

MBC – 3/28/2021 – Pastor Doug Thompson  
**"We Wish to See Jesus!"**  
 John 12:9-36

On this Palm Sunday, we're going to look at the *least* familiar version Jesus' Triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which is John's version in John ch. 12. So turn there with me this morning. I have one goal this morning and that is that you would see and hear Jesus in this passage and that as the result of what you see and hear, you would love Him and obey Him.

Pray before we read. . . This is a long passage so we will look at it in sections—

**I. The bittersweet entry (vv.9-19)**

We begin in Bethany where Jesus has been at a dinner with his friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus—

- John 12:9–19 <sup>9</sup>When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup>So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup>because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. <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."

Word had gotten out that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, and the reaction was explosive. Matthew's version of this says that *"the whole city was stirred up."* It's the Gk. word for "earthquake." They were "stirred up" mostly because of His raising of Lazarus. Those who had seen it happen were telling others, and those who didn't wanted to see this Jesus and his walking, talking miracle – *Lazarus*. I would be curious too!

- But also in this crowd were the chief priests, who were *Sadducees*, and who did not believe in resurrection. They wanted Jesus, *and* Lazarus dead, because a resurrected guy made them look really bad. And because of this miracle, many were beginning to follow Jesus. That's competition. They had to be thinking, "How do we make sure Lazarus stays dead this time? Maybe a silver bullet?"

Middle Easterners are not a quiet bunch. They were loud and emotional; the adrenalin was pumping, and they were ready to put the Messiah's crown on Jesus right then and there. Look at v.13:

- John 12:13 <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!"

They called Jesus the King of Israel. Matthew says they called Him the Son of David. That's Messiah talk. And "Hosanna," means *"bring salvation now."* But the salvation they were looking for wasn't spiritual, it

was political. They wanted salvation from Rome; from high taxes; from the occupation of their country by godless Gentiles. And if Jesus could raise a man from the dead, then He was the Man who could pull it off. And remember, all of this is leading to Passover, which celebrated Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt – so this has morphed into a huge patriotic freedom rally. "Make Israel Great Again!" It was deafening!

But something else was going on in Jerusalem on this particular Palm Sunday. And once you hear it, you will be able to envision the incredible tension in that city on that day—

"In the year 30 AD, Roman historians record that the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, led a procession of Roman cavalry and centurions into the city of Jerusalem.

Imagine the spectacle of that entry. From the western side of the city, the opposite side from which Jesus enters, Pontius Pilate leads Roman soldiers on horseback and on foot. Each soldier was clad in leather armor polished to a high gloss. On each centurion's head, hammered helmets gleamed in the bright sunlight. At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel; and, in their hands, each centurion carried a spear; or if he was an archer, a bow with a sling of arrows across his back.

Drummers beat out the cadence of march for this was no ordinary entry into Jerusalem. Pilate, as governor of the region which included not only Judea, but Samaria, and Idumea, knew it was standard practice for the Roman governor of a foreign territory to be in its capital for religious celebrations. It was the beginning of Passover, a strange Jewish festival that the Romans allowed. However, the Romans must have been aware that this festival celebrated the liberation of the Jews from another empire, the empire of Egypt.

So, Pilate had to be in Jerusalem. Since the Romans had occupied this land by defeating the Jews and deposing their king about 80 years before, uprisings were always in the air. The last major uprising, long before Pilate's time, had been after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC. That uprising started in Sepphoris, about 5 miles from Jesus' boyhood home of Nazareth. Before it was over the city of Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee, and the town of Emmaus had been destroyed by the Roman army.

After putting down the rebellion there, the Romans marched on Jerusalem. After pacifying the city, they crucified over 2,000 Jews who were accused of being part of the rebellion. The Romans had made their intolerance for rebellion well-known. And so on this occasion, Pilate had traveled with a contingent of Rome's finest from his preferred headquarters in Caesarea-by-the-Sea, to the stuffy, crowded, provincial capital of the Jews, Jerusalem. (And there were something like 200,000 *extra* Jewish pilgrims in the city for the Passover.)

The Temple would be the center of Passover activity. Antonia's Fortress, the Roman garrison built adjacent to the Temple compound, would serve as a good vantage point from which to keep an eye on the Jews. Pilate's entry into Jerusalem was meant to send a message to the Jews, and to those who might be plotting against the empire of Rome. The spectacle was meant to remind the Jews of what had happened the last time of a wide-scale uprising. And, it was meant to intimidate the citizens of Jerusalem themselves, who might think twice about joining such a rebellion if it was slated to fail.

And on the other side of the city, from the east, is a crowd of people who hate Pilate and Rome and are hoping that their King and deliverer has finally come in Jesus of Nazareth! Isn't that amazing?

- And here He comes: riding on the back of a donkey, not a white stallion. No army behind Him; just a few fishermen, down-and-outer's, and curiosity seekers. He isn't leading victory cheers; Luke tells us that He is sobbing over the city as He enters. He is grieved at their spiritual condition, not their political situation.

And instead of riding up to Fort Antonius to show the Romans who's in charge, He goes to the Temple, wrecks the place, and condemns the hypocrisy of their worship. He's not at all the kind of king they wanted - *because His kingdom is not of this world*. And the tide is going to turn: Now He is being cheered and worshiped by the crowd that had followed Him from Galilee. But by Good Friday, another very different crowd would be screaming, "Crucify Him!"

But right now, it looks like everyone loves Jesus. Look at v.19: So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the *world* has gone after him."

Do you catch the irony in that statement? Jesus *is* the Messiah and Savior for the world, for Gentiles too – not just the Jews. And this is the segue into what happens next—the world really *does* come to see Jesus—

## II. The hour arrives. (vv.20-23)

- John 12:20–23 <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."

These men were not necessarily from Greece. They were Greek-speaking Gentiles who worshiped the God of Israel. They were called God-fearers. They weren't allowed beyond the court of the Gentiles in the Temple. But they were drawn to Jesus. They heard that He could raise the dead, that He claimed to be the Resurrection and the Life – that He could forgive sins and give eternal life – so they went to Philip because He had a Greek name like theirs and said: "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus*" (v.21).

- Look at Jesus' response – He didn't respond to what they told them, instead He said: "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" I.e., "It's time to go to the cross." Up to this point, Jesus has said over and over, "It's not My time. . . my hour has not yet come," but now it's time. Time to do what He came to this earth to do: die on a cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Why did this request from foreigners to see Jesus, trigger this hour? Think about this—

While Jews are plotting to kill Him, Gentiles are seeking to worship the King of the Jews. It's what John said in the beginning of His Gospel—

- John 1:11–12 <sup>11</sup>He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

While Jews are trying to kill Him, "*the whole world has gone after Him.*" Turn back to ch.11, and we see Caiaphas also prophesying without knowing it—

- John 11:49–52 <sup>49</sup>But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup>Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” <sup>51</sup>He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup>and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

If you are a Gentile Christian this morning – this is a prophecy about you! You are one of His elect children scattered abroad that He has called to Himself. Jesus said the same thing in—

- John 10:16 <sup>16</sup>And I have *other* sheep [Gentiles] that are *not of this fold* [they are not Jewish], I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

So when these Gentile, foreigners came seeking Jesus – this signaled the tipping point. This is what led Jesus to say, “It’s time to go to the cross.”

- And this is a turning point in redemptive history because from this point until right before Jesus returns, the Gospel will be believed primarily by Gentiles, and except for a small remnant of believing Jews, most Jews will continue to reject their Messiah. As Paul explains it in Romans 11, God would now set aside the natural branch, Israel, and graft the wild Gentile branches into the rootstock of father Abraham himself.

These Greeks were some of those “wild branches,” those “other sheep” and those “children of God scattered abroad” that Jesus was going to gather together. But something had to happen in order for Jesus to bring in all His sheep. Let’s read on—

### III. Death before life. (vv.24-26)

- John 12:24–30 <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.

Two things Jesus is saying here—

#### **A. Jesus had to die.**

He’s that grain of wheat, isn’t He? They could all relate to that analogy: They knew that one grain of wheat wasn’t worth much, but if you sacrificed that one grain by burying it and allowing it to decompose – it would come out of the ground bearing many more grains. That’s just what Jesus was going to do. He would die and rise again, so that His people might live. One for many. Isaiah prophesied this hundreds of years before Jesus came to die—

- Isaiah 53:10–12 <sup>10</sup>Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his *offspring*; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. <sup>11</sup>Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make *many to be accounted righteous*, and he shall bear *their* iniquities. <sup>12</sup>Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of *many*, and makes intercession for the *transgressors*.

Death before life – suffering now, glory later – that’s always the pattern in Scripture. And what was true for Jesus is true for His followers. Look at what He says next—

***B. Jesus' followers have to die.***

- *<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”*

What did Jesus mean? Oh, we need to hear Jesus. He divides all people into just two groups: those who will give up this life for the next – or those who give up the next life for the pleasures of this life. You either count Jesus so precious that you willingly die to your own desires to follow Him – or you ignore eternity to grab what you can in this short life. It really is that simple. And everyone here is in one of these two groups. Are you living for this life, or the next? Which group are you in?

- And I believe we need to present this choice to our unbelieving friends, following Jesus means some things change in your life: you can’t follow Jesus and keep your hatred, your lying, your immorality – whether heterosexual or homosexual. Jesus said we must *repent* – turn from our sins to follow Him.

But we also need to tell them the good news that what they will find in Jesus can’t even be compared to those things that they must leave behind. Listen to how Jesus Himself put it—

- Matthew 13:44–46 <sup>44</sup>“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his *joy* he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. <sup>45</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, <sup>46</sup>who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Jesus is that Treasure, and Jesus is that Pearl – amen? Would *any* of you here, *any one* of you, trade what you have found in Jesus for what you left behind? That’s the way we need to present the Gospel! Yes He calls us to follow Him in suffering, in persecution—

- Matthew 7:14 <sup>14</sup>For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

But they are a *happy* few! They’ve tasted and seen that the Lord is good, they say with Paul: “I count *everything* as loss because of the *surpassing worth* (the Gk. word means “over the top excellency”) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord! Don’t you say that this morning? If you don’t, come see me afterwards!

But back to our passage, being a Christian means following Jesus – and where was He going? To the cross, right? But, look at the promise He makes those who will serve and follow Him in this life—

- John 12:26 . . . where I am, there will my servant be also.

Jesus prayed in John 17:24 “*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with Me where I am, to see my glory*” . . . Will the Father answer that prayer? Absolutely. And He also promised—

- *If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

Well, we rub our eyes when we read this – the *Father* will honor *us*? He promises, “If you follow Him in this life, one day you will be where He is now, in heaven, at the right hand of the Father, and *the Father Himself will honor you!* I can’t even imagine what this means, but in our study of 2 Tim. we heard this promise: “*If we endure, we will also reign with Him.*” We will experience an eternal weight of glory *far beyond all comparison* to any suffering here.

The next thing we see is Jesus turning from His disciples and the crowd, and pouring out His heart to His Father. This is where we see what the cross meant to Jesus. He’s very emotional—

### III. The purpose of Jesus’ life was death. (vv.27-30)

- <sup>27</sup>“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” <sup>29</sup>The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” <sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.”

Never forget that Jesus was (and is) a man, with a body and a nature like ours, and the thought of bearing the weight of your sins and mine on Himself; and taking the Father’s wrath over those sins – and all the horrors of crucifixion – it was just about to break Him. Would it even be right for Him to ask His Father to spare Him? But He loves His Father, so He pours out His heart.

- And don’t think that Jesus found immediate peace and went merrily on to the cross –just a few days later He’s at Gethsemane having this very same struggle again: “*Abba, Father! If it’s possible let this cup pass Me by – yet not My will but Your will be done!*” The stress is so great that Luke says He was sweating great drops of blood.

Jesus is talking to His Father, but also to Himself: How can He avoid this hour when He was born for this hour? He knows He can’t. This is *why* He came to earth. He was born to die.

And then, for the third time in the Gospels, God spoke from heaven about His Son. The first time was at His baptism when He said, “*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,*” the second was at the Mt. of Transfiguration when God said the same thing and added, “*Listen to Him!*” And now the third time, God the Father says, “*I have glorified it [My name], and I will glorify it again.*”

Everything in Jesus’ life led Him to this point, the very purpose for which He came, to die on the cross for sinners. He’s ready. And Jesus tells us—

### IV. Four accomplishments of the cross. (vv.31-33)

- John 12:31–33 <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” <sup>33</sup>He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. (Crucifixion)

At the cross—

#### 1.) The world thought it was judging Jesus, but the cross means judgment to the world.

The cross makes a division; which side are you on? Do you accept Jesus as your substitute? Have you taken up your cross to follow Him? If so, then when you look at the cross, you can know that your judgment day has already happened, 2,000 years ago.

But if you refuse Christ, then the cross is a reminder that the judgment for your sins is still coming – and you will have no Substitute. You will have to bear the wrath of God on your sins, and it will be forever. God offers an escape, He offers terms of peace: believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. *But it's the only offer on the table.* At the cross—

## **2.) Satan thought He defeated Jesus, but the cross defeated Satan.**

*"Now will the ruler of this world be cast out."* The cross was Satan's shining hour! He thought. He pulled every trick out of his bag to get Jesus crucified. But it was his ultimate undoing. Back in the Garden, Satan brought down the entire human race, but on the cross, Jesus rescued the human race from complete destruction. It was Satan's defeat. He still prowls around like a roaring lion, Peter says, but he has no authority over Christ's followers. For them, he has been de-fanged and de-clawed. At the cross—

## **3.) Jesus is humiliated *and* exalted.**

*"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."* "Lifted up?" It means crucified. There isn't any other form of execution in which a person is lifted up. But there is a double meaning here. John does this a lot. When men looked at Jesus lifted up on the cross they saw a pitiful loser being humiliated. But heaven saw the cross as the exaltation of the Son of God--His coronation. Why? Because of His complete obedience to His Father's will. Isaiah wrote this—

- Isa.52:13 "Behold, my Servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted"
- And Paul said in Phil.2.9-10 that because Jesus obediently humbled Himself in His death on the cross, <sup>9</sup>"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

And at the cross—

## **4.) He was rejected by men, but will draw all men to Himself.**

- <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Do you remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus back in Jn.3?—

- John 3:14–15 <sup>14</sup>And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Whoever looked upon that bronze serpent in the wilderness was saved from death – and whoever will look on Jesus hoisted up on the cross and trust in Him - will be saved.

- And beloved, Jesus is keeping His promise! He is drawing in His elect from every corner of the globe. We saw that in a mighty way in our study of Acts. And He is doing that today. I want to remind you what Jesus is doing over in Uganda: 9 years ago Dustin Brassfield and I went to visit Pastor Vanensio in the village of Bundibugyo. Our church helped to put a roof on his church of

maybe 250 people. Since that time, they've planted 18 more churches with over 6,000 people worshipping Jesus. He keeps His promises beloved!

And God gets His glory through the irony of people all over the globe receiving eternal life by trusting in a crucified Jewish carpenter from the biker town of Nazareth, in Galilee? What the world calls foolish, we call the Good News!

- And Jesus said, just *lift Me up*, and I will draw my sheep to myself. Just preach Christ crucified, and they will come. Make them see the blood and feel the splinters of the cross, and hear the mocking of the crowds. His sheep will recognize that Man on the cross as their Savior, and they will leave everything to follow Him. They will come because Jesus will draw them. And they know their Master's voice.

We don't need tricks or gimmicks to try and draw a crowd: I read about a pastor in Colorado, every year he dresses up in a pink bunny costume for Easter. Jesus said, "Just lift Me up."

- There are churches that downplay the cross because it just isn't pleasant, it offends some "intellectual" people. But Paul said, "That's precisely the point—"
- 1 Corinthians 1:18 <sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
- 1 Corinthians 1:21–23 <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles – but it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. So just lift Him up, bloody cross and all.

Jesus will do the rest! There are many ways to draw big crowds of people. But only the message of the cross draws Jesus' own sheep to Himself.

#### V. "So how can we see Jesus?" (vv.34-36)

- John 12:34–36 <sup>34</sup>So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" <sup>35</sup>So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. <sup>36</sup>While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

They were confused--again--by what He was saying. Didn't the Scriptures teach that Messiah would have an eternal kingdom. What's this about a crucified Messiah!? Understandable questions, but they're getting sidetracked. Look at Jesus' answer in vv.35-36: "I'm not going to be here much longer, you need to get serious and believe in Me now. While you have the light, believe in the light."

- I.e., They didn't need to have all their questions answered in order to believe. They had more than enough evidence: He had claimed to be God in human flesh, and backed up this claim by miracle after miracle – *He had raised the dead!* Jesus said to them what He's saying to some of you this morning: "Stop making excuses. Don't wait to have all your questions answered. *"Believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."*



Wow. That's profound. You and I know people who say, "I have to be intellectually honest. I will not believe until I understand it all." But when it comes to Jesus, that's backwards. Anselm, the medieval theologian said this: *For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand. For I believe this also, that 'unless I believe, I shall not understand.'*"

- Some of you have questions this morning that have kept you from taking up the cross and following Christ: "But Jesus, I don't understand how dinosaurs fit with the story about Adam and Eve . . . how can God send people to hell who have never heard about Jesus? . . . why are so many Christians hypocrites? . . . I don't understand this election and predestination stuff.

Those are valid questions, and there are answers. But those questions aren't keeping you from coming to Christ. Your problem isn't intellectual, it's spiritual—

- John 3:19 <sup>19</sup>And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

If you haven't come to Jesus Christ, this is why. But Jesus has been lifted up this morning – and maybe He is drawing you to Himself. If you see yourself as a sinner who needs this Savior, then *look*. Do you wish to see Jesus? Then look: see Him lifted up on the cross – is He dying for your sins? Do you see Him?

*"Believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."*