

The Impossibility of Neutrality with Christ: John 12:12-19

Text: John 12:12-19 "On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt. These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him. The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him..."

Part 1: The Setting: John 12 is the hinge between two sections of John's gospel:

- **John 1-11** presents 7 signs to convince us that Jesus is the Christ.
 - There is a building tension in the way he presents each of these proofs.
 - His first miracle was private at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.
 - The seventh was public and inescapable in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem.
- **Bethany plays a significant role in this moment for three reasons:**
 - Jesus had dear friends who lived in the town.
 - He used it as a base when traveling back and forth to Jerusalem during Passover Week.
 - Tens of thousands of pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for Passover went through it.

Part 2: The Building Tension: Palm Sunday is an event within a story:

- **The big picture:**
 - This story starts with numerous Old Testament prophecies pointing to Christ.
 - His cousin John preached throughout the Judean countryside preparing the way.
 - Christ preached the same message.
 - He performed numerous miracles confirming His identity.
 - Each miracle called the people to make a choice and with that choice came division.
 - Some wanted a national hero who would lead a triumphant rebellion against Rome.

- Others felt threatened by the instability a rebellion would create.
- It seemed that few understood the true purpose for His coming.
- **The immediate context:** Drama in Bethany
 - **John 12:** He traveled up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover for the last time.
 - On the Friday evening before His final Passover week, Christ stopped in Bethany to gather with friends.
 - They were invited into the home of Simon, a leper whom Christ had healed.
 - Lazarus and Christ were the center of attention that evening.
 - **John 12:1-11**
 - **Jesus ate with his friend who was dead for four days then raised to life:** "Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead..."
 - **Mary took this moment to show extravagant, humble worship:** "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair..."
 - **Judas mocked her worship:** "Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot...Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?"
 - **Jesus defended it and put her sacrifice into perspective:** "Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this..."
 - **The Chief Priests plotted to murder Lazarus:** "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus..."
- **The building division that led to the cross:**
 - **Some believed on Him: 11:45** "Many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him..."
 - **One humbly worshipped Him: John 12:1-3** "Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead...Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment..."
 - **The masses wanted a national hero to crush their enemies: 12:12** "When they heard that Jesus was coming to

Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him..."

- **Others saw Him as a threat: 11:46-48** "But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done. Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, what do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation..."
- **One betrayed him: 12:4-5** "Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?"
- **This treachery unknowingly culminated in history's greatest triumph: 11:49-51** "One of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them...it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not...This spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad..."

Part 3: The height of this tension: 12:12-19 "On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord...The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him..."

- **Three Important Observations:**
 - History is dynamic, not static, because people make choices, and they must live with the consequences of those choices.
 - These movements flow in cycles, because generational turnover fails to change human nature.
 - These cycles are not random but rather guided by God.
- **Jerusalem was packed with worshippers gathering for Passover:**
 - For perspective, Josephus recorded over 250,000 lambs sacrificed in one Passover during this period.
 - There were easily a million or more worshippers in the city.

- As they prepared to celebrate, few understood this Passover's significance.
- The Lamb of God who would complete this picture was in their midst, and they missed it.
- **As He descended the Mount of Olives into the Kidron Valley and then up again into the city, every piece ordained by God was falling into place.**
 - **This event occurred to the day in perfect sequence with the prophecy recorded in Daniel 9:**
 - **The people cried out in passionate but tragic irony: 12:13** "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord..."
 - **Their cry was a direct quote from Psalm 118 the final Psalm read by each family during the Passover Meal.**
 - It reminded them that the Passover was meant to look in two different directions.
 - They understood the need for a Savior.
 - They did not understand the nature of that salvation.
- **Salvation comes through a sacrifice: Psalm 118:22-25** "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now..."
 - **The Savior would be rejected:** "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner..."
 - **This rejection would culminate in accomplishing God's will:** "This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes..."
 - **It will be the single greatest event in history:** "This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it..."
 - **Salvation is possible now:** "Save now..."
- **Even His disciples failed to understand this Psalm in the moment: 12:16** "These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him..."

Part 4: The resolution:

- **God accomplished His promises at the right time through these people:**
- **Though they rejected Him in rebellion, they unknowingly participated in the unfolding of that plan: 12:23** "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified..."

- **Passover 1: John 2:4** "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come..."
- **Passover 3:**
 - **John 7:30** "Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come..."
 - **John 8:20** "These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come..."
- **Passover 4:**
 - **Triumphal Entry: John 12:23** "Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified..."
 - **Upper Room: John 16:32** "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come..."
 - **Before the Betrayal: John 17:1** "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee..."
- **Through the cross, God demonstrated His righteousness and made salvation possible: Romans 3:24-26** We are "Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus..."
- **God's grace was available even to those who stumbled:**
 - **The Disciples: John 20:19** "The same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews..."
 - **Thomas: John 20:27-28** "Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God..."
 - **Peter: John 21:17** "He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep..."
- **He pursued those who rejected Him through those who stumbled:**
 - **At Pentecost 3,000 people who once rejected Christ embraced Him: Acts 2:36-38** "Let all the house of Israel know

assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ..."

- **On the road to Damascus, the church's greatest enemy embraced the Gospel:**
 - **1 Timothy 1:15, 13** "This is a faithful saying...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief...Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy..."
 - **Acts 26:4-12** "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning,...many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities..."

Application: This passage calls us to action

- **It shows the impossibility of neutrality with God:** If you have never placed your faith in Christ alone, repent and believe on Him.
- **It shows the incompressible beauty of His grace:**
 - He graciously pursued those who stumbled and rejected Him.
 - No matter where you have been in life, you can turn to God.
 - No matter how you have stumbled in your Christian life, you can get back up and God can use you.
- **It shows the meticulous precision of His care:**
 - Against unimaginable obstacles, God wove together to the very day every detail of His plan to provide salvation.
 - Trust Him to care for you with the same meticulous care.
 - Your life is being upheld and shaped by the sovereign hands of your Father.
- **It shows the completeness of His revelation:** Study the scriptures with careful attention to detail and delight in the care He has taken to communicate all you need to know Him and walk with Him.