

Hosanna!

Mark 11: 1 – 11

There are a number of words that we use frequently in a worship/ church context that we may not realize come to us directly from Biblical languages. Take the word, “*Amen*”, for example. What would you say that word actually means? Have you ever thought about that? Sometimes, I think people believe the word means “The End” as we tack it onto the end of our prayers; it’s a way of letting God know “We’re finished now! Be back soon!”

There’s a phrase that Jesus uses a number of times in the Gospels, (in fact 30 times in just Matthew’s Gospel!) one that gets translated in various ways by different versions of the Bible... sometimes we’ll read, “I tell you the truth...”, “Truly, I say unto you...” or if you remember the KJV it would be “Verily I say unto you...” What Jesus is literally saying in the Greek is “*Amen Amen... I say to you...*”

So the word, “Amen” doesn’t mean “the end” or “over and out”, or “that’s all for now”, but it has something to do with *truth*. One possibility is, “May it truly be”, “May these things surely happen”, or just a call for “Truth!” People say ‘Amen’ today in pretty much any context, and it simply has come to mean, “I agree with that!” It seems like we may have lost something there. I love thinking about these things!

There is another word, a really important word, in the Bible that has also come to common usage in today’s English: *Hallelujah!* It’s kind of sad to me to hear this wonderful word, (usually to the refrains of Handel’s Messiah) used to sell airline tickets, Spaghetti Sauce, corn chips, and just about anything in between on TV commercials, as well as being used as an exclamation of excitement in conversations and TV sit-coms. (Like, “I finally got my girlfriend to ...” and someone will reply to a canned laugh track: “Hallelujah!”)

Do you know what that word means? It also comes to us directly from the Bible, although, if you looked up “Hallelujah” in a concordance you will find just four uses in the New Testament and ... *none!*... in the Old Testament. That’s because it is actually a two-word *phrase* in the Old Testament, one which occurs well over 100 times, and it is usually translated (as opposed to *transliterated*, which is turning a Hebrew word into an English word.)

Hosanna!

It comes from Hallelu (or *‘allelu* = which means ‘praise’)

Yah = *God*. Not just the generic ‘God’, but the unpronounceable, sacred name for God, the name that God himself spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

So ‘Hallelujah’ carries a lot of weight. It means “Praise to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”, praise to the Holy One who alone sits in Divine majesty above all things... it is a powerful, wonderful word!

[Just a bit of an aside here... I don’t get angry, or indignant when I hear these things on TV or in conversation. I know the Third commandment says “*You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.*” but that is a command for us to follow, in our own lives and our faith community; the Scriptures never lay on us the burden of being the protectors of God’s name in society in general.

I think God is quite capable of doing that for himself. And as someone once said, it’s not so much that we break God’s commands, it’s more that “we are broken on them”. You can see that happening in our culture today.

I see *this* casual use of God’s Holy name, and the use of “O God, O my God” as a simple exclamation of excitement, anger, pretty much any emotion, these are all to me *symptoms* of how far removed from a grounding truth we have become as a culture, a society. We’re trying to hang on to the last six commands (the ‘horizontal’ commands) – i.e., don’t murder, stealing, lying, coveting (sometimes), but we’re trying to do that without the grounding of the first four (the vertical connection). And it’s not working very well, is it? So, it doesn’t make me angry to see this; it makes me sad, because people – our fellow human beings – just don’t know any better. They’re not *hearing* the Truth. And they’re suffering because of it.]

But *we* should understand what we mean when we say, “Amen” or “Hallelujah!”... or, this morning... “Hosanna!”

Hosanna!

That's another one of those words. If you look up "Hosanna" in a Bible dictionary, you'll find that it means... "*Hosanna!*" The English translators simply took the word right out of the Greek text, and changed it into English letters. But if you look it up in a *Greek* dictionary... you'll find that that Greek writers did the same thing with another Hebrew *phrase*. (Much like "Hallelujah")

Hosanna also comes from two Hebrew words, ... "Hoshiya na!", which means, "Help, save me". The really interesting thing about this is that those two words together are only found in one place in the entire Bible. And that is in Psalm 118: 25, a verse that we read earlier in our Responsive reading. "Lord, save us" is, in Hebrew, *Hoshiya na!*

Something interesting happened to these words, which led to its use in the day that we are celebrating today – Jesus' Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. (Which we call Palm Sunday.) And it stems from that verse in Psalm 118, and the *next* verse. You see, the cry "Lord, save us" in that Psalm is immediately followed with these words: "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

The cry for help, *hoshiya na*, was answered almost before it came out of the psalmist's mouth. And over the centuries the phrase *hoshiya na* stopped being a cry for help in the ordinary language of the Jews. Instead it became welded to the next phrase, and became a shout of *hope* and exultation.

It used to mean, "Save, please!" But gradually it came to mean, "Salvation!" "Salvation has come!" A pastor named John Piper put it like this: "It used to mean what you would say when you fell off a high diving board, and you had only gone up there to look. Because you can't swim. You know, as you are tumbling down to the water, you're calling out "HELP MEEE"!!!"

But over time it came to be what you would say when you saw the lifeguard coming to rescue you! It is the bubbling over of a heart that sees that hope and joy and salvation is on the way and you just can't keep it in."