



Sunday, March 29, 2026

John 12:12-16

As we step into the message today, we're going to take a bit of a different direction. Even though we're still in the book of John, we're going to jump ahead to John chapter 12 - where John records the events of the triumphal entry.

This is the moment where Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, and the crowds are shouting, 'Hosanna! Hosanna!'

And part of the reason we're doing this is because today, all around the world, Christians are celebrating Palm Sunday. Which historically, marks the beginning of Passion Week - the moment where the countdown begins toward Jesus' death and resurrection.

This final journey to the cross is incredibly significant. It's where the three years of Jesus' public ministry now culminate with events over the next 8 days that would literally redefine eternity and change the course of human history forever.

To give you a bit of a picture - I recently finished watching the Star Wars miniseries Andor with my son. And for most of the show, it's slow, intentionally building characters, revisiting backstories, laying groundwork. But then in those final 2 or 3 episodes - that's when everything really starts to come together.

And in a similar way - Jesus spends 30 years preparing for three years of ministry. And even in those three years, so much of His work is laying groundwork - fulfilling prophecy, performing miracles, teaching, forming His disciples. But here, in this final stretch - these last eight days - everything now starts to come together but in ways that no one ever expected. The signs were always there but only after the fact would many begin to understand.

So if you have your Bibles with you this morning I'd like you to turn with me to John 12 where we

will be reading verses 12-16. If you are able to, I'd also like to invite you to stand for the reading of God's word.

John 12:12-16

'12 The next day, when the large crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13 they took palm branches and went out to meet him. They kept shouting:

"Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord —the King of Israel!"

14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written:

15 Do not be afraid,
Daughter Zion. Look, your King is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt.

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first. However, when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.'

Historically the significance of Palm Sunday is found in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, just one week before His crucifixion. This took place at the beginning of Passover which would have truly been like no other passover before. History teaches us that literally millions of Jews were in Jerusalem at this time - far more than normal - because they caught wind that this Jesus of Nazareth might show up. Word about the miracles, the healings, the exorcisms, the bringing back from the dead, the commanding of the storms....all of this had spread like wildfire, where many were wondering and eagerly anticipating that this could truly be the Messiah that they had long been waiting for.

Now, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is what is referred to as the Triumphal Entry and is a really interesting topic to talk about because for centuries upon centuries the belief and expectation was that when the Messiah came, you would know, because he would come in full array of His glory and splendor (like the warrior Jesus of Revelation 1) and wage immediate war on the oppressive Roman empire, declaring His rule for all of eternity. There would be no shadow of doubt of victory as He stormed in on His stallion, flanked by throngs of His mighty angels ready to pronounce judgment upon an evil and wicked generation.

And so this expectation stood in the way of so many Jewish people receiving Jesus as Messiah, because He was clearly not the expectation that had been conjured up in their mind.....in fact, He was anything but. Jesus was born in a lowly town called Bethlehem.....born not to nobility but the son of a simple carpenter.....He came as a baby, not as a glorified deity....and so on and so forth...

And so, the reason that the triumphal entry is so significant, is because in it, there are these little, seemingly insignificant details that show us that, even though this was not the image they had in their mind, this Jesus was without doubt, the one, true Messiah. And believe it or not, a lot of this significance comes simply in how Jesus shows up to Jerusalem. Now, all four Gospels share the story of this most historic of passover celebrations and help to give us an overall picture of what transpired that day. John talks about the prophetic aspect but Mark actually breaks it down a little bit further and helps to fill in the gaps.

Mark 11:1-11a

‘Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; 2 and He said to them, “Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. 3 And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it,’ and immediately he will send it here.”

4 So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. 5 But some of those who stood there said to them, “What are you doing, loosing the colt?”

6 And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. 8 And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

“Hosanna!

‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’

10 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David

That comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest!”

11 And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple...’

Did you notice that in both accounts see very clearly that Jesus was riding on a donkey and prophetically, we learned that this was intentional. However, it's not just a donkey but a colt. Now a colt could mean any young animal of the equine family...horse, donkey, zebra, mule, pony. But it isn't until we hop over to Matthews account of this story that we learn that this colt was tied up to its mother which was a donkey. So this colt that Jesus was riding was in fact a donkey. In fact, not just any donkey but a young donkey. Which is significant because there was an ancient prophecy that said that Jesus would not be riding an old donkey, but a young one:

Zechariah 9:9b

'Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey.'

So, if you had been paying attention in Torah class when you were a kid, you would have learned about this prophecy and the simple fact that Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey would have served as an immediate fulfillment of that messianic prophesy.

But it's interesting that a King would be riding a donkey and not a horse right? It just doesn't seem fitting that a King would be, lowly and riding on a donkey...' as Zechariah prophesied. You see, historically, in times of war when kings and nobles rode into a city on a donkey it was actually a symbol of peace. Horses on the other hand were used as a declaration of war and judgment. During ancient times, victorious Roman generals would enter their conquered cities in chariots drawn by white horses - declaring victory. And later on, as the book of Revelation shows us, we will see that Jesus will return riding a white horse - ready to bring final victory and judgment.

But not here.

Here, Jesus is making a declaration of peace.

A declaration of His willingness to sacrifice... and to lay down His life.

But it's not just the fact that He is riding a donkey that is significant, it's the context of this donkey that gives us even more information.

We know from Matthew's account that the colt was with its mother.

And in Mark, we're told that no one had ever sat on it - which means it was unbroken.

So think about that for a second...

This is a donkey that has never been ridden before. It would need to be broken in before anyone could ride it - let alone through a packed Jerusalem.

So with that in mind and if the point is peace...why not just ride the older donkey? The one that had already spent its life being ridden?

There's actually a reason for this, and it comes down to the language being used.

We're told that the colt was tied up - bound. When Jesus says to untie it, some translations use the term to, 'Loose it.' This is where it gets interesting because the exact same language for untying the colt shows up in Matthew 16, where Jesus tells the disciples that whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever they loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

It's the same word - *lyō* - which means to release, to set free. But more than that, it carries a sense of authority. So when Jesus says, 'Go and loose the colt,' this isn't just an instruction, it carries a prophetic undertone that points to something far beyond the untying of a knot.

Scholars suggest that this loosing of the young donkey actually symbolizes the releasing of something new - a brand new covenant that Jesus was about to bring into the city of Jerusalem.

And that helps explain why He doesn't ride the older donkey.

the donkey that was well seasoned, used to being ridden for in this context, would be considered the old covenant - the Law - which was marked by individuals making continual sacrifices to pay the price of their sin.

But Jesus came with something new. He came to fulfill the old covenant by being the final sacrifice.

And so, by entering Jerusalem on this newly released colt - during Passover - a feast centered on the sacrifice of a lamb - Jesus is clearly declaring that a new Lamb has arrived.

The final Lamb. The final sacrifice for all of eternity.

The old is about to be fulfilled and something brand new is beginning.

And again, if you were well-versed in the Scriptures at that time, this imagery would have reminded you of the verse in Genesis that prophesied all of this hundreds upon hundreds of years earlier:

Genesis 49:11a

‘Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine...’

And so, we can see that even in this single act of riding into Jerusalem on this young donkey, Jesus was declaring that He is the new covenant, come to be the final sacrifice and that as the Messiah He would declare victory by giving up His life.

And Jesus really didn’t need to say anything, because the crowd that had gathered around Him was doing it for Him - declaring that He is the One who comes in the name of God; the One who comes from the lineage of David and all the while bracketing this declaration with the shout of Hosanna!

Now, based on this declaration and the act of laying down clothing and branches, one might naturally assume that the term ‘hosanna,’ that was being shouted was simply an emphatic term of praise.

However, the Greek word ‘hosanna,’ actually has its roots in the Hebrew phrase ‘hoshiya-na’ - which simply means, ‘Save us,’ which clearly shows us that they still weren’t getting it.

History teaches us that at that time in the first century, all of Israel was under the oppressive Roman rule and so the people of God, were desperately praying for a Saviour - the Messiah - to come and specifically free them from this specific oppression. But for Jesus, the Roman oppression was secondary. The deeper oppression was sin and death. And unbeknownst to them, the way that He would do this would actually be by submitting to the oppression of the Romans, instead of overruling them.

And this is where it gets really significant. Because many of the same people shouting ‘Hosanna!’ here will later turn on Him. Why?

Because He didn’t fit their expectation of who the Messiah should be.

Which is interesting to me, because time and time again, Jesus seemed to make it very clear to His disciples and followers that He would have to die, and then would be resurrected in order to establish His Kingdom.

In fact, in Luke's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem we read:

Luke 18:31-34

'Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. 33 They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." 34 But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.'

So Jesus shares this information with them, but then we learn that the saying was hidden from them, which seems to make no sense. Why would Jesus clearly speak something to His disciples, but then hide the meaning from them? Why wouldn't He just not say anything?

Because for Jesus, timing is everything. Jesus spoke those words in that moment and withheld the understanding because the understanding was not for that time. The understanding would only come when Jesus was crucified. Because at that point in time, when the disciples would be at their lowest, potentially wanting to run away, Jesus would not be there to guide them - only the remembrance of His words. And in that moment, those words would come back. And what once didn't make sense would suddenly become clear.

This was supposed to happen. But not only that - it wasn't the end. Because He also said that three days later He would rise from the dead.

And so, I think that this is simply a case of delayed clarification. And so when Jesus spoke these words into their blank faces, all the while, knowing that it was going over their heads, He still spoke those words because He knew that at the right time, in the right space they would remember them.

Because His Word does not return void!

******And some of you here today have received a word from God and you have no idea what it means. Let me encourage you. God's word will not return void. You hang onto His words. You hang onto his truth, and at the right time - the appointed time - He will bring clarity to your heart, soul, and mind. And just because you don't understand it yet, it doesn't mean God isn't already at work.

How do I know this??

Because even in the midst of Jesus speaking these things to His day-dreaming disciples, whether they realized it or not, He had already prepared them for moments like this with one of the most interesting, supernatural healings that has ever been recorded in Scripture.

Remember in Mark 8 when Jesus healed the blind man in Bethsaida? It was the most unique of all of His healings because He took two tries to heal him. The first time, He responded and said I see men like trees walking around. Jesus then went back again and this time his sight was fully restored.

Some have said that this happened because it showed a limitation of Jesus' power but that is simply not the case. Jesus never lacked the power to fully restore his sight. Rather it was a lesson about sight and clarity. Perhaps specifically for the disciples - this was a lesson that there would be seasons where they would have sight but not clarity. That, understanding and clarity of some of Jesus' teachings may not be available now, but would be given at a future date.

And so, for the disciples, clarity would have come through the process of Jesus being nailed to the cross, crying out and giving up his last breath.....and then waiting the three days not knowing what to do with themselves, and then seeing the gardener, but it wasn't the gardener - it was Jesus, and then for some putting their hands in His wounds and watching Him ascend back into Heaven. And all of a sudden as all of these things - like pieces of a puzzle began to fall into place one section at a time, the full image would have appeared. 'Oh....that's what Jesus meant!' 'That's what He actually said!' 'Oh, I get it now!!!'

And so for them the understanding that Jesus was not the Messiah that they expected but the Messiah that they got - the suffering servant - who truly was and is the Son of God, was the crucial piece of information that was needed to propel them into their towns and villages to preach with incredible conviction the death and resurrection of the One, True Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ.

So you see, at the end of the day, whether you were the disciples following Jesus, or you were the Jews resisting Him, or the Jewish Christians embracing Him in the Triumphal entry, none of them had it all figured out. Although there may have been many signs along the way, ultimately it was only Jesus who knew exactly what was coming next. And for us, this should bring us comfort instead of fear, because, being on the opposite side of history, we know that the road He travelled was for our sake, to bring us a glorious freedom that we were powerless to achieve on our own. And because He has done this great thing for us, regardless of our understanding of the future, we can rest in the assurance that He and He alone is in control!

Points to consider:

You actually don't have to have everything figured out in full detail in order to follow Jesus. 1 Corinthians teaches us that there are simply some things in this life that are un-knowable but that this should not preclude us from putting our full faith, hope and trust in Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 13:12

'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.'

You can expect the unexpected. Things will not always go your way - or the way you planned, but that doesn't mean that God is any less in control. For some of us, you can relate to many of the Jews, being frustrated with their expectation of who the Messiah was supposed to be, and the Messiah that they received. For some of us, we have expected one thing in our relationship with Jesus. Perhaps, immeasurable blessing, wealth, health, smooth sailing, but we've received trials, tribulations, and even persecutions. Listen there is great blessing to following Jesus but it is not without its challenges. Think about some of Jesus' last words to His disciples: to take up their cross daily and follow Him. This was yet another one of his incomprehensible messages to the disciples because they had no idea He was going to the cross, but afterwards, they would certainly remember these words. That yes, there is great freedom and great blessing in following Jesus, but there is also sacrifice, and surrender, trials and tribulations. But no matter what you walk through - He has been there and will walk you through it!

The word of God will not return void.

Blessing

May the Lord Bless you and Keep you
May He cause His face to Shine upon you
May He be gracious towards you
Lifting up His countenance before you
And may He give you peace
In Jesus name, Amen.

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