

Holy Week in Biblical Perspective
Palm Sunday
“The Triumphal Entry and the Moment is Now”
John 12:12–26
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The Gospel of John will be guiding us through this Holy Week. We will be looking at John 12 but I’m going to introduce it by looking at John 11 to set up our study in John 12. John 11:55–57 says [55] *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.* [56] *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?”* [57] *Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I was encouraged to see a movie when it came out a number of years ago and I’m glad I did. Now all the critics said it was a bad movie and that shows how wonderfully insightful I am or how terribly unsightful they are because I actually really liked it. In this movie the retold an event eight times and the reason they did this is because you see it from different vantage points. The name of the movie was Vantage Point. The brought in eight different witnesses from eight different vantage points and every time one of them reported where you saw if from their perspective something new was added to what you understood until it was clear and you realized actually what had happened.

God has done something very similar to that for you. On the life of Jesus He has given you four vantage points that are given by the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There are not many events in the life of Jesus where all four Gospel writers write about but the one we will look at in this study is one of them – the triumphal entry. When you put together what they see and say there is something pretty extraordinary. I think John has poor pastors in mind and I want to explain what I mean by this.

There are many of us who are not slaves to the church calendar but we like to use the church calendar especially during Advent Season, Holy Week, and Pentecost for those become wonderful opportunities to bring focus to particular areas. By doing this it can enhance the worship of God’s people, and the discipleship of God’s people as we return continually to look at these texts that are unfathomable in their meaning and understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. It gives us essential focus of these dynamics in the very ministry of Christ for our redemption. This also enhance outreach in our culture for there are a lot of people who will come to these events who don’t yet know the Lord when invited, but there in another side to this.

That is, if you’re a pastor and you keep coming back to the same text to preach on every year then you think ‘don’t repeat yourself.’ How are you not going to repeat yourself when you’re preaching on the same text? It’s a challenge not to repeat ourselves each year. I’ve been at it 40 plus years preaching 40 plus triumphal entry sermons so that is a little bit of challenge not to repeat myself but God’s Word is unfathomable, inscrutable, understandable but I can never understand it exhaustively and I think John may be the one writer that took pity on us because of the way he fashioned the book of John to give us things the other writers don’t give

us. The other writers give us things at about 30,000 feet but John will go down to about 100 feet with you in some cases and he does that in the triumphal entry.

He also does it with the life of Jesus. The Gospel writers cover 33 years of the life of Jesus. They focus on the last three years of His public ministry. The first three chapters of John are focused on the first week of Jesus' public ministry. Then John gives you a series of evangelistic encounters. Then from John 11 all the way to John 21, almost to the end of the book, is devoted to one week which is the last week, the week of Passion where Christ fulfills the mission. In these chapters we are given information that the other Gospels don't give us and one piece of information is the composition of the large crowd, waving palms. John gives us a little more insight into this large crowd and how that impacts what Jesus says and does.

Now from John 11 we have already been told that pilgrims have arrived in Jerusalem. They are resting up for the Feast of Passover as they go through all kinds of baptisms and cleansings to get ready for the Passover. They are getting their offerings and setting up the entire Passover week. They hear that out in the suburb is Jesus the Messiah, the One who raised Lazarus from the dead. Some think He won't show up. The Pharisees are mingling around probably telling people 'if you know where He is you better tell us.' In the midst of all of that Jesus has arrived from Jericho, rested on the Sabbath, getting ready to go into the city but is first anointed by Mary and He declares it as the anointing of His burial.

He is ready to leave the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus to go down the deep decent of the brow near the Mount of Olives, over the Kidron Brook to the Temple. He will do some Spring house cleaning in the Temple for the second time when He gets there. On His way there is a crowd. Who is in that crowd? Let's look at John 12.

John 12:12–28 says [12] *The next day (this would be what we call Palm Sunday) the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. [13] 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!"* [14] And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, [15] *"Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"*

[16] *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. [17] 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. [18] The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. [19] So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."*

[20] *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. [21] So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." [22] Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. [23] And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [24] 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. [25] Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. [26] 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.*

[27] *"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. [28] Father, glorify your name."* Then a voice came from heaven: *"I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."*

Let's start with this large crowd. John does a demographic analysis of the crowd. There are five groups in this large crowd. I will list them in order of appearance. The first crowd are the Jerusalemites. They are not all citizens of Jerusalem but they are people coming from Jerusalem. Some are pilgrims that have arrived for the Passover and that would have been a lot of people. We don't know how many but some extra Biblical writers actually give us counts where some would even say over two million were there for this feast. Now I don't think there were over two million but I do believe the size of Jerusalem probably doubled or tripled during this feast observance so that would have probably been about 400,000 to 500,000 people.

These people have been talking amongst themselves about this Jesus of Nazareth who was out in Bethany, knowing that the Pharisees want to arrest Him and wondering if He would show up in the city. Then they received word that He was coming. On the first day of the week He is on His way. So these citizens and pilgrims grab palm branches, cut them and come out waving them as they sing a song – ‘Hosanna’ meaning save us, God save us. “*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!*” That is the large group that most of us think about when we read about this event who are coming out to meet Him, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

A second group who were there was Jesus' disciples. We know of His 12 Disciples but it may also include at least some of another group of disciples called the 70. Jesus also had a significant cadre of women disciples and they are going to be very prominent. It seems as if His mother is there because she will be at the cross. Joanna is there because she will be at the cross. Mary Magdalene must be there because she will be at the cross. There is also Mary and Martha. Many of these women will also be at the tomb on the first day.

A third element in this demographic study of the large crowd is the curious. They are the ones who are out there at Bethany because they heard Jesus was there and they want to see Lazarus, the resurrected man and the One who resurrected him, Jesus. What would Lazarus have to say? What would Jesus have to say? These are some of the questions the curious are wanting to know. When Jesus leaves Lazarus they go with Him so that crowd with His disciples are on the way in and the crowd from Jerusalem comes out to meet Him.

The fourth group are the bad guys, the Pharisees. They are there to take care of both Lazarus and Jesus to bring them to an end, either imprisonment or death.

The fifth group who are there show up after Jesus and those following Him arrive. Jesus comes in and cleanses the Temple and Jesus is made aware that there is a group of people in the crowd that want to talk and ask to Him. They are Gentiles. They are Greeks which is kind of a general name for anyone who is not a Jew. Interestingly Philip goes to Andrew to ask him how these Gentiles can see Jesus when Andrew was the one who brought Philip to Jesus. Andrew probably just said ‘Let's just go tell Him that these Greek have come to see Him.’

All these people have different motivations. All of them see that this is a big moment, a key moment but each of them see it as a big moment for a different reason. The moment becomes an even bigger moment to Jesus because Jesus is about to stop saying something that He has said for three years and He's about to start saying something that He's never said for three years. So let's walk through the big moment for each of these groups of people.

What kind of moment is it for the Jerusalemites? This is a national moment. These are nationalists. In other words, if they saw how we treated the triumphal entry they would have thought we were crazy. This was kind of like a memorial day parade for them where we see all the flags. They didn't have flags but for hundreds of years for their national symbol they had used from Psalm 116 and 118 were palm branches. That is their version of a national flag. They

come waving their national symbol for this moment of nationalism and they come with a refrain which is ‘Hosanna, God save us!’

They are not talking about God saving them from sin but from Rome. They used to have a king that conquered everything who was David so they wanted the Son of David, the Messiah, to be brought to make them conquerors again and so that the boot of the oppressor could be thrown off. This wasn’t just any king, even the King of Israel! “*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!*” That is the song they are singing. It is a song of nationalist fervor, nationalist deliverance and a song of a king that will take them from being victims and oppressed to victors and overcomers of all the kingdoms that surround them. This is the moment and they have heard about Him raising the dead, having done the miracles and many are saying this is the Messiah. Let’s go meet Him. He is coming like other kings, on the fowl of a donkey, even as some of their kings did into Jerusalem.

This was also a moment for the disciples for it was a significant teaching moment. For instance, when you keep saying that you keep telling your kids something but they are just not listening to me. Then you’re riding along in the car and they quote you. I take great hope in that as a pastor because there are many times I’m preaching and I’m convinced that many aren’t really listening. Then all of a sudden I hear someone quote me and realize someone is actually listening. This is one of those moments. You kind of think the disciples aren’t listening but then the text says ‘later they remembered’ and they attached this moment to Zechariah. Behold this was a prophetic fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah—just as it is written, [15] “*Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!*”

What is not quoted in this text is the rest of this verse. Zechariah 9:9b says [9b] *Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* That is significant for if the king came into the city on a white stallion that meant he was coming to conquer but if he came in on a donkey that meant it was a mission of peace. In Zechariah 9:10 it says he comes to speak peace to all nations and not just Israel. The disciples who will be sent to the nations with grace and peace will remember this moment. When Jesus says that all authority has been given to Him they remember that this is the King for the King has come in fulfillment of Scripture and is sending us out with the Gospel of grace and peace to all the nations. It was a learning, teaching moment for the disciples. It would pay big dividends after the resurrection and the ascension.

Thirdly, it was a questioning moment for the curious. People were wanting to see Lazarus who had just been raised from the dead. He is a rock star, a celebrity at this point. He could have written a book if he wanted to. I don’t buy the books of people who have said they have died and came back to life for I only know of one, Lazarus, and he never wrote a book about it. He didn’t seem to have said much at all about what had happened to him, if at all. They come to see and question Lazarus and Jesus who raised him from the dead but when they look at Jesus they will be looking at One who will die and in a few days after be raised, not to die again like Lazarus but to be enthroned on high.

There is a fourth group which is the Pharisees and it’s a moment for them. When Jesus was coming from the home of Lazarus to Jerusalem there was a price on His head. The price was ‘wanted dead or alive.’ They had a plot to kill Him with a price on His head and all they needed was for somebody to betray Him and collect it. The plot and price was not only to kill Jesus but Lazarus also. If the Pharisees could get someone to betray Jesus it would be the moment they could arrest Him, sentence Him and kill Him. They didn’t want a king to reign but

for this King to be put to death. So it's a precarious moment as Jesus rides into a city surrounded by the ruling authorities for Israel under the authority of Rome.

The fifth group is the Gentiles, the Greeks and they want to see Jesus. They go to Philip and why Philip? I think the key is in the text. Philip and Andrew are from Bethsaida and it's on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. That area was called the Galilee of the Gentiles and had become dominated by the Gentiles. Philip was a Hebrew but he had a Greek name. So here come the Gentiles, those who are speaking the Greek language and they meet Philip and Andrew who are of the 12 Disciples who are from Bethsaida, asking for an audience with Jesus and that becomes a momentous moment.

From that moment on Jesus will never say what He has repeated often in the past three years which is 'The time is not yet come...' or 'This is not My hour...' It seems He is always withdrawn from the multitudes and now He is coming in a parade right into the city. Now He is going to go make this scene in the city as He cleanses it. All this attention is being drawn to Him now. Has Jesus all of a sudden changed tactics? No, Jesus has not changed but what has changed is the time. This is one of the things God wants Jesus to do and that is to declare that the time has come for the cross. The hour has come. When the Gentiles coming from all the nation come to say 'We would see Jesus' then Jesus says 'The time has come.'

I love the appearance of this pulpit and I thank God for the history of this pulpit but I want to tell you something never to do. When you see these beautiful pulpits, don't come up where the preacher stands behind it for you may find water from about three months ago, chewing gum wrappers, notes on a bulletin that's two months old and then all the wires in it. I like the way James Boyce talks about this for he says 'it doesn't matter how ugly it is on the preacher's side of the pulpit for when the preacher gets the chance to look right in front of him is a brass plaque that says 'we would see Jesus' for that's why the preacher is there.' That is what makes the pulpit beautiful.

Here is Jesus coming in on the fowl of the donkey announcing peace and now has those coming from all the nations wanting to see Him, the Prince of peace, who makes men and women right with God through what He is about to do this week. Then He says 'The time has come, the time has changed.' The very reality that the time has come sends Him into a moment of introspection and dare I say, almost depression, because now this time means the cross. Here is how He introduces it; the time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. How will He be glorified? It will be on the cross. When you think of the word glorify think of exaltation, display, reveal and manifest. What is going to reveal the glory of God the Father in the exaltation and glory of God the Son? It is when He ascends to that cross and that cross is lifted up.

At Christmas we were celebrating the humiliation of Christ. Philippians 2:5–8 says
[5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus is at the lowest extremity of His humiliation and at this point is the initiation of His exaltation. At that cross the love of God will kiss the holiness of God by the Son of God to save sinners through the grace of God for the glory of God. There when He is lifted up on that cross we are drawn to Him, we would see Jesus. In Him alone is our life evermore. It is at the cross that the King ascends to be lifted up and when He is lifted up at the cross then we will be lifted

up to glory. His exaltation began in the extremity of His humiliation on a cross in a tomb and then from the tomb to glory, the ascension and our salvation.

It is at the cross that you see the power of our God and the humility of our God to save sinners to become the people of God. It is at the cross that you see the love of God meet the justice of God. It's at the cross that God does what only God can do and that is to make men and women who are wrong with God, right with God. At that cross the glory of His righteousness is stripped away and placed upon Him is the depravity of our sin, the rebellion of our treason, the declaration of our hatred of God Himself. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says [21] *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

There at the cross you hear the cry of Jesus' dereliction, 'Oh God is there any way that this cup can pass from Me?' There is no way for the cup to pass and sinners to be made right with God. It is at that cross at that moment where Jesus Christ is drinking to the bottom the cup that He didn't want to drink and you hear it in His cry of dereliction "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" that is, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matthew 27:46) He cried this for you to be saved. As the wrath of God unmixed is poured out upon the Son of God we are saved by the glorious grace of God. Praise His Name forever!

That righteousness that was stripped off of Him so that our sins would be put on Him, then that righteousness is placed on you. You are not only forgiven but you are now innocent, right with God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says [21] *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* Amazing grace! Oh the glory of His grace!

Little did those Pharisees know and can't you just hear them frustrated in their moment, 'Your plans aren't working for the whole world is going after Him...' Oh how blind they are! Jesus was going after the whole world, including you and would save His people from their sins. Now your hour has come. You have no idea how many times I was in a church lost and headed to hell but I thank God I was there because everybody kept telling me that I could be right with God and one day my hour came. When that hour came for me I said 'Hosanna! Save me' not from being a victim in this world but to save me from my sin.

My Savior who is lifted up draws you to glory in Him. This is your hour. Will you come and say 'I want Jesus'? Give me Jesus. Those of us who have come to Jesus our privilege has come to go tell the world that the hour has come for them to be right with God. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, would You speak to our hearts and our minds even now? Holy Spirit, You come and speak. Jesus draw everyone reading this today to come to Christ. I pray for everyone Father to know Christ, the Savior who drank the unmixed, unrelenting wrath of God on the cross and then cried out 'It is finished!' Father would You bring men and women to Yourself? If you want to give your life to Jesus you just simply call upon Him saying 'Jesus I come to You. I confess I'm a sinner and I cannot save myself and I put my trust in Jesus alone.' If you want to talk and pray without someone please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and we'd be happy to do this. For those who know Jesus, God would You first of all receive our praise for the hour that came and Jesus saved us? O praise His Name forever and now Jesus would You send us to bring others to that Savior for their hour has come to come to Him who saves us for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE LARGE CROWD

- I. The Jerusalemites
- II. The Disciples
- III. The Curious
- IV. The Pharisees
- V. The Gentiles

THE MOMENT

- I. Jerusalemites – National Moment
- II. Disciples – Teaching Moment
- III. Curious – Questioning Moment
- IV. Pharisees – Precarious Moment
- V. Gentiles – Momentous Moment

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The Momentous Moment

“My Hour has Come”

“But if I be lifted up, I will draw all people to Myself”