

The Big Hosanna

by Lori Williams

The tree curved gracefully over the tallest slide at the park. Leafy, overhanging branches lent generous shade, making the slide a busy place on hot summer days. The first time my daughter Aurelia went down the slide on her tummy, she shrieked with excitement. Then, as she reached the 10-foot slide platform, Aurelia grabbed a sturdy arching tree branch and shouted exuberantly, "Mom, look at me! It's a big hosanna!"

I had to agree with my daughter's proclamation! The park, complete with its dappled shade and refreshing breeze, was the perfect setting for praising God.

The Feast was an annual memorial to how God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt.

God Himself designated the original time and place for great (or big!) hosannas. During the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites¹ took palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars and rejoiced before the Lord for seven days (Leviticus 23:40, NIV). The Feast was an annual memorial to how God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt. The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles was called "the great Hosana."²

For the duration of the Feast of Tabernacles the Israelites lived in booths, or temporary shelters, made of tree boughs. Perhaps the Israelites even called them "hosanna booths!"

The booths symbolized God's care for the Israelites during the desert wanderings. But, more importantly, the booths reminded each subsequent Israelite generation of God's overshadowing faithfulness and commitment to His chosen people.

My daughter is older now, and these days we seem to have less time to go to the park and wave the hosanna branch. So Aurelia has chosen a creative and practical substitute: a hosanna shirt. The original is my husband's favorite Hawaiian shirt. But Aurelia isn't picky: Any shirt strewn with palm branches will do. In fact hosanna shirts can turn up just about anywhere: at the beach, in a department store, even at a Sunday-night church service. Is that because any time can be hosanna time?

Yes, hosannas really are seasonless because the word hosanna actually means, "save, we pray."³ The Israelites celebrated "the great hosanna" once a year as a memorial to the Lord's faithfulness. But Jesus Himself declared that hosannas are always in season when He stood up in Jerusalem on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles and said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37-38, NIV). By His death on the cross Jesus became our "Great Hosanna." Our great and precious salvation is a daily reason for hosanna celebrations.

My daughter and I still comment when we pass by the park with the hosanna tree or see a hosanna shirt. Sometimes we even go on a "hosanna hunt"! In the process we are beginning to intentionally look for opportunities to rejoice in our salvation and remember the faithfulness of our "Great Hosanna." The prophet said it best in Isaiah 61:10 (NIV), "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me in garments of salvation." Could it be that the prophet Isaiah wore the original hosanna shirt?

¹ The Feast of Tabernacles is a weeklong autumn harvest festival. Tabernacles is also known as the Feast of the Ingathering, Feast of the Booths, Sukkoth, Succoth or Sukkot. (Variations in spellings occur because these words are transliterations of the Hebrew word pronounced "Sue-coat.") All holidays begin at sundown on the day before the date specified.

² W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Bible Publishers, 1981), 234.

³ *Ibid.*