

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## DATES

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14TH JULY 2021

Dates; the wonderful thing about the English language is that one word can have two very different meanings. On the one hand a date could be just be a marker of time, or maybe a special occasion where two people spend time together, or on the other hand it could be that sticky dried fruit that you eat at Christmas.

A news story caught my eye recently. It concerned the Date palm trees. What I didn't know was that there are more than one type of date palms. In particular, the type of palm that was grown in Jesus' time had actually gone extinct in the second century AD. This was because during wars between the Jews and the Romans they had been cut down or burned. This was unfortunate as this type of date was bigger, juicier, and lasted longer than modern dates. This meant that they could be exported all over the Roman empire without rotting on the way. These dates were especially useful in medicine at the time, but it was the leaves that were the most important symbol. The palm trees were considered to be a sign of grace and beauty. In Psalm 92 it says "The godly will flourish like palm trees".

Now it so happened that during archaeological digs a number of seeds had been found. One in particular was found at Masada. Now for those of you who don't know this, Masada was a hilltop fortress where a group of Jewish rebels to refuge at the end of the first Jewish war. As the Roman army closed in they chose to commit suicide rather than be taken, they burnt everything except the food stores to show that it wasn't a lack of food or water that had caused them to take this course of action, and in doing so left us with the opportunity to revive the extinct date palm. It should be noted that the end of this siege, which came shortly after the destruction of the temple, marked the end of Judaism as it was practised in Jesus time. The news story reports that the efforts to revive the seed were successful and we now have a date palm growing exactly as it was in Jesus time.

So, what is the point of this story? Well it's this; Jesus told us to watch out for signs. Any news story that involves Israel of biblical times is worthy of further investigation. Is there a significance in the revival of a tree? What factors can we consider to decide if it is important or not? Well one point is this; we all know when the palm leaves were used. This was on the Sunday that Jesus entered Jerusalem. You see in addition to grace, palm leaves were symbolic of victory. The crowds cut down palm leaves and

spread them at Jesus feet. Even though Jesus had not won the final victory at this point the crowd seemed to want to celebrate in advance.

Another story in the bible with a palm tree in it is the story of Deborah. Deborah was a judge of Israel and her story can be found in the book of judges chapter 4. At the start of the story it is noted that "She would sit under the palm of Deborah, and the Israelites would go to her for judgement" Later in the story God gives her a message, He says "I will call out Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon river. There I will give you victory over him" Jabin was a Canaanite king who was oppressing Israel at that time. Well the story ends exactly as God said it would, Sisera was dead and the bible says "On that day Israel saw God defeat Jabin the Canaanite king" Now there are several reasons why Deborah may have been sitting under the date palm, but one thing is absolutely clear. She was under the grace of God. We might also note that by being under the palm she was declaring the victory ahead of time. Just like Jesus entering Jerusalem the palm leaves were used to celebrate a victory that was yet to be won.

At the beginning of this beacon I mentioned that the word date can have two meanings, we have mentioned the sticky dried fruit but what about the second meaning, the marker of time? Well there is a date in the future that is well worth considering. We don't know what that date will be but we do know that it definitely will happen. That date is the date when Jesus will return from heaven. His purpose on that day will be to call his followers and to return to heaven with them for all eternity. The apostle Peter refers to this date in his second letter, he felt that it was important to remind his readers of the certainty of that day. He wanted to remind them to continue to live as though that day was today. As most of us might have found at some point in our lives, we can often live like this for a while but after a while we can get bored and start to drift. We need to be reminded of the certainty of God's word, we need to push the reset button and re-double our efforts. We need something to remind us that Jesus is coming back and that day might be today. Perhaps a story about a palm tree will help to remind us.

Now before we start worrying that we won't be ready, or that we aren't good enough lets go back to the story about Deborah.

You see she was sitting under the palm tree, therefore, her victory was already assured. If you have committed your life to Jesus then you are under His grace, the same grace that is symbolised by the palm tree, therefore, like Deborah, your victory is also assured. You see, just like Deborah it isn't you that is responsible for the victory, remember, the story told us twice that it was God who gave the victory. Exactly a week after the crowds had laid down the palm leaves under Jesus feet Jesus claimed the ultimate victory over sin and death by rising from the dead.

So how do I remain under the palm tree? Just by continuing to serve and worship Jesus.

Our palm tree is not a physical one, but rather it is the grace that God gives us. I don't think that we will need to use the leaves off that revived palm tree on the day that Jesus returns, our offering will be ourselves, but that begs the interesting question, why has this tree been revived? If you have an answer to this question let me know, if not then just sit safely under your tree and wait patiently for the Lord's return.



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