

## 45. BEHOLD, THE KING IS COMING (12:12-26)

We now come to a pivotal event in the life of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospel, what has become known as the Triumphal Entry (cp. Mat. 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-40). The traditional view of this event is that this is a moment of joy as Jesus is finally recognised as Messiah and King. Unfortunately, many of us have learned more from tradition than from Scripture, but tradition often proves to be distorted. This is one such instance.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. If you had to apply the term “Triumphal Entry” to human kings, what images come to mind? How do those images match the events here in John 12:12-26? Based on that, would you say that it is appropriate to call Jesus’ entry “Triumphal”? Explain.



### THE CONTEXT

The event occurs on the first day of the week, four days before the Passover. It is estimated that during this time as many as two million Jews would gather in the city. Just before this, Jesus was in the town of Bethany, about three kilometres away. We learn from the other gospels that Jesus stayed in Bethany during the last few days leading up to His arrest, travelling in and out of Jerusalem each day (see Mat. 21:17). However, this particular entry into Jerusalem is truly significant for it sets the stage for everything that will follow in the days to come.

Through the Gospel of John Jesus has grown in popularity. This popularity leads to the formation of two groups who have different responses to Him. The first are those who have come to believe in Him to a certain degree, be it genuine saving faith or merely being a fan. The second group are not fans of Jesus in any way, instead since chapter 5, they have grown more hostile towards Him. Since the raising of Lazarus just a few days earlier, His popularity with both groups is growing rapidly.

Up to now, Jesus has responded to these groups in basically the same way – He goes to great lengths to stay clear of those who are not genuine believers and those who want to do Him harm (cf. 6:15; 7:6-9; 11:54). In each case it is because His time had not yet come. But not so here in John 12. Aware of both groups, Jesus makes Himself available to both as He enters Jerusalem. This is essentially what makes this day so significant; Jesus is heading towards both being hailed as King and being crucified. Towards worship and rejection.



### I WILL BE EXALTED (VV 12-19)

The raising of Lazarus is a pivotal event in the Gospel of John that solidifies many people’s opinions about Jesus. More and more people start to believe and now in John 12 as they gather in Jerusalem they start talking about it. As people arrive from afar, those who were in or around Jerusalem when Lazarus was raised, share what they know with others. So much for the Pharisees’ plans to keep the people silent about Jesus. Instead, word is spreading. When they hear that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, a crowd builds to welcome Him.

To welcome Jesus is one thing, but how they welcome Him is quite another. Because in verse 13 we see that He is not just welcomed as a great teacher or as a healer but as king and specifically as the king of Israel. But why a king?

For many years Israel had kings on the throne. Initially they are united under one king (Saul, then David, and then Solomon). Unfortunately the kingdom divides after the death of Solomon into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Even more unfortunate is that as punishment for their continued idolatry, God allows them to be taken into captivity – first Israel by the Assyrians in 715 BC, and then Judah by the Babylonians in 586 BC. After seventy years He brings the Judeans back to their homeland, but things are still unsettled politically. Eventually, the Greeks seize control, who are later defeated by the Romans. Despite being under foreign rule, there is one thing that continues to give Judah hope – the promise that God will send someone who will defeat their enemies, set them free from slavery, and will reign over them forever as their victorious King. As a nation they have waited for this Promised One for centuries.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Why were the Jews so wrong in their understanding of who the Messiah would be and do?
2. How is Jesus better than any king the Israelites had in their past or could have hoped for in the future?

In John 12, after witnessing Jesus' signs and teachings, or hearing about them from family and friends, they start to believe that maybe Jesus is the one spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. Therefore, they gather to welcome their king.

In verse 13 we see that they take branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him. Their choice of palm branches is not because they were the easiest or quickest thing to grab, but because of what they symbolise. Back then, palm branches were a nationalistic symbol. They were like a nation's flag and represented them as a people. The other Gospels further tell us that they also take off their cloaks or outer garments and lay them on the ground before Him. This is like rolling out the red carpet. Together they are incredible symbols of honour and exaltation.

What's more, they cry out, "*Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*". Here they quote Psalm 118, a psalm that is sung during the Passover week to praise God for delivering them from the hands of the Egyptians during the Exodus. However here, they ascribe it to Jesus. They see Him as the one to deliver them from their current oppression under the Roman Empire.



**Note:** "*Hosanna*" is a Hebrew word that means save us. Unlike how this word is used in modern worship songs, this is not an expression of gratitude for being saved. Rather it is a cry for help to the one they believe can rescue them who comes in the name of the Lord.

But they add something to the end that is not in Psalm 118, "*Even the king of Israel*". Here they add their interpretation of the psalm's fulfilment based on other passages that speak of the coming king.

What is more, Luke tells us that the Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke the people. Jesus replies in Luke 19:40, "*I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out*". If you have ever seen news items on the

conflict in Israel you will know that in Israel stones cry out when people throw them. So what Jesus is saying is that if He rebukes them, there will be a riot. They will cry out all the more and cause trouble, which will lead to yet even more oppression by the Romans.

However, although they are hailing Jesus as king, they fail to see what kind of king He is. In verses 14 and 15 we read that, *“Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!”*” The other Gospels provide more details on this. Jesus sends two of his disciples to go into the village ahead of them and tells them where they will find a donkey that has never been ridden, and that they must bring it to Him. But why ride a donkey?

Back then, a king would generally ride through a city in one of three ways depending on the message he was communicating. The first two ways were on a chariot or on horse back. In both cases it represents his power and dominion over the people he is parading before. The third way is on a donkey. In this case he shows his humility. That he is one of them and truly cares about them.

Furthermore, John points out that this is the fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy in verse 15, *“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!”*. Now whenever we see a reference or a quote from the Old Testament in the New we should consider both the part that is quoted and the larger context of the original verse. This is because the New Testament writers assume that their readers know the Old Testament texts. Unfortunately that may be true for the original recipients, but generally not for us today – we have not memorised the Old Testament like the Jews do. Therefore, we need to go back and see what more they have to teach us.



**Read:** Zechariah 9:9-11

What Zacharias is primarily saying is that a king is coming who will rule over all the world and will bring peace, but he will also be a humble king riding on a donkey. In verse 11 we also see that He will be a king who will set prisoners free through a covenant of blood. This is not referring to criminals in a prison, but to people who are in spiritual bondage to sin. He will also be righteous and having salvation. So Jesus is riding into the city declaring that all these things are true about Him, but that not all is currently being fulfilled. He is declaring that He is indeed the one who will rule over all the world, just not yet. This time He is coming as God's humble servant, not as the triumphant king. That will only happen at His second coming.

Now unfortunately, at first His disciples do not understand these things, but do so only later when the Son is glorified (12:16). They were with Jesus in Galilee when the crowd tried to crown Him king following the feeding of the five thousand, but He evaded them. Here, however, they see that He is willing to receive the acclamation of the crowd. We see too the heart and motivation of the rest of the people in verses 17 and 18 – they are there merely for the parade. To see the one everyone is talking about. They do not want to be left out, and so join the crowd as they hail the one everyone else thinks should be king of Israel.

But all this popularity upsets the Pharisees in verse 19 who point fingers at one another and say, *“You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him”*. These Pharisees are growing more frustrated and jealous as they see people who have come from afar, favouring Jesus over them. As the story unfolds in the coming chapters, this jealousy will ultimately lead them to completely fulfil God's

plan. Jesus entering Jerusalem sets things into motion. Four days later He will be crucified on the cross, but because of His humility, we learn from Philippians 2:9-11, He will be highly exalted, given the name above all names, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

So no matter how hard they try, Jesus will be exalted.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Some commentators see an additional sign (miracle) in Jesus' entry into Jerusalem that is not typically included in the list of His miracles. Can you spot it?
2. What contrasts can we make between Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and this crowd welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem?
3. What examples can you think where people today behave like the crowd did then?



### I WILL BE EXECUTED (VV20-26)

In verses 20 to 22 we see that some Greeks who had also come to Jerusalem for the feast (probably converts to Judaism) want to meet Jesus personally. It is not clear when this conversation takes place, perhaps it was later on that Sunday or it on the Monday, but what stands out about this interaction is Jesus' response to hearing about these Greeks. As we have seen several times, God's timing is a common theme in this Gospel. Not only does Jesus comment that His time had not yet come, but John also points out that their attempts to arrest Him are not according to God's timing. But the moment he hears of these Gentiles wanting to see Him, Jesus declares, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*". After three years of ministry to His own people who do not receive Him (cf. 1:11), it is the interest of the pagan Greeks that prompts Jesus to say His time has come. Now whether they genuinely believe in Him or not is not stated, but it does illustrate what Jesus said back in 10:16 about Gentile sheep who He will bring in to the fold.

But how is He glorified? Well, He explains how in verse 24, and it is not the way the Jews, nor these Greeks, would expect. He says, "*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*". Jesus is talking about Himself. He is the grain of wheat. In other words, unless He goes to the cross, dies, and is buried, then His purpose in coming to earth will have been wasted. As a result, He will remain alone, that is, His ministry will bear no fruit – no one will be saved. But if He dies, like the grain of wheat, He will bear much fruit, and only then will they see the full effect of His work and life.

So here Jesus is declaring, "I will be executed. This is the reason that I came. I have performed all these signs. I have taught you about the Father, myself, and my work. You have seen and heard it all, but still you do not understand or believe. What is more, merely believing in those things is not enough, for they in and of themselves will not save you. Instead, it is only by my death that you will be saved. Therefore, I will be executed, I will be glorified".

Now if we consider the people who welcome Jesus into the city that day, they expect Jesus to be crowned, given a throne and the sceptre, and that He would rid them of the oppression of Roman rule. But as we have seen many times in John, things are not what they expect when it comes to Jesus. For in-

stead of sitting on a throne, He is hung on a cross of wood. Instead of a crown of gold on His head, He is given a crown of thorns. Instead of a sceptre, He is handed a reed when the soldiers mock Him. Instead of rescuing the Jews from Roman oppression, He saves the whole world from the bondage of sin.

So here we have two groups, that although are different with different desires and goals, they lead to the same conclusion. In fact, they are dependent on one another. Jesus declares that He will be exalted, but the only way that can happen is if He is executed.

But, this is not the end of the story, for we know that He is coming back. In Revelation 19 we read of another triumphal entry, and this time Jesus will be riding a horse, and He will have a crown on His head. And when He comes, it will not be as the servant King, but as the conquering king who will defeat all His enemies and gather His sheep to Himself.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. What is the meaning of the parable in verse 24? How is it connected to verse 23?
2. Why is it important for Jesus to both be exalted and executed? How are these two seemingly contrasting truths reconciled in this account and in those that follow?

### APPLICATION

But we cannot consider Jesus' execution and exaltation with considering how it applies to us. As we wait for His return, how are we to respond? After applying the metaphor of the seed of grain to Himself, Jesus now applies it to us in verses 25 and 26. The basic principle is the same – as the grain of wheat (Jesus) needs to die to produce a fruitful crop, so too do we need to die to produce fruit. Except in our case it is not a physical death, but a spiritual one that has implications for our physical lives.

Jesus commands us in Luke 9:23 to daily take up our cross and follow Him. That means you have to die to self. You have to surrender the rule of your life to Jesus. You must do what he says to do, and stop doing what he says to stop. Not just once on the day you are saved, but every day of your life from then on.

Herein lies a great paradox: if you do not take up your cross and instead try to hold on to your life, you will lose your life. But if you surrender your life to Him, then you will live.

The question you have to ask yourself is what are you living for? If you are a follower of Christ are you really willing to give it all for Him or are you living for your best life now? As Jesus asks in Mark 8, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul? Our reward is in eternity and not in this life. As we consider the execution and exaltation of Jesus we must remember that He is calling us as His followers to also be willing to die so that we too may be fruitful. For it is only when we give up our right to doing things our way and follow His way that we will truly be fruitful and have an abundant life.

This is so different from the way that most people in the church think about the Christian life. The prevailing thought is that we live for ourselves and that Jesus died so that we can be happy (what is known as the Self-Help Therapeutic Gospel). No, Jesus died so we can be forgiven and have eternal life. Our only appropriate response to that is to live for him today, regardless of the cost.

And the rewards are truly out of this world. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus went to the cross for the joy set before Him, that joy was the exaltation that followed His execution. Paul further tells us that as Christians we are co-heirs with Christ, which means that the same joy that was set before Him is also set before us. But that joy, that exaltation when we are glorified with Christ in the last days, is only possible through our execution today.

As we look back on the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, we also look forward to His second, and greater Triumphal Entry to come. We look back at Jesus' execution as the propitiation for our sins, but we also look forward to when He will return as the conquering king who will save us from this dark world and take us to dwell with Him forever.

### The Radical Cross

"The cross is the symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of the human being. The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said goodbye to his friends. He was not coming back. He was not going out to have his life redirected. He was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing. It slew all of the man completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck swift and hard and when it had finished its work the man was no more. That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of man is false to the Bible and cruel to the soul of the hearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world. It intersects it. In coming to Christ we do not bring our life up on to a higher plane. We leave it at a cross. The grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die. That is the beginning of the gospel."

~ Aiden Wilson Tozer ~



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. How often do you hear the following statements, "Me first", "What's in it for me?", or "Take care of yourself, because nobody else will"? That is the philosophy of the world. How does that differ from what Jesus is telling us in the closing verses of our study?
2. What would your life look like if you completely surrendered your life to Christ as spoken of in verse 25 and 26? What would be different?

