple—not the temple of Venus this time—but of His heavenly Father. He goes there not to offer a sacrifice—that will come soon enough—but to cleanse the temple. Y'know, it's no wonder this is called Jesus' Triumphal Entry, because it's just like a Roman triumph. Maybe this helps put things in perspective for us.

But the similarities between Jesus Christ and Julius Caesar don't stop there as we'll see this Holy Week. They both work toward the good of the people at the expense of political allies. Their colleagues are afraid of losing power and influence, and so there are plots against both of them. Both are assassinated just days apart—the Ides of March and the 14th of Nisan (Passover), which was thought to be in early April. And their conspirators are both close friends, Marcus Brutus and Judas Iscariot. But that's where the similarities end.

After all, who's Julius Caesar to you? Just another name from history class probably. If you've ever visited Rome, then you know firsthand how that once great empire now lies in ruins. My guess is, in your regular everyday life, Julius Caesar doesn't have much bearing. But I know that's not the case for you when it comes to Jesus Christ—He is the single most important influence in your life. So, what's the difference?

Well, Julius Caesar brought sweeping reforms to Rome. While not everyone felt their impact in his day, the people still saw him as a savior. And his reforms would lay the foundation for the Pax Romana that his nephew Augustus Caesar would later implement. There was the promise of peace in the air, bread on every table, and a celebration of the arts. But as great as all that was, where is it now?

But you, you take your place among the Palm Sunday crowd. You wave your palm branch. You praise your Lord. And you call out for Him to save you. Because you need a salvation unlike any other. You need more than just "bread and

circuses,” you need forgiveness and eternal life. You need the kind of salvation only Jesus Christ can give. One that lives on as long as He does—forever and ever, world without end. Amen.

And so you hail Him as your Savior today. Because you know where this Triumphal Entry is headed. Jesus rides into Jerusalem to face down your enemies of sin and death. And the next time you will see Him, He’ll be proudly brandishing His trophies. The mark of the nails will tell you the victory’s been won. He will give you something far greater than the Pax Romana, “Roman peace.” On Easter, when He says, “Peace be with you,” He’ll give you the Pax Domini—“The peace of the Lord.” And maybe upon seeing those proud trophies, like Doubting Thomas before you you’ll also declare, “My Lord and my God!” A title reserved for the emperor of Rome, “Dominus et Deus noster.”

Yes, nobody has made a difference in the world the way Jesus Christ has. His rule and dominion have stretched out to the four corners of the earth. Wherever His Church has been established, His kingdom has staked its claim. Lives have been transformed, history’s been altered, the planet will never be the same. All because of this great Agent of change! And you get to be part of the unstoppable movement He has created.

There’s an Anglican theologian by the name of N.T. Wright. Having been trained as a classical historian, Wright’s said he’d love to live near the Ashmolean Museum. It’s one of the great classical, Greco-Roman museums in the world. He still recalls his Oxford days when he’d roam the museum’s halls, walking up and down rows of statues—many of them being various Roman emperors. One thing always struck him though—why were so many statues of these powerful Roman emperors from somewhere other than Rome? After all, doesn’t it just make sense that such statues would be most common in the capital city? But these statues had been brought into the museum from all over the Mediterranean world—anywhere and everywhere else but Rome itself. Places like Egypt, Turkey, and Spain. Why was that?

Ultimately, Wright realized the reason. Rome had no need for statues of the emperor, because they had the real thing. The living flesh-and-blood emperor lived there, and they already got to see him. But the rest of the world, that is most of the world, didn’t. They needed images to know who their Lord and Master really was.

Friends, the Book of Genesis tells you that you are made in the image and likeness of God. And your Lord Jesus Christ, who is the visible image of the invisible God, shows you what that image looks like. Because of Him and His salvation, you have been molded into the perfect image of your Creator. By your lips and your life, you now help show the world the love and the life of Jesus Christ. So go, join His grand procession and carry Him out to the highways and byways. Let everyone know who their King truly is.