

## U7k0The World Has Gone After Him

John 12:12-26

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*<sup>12</sup> The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" <sup>14</sup> And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,*

*<sup>15</sup> "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"*

*<sup>16</sup> His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. <sup>17</sup> The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. <sup>18</sup> The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. <sup>19</sup> So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."*

*<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. – John 12:12-26, ESV*

### **Intro: The King Comes to His Glory**

Sometimes people can be so right and so wrong at the same time and not even know it. John makes great use of this reality throughout his Gospel. Throughout his Gospel, John often relates words people say that are more right than they themselves realize. He also relates words Jesus says that His disciples misunderstand or fail to grasp. In these cases, Jesus is far more right than His disciples understand.

John does two different things when he highlights these disconnections:

1. He shows us how divine and in command Jesus truly is throughout His life, death and resurrection.
2. He challenges our assumptions about life and the way the world works, so we can see things from God's perspective and not from our own or from the world's.

In these two ways, John's simple and beautiful Gospel has power to deeply shape our worldview, as it shapes the way we think about Jesus, about ourselves, and about the nature of life, power, glory, suffering and salvation. We come to salvation when we come to know Jesus for who He really is, as the Son of God and Savior of Sinners. Yet as we come to know Jesus better, as we come to understand His mission, His heart, His priorities, the nature of His kingdom and salvation, this knowledge of Christ transforms the way we see ourselves and everything in life.

For example, in that today's passage, Jesus says, *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."* But what does He mean? What do the disciples think He means? Are they thinking that because large crowds of thousands of enthusiastic people came and met Jesus and hailed Him as the "King of Israel," that meant He was now going to take His place on David's throne over the nation of Israel as her long-awaited Messiah?

If this is what Jesus means, then why does He immediately begin speaking about dying? *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* What does a dying grain of wheat have to do with glory? What is Jesus teaching His disciples about Himself that they are so clearly missing? And what is He teaching all of us not only about Himself, but also about life and glory?

In this passage, we're going to see three groups of people who deeply misunderstand Jesus – the cheering crowd, the dense disciples and the frustrated Pharisees. Then, we'll see two people on a mission: Greeks on a mission to see Jesus, and Jesus Himself on a mission toward His moment of glory, a glory which comes through an obedient death.

## I. Misunderstandings:

### A. The Cheering Crowds

The cheering crowds are the first ones in today's passage to misunderstand Jesus, but they are also the first ones to be more right than they know, to be both so right and so wrong at the same time.

*<sup>12</sup> The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" <sup>14</sup> And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,*

*<sup>15</sup> "Fear not, daughter of Zion;  
behold, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey's colt!"*

John tells us the reason why the crowds are welcoming Jesus in this way is because they have heard about the raising of Lazarus. They believe this is a man who can defeat death. And they are right! They reason that He must be the One to lead the people of God to victory, and they are right again! Yet they don't know how wrong they also are about this long-awaited Messiah and what He has come to do.

Two Scriptures come together in this scene: The crowds are chanting lines from Psalm 118 – "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." When they shout "Hosanna!" they are shouting "Save us now!" These words come from verses 25-26 of Psalm 118, which was practically the national anthem of Israel, sung by the Jewish people at each of their three annual festivals – Passover, Pentecost & Tabernacles – and sung more often than any other psalm. This is a joyful song of celebration and a cry for salvation that all faithful Jews knew was a prophecy of the coming of Messiah.

If they had paid attention to the broader context of the lines they shouted, perhaps they would have learned more about what Jesus had come to do –

*Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the LORD.*

*<sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the LORD;  
the righteous shall enter through it.*

*<sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.*

*<sup>22</sup> The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone.*

*<sup>23</sup> This is the LORD's doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.*

*<sup>24</sup> This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

*<sup>25</sup> Save us, we pray, O LORD!  
O LORD, we pray, give us success!*

*<sup>26</sup> Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!  
We bless you from the house of the LORD.*

*<sup>27</sup> The LORD is God,  
and he has made his light to shine upon us.  
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,  
up to the horns of the altar!*

Jesus is riding into Jerusalem through the Sheep Gate as the One who has come to be the salvation of His people. He is the light, sent by God to shine on them, and He has indeed come to save them, but not as they expected. He will become their salvation by being the festival sacrifice, the Passover Lamb for the people of God. The altar on which He will die is the cross. He will be rejected by the builders, by the leaders of God's people, and will become the cornerstone of God's new and living Temple, founded on Him in His death and resurrection.

Though the people had sung Psalm 118 countless times, and while it was exactly what they should have shouted when Jesus was riding into Jerusalem, they were both so right and so wrong at the same time. They shouted for Him as "the king of Israel" and their "Hosanna" was calling for a political salvation from the oppression of the Romans.

When we worship Jesus, do we understand the words of the songs we sing? When we pray and ask God to bless us or to bless our family, do we understand what we're asking God for? Do we know what kind of salvation Jesus came to bring? Our greatest problem is sin. Our greatest need for deliverance is from our own sinful hearts and the guilt of our rebellion against God. Jesus came to be our salvation by dying in our place. Are we singing the right Hosanna to Him?

In addition to the words of Psalm 118 on the lips of the crowd, Jesus is riding on a donkey to fulfill Zechariah 9:9 and to call the people to attend to this promise, found in Zechariah 9:9-11:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!*

*Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!*

*Behold, your king is coming to you;*

*righteous and having salvation is he,*

*humble and mounted on a donkey,*

*on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*<sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim*

*and the war horse from Jerusalem;*

*and the battle bow shall be cut off,*

*and he shall speak peace to the nations;*

*his rule shall be from sea to sea,*

*and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

*<sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,*

*I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*

These words from Zechariah point to at least four key truths about Jesus:

1. He enters riding a donkey, which means He comes as the righteous One who has salvation.
2. He comes to bring peace not a military conflict and conquest.
3. Freedom from death (“the waterless pit”) will come through the blood of His covenant with His people.
4. His kingdom will rule worldwide – “to the ends of the earth” – and thus not just for Israel.

Both the words of Psalm 118 and the words of Zechariah would have helped guide the people away from their expectation of a nationalistic, military Messiah. We need to make sure we are letting Scripture guide and shape our expectations and our hope in the Lord, not our own small-minded and self-centered desires.

## **B. The Dense Disciples**

The disciples are also misunderstanding Jesus, but they remain silent in today’s passage. Even when Greeks come seeking Jesus, we don’t hear them speak directly. All we know about them for sure is that they didn’t grasp the significance of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus on that first Palm Sunday –

*16 His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.*

The disciples were not any more Scripture-minded than the chaotic cheering crowd on that Palm Sunday morning. They had spent the better part of three years with Jesus, listening to Him teach and preach and seeing Him perform many miracles, but they weren't meditating on Psalm 118 or on Zechariah. They seemed to be caught up in the moment and just did not understand what Jesus was doing or what the significance of this moment in Jesus' life and ministry truly was . . . until later, when He had died and risen again and had sent them the Holy Spirit.

How often do we miss what God is doing? Despite the fact that we've been in church for years and we've heard sermon after sermon, too often our minds are not focused on God's word. We get easily caught up in the moment and miss the kingdom realities of Jesus at work in our midst. We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes, just as He opened the eyes of the disciples, so we can see and understand our place in Christ's kingdom, our calling as His ambassadors, His grace at work in our lives each day.

### **C. The Frustrated Pharisees**

Unlike the excited crowd and the dense disciples, the Pharisees are not happy at all with the scene unfolding before them in Jerusalem. Yet like the crowds, even though they fundamentally misunderstand Jesus, what they say about Him is more right than they know:

*So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."*

They were right that they were, in fact, gaining nothing by their opposition of Jesus and His kingdom, and they were right that the world was indeed going to go after Jesus.

They were afraid. What they meant was that the rabble, the mob, the chaotic crowd was all cheering for Jesus, going after Him. Had He wanted to, He could easily have raised an army of the people and led them in an uprising against the Romans. Such a populist uprising happened in AD 68 and led to disastrous consequences for the nation and for the Jewish people for centuries.

Yet the truth is that Jesus wasn't interested in overthrowing Roman rule of Judea. He was going to overthrow Satan's oppressive rule over the whole world. They weren't in danger of losing their positions of political advantage and influence and prestige, they were in danger of missing God's Savior and God's salvation, in danger of missing the kingdom and forgiveness that Jesus was bringing in Himself.

## **II. Missions**

Thankfully, we see much more than just mistaken people in this passage. We also see Jesus on mission. He's not the only one. A group of Greeks is also on a mission. They want to see Jesus.

### **A. The Greeks Seeking Jesus**

*Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.*

We don't know who these Greeks are; the important thing about them is the fact that they're Greek, not Jewish. These are not Greek-speaking Jews, Hellenized Jews, but rather Greek-speaking non-Jewish God-fearers, like Cornelius the Centurion whom Peter will lead to Christ years later in Acts 10.

These Greeks come to Phillip. John tells us that Phillip comes from Bethsaida in Galilee, probably because this background gave Phillip lots of exposure to Greek-speaking Gentiles. Phillip doesn't know what to do with the Greeks and their request. Here they are in Jerusalem for the Passover, and Greeks want to see the Messiah. This would be a challenge to nationalistic ideology, during a great nationalistic festival, immediately following a procession that was charged with nationalistic fervor. So Phillip goes to Andrew and together Andrew and Phillip go and tell Jesus about the request of the Greeks.

## **B. Jesus Seeking Glory in an Obedient Death**

In another interesting omission, John does not tell us whether the Greeks got to see Jesus or not. Jesus' response to Phillip and Andrew doesn't even seem to answer the request of the Greeks at all. In fact, it seems completely unrelated, but it's not.

Jesus takes this request from the Greeks as the moment to announce that His hour of glory, for which they had all been waiting for so long, had now come at last –

*And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*

But He doesn't follow His announcement that the hour of His glorification has finally come with any words or actions that seem especially glorious. Instead, He starts talking about wheat and death . . .

*<sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

Jesus knows the way to glory lies through His death on the cross. The path of glorification for the Son of Man is the way of the cross, the way of dying. He takes as His illustration something familiar to all of the disciples: wheat. As long as a grain of wheat remains alive and connected to the head on the stalk, it remains but a single grain of wheat. Yet if it will die, if it will drop to the ground and be buried, it can multiply greatly, bearing much fruit, becoming more and greater through dying and rising again.

In the wheat, God had given us a living demonstration of His Son. Jesus is the perfect and holy Son of God. He pleased His Father in all He did. As such, He was and is entitled to inherit the kingdom of God and to sit at God's right hand forever. But unless he dies, He remains alone. He remains the one and only Son of God.

Only as Jesus lays down His life, only as His body is pieced and broken, does He become greater, is He truly glorified. For in His dying, He brings many sons to glory by bearing our sins and making us as righteous as He is. He rides into Jerusalem righteous and having salvation, but in order to give that salvation to us, He must die and by the blood of His covenant set us free from the waterless pit, from death itself.

Yet this pattern of glory through death is not just true for Jesus, as Jesus says –

*<sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

The only way for any of us to truly live is to die. The only way to enter glory is through the cross. Our King secured His throne by dying to Himself, saying to His Father, “*Not My will, but Yours be done.*” Those who belong to Jesus must follow Him, dying to self as He died, living for the Father’s glory, as He lived for the Father’s glory.

### **Conclusion: The Glorious Mission of the King**

Yet why does Jesus say all of this in response to Greeks looking for Him, wanting to see Him? Because this is why He came, and this is His mission in the world still! Jesus came to give His life so that more people from more people groups could come to have life in Him. He came to die to bear much fruit, and these Greeks were evidence of His mission at work.

This is still the glorious mission of the King, and we are called to be fully engaged in it, just as Jesus was. Jesus calls us, not to hold onto our lives and seek our own pleasure, but to surrender our lives to His mission, serving Him with all that we have and all that we are, just as He poured out His life unto death for us.

Why did the crowds and the disciples and the Pharisees all misunderstand Jesus? Because they were focused on themselves to the point of blind obsession. They could not think beyond their desires, their agenda, their priorities. Those who think in such ways miss the true life found in Jesus. Those who reject their own selfish hearts to trust Jesus instead are the ones who find true life! May the Holy Spirit grant us eyes to see and hearts to love His glory, His kingdom, His mission in this world!