

John 12:12-25 “A New Kind of King”

Intro. I have just read to you John’s account of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. This is one of the few events in the life of Christ that is recorded by all 4 gospels. So this event in the life of Christ is very important.

One thing that is important about this event is the uniqueness of it. Up to this point Jesus has shunned publicity. For example, as He was coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He gave orders to His disciples that “they should tell no man what things they had seen...” (Mk. 9:9). When His brothers urged Him, “Show yourself to the world” (Jn. 7:4), He answered, “My time is not yet come.” In Mt. 16:20 He told His disciples that they should tell no man that He was the Messiah. But here we see Him making a public entry into Jerusalem, attended by an immense crowd of people, causing even the Pharisees to say, “Behold, the world has gone after Him.” He even allowed the crowds to hail Him as King.

Why was there a change of policy? Why did He allow the crowds to hail Him with their “Hosannas”? Why did He permit them to proclaim Him their King, and praise Him? I hope you will know the answer by the end of the message today. The answer is different from what you might expect.

So this morning I am going to share with you:

I. THE EVENT OF JESUS’ COMING INTO JERUSALEM

I want to tell the story of the event itself. As 11:57 indicates, Jesus was the topic of conversation in Jerusalem. Everyone wanted to know if He would attend the Passover feast that year, especially since they had heard that the religious leaders were out to get Him. Then, on a Sunday morning, word began to spread that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem from Bethany! Something unusual was the fact that as He was traveling He began to ride on a donkey when He reached the eastern side of the Mount of Olives (Bethphage, Mt 21:1).

Now notice what happened. Beginning in v.12 we read, “The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him....” A large, Passover-multitude came pouring out of Jerusalem’s eastern gate. There were also crowds of people who were staying just outside of Jerusalem who were drawn to Him. It was a large crowd of people for several reasons. *First*, because at least a hundred thousand pilgrims¹ had come to Jerusalem for the Passover from all over the world. *Secondly*, vv.17-18 gives the main reason such a large crowd went out to meet Him, “Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign.”² They who had witnessed that notable miracle had reported it in Jerusalem. In fact, the verb

¹ Burge estimates 100,000 - 120,000 had come to Jerusalem. Josephus records one Passover hosting over 2.5 million, but he says this is surely an exaggeration.

² Luke is the only other gospel that ties the size and praise of the crowd to the [recent] miracles of Jesus, “the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen” (Luke 19:37 NASB). John is the only gospel that reports the resurrection of Lazarus. The other recent miracle in the

translated “bore witness” means that kept telling what happen over and over again (imperfect tense). So just about everyone in Jerusalem, and many of the pilgrims, had heard about this great miracle.

Now notice how they expressed their praise unto Him. First of all:

A. They Met Him with Palm Branches – We read in v.13, they “took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him...” In Israel there are many date palms, and so they were easily accessible. The palm branches were tokens of rejoicing & triumph. This goes all the way back to the establishment of the feast of tabernacles. Lev. 23:40 says, “And you shall take for yourselves on the first day ...branches of palm trees, ... and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.” In Rev. 7:9 we read of an “innumerable multitude before the throne and before the Lamb,” and they had “palms in their hands.” Furthermore, Palms had become a symbol of Jewish nationalism by the Maccabean era.³ Based on what they say in v.13, the palms were also expressing a belief that Jesus was the promised King who would bring deliverance to Israel.

The fact that they “went out to meet Him” is significant. It was a common practice for the inhabitants of cities to go out to meet their triumphant, returning king.⁴

B. They Hailed Him as King – The crowd says in the last of v.13, “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ The King of Israel!” The exclamation “Hosanna!” is derived from a Hebrew verb which means “save now,” or “save, pray.” They are quoting from Psa. 118, one of the most commonly quoted Messianic Psalms in the New Testament. And they quote another part of the Psalm, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!” So it is clear that the people were proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah, and they were rejoicing in the anticipation of the salvation that He would bring.

But most were not seeking salvation from sin. It was the joy of anticipated earthly salvation and victory to which the people were giving expression. Salvation in an earthly sense seemed assured, for if this Jesus was able to raise from the dead a man who had been in the tomb 4 days, what were the limits to His power? Under such a leader, they could even shake off the yoke of the Romans! Why, Jesus had the power to speak the word, and Roman legions would fall dead before Him. Besides, the time was right for such to be on their minds. They were about to celebrate Passover, commemorating the anniversary of God’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Was God about to deliver them from Roman bondage?

II. THE MEANING OF THE COMING OF JESUS

Why did Jesus make this triumphal entry into Jerusalem? What was He trying to accomplish? Was He seeking to become the King of Israel and lead a revolt to overthrow Rome? John acknowledged in v.16 that he and the other disciples did not understand the real meaning of what was happening. They probably had the same hopes and expectations as the crowd. They probably hoped that Christ as about to set up an earthly kingdom, and they would reign with Him. But Christ understood completely the meaning of all that was going on. He was not misled by the

area was the healing of blind Bartimaeus (Luke 18:35-43)

³ When the temple was rededicated during the Maccabean era, palms were used in the celebration (1 Macc. 13:51; 2 Macc. 10:7). - Burge

⁴ However, here the word used in *hupantesis* rather than *apantesis*, as in 1 Thess. 4:17, referring to meeting the Lord in the air upon His return.

exalted cries of the people. He knew that by in large, the people were not ready to accept Him as Savior from sin. We shall see that He knew that the hour of His crucifixion, rather than His coronation, was near at hand. He knew that in only a few days' time the "Hosannas" of the multitudes would give place to their shouts of "Crucify him!" He knew that before He could wear the crown He first had to bear the Cross.

So let's see now the real meaning of all that was happening here. First of all:

A. He Acknowledged that He Is the Messiah - Jesus does nothing to deny the clear Messianic implication of what the people were doing & saying. In fact, He deliberately fulfilled Messianic prophecy. How did Jesus normally arrive into Jerusalem? He walked! Yet this time, He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Why is that? Look at vv.14-15, "Then Jesus, when He had found⁵ a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt.'" John quotes from part of Zech. 9:9⁶. Israel's true king, David's Son and Lord, now officially presented Himself to the nation. This act certainly fanned the praise and excitement of the people. Jesus is indeed the Messiah that God promised to send to save His people. None of those who rejected Him could say that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah.

B. He Showed the Kind of Messiah He Came to Be - If His intent was to claim the throne of David and lead the armies of Israel to overthrow Rome, He would not have come riding on a meek, slow-pacing donkey! A conquering king would have made his triumphal entry in a chariot or on a battle-horse. Not only that, but emphasis is laid on the age of the animal that Christ rode. It was a "young" donkey, not even full grown. It was barely old enough for a man to ride upon. When I was a kid I tried to ride a large dog. That's about the picture we see here of Jesus, a grown man, riding a young donkey.

So why did Jesus ride on a young donkey! It was not only to fulfill prophecy, but to demonstrate the essential nature of His kingdom. He did not come to them as the Messiah of their dreams by riding upon a horse of war. Instead, he rode upon an animal of peace and meekness. Thus, He shows that He has come, not to shed the blood of others but to bring *spiritual* salvation by the shedding of His own blood.

This leads to:

III. THE GOAL OF THE COMING OF JESUS

What was the ultimate goal of His coming into Jerusalem *at this time, and in this way*? What was on His mind as He entered Jerusalem to the praise of the multitude? Outwardly, all was ready for His earthly glory. The multitudes had proclaimed Him king; the Romans were silent, offering no opposition (a thing most remarkable); the Greeks sought Him. Did He get caught up in the excitement, and have visions of leading the armies of Israel to victory? No. He had one thing on His mind as revealed in His response to the request of the Greeks. It was His impending death. The Savior knew that before He could set up His royal kingdom, He must first accomplish the saving

⁵ We know from the other Gospel accounts that Jesus "found" the donkey through the agency of two of His disciples. He "found" it because He directed the disciples where to find it! This was an unmistakable way He evidenced His omniscience.

⁶ Zechariah 9:9 says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey." Mt. 21:5 also quotes this prophecy.

work of God. And there are several truths about the death He was to experience. First of all we see:

A. To Accelerate the Time of His Death – Jesus said in the last of v.23, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” On a number of previous occasions, Jesus had expressed that His hour had not come (7:30; 8:20). But now He recognizes that the time had come. The “hour” referred to a designated period of time, not a literal 60 minute period. I believe Jesus has in mind the time of His death, burial, & resurrection. It may even include His ascension & heavenly coronation. Jesus is ready. The time is at hand.

So Jesus fully participated in this demonstration because He knew that it would lead to His sacrificial death at the right time for the following reasons. *First*, the enthusiasms of the masses would enrage the hostile leaders at Jerusalem to such a degree that they would desire more intensely than ever to carry out their plot against Him. Look at what they said in the last of v.19, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!” *Secondly*, the Jewish leaders had determined that they did not want to carry out their planned execution of Jesus on a feast day. In Matthew 26:5 they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” But the Passover is exactly when God wanted Jesus to be sacrificed, just like the Passover lambs. The praise of the crowd made them determined to carry out their plan at any opportunity, even at the time of the Passover. What more fitting time for Jesus to die than at Passover, when the lambs were slain. Jesus knew that He was to die as the Lamb of God, for the sins of others. And so 6 days before Passover, Jesus openly declared Himself to be the Messiah, and this made the leaders of Israel willing to accept *any* opportunity to put Jesus to death. And when Judas gave them that opportunity on Passover, they took it. The purposes of God are sure to overrule the purposes of man. *Thirdly*, when the crowds realized that Jesus was *not* going to lead a rebellion, many turned against Him. When Jesus did not deliver them at Passover, their hopes were disappointed, their joy was turned into rage and therefore *they* joined in the cry of “crucify him”!⁷ This is the only explanation for the way at least some in the crowd turned against Jesus.

B. To Accept the Necessity of His Death – Jesus knew He could not bypass the Cross to get to the Crown. Apart from the voluntary sacrifice of Christ, He could do nothing for these Greeks, or anyone else as far as salvation from sin is concerned. And so He gives an analogy from nature. He said in v.24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone....” If a seed remains in a package and is not put in the ground, it remains just a seed; nothing more. But if it rots and dies in the ground, then it springs forth new life. Even so, life could not come to us but through the death of Christ. Apart from the cross, there is no spiritual harvest.

C. To Multiply the Fruit of His Death - Continuing the analogy, the death of the seed not only brings forth new life, but also *much* fruit from that one little seed (v.24b). I believe it is significant that these words were spoken just after the Greeks came to see Jesus. John reports in vv.20-22, “Now there were certain Greeks⁸ among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’ Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.” That these “Greeks” were not idolatrous heathen is evidenced by the fact that they “came up to worship at the

⁷ Now as we have seen, Jesus did not lead them into believing He would lead a rebellion. It was their own fault for such expectations.

⁸ I am inclined to think that very likely they were Syro-Phoenicians. Mark 7:26, “a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by nation.”

feast.”⁹ They were known as “God fearers” who were seeking the true God. They were seeking forgiveness of sin, and peace in their souls. When they came to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, no doubt they heard the reports about Jesus. Being Gentiles, they did not approach Jesus directly. Or perhaps Jesus was in the Jewish portion of the temple and not even accessible to them, since they could only go into the court of the Gentiles. So they make known their wish to Philip, saying, “Sir, we wish [or desire] to see Jesus.” They may have approached Philip because he had a Greek name. Being from Bethsaida of Galilee, he was accustomed to having contact with Greek speaking Jews and Gentiles.

Since they were Gentiles, Philip was not sure of what he should do. After all, Jesus had said in Matt. 10:5, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles” and in Matt. 15:24, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel!” So he sought out Andrew and asked his advice (v.22). Andrew was another disciple that had a heart for bringing people to Jesus. Together they agreed to tell Jesus of the Greeks’ desire to see Jesus. Hearing this, in v.24 Jesus used the analogy of the grain to speak of His pending death, which would bring forth much fruit. Furthermore, the connection to v.19 is very striking. There the envious Pharisees say, “The world is gone after him.” Indeed, these Greeks were just the beginning, a “first-fruit,” as it were, of a coming harvest.

So the fruit of His death would include Gentiles from all over the world. These “Greeks” pointed in the direction of those other “sheep” which the Good Shepherd must also bring into the fold. It was the pledge of the gathering together into one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (11:52). It was another evidence of the fields being “white already to harvest” (4:35). This was the first voice from the outside world which gave a hint of the awakening consciousness that Jesus was about to be the Savior of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. It is also significant to note that just as Gentiles (the wise men from the East) had sought Him soon after His birth, so now these “Greeks” came to Him shortly before His death. Nothing less than of a myriad of Gentiles have believed in Him, which is the “much fruit” that Jesus anticipated.

D. To Challenge Us by the Example of His Death – Jesus said in v.25, “He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Just as a seed must die before it can experience new life, even so you must die to self and this world if you are to experience eternal life. You see, there are two kinds of life that are put in contrast here. “He that loves his life” (*psuche*) refers to this physical, natural life that we have here on earth. It refers to the psychological & sensual life that enjoys the things of this world and finds satisfaction in the gratification of the senses. It is the kind of life that really whoops it up down here. You can really live it up, party, drink, abuse mind-altering drugs, and so forth, but do you know what is going to happen? One day you are going to die. You’ll lose it forever.

On the other hand, Jesus went on to say, “he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Just as Jesus was willing to die to self, even so we should be willing to die to self. He does not simply say, “he who hates his life,” but “he who hates his life *in this world*.” So Jesus is saying that if anyone serves Him, let him follow Christ all the way, even though it be the way of self-denial and the cross. Very different were the thoughts of Christ from those that, most probably, filled the minds of His disciples on this occasion. There must be the suffering before the glory: the Cross before the Crown. He who takes it for the ground of his trust alone, and not as the pattern of his life, has need to ask himself whether his trust in it is genuine or worth anything.

This should serve as a word of warning for the beloved disciples. They had just witnessed the palms of victory waving in His path: soon they would hear them cry, “Crucify him.” Then they

⁹ The verb shows they were in the habit of so doing! (present participle).

would enter into the fellowship of His sufferings. They must not, any more than He, count their life dear unto them. He warns them against selfishness, against cowardice, against shrinking from a martyr's cross.

But the principle here is of wider application. The one who loves his life in this world must necessarily lose it, for it is "alienated" from God (James 4:4). The world is going the opposite direction from the way Jesus is going. You must choose between following Christ and dying to self, or following the world and dying in reference to God. Self-renunciation guards the way to the "tree of life." That lesson was especially needed by "Greeks," who were accustomed to a much more sensuous lifestyle. It is no less needed by our sensuously luxurious generation. The world's war-cries today are "Get! Enjoy!" Christ's command is, "Renounce!" So if you do not live for this world or for the things of this world, but follow and serve Christ, you will keep your new life in Christ forever!

Conclusion: So in spite of the excitement of the triumphal entry, Jesus had one thing on His mind: His sacrificial death on the cross. The time had come. He must walk the path to Calvary. Jesus did it all for you. He loves you. He died for you.

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may listen free at www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker. Dr. Felker's email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).