

# The Gospel of John

*“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!” (John 12:13)*

*“The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.”  
(John 12:18 ESV)*

**Title: Tainted and Imperfect Acclaim of the King**

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**John 12:12-19**

**Gerhard Peysar**

## **Introduction:**

Good morning, flip with me in your Bible's to John Chapter 12. Today is Palm Sunday, and we are looking at a very familiar passage. The Triumphal entry. We all love today! The cute little kiddie's waving their branches singing Hosanna! And our CM group does such a great job of keeping order with all these chaotic little ones. It's beautiful and joyous. In it we see a picture of triumph when Christ will come again to receive adoration and worship and acclaim! The Word of the Lord starting in John 12:12-19:

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 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!” And 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!”

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. 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. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.” John 12:12-19 ESV

The Word of the Lord!

The structure for today will be pretty simple. First we will examine the importance of the sign Jesus claims as he enters Jerusalem, namely why did he come riding a donkey? Next we will take a look at the crowd's response, waving palm fronds. Finally we will ask ourselves a key question regarding the followers in Jerusalem and what that can say about us and our praise and acclaim of Jesus. So with that in mind, let's turn to:

### **The Sign: Riding on a Donkey**

This sign is at the center of the center of what the Apostle John wants us to see in this narration of the historical Triumphal Entry. Jesus is claiming the title Messiah by claiming a prophecy given by the prophet Zechariah 480 before:

Zechariah 9:9-10

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
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.  
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
and he shall speak peace to the nations;  
his rule shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Here some 500 years before the Triumphal entry, a prophet of God tells his people the Messiah King will come on a Donkey. The Apostle John wants us to see this obvious connection. Other Gospels make it clear that Jesus himself orchestrated this symbolism, he says:

“Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” Luke 19:30

This is Jesus approved symbolism! He is staking a claim to a throne, and in it he is saying a couple things about how he will rule. He's saying:

#### **1) I am the Righteous Messiah King!**

I am the King in the line of David that God promised. Here I come, in Righteous.

“The coming king of Israel will be righteous: that is, he will rule with justice and fairness”.<sup>1</sup>

Don't you want a King that is fair? One that brings Justice. Like Martin Luther King Jr. don't all our souls scream the words of the prophet Amos:

“we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream”<sup>2</sup>

And Jesus says, I WILL BRING THAT!

## **2) I am humble and will rule differently than other Kings.**

I'm on a Donkey for crying out loud! One commentator spells it out for us:

“The contrast offered by the specification of his mount is that this king is not coming in a military context (which would have featured a horse, mule, or chariot), but is coming in peace and humility.” Tyndale NT Commentaries.<sup>3</sup>

Here Jesus is foretelling the kind of King he is going to be, the king who serves, humble, putting others before himself, even as he washes the disciples feet 4 days hence. As he says:

“Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”. Matthew 20:28

He says, I am the servant King – don't you want a King like that?

And he will eventually speak peace to the nations and break the instruments of conflict! Isn't that a timely promise for our day and age. He will not rule with the machinery of war. He will not coerce and threaten. His rule will not be based in worldly power or naked force, but he will control by speaking peace.

He says, I am the King who will bring lasting peace, in the words of Psalm 46 he says:

“He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with fire.  
“Be still, and know that I am God.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew E. Hill. (2012). Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries Volume 28. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi An Introduction and Commentary

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. I have a Dream. Speech 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew E. Hill. (2012).

I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!" Psalm 46:9-10

Don't you want a King let that?

### **3) I will rule pervasively over all the earth**

Lastly, claiming the prophecy of Zechariah 9, Jesus claims the interesting title saying "and rule them from sea to sea, from the River to ends of the earth." That last phrase, I first came across in my textbook on Ancient Mesopotamia that I sometimes read to deal with my insomnia. It's an idiom used by middle eastern Kings to express complete and total rule of the world, first used by Sargon the Great in 2300 BC! Remember Zechariah was born in Babylon, this was the phrase used for the King of the Whole World that he picked up when studying there!

And Jesus mounting on a Donkey is claiming this title foretold in Zechariah, I am the rightful King of the World. "I'm HIM!" Like a sanctioned political ad, this symbolism reflects what the King really wants to say about himself!

By claiming this prophecy Jesus says: I am THE KING. I am Just[ice]. I am Righteous. I am humble. I come in peace. And will rule without violence, expel evil, heal wounds and all hurts! I am the King on a Donkey, I come in humility to serve, and bring peace. Don't we all want a King like that?

As I said, this is THE CENTRAL ANOUNCEMENT of John's account.

But this is not all John wants us to see. He also documents the response of the crowd, and we would do well to see what he draws our attention to.

### **The Response: Waving Palm Fronds**

To set the stage for interpreting the response of the crowd, I think we need to use our sanctified imagination and try to transport ourselves to Jerusalem 2000 years ago so story time with Mr. Gary:

Imagine you're there. You have travelled from let's say, Beersheba 80-100 km south. With some of your family, maybe 75 people – families were big in those days. Lots of kids running around, and are we there yet. And when you get to Jerusalem you see other families from all over Judea, Samaria, Galilee have come. The population of Jerusalem swells to possibly double! Josephus says 2.5 million, but he is known to exaggerate. At any rate, the city is swollen to breaking with people. You and your immediate family of 8 are chilling out, eating some dates and hummus, when all of sudden you hear cheering. Not just any cheering, but gut rumbling cheering of people stomping feet and shouting. It's like Skydome during the World Series. And of course, your son, it's always a son, bolts out of your wife's arms to go "check it out". By the time you catch him, you can start to make out sounds, "Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest!!" Now you are curious. A couple streets further on you hear more shouts and singing: "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" And you think to yourself, wait a second that's Psalm 118:26, that is a Messianic Psalm! They are cheering for the Messiah!! The Messiah! You grab your boy's hand and run into the screaming crowd. You ask someone, is it him, is it Messiah? You can barely hear the reply, "It's Jesus of Nazareth, he's riding a donkey! Like the prophets foretold!" Another man says, "I saw him raise a man from the dead just a few days ago!"

The press and power of this mob of people would be terrifying, if it were not for what they were saying. Even as it is, you are frightened for your son given the sheer number of people here. People get trampled in these kinds of displays. There is the smell of riot in the air. The fevered odour of men, high on hope and adrenaline, pitched for you know not what. Worship? Insurrection? But you know you need to get back to your family, get your son out of the mob, so you turn back...

The picture this imaginary narrative paints for us is far different from the usually bubbly and orderly view of Palm Sunday we often carry in our minds. And yet, I submit it is likely closer to the truth. The historical triumphal entry was most certainly a mixed bag. Some political radicals. Some socialist crusaders, and a couple true believers. What should have been pure worship and adoration of the Rightful King was more about trying to force the King into their own box of nationalism and self-serving government.

You ask, Gary – How can you say that! I mean our kids wave the branches! Well, here me out.

The Palm was a Pagan synonym for victory. They were given to Athletes, Politicians and military Leaders. In fact, a special kind of Toga, the Toga Palmata worn only by generals in triumphant processions, featured the palm branch. So the crowd seems to have appropriated these meanings and transferred them to nationalistic dreams of insurrection against the Romans. That's not just my opinion either. Beal and DA Carson agree:

“The people’s waving of palm branches may signal nationalistic hopes that in Jesus a messianic liberator had arrived... it appears that both the crowds (which, as mentioned cherished false nationalistic notions of the Messiah) and the disciples misunderstood Jesus true identity at the triumphal entry”<sup>4</sup>

The palm tree became a symbol of Jewish nationalism as evidenced by illegal coins featuring the palm. The Smithsonian museum notes:

“Minting silver shekel coins became a bold assertion of independence against the oppressive [Roman Empire](#) during the [Great Revolt](#), a Jewish rebellion that lasted until 70 C.E.”<sup>5</sup>



Coin from Jerusalem AD 69; Not Roman issue

<sup>4</sup> GK Beale and DA Carson. 2007. Commentary on the NT use of the OT. Baker Academic. Pg 470.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/silver-quarter-shekel-coin-jewish-revolt-israel-180980788/>

So there is no doubt an announcement of Victorious Coming and REVOLT was in view when the Jerusalem mob employed this symbol. Using Palm branches to honour someone coming into the capital was a clear sign to the Roman's saying "We are our own masters, Here is our King!"

As it turns out, the use of the Palm was likely less about honouring Christ as Rightful King and Messiah and more an image of insurrection and nationalism. It was a symptom of sickness in their hearts indicating they were trying to conform Jesus to the image of a King they were expecting and desiring.

Now, I am not calling for cancelling the children's Palm Sunday. Notice, Jesus does not reject their response. He accepts the acclaim of the crowd; He is the rightful king of Israel. It was right to wave anything at Christ that would tell the world he is King! I am merely pointing out the crowd's response was a mixed bag. The Palm Frond is a legitimate way to announce the King, but in this context, it should also serve as a warning that the Apostle John wants us to see.

Specifically he wants us to see the crowd's response was:

### **A Picture of Tainted and Imperfect Acclaim**

This is at the heart of the tragedy of Palm Sunday. This should have been a day of perfect celebration and worship! The Messiah King has come proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour! The Kingdom was coming! The hope and salvation of Israel AND the light to the World had arrived! And the crowd WAS RIGHT TO SING AND SHOUT the words of Psalm 118:25-26: "Hosanna" [that is save us] and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!"

They were singing the right song, but with the sick heart! Waving Palm Fronds they were hoping for political superiority and national autonomy. They wanted all the OT promises of the Messiah now! They wanted to be free of the Roman yoke of oppression now! They wanted a King to do their bidding instead of a Humble King that would cut off their own war horses and chariots and break their battle bows – thereby ruling the nations by speaking peace.

At the heart of the tainted and imperfect acclaim was idolatry – The Mob was Trying to construct a God conforming to our preferences and desires. And when Jesus wouldn't dance to their tune, they turned on him. As Jesus said,

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;” Matthew 11:17

in response to accusations he was not the messiah the Pharisees looked for. The question is, how often do our hearts suffer the same sickness? How many of our loved ones have walked away from the faith because Jesus wouldn't dance to their tune. Because that financial payoff didn't come, or this person let them down? Or that prayer wasn't answered their way? How often are we tempted to walk away, or at least hold back our love and acclaim?

Part of what John wants us to see in this account is that human beings are inherently fickle.

EVERYBODY WANTS THE FREEDOM CHRIST PROMISES  
BUT FEW WILL ENDURE HIS LORDSHIP.

You know, mediating on this passage for over a month now I keep coming back to the same observation. Through 4 drafts, this question stayed at the front of my mind, I couldn't shake it. And that Question is:

WHY DID THE CROWD ABANDON HIM BY FRIDAY?

I believe this is the implicit question God wants us to answer today. How could a crowd so fervent, so loud, so joyous be so fickle? And more importantly, how am I, How are We like that crowd? You know, I don't want to be like that crowd. I don't want to abandon my saviour. I want to KEEP ON SINGING HOSANNA, BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD through the res of my life, and you do to.

So with this in mind I have 2 suggestions:

## **Ensuring our Praise Will Endure**

- 1. Resolve to trust the King's timing even when it feels delayed**

The one's who keep singing are the ones who can look through present uncertainty, and by faith see the coming promises of God. This is a mark of a true believer, seeing through the present trial and PAIN to the future REIGN of Jesus. This is what the author to the Hebrews means when he lists just about every prophet and hero of the faith and says ALL OF THEM WERE DISAPPOINTED IN THIS LIFE!

“And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised”. Hebrews 11:39

None received what was promised... IN THIS LIFE!. And yet, they all received what was promised in the life to come. God is no cheat, He is the Promise Keeper!

Part of the problem with the Jerusalem Mob was they suffered from inadequate theology. They believed the wrong things, and therefore hoped for the wrong things, and were disappointed when they didn't come to pass. They believed all God's promises would be fulfilled in the here and now, in the way they expected, falling prey to what theologians' call “Over-realized Eschatology.” They thought all the OT promises about the Messiah would come at once. This happens when we expect the “not yet” to be here now. And just like the Israelites who expected all God's promises in the here and now, we can do the same.

So many of “our disappointments in God” are down to timing. And I don't make light of these disappointments. Some are very heavy, like personal or familial sickness. Like death of loved ones, or the state of injustice in the world. God will deal with these, but NOT YET. Death will die and God will bring perfect justice and peace to the world. But not yet.

He will not disappoint us. Is it even possible we will we have ANY DISAPPOINTMENT in the New Holy City whose light is God himself? Will any present or past disappointment matter when we walk with him?

“He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21:3-5

This is the consummation of the promise quoted by the Apostle John, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!” Fear not brothers and sisters, our King has come and is coming again. Let us resolve to wait on his timing.

Secondly

## **2. Resolve to Worship the King for Who he Is, not who we want Him to be**

The Jerusalem mob really wanted political emancipation and didn't want a Saviour. When Jesus didn't fit the bill they turned on Him.

They fell into this trap in part because *they selectively read the scriptures*. They came up with a vision of God, and then read selectively only the parts that fit their pre-conceived notions of who God and the Messiah were.

The warning to us is obvious. We cannot selectively read our Bibles to cherry pick a notion of who God is. To do so is to violate the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image” Deuteronomy 5:8 ESV

Making an idol or carved image for worship suggests to both us and the ancients that we have control over that god. Coming up with our own version of God is doing the same thing, casting a god of our own making. To be clear, the trice holy God is not under our control! We dare not manufacture our own version of God! As one writer puts in succinctly:

“God is not the God of our making or imagination, or even of our own discovery.”<sup>6</sup>

**HE IS WHO HE IS! AND WHAT A GOD HE IS! HE IS SO MUCH BETTER THAN WE COULD IMAGINE!**

And this is where I would like to land today. Jesus as he is, as the Bible reveals him to be, is so much better than any God we could ever construct. Let's see that!

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/worship-in-the-image-of-me>

The gods of our making will always disappoint. But King Jesus, Look at how he serves you? Look at how he advocates. Look to what lengths he will go for our good.

My challenge to you this week is to see again the greatness of the King we have in Christ Jesus. And it's the perfect week for that. It's Holy Week. Jesus reveals so much about himself in just these seven days.

Take time to read passion narrative in John this week, starting in Chapter 12-19. It only takes about 32 minutes! Celebrate Maundy Thursday in Chapter 13-18. Meditate on him and fall in love with him anew. That is my prayer, for myself and for all of us. That we would see our King for who and what he really is! He is:

The King with a servant's heart, A King who washes feet (John 13:5)

The King who promises a place in the Father's house for us (John 14:3)

The King who promises that we will bear much fruit if we abide in him (John 15)

The King who in agony sweats blood for us (Luke 22:44)

The King who says to the Father, not my will but thine (Luke 22:42)

He is the King who has the greatest love for our souls; who lays down his life for his friends and people (John 15:13)

So my advice this week is pretty simple. This week, take time to BEHOLD JESUS FOR WHO HE IS.

Praise that Endures does this. IT ENDURES BECAUSE IT REMEMBERS the good things he has done, the good things he is doing, and the good things will do at the coming of the age!

Let us pray

Heavenly Father, by your Spirit cure our sick heart's desire to turn you into something you are not. Keep us from treating you and your Son like a vending machine, putting in coins of good works, or prayers and expecting the return we want. Keep us from trying to cast you into a god of our own making. O Father, we desire to be worshipers who do not abandon our God, worshipers who keeping singing your praise – to that end, fill us with your Spirit. Amen.