

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #48

John 12:12-19

As we come to this section of the Gospel of John, we come to what is commonly referred to as Palm Sunday or as many suggest “Christ’s Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.” This event occurs here in John’s Gospel, and also in Matthew (21:1-11), Mark (11:1-11) and Luke (19:28-44).

From a spiritual standpoint, this is the beginning of the most triumphant moment in world history. Jesus Christ has finally arrived in Jerusalem to be led like a Lamb to Slaughter to the cross, so that our sins might be forgiven so that we might have a relationship with the Holy God. However, from a physical standpoint, this is anything but a triumphal entry for Jesus Christ; in fact, it is very, very sad and depressing.

Christ’s earthly assignment was over. In His years of life, He had traveled up and down the promised land, teaching and performing all kinds of messianic signs, and now it was time for Him to ride into Jerusalem as her King. **This is the only “national public demonstration” that Jesus permitted concerning Himself.** Jesus longed to reign over Israel and give her all of God’s blessings, including her Kingdom, but she would not admit she was a sinner and that Jesus Christ was her only Savior.

Earthly kings, for the most part, are interested in how life is in their Kingdom. They are primarily interested in what is going on with the people, their houses, jobs, money, property and health and welfare. **Jesus Christ the heavenly King, for the most part, was interested in His people’s entrance into the Kingdom. The message of Jesus Christ was not one of living in the Kingdom, it was getting into the Kingdom.** Israel needed to repent of her sins, which means she needed to acknowledge she did not have the righteousness necessary to get into the Kingdom and believe that Jesus Christ was the only One who could give her the righteousness to get in.

Josephus claims at Passover time, it was not uncommon to have three million people in Jerusalem. These are huge numbers of people and most of them would have witnessed the way Israel’s supposed King made His entrance into Jerusalem. There were many eyewitnesses of this event, which actually makes this even more tragic. In this context there are six groups of people who are specifically identified, who would have seen this:

- 1) His disciples are there (12:22);
- 2) Many Jews from Jerusalem are there (12:12);
- 3) Many local Jews who had witnessed Lazarus’ resurrection are there (12:17);
- 4) Many Jews from outside Jerusalem were there (12:18);
- 5) Many Greeks who were non-Jews were there (12:20);
- 6) The religious leaders were all there - Jewish and non-Jewish (12:19);
- 7) Some Roman leaders and military were there, which becomes obvious later on (18:3).

Now the whole reason for this scene is to fulfill the O.T. prophecy of Zechariah in Zechariah 9:9, which says “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.” Jesus Christ did not just get on a donkey and ride into town in front of all of these people for the fun of it. In fact, as you shall see, this is very humiliating and it was designed to teach Israel that she needed to humble herself before God, and acknowledge that she did not have the righteousness necessary to get into the Kingdom. **Jesus Christ did this to fulfill the prophetic will of God and the Word of God to show her this very point. Jesus Christ specifically climbed on this donkey knowing it was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah (John 12:14-15). Do not miss this point - Jesus Christ is not a victim in this, He is the Sovereign Director of all of this. This is the parade that will lead Him right to the cross.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, carefully observe how important the written Word of God is. There was absolutely no excuse for the Jews to miss the identity of Jesus Christ, because His identity was clearly revealed by the prophet Zechariah and other O.T. prophets. If you refuse to acknowledge that you are a sinner and you need a Savior, you will have no excuse, for this is clearly revealed over and over again in the written Word of God.

The main point of this text is this:

JESUS CHRIST SPECIFICALLY RODE A DONKEY INTO JERUSALEM TO FUFILL BIBLICAL PROPHECY WHICH DEMANDED THAT HE DIE ON THE CROSS, AND TO SHOW ISRAEL THE HUMILITY NEEDED TO ENTER HER KINGDOM, WHICH SHE DID NOT IN ANY WAY UNDERSTAND.

The prophetic purpose behind all of this was to show Israel that her Kingdom was first spiritual before it would be physical. She needed to humble herself and see herself as a sinner. Martin Luther, the great Reformer, said that when he was a boy they used to act this parade out at school and ultimately the Pope decided to put this into the church. But as Luther went on to say, he had no clue as to what it meant. He did not realize that it was designed to show that one must humbly and honestly admit one is a sinner and does not have the righteousness necessary to get into the Kingdom.

Now one question comes to our minds and that is this - in view of the fact that the Romans controlled the world and historically stamped out any hint of another leader or power surfacing, why would they permit a parade to take place, in which He is being identified as the LORD and King? Why didn't Romans put a stop to this whole thing? One answer to this question is, to the Romans this parade is very funny. This parade that featured Jesus Christ was probably something that would have made the Romans laugh.

The Romans were used to seeing a great leader ride into a city to display their Roman triumph. But their kingly victory parades were far different than this one. Their parades featured a display of impressive military men and the key political leader riding on a big, beautiful white horse, completely dressed with full military regalia. For these Romans to watch a parade that featured Jesus riding on a donkey with a bunch of old coats and broken palm leaves, would have probably given them a good laugh. This spectacle would have been the joke of the hour.

But I can guarantee that next time Jesus Christ comes with a parade, there will be no one laughing. He will come displaying the full glory and power and majesty of God and every knee will bow down before Him.

Now there are seven historical Palm Sunday facts brought out by John that we want to see:

FACT #1 – A great crowd comes to the Passover feast and they have heard that Jesus is coming to Jerusalem. **12:12**

The fame of Jesus Christ had spread all over the country. His name, by this point, was a household name. Many had never actually seen Christ but they had heard of Him. When word spread among the crowds that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, multitudes wanted to see Him. The day is Palm Sunday and this is the day every Jew should have known because this was the very day predicted by Daniel as the day Jesus would ride into town (Daniel 9:25).

Years ago, when I was in radio back in the 70's, I was in Atlanta, Georgia for a radio convention. One of the entertainers who I had somewhat got to know because he had been on my radio show a few times, was a man whose hit song was "Tie A Yellow Ribbon Around the Old Oak Tree" - Tony Orlando. Tony Orlando was a nice man and we were in a room discussing Kalamazoo radio and his PR guy stuck his head in and said there are several people who want to see you on the other side of the sliding curtain. We finished our conversation and Tony said "open the curtain" and I looked up and there were hundreds of people just wanting to get a look at him.

For Jesus it wasn't hundreds, it was thousands. Thousands heard he was coming and wanted to get a look at Him.

FACT #2 – The crowd broke off branches from palm trees and began to cry out several things that were a national cry for political victory. **12:13**

I want you to visualize this for a moment. The King of Kings is coming to town and the best people can do is break off a bunch of old palm branches and put down some old coats.

Now John records that the crowd began to shout out three things. There are three public messages that this crowd communicates. Their message is given based on the fact that they think that Christ is going into Jerusalem to take over the political world.

(Public Message #1) - The crowd shouts out Hosanna . **12:13b**

This is a quote from Psalm 118:25-26 which is a Psalm that anticipates national deliverance. The idea behind "hosanna" is save now. They are crying for Christ to save and deliver Israel right now. The only problem is they are expecting physical deliverance and not acknowledging their need for spiritual deliverance.

(Public Message #2) - The crowd shouts, “ Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”
12:13c

What I find so interesting about this is that Jesus will not return and actually give Israel her Kingdom until she cries this again (Matthew 23:37-39). The next time she cries this, she will instantly admit her lost status.

(Public Message #3) - The crowd shouts Jesus is the “ King of Israel.” **12:13d**

The momentum is building for Jesus Christ, but the only problem here is the momentum is for that which is physical and not that which is spiritual. That is what was so sad. In fact, while the crowd was shouting, Jesus was crying (Luke 19:37-44*).

This crowd that is acknowledging that He is the King of Israel, will soon be shouting “crucify Him, crucify Him.”

FACT #3 – Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9.
12:14-15

Jesus is going to Jerusalem for a purpose - fulfill the prophetic plan and Word of God. Truth is, this parade didn't cut it for the Jews for they are still looking for their Messiah to ride into Jerusalem and deliver them. How could these Jews have possibly known that this donkey riding Person was their king? By the written Word of God. It was revealed in God's Word that Israel's king would first ride in on a donkey. **The entire nation missed the true significance of this moment because of their ignorance of God's written Word.**

We learn from Mark and Luke's account of this that the young donkey had never had a rider on its back. So a young colt was used for this parade. There is actually the power of God seen in this because you just do not climb up on the back of an unbroken, unriden animal without expecting it to become a bucking bronco. But this was God on the back of this donkey. All animals are God's animals and they do His bidding and this donkey had a job to do - carry the God/Savior/King into Jerusalem and he performed admirably.

FACT #4 – Jesus' disciples had no idea what He was doing. **12:16**

The disciples are watching this bizarre parade. Jesus has climbed up on the back of a donkey and is riding it into Jerusalem and the people are waving broken palm branches and throwing old coats on the ground and shouting things. These disciples had no clue as to what was happening here. These things were mind-boggling to His disciples and they would not see the significance of this until Jesus was glorified and the Holy Spirit would bring these things to their minds.

They would come to understand the fulfillment of prophecy at Christ's first coming and the lesson this taught Israel, that she refused to humble herself, even when her own King did. They would also come to understand the glory of Christ's second coming (John 14:26).

FACT #5 – The witnesses of Lazarus’ resurrection were leading the verbal witness. **12:17**

Not only did you have the crowd shouting about Him, but you also had the verbal testimony of those who had actually seen Lazarus come out of the tomb. They were telling people all along the parade route that they saw Him raise a dead person.

FACT #6 – The multitude who heard of the miracle of Lazarus went and met Christ because of this amazing sign/miracle. **12:18**

Some people just went to meet Jesus Christ because they heard about His miraculous power. They do not see themselves as sinners who need a Savior. They are just interested in seeing one who can do miracles.

FACT #7 – The Pharisees are acknowledging the whole world has gone after Jesus and are blaming each other. **12:19**

The Pharisees began arguing amongst themselves and saying to one another - you aren’t doing any good, the whole world has gone after Him.

The truth is most of the world had gone after Him, but the tragedy is most didn’t believe in Him.

That is what this parade on a donkey was designed to show them. They needed to humble themselves and believe on Jesus Christ as Savior. But they were too proud, too pious, too powerful to admit they were sinners who needed a Savior.

It is possible to own a Bible and go to religious services and miss having a true relationship with Jesus Christ. It is possible to sing hymns, give money, do various works and miss the will of God. It happened to the nation Israel and it is still happening today.