

## **Behold Your King!**

John 12:12–19

Studies in John #26

**C**AN you feel the anticipation? Can you sense the excitement? As you look around you see thousands upon thousands of jubilant citizens lining Pennsylvania Avenue hailing the newly elected and soon-to-be president as the motorcade goes by. It's the inauguration of a new President of the United States. What a memorable event in the life of our nation! Every four years is a turning point! Every four years brings fresh hope! Yet inevitably the bright lights of that day turn into a storm cloud as the air fills with disappointment, despair, and disillusionment at the whole political process.

Welcome to Palm Sunday! We feel the anticipation of the people asking each other, “What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?” (11:56) We feel the hope of the “large crowd... [that] had come to the feast” (12:12). Around the year 60AD the Jewish historian Josephus tells us there were 2.5 million pilgrims in Jerusalem for the Passover. Imagine that? Almost the entire county of San Diego packed into 125 acres within Jerusalem's walls!

All the acclamation and adulation we know during an inauguration was there; but in five days—not four years—everything was dashed in disappointment. The light of that day resulted in the darkness of Good Friday. But here's where we by faith stand in amazement. Out of the despair and

disillusionment of those left-behind palm branches God builds a stage to perform his most amazing act. The plan of God was that Palm Sunday was the precursor of Good Friday. And the cross is our salvation! Amen?

### THE PROMISED KING (VV. 12–15)

*Behold your King, THE PROMISED KING!* We read in verse 12 **the next day**.

It's now Sunday, the day after Jesus was in Bethany at Lazarus' house in the previous story. We read of **the large crowd that had come to the feast**, which 11:55 said "many...went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves." John tells us "they were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?'" (11:56) Then they **heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem**—against their expectations!

Think about that. The Pharisees wanted him dead. They had even "given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him" (11:57). So serious was their desire that they even "made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus" (12:10–11). Jesus is walking into a trap! Why? He has a mission to fulfill! "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (6:38).

This **large crowd** carrying **branches of palm trees...went out** to the city gate **to meet him** (v. 13). Children, why palm branches? Have you ever picked one up and shook it? It waves and it makes a noise. *The palm branch is a biblical symbol of praise.* For example in Revelation 7 we read of that “great multitude that no one could number...standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (v. 9). With those branches we hear them “crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (v. 10) *The palm branch was also a political symbol of liberation.* This is what you would’ve felt deeply if you were a first-century Jewish person on that road waiting for Jesus. The palm branch was the symbol on Jewish coins after Judas Maccabaeus revolted against Antiochus Epiphanes and cleansed the Temple in December 164BC.

As he draws near to the city the **large crowd** with **branches of palm trees** are **crying out** at the top of their lungs, “**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!**” (v. 13) Illustration: Remember when then candidate Obama spoke and people were fainting? Those on the right thought these people were crazy. But what about when candidate Trump was campaigning? Just as crazy! Use that as an image of what’s going on here. People are ready to explode!

What's the meaning of their cry? Turn to Psalm 118. This is one of the Psalms that were sung at the Passover, remembering God's great work of salvation from Egypt. In verse 19 is the plea, "Open to me the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them" and in verse 20 the declaration, "This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it." Where is the large crowd again? At the gate of Jerusalem! Then in verse 25 we hear their cries: "Save us, we pray, O LORD!" Listen to it in Hebrew: *'ana' Yahweh hoshi'ah na'*. **Hosanna** is an exclamation. It means, "Save now!" It's time! The anointed king is entering the city of God as the Psalmist prayed prophetically. He's bringing salvation! **Application:** Nothing demonstrates this more in our country than the mingling of the cross and political power. I saw a car last night with a bumper sticker on one side advertising a church and then on the other with Trump. Or we see the image of a US soldier in full gear bowing before the cross. Or we hear it that a certain political candidate is our only hope! When we do this we're just like those who had a front row seat on Palm Sunday. And just like them, would we stick around for Good Friday?

But as we've so many times before, Jesus blows their expectations—and ours—out of the water. Look at the strange scene: **Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it** (v. 14). Why? John tells us: **just as it is written, "Fear**

**not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"** What have you heard this means? Riding in on a donkey was a sign of humility, right? But John quotes Zechariah 9:9, which picks up a prophetic theme all the way back in Jacob's prophetic blessings of his sons in Genesis 49. I won't take you there now, but read Judah's prophecy. He's the line of kings. But then there's this strange image: "Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11). The crowds wanted a political Savior; Jesus rides in on a donkey to show that he's a sacrificial Savior. *Behold your promised King!*

#### THE WORLD'S KING (VV. 17–18)

*Behold your King, THE WORLD'S KING!* Back to that **crowd that had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead** (v. 17). Skip to verse 18 for a moment: the apostle tells us **the reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign** (v. 18). Now back to verse 17: the crowd that was at the tomb and believed **continued to bear witness.** Application: This is one of the themes we saw in the beginning of the Gospel: those who see, remain, then go out to tell others.

Then comes verse 19. We know the saying, “An irresistible force meets an immovable object.” The irresistible force of the evangelistic testimony that Jesus is the promised King meets the immovable object of the Pharisees: **“You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him”** (v. 19). Remember after Lazarus’ resurrection “the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council (meaning, the Sanhedrin) and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him” (11:47–48). The high priest Caiaphas said “it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (v. 50), which was a prophecy “that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (vv. 51–52).

They say this time **“the world has gone after him.”** Let me say a couple of things about that word **world** or κόσμος. First, Jesus doesn’t mean every single human being who ever lived. When our friends say “God so loved the world” and “world” means every single human being obviously it doesn’t. Context is king. The context is the great multitude at the Feast rushing out of the city to hail Jesus as King. Second, since the crowd was made up not only of ethnic Jews but also Gentile converts to the God of Israel, **world** means the

Jews and Gentiles who make up this great crowd. Note how the next episode shows this too, as in verse 20: “among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.” The word translated “Greeks” is Ἕλληνες, which doesn’t refer to ethnic Greeks but those in the eastern Roman Empire that had been “Hellenized” when it was previously the Greek Empire. This shows us what Jesus will go on to say even later in this story: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (v. 32). This was the vision of the Old Testament as God made his promise with one man, Abraham, that through his offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

**Application:** This is the vision of the New Covenant church, amen? Pray that Jesus would continue to gather in this place people from every tribe and people. But let me also say that when they come, we welcome them as they are, with their culture, with their skin color, with their empty pockets! That’s who they are. And who they are is a gift to us to add into the mix! *Behold the world’s king!*

#### THE SOON-GLORIFIED KING (V. 16)

*Behold your King, THE SOON-GLORIFIED KING!* What a king Jesus is! He’s the Jews’ king; he’s the Gentiles’ king. Amen? He’s one nations’ king; he’s the world’s king. Amen? His triumphal entry on what we call “Palm Sunday” is a momentous event in the history of salvation.

Yet even Jesus' closest disciples didn't get what was going on at first: **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** (v. 16). When was Jesus **glorified**? Fill in this sentence for me: in the New Testament Jesus was **glorified** when he \_\_\_\_\_. What did you write down or what are you thinking? Did you write down "in the New Testament Jesus was **glorified** when he was *resurrected*?" If you did, you would be correct.

But we're specifically in John's Gospel this morning. So fill in this sentence: in the John's Gospel Jesus was **glorified** when he was \_\_\_\_\_. What did you say? In the John's Gospel Jesus was **glorified** when he was *crucified*. That just doesn't sound right, does it? But it's correct. Just past our story we start to get the answer. When the "Greeks" said to Philip, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (vv. 20, 21), Jesus explains that "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be *glorified*" (v. 23). When will that be? He then gave a parable: "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**" (v. 24). So it has something to do with death. On Maunday Thursday Jesus told his disciples after washing his feet, "'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (v.



31) and then “Where I am going you cannot come” (v. 33). When Peter asked, “Lord, where are you going?...Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you,” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me?” (vv. 36, 37, 38).

The Jewish crowds wanted a political king with a political salvation that was the solution to their problems. But what they got was the world’s king who would soon be glorified on the cross. What a contrast! What a plan of God right before our eyes. Brothers and sisters, I said to you last Sunday that we as a church family must always glory only in the cross, seek to know nothing but Christ and him crucified, and never forsake singing, praying, preaching, and communion with the cross before our eyes! *Behold your King!*