

# Not Just Savior but Ruler

John 12:9-19

**BI: Humbly making his way to the cross Jesus is revealed to be our sovereign, victorious King.**

In his brief letter written to the church at Philippi, the apostle Paul declares that the greatest ambition and highest goal of his life was to attain the surpassing treasure of knowing “Christ Jesus my Lord.” Think about that for a moment. This was the great apostle Paul, arguably the premiere intellect of his time and the man through whom the H.S. inspired most of the N.T. If anyone knew and understood Jesus Christ, it was Paul! And yet he declares that the ambition that dominated his life was to NOT planting churches (though he did that), NOT writing books, NOT becoming famous or changing the world, but to knowing Jesus.

I think one of the greatest inhibitors to our own growth in godliness and knowledge of God’s word is that we think we already know Jesus as much as we can know Him. After all, we know He is God’s Son, born in Bethlehem, performed many miracles, died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the dead, coincidentally, on Easter Sunday. What else is there to know? That’s like saying, Because I have often swam in a bay beside the sea, I know the ocean. But I get the sense that Paul, who spent all of his adult life deliberately exploring the unfathomable depths of Christ, believed with all his heart that he had hardly penetrated the surface of knowing Him. There was just so much more to know!

The passage before us this morning will, I hope, stretch and deepen our knowledge of Christ so that we will love Him more and be more inclined to worship Him for the glorious being that He is. Most of us know something about Jesus the man, Jesus our Savior, Jesus the Prophet-teacher, and Jesus our great high Priest. But how well do we know Jesus as King? Not just Savior, but Ruler!

The passage before us this morning introduces us to Jesus the King and helps us to consider how to relate to Him as subjects of His kingdom.

Read John 12:9-19

If you’re taking notes, let’s call this first section...

## **I. The King’s Conflicting Attention:**

1. The first thing we see is the dichotomy between two groups. The first is what John calls (9) a “large crowd of Jews.” Apparently, word got out about the gathering that was taking place at Simon the Leper’s home in Bethany where Jesus and Lazarus were the honored guests. Both of these men were the subject of intense controversy at the time and this surely intensified the curiosity of the people who lived in Jerusalem. In any case, a large crowd of them decided to walk over to Bethany to have a look.

2. The second group of people was the Sanhedrin; that body of religious leaders who hated Jesus and had just recently put out a warrant for his arrest. When they saw the large crowd of curiosity seekers heading to Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus, they conclude that they would have to kill, NOT only Jesus, but Lazarus as well. Why? “Because (11) on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.”

3. As Cleon Morris observes, “For the Sadducees, Lazarus was a double embarrassment. Not only did he cause people to go over to the side of Christ, but he was also a standing condemnation of their doctrine [everyone knew they did not believe in resurrection].<sup>1</sup>

4. Now don’t get the wrong idea here. The crowds were not “believing” in Jesus unto salvation. After seeing Him raise Lazarus from the dead they were simply concluding that He was probably Israel’s Messiah come to deliver them from the oppression of Rome. In less than a week, however, this same crowd of people (and more) will demand that He be crucified.

5. Jesus was always a polarizing figure, and the intensity of opposing feelings of these two groups (the crowd and the Sanhedrin) pointed ominously to a major conflict to come. So here we see the King’s conflicting attention.

## **II. The King’s Spontaneous Reception:**

1. Read 12-13

2. Now it’s the morning after the party. Christian tradition refers to this day as “Palm Sunday” because of what happened here. Apparently, Jesus is now walking with his men and presumably the large crowd who had come to him the night before. On the other hand, there is another large crowd of pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover.

3. Considering the fact that the population of Jerusalem in that day was approx. 100,000, and the number of pilgrims who had come to the feast being several times that number, the “large crowd” gathered at the Jewish capitol that week may have numbered up to a million people.<sup>2</sup>

4. In any case, there appears to be a crowd following Jesus up the road to Jerusalem and another crowd coming down the road to meet him. In fact, the phrase “Went to meet Him” is an unusual phrase used nowhere else in the NT. But it was used regularly in Greek culture where such a joyful reception was customary for a Greek general or King as he approached a city.<sup>3</sup>

5. These two crowds literally surrounded Jesus. Matt. and Mark write that there were many people in front of Jesus and many behind him (Mat. 21:9; Mark 11:9).

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John Revised Edition*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 517

<sup>2</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2004), 368

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 369

6. Something fantastic is about to happen here and we know it's important because all four gospel writers give an account of it (Matt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk. 19; Jn. 12).

7. Several unique things occur that deserve special attention. First, the people begin peeling Palm branches (or fronds) from the trees and started waving them at him. Now that seems a bit unusual, doesn't it? But history tells us that "The waving of Palm Fronds had become a common practice at national celebrations in Israel (Lev. 23:40). By the intertestamental period, "Palm" fronds had become a national symbol for victory or celebration (cf. 1 Macc. 13:51). They appear on the coins that the Jewish nationalists produced during the war with the Romans in A.D. 66-70. Used on this occasion, however, they probably signaled popular belief that Israel's Messiah had appeared (cf. Rev. 7:9).<sup>4</sup>

8. Second, these huge crowds begin shouting "Hosana! Hosanna!" "Hosanna" is the transliteration of a Hebrew phrase that means "Save us" or "Deliver us!" The Jews commonly used this word in their worship at the feast of Tabernacles, Dedication, and Passover. It was part of the Hallel (a series of Psalms - 113-118) that the all-male temple choir sang [every morning] by the Temple at the feasts (Psa. 118:25). And as they sang, every man and boy would wave a bouquet of willow, myrtle, and palm branches right when the choir reached the part where they sang "Hosanna!" "Save! Deliver! Save!"

9. There can be no mistake. This was a massive public declaration that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. He was being hailed as King. Mathew makes this even clearer when he records that they also called Him son of David. That is, Son of the King and worthy of Israel's throne.

10. Third, notice how they also cry out (13), "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" The Jews of Jesus day regarded the phrase "He who comes in the name of the Lord" as a reference to Messiah.<sup>5</sup>

11. "He who comes" reminds us of the question John the Baptist asked when he sent word to Jesus saying, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matt. 11:3). And we remember that in her great confession before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Martha declared to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world" (Jn. 11:27). The terms "coming One" and Messiah or Christ are often used together in John's gospel. Jesus was indeed the One who was to come; the Messiah, the Christ, "Even the King of Israel."

12. Fourth, while all the people are shouting and the choir is singing, and the palm branches are waving, Jesus does something we might find completely unexpected. He mounts a donkey.

13. Each of the other Gospel writers offer more detail than John about Jesus securing the "young donkey." It seems here in John that there just happened to be a donkey standing there for him to ride. But Jesus was more intentional than that. The other gospels tell us that before this spontaneous reception broke out He sent two disciples into a village to

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Constable, "Notes on John," Dr. Constable's Notes, Sonic Light, p 208, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/john.pdf>, (accessed March 11, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

find a mature donkey with her colt. Jesus specifically wanted the colt that had never been ridden before.

14. Why did He insist on riding a donkey? Because it was the fulfillment of messianic prophesy. (Zecha. 9:9) “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

15. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to symbolize a conception of messiahship very different from that of the crowds. They hailed him as the messianic King. They viewed Him as a conquering monarch, but He came as the Prince of peace.<sup>6</sup> He came into Jerusalem NOT on a war horse but on a donkey, and not even a mature donkey but one that was probably deemed too young to ride (the colt of a donkey).

16. It must have been a glorious scene! Thousands upon thousands of people clapping and shouting “Hosanna.” Palm branches are waving, the choir is singing. People are announcing him as the son of David, the King of Israel. Jesus is riding on a little donkey. Luke tells us (Lk. 19) that people were taking off their coats and laying them on the ground in front of the donkey as if to lay out the Red Carpet, and that the whole crowd was praising God with a loud voice for all the miracles He had done.

17. This was an astonishing moment. It was the absolute high point on Jesus Ministry. And what is most astonishing to me is not so much that the people were welcoming Him and praising Him as King, but that He accepted the honor! You may remember back in John 6 after he fed the five thousand, the crowd was so astonished they determined to take Him by force and make him king, but Jesus rejected the idea. Now things are different. Now His hour had come. Now he was an active participant in the spontaneous reception of the King. In fact, Jesus makes that abundantly clear when the Pharisees approach him in the middle of all this and say (Lk. 19:14), “Rabbi, rebuke your disciples!” But Jesus replies, “I tell you if these become silent, the stones will cry out!” Yes, Jesus was accepting their praise and honor and worship because He is indeed their king. Their king and ours.

18. So we have seen the King’s conflicting attention; the King’s spontaneous reception, and now...

### **III. The Disciple’s Temporary Confusion:**

1. Read v. 16

2. Late in John 16 Jesus will promise to send the H.S. who will guide his disciples into all truth. This verse (12:16) is an example of that. At first the disciples did not understand what the Scriptures taught.<sup>7</sup> Not even the disciples themselves understood what was happening that day. They didn’t comprehend the nature of Jesus’ kingship. Why? Because the H.S. had not given them the ability to understand the meaning of those pertinent O.T. prophecies about the Messiah. But after his resurrection they got it.

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<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John Revised Edition*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 520

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 521

3. Look at Acts 2:15. Here Peter, who so many times did not understand what Jesus was saying about Himself, His death and His kingdom, but now it all starts to come together. (Read Acts 1:16). (Read 2:16).

4. This is what John is talking about. He's confessing that they didn't understand what was going on at Jesus' triumphal entry, but now (after the resurrection) they begin to understand their Bible. They begin to see that God had already revealed that these things were going to happen by His written word LONG before any of it happened. In this case, they began to understand what it means that Jesus is KING.

5. Beloved, we understand that Jesus fulfilled the office of Prophet as He spoke the word of God to the people. We understand that He fulfilled the office of Priest, as He offered Himself as the "once for all sacrifice" for our sins. But how well do we understand that Jesus came also to fulfill His office as King? Jesus isn't just Savior, but ruler as well.

6. Consider this:

A. Consider the fact that when the Magi came to Jerusalem with that great caravan from the east (Mat. 2:2) their question was, "Where is He who was born King of the Jews?"

B. When Nathaniel met Jesus in John 1, he says to Jesus, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

C. John 18:36 Pilate asks Jesus if He is a king and Jesus responds, "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingship was of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is my kingship is not of this world.

D. Throughout the narrative of the crucifixion the gospel writers go out of their way to show that the Roman guards mocked Him by dressing him like a king and weaving a crown of thorns for his head.

E. And in the end Pilate had a sign made to hang over Jesus' head, "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews."

7. Ironically, this is exactly who Jesus is. He is King!

A. God sent John the Baptist ahead of Jesus to declare that the Kingdom of heaven is near."

B. Much of Jesus' teaching was about the kingdom of God. He wasn't speaking of a geographical location, but rather about the rule, reign, and authority of the King.

C. Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Jewish leaders wanted a political leader who would deliver them from Rome; but Jesus came to bring His spiritual rule to the hearts of people. This does not deny the reality of a future kingdom (Rev. 20) but affirms that Jesus was gathering to himself a host of people who willingly and gratefully submit to His rule over their lives.<sup>8</sup>

D. As one author put it, "It is the gospel (the glad tidings) of the kingdom of God that every penitent and believing soul is immediately and without any delay whatever

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<sup>8</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996.), 20

taken into the favor of God. As soon as the submissive spirit of the man says, “Father, I have sinned,” so soon is grace bestowed, so soon is the name entered on the roll of the heavenly citizenship.”<sup>9</sup> That’s how we become citizens of Christ’s Kingdom.

E. When you read the NT you learn that Jesus has authority over the wind and waves, over disease, over space and time. He is sovereign over the affairs of men, and one day every knee shall bow and every tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord! He is the King.

8. The disciples didn’t understand all of that until after the resurrection, but they got it. The question is, do we get it? Do we get the fact that Jesus isn’t just Savior but Ruler! He is King of Kings and Lord of Lord. He is worthy of our obedience in all things and our greatest joy can be found and knowing and serving Him as King.

9. Now, one last thing. We have seen The King’s Conflicting Attention; The King’s Spontaneous Reception, The Disciple’s temporary Confusion, and finally...

#### **IV. The Priest’s Ironic Declaration:**

1. Read 12:19

2. The effect on the Pharisees is predictable... “Do you see how helpless you are? The whole world [kosmos] is gone after Him!”

3. The irony here is magnificent. The priests employ hyperbole to complain that the “whole world has gone after him,” and that is exactly what Jesus came to do. They are concerned that a few Judeans were being influenced. But their words express John’s conviction that Jesus was conquering the world.”<sup>10</sup>

4. You see beloved, Jesus is King. By the end of that week the Jews will successfully murder Jesus by nailing Him to a cross. But God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,<sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.<sup>22</sup> And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,<sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

5. You see beloved, Jesus is far greater and more glorious than we can imagine. And one day, as we ready in the book of Revelation,

- Rev. 11:15 “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”

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<sup>9</sup> Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). St. Luke (Vol. 1, p. 218). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John Revised Edition, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 523

6. And one day we who belong to Christ will join that great multitude which no one can count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

**BI: Humbly making his way to the cross Jesus is revealed to be our sovereign, victorious King.**