

Palm Sunday: A Son Sent: In the Name of the Lord

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A Son Sent / Palm Sunday / John 12:12–26

Palm Sunday confronts our expectations about what Jesus will do for us.

Discussion Questions

1. The sermon mentions that people in Jesus' time had specific expectations of Him, viewing Him as a means to their end. Reflect on modern-day examples where people might view Jesus in a similar way. How can we shift our perspective to see Jesus as an end in Himself rather than a means to fulfill our desires?
 2. The Jewish leaders feared losing their place and nation due to Jesus' growing influence (John 11:48). Discuss times when fear of losing status, comfort, or control might prevent us from fully embracing Jesus' teachings. How can we overcome these fears?
 3. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a colt was a subversion of the expected kingly entrance. What does this act reveal about the nature of His kingship and mission? How does this contrast with worldly expectations of power and leadership?
 4. The sermon points out that some followed Jesus not out of faith but for entertainment or to witness spectacle (John 12:17-18). Discuss the difference between seeking Jesus for sensational experiences and following Him for genuine faith. How can we cultivate a deeper, more authentic relationship with Jesus?
 5. Jesus emphasizes the importance of following Him to serve and glorify God (John 12:26). In what ways can we, as modern disciples, prioritize God's glory in our lives? Discuss practical steps to align our actions with this goal.
 6. Jesus speaks of walking in the light to avoid darkness (John 12:35-36). What does it mean to walk in the light of Christ in today's world? Share personal experiences or challenges in striving to live as "sons (or daughters) of light."
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Introduction

There was a Roman tradition—a civic and religious spectacle—called the Triumphus where a general would ride into the capital on huge war horse to the veneration of crowds. Now, most Romans would not have seen this but they would have seen arches, the coin depictions, or other images throughout the empire.

A "Triumphant Entry" is the name that editors have given to this particular moment because of how three groups of individuals bring their expectations to this very moment. They each view Jesus as the king who will fulfill their expectations. Yet, Jesus subverts their symbols to teach them how his mission is not to meet their expectations.

- John shows us three groups of people who view Jesus as a means to their end, rather than an end Himself. They treasure what they think Jesus can do for them rather than who Jesus is for them.

- We should reject anything expectation that distracts us from what Jesus has come to do. What are you expecting from Jesus that is distracting you from who he is?

John 12:12–36 ESV

¹² The next day 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.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

1. We expect status quo.

Our first group of people are the those who expect status quo from Jesus, and to meet these people we need to go back to the eleventh chapter. Let me refresh your memory of what is happening.

Jesus has waited for Lazarus to die; he travels there when all hope is lost to rage against death itself; he brings Lazarus back from the dead. And, of course, the people marvel—because stuff like that does not happen.

However, there is a group of people who are really upset about this.

John 11:45–50 (ESV)

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. [the adversative “but” indicates this has the sense of snitching] ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and **the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.**” ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.”

Why do they want to put Jesus to death? They are genuinely afraid that this messianic figure will gather such a large following that the Romans will crush the status quo. They are afraid of what the consequences will be for them if people follow Jesus. Caiaphas, however, does not realize he has prophecies the blessings which will come from Jesus's death.

John 11:48 ESV

⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

By **their place**, they mean **the temple**, and by **their nation**, they mean **their influence**—what we think of as “nation” is a really novel idea. Overwhelmingly, this word nation is translated from “ἔθνος” from which we get our word “ethnic group.” The Romans would have never given control of this territory to the Sanhedrin. But they are afraid that they'll lose the little control they have if they don't act soon.

But they were running out of time, because Jesus was getting enormously popular.

So, the events of the next day, our text today, cause deep anxiety for them: so much that they plan to kill Jesus and Lazarus.

- › **But aren't we like them?**
- › **Are you willing to lose place and influence for him?**

2. We expect status reversal.

Jesus enters the city in an ironic triumphant entry. He chooses key images in clarify his mission in spite of people's expectation.

Our crowd in this text sees Jesus's entry and immediately recognizes its significance and continuity with other key kingly moments, such as when Solomon rode a mule in Jerusalem on his way to be anointed king (1 King 1:33).

John uses the word “crowd” here as a catch all for people who are spectators to Jesus's ministry—they have followed him hoping he'll reverse their misfortune of Roman occupation.

This is the last time he will use the word crowd. When this crowd realizes that Jesus will not cater to their expectations, they turn on him, and John switches from the generic “crowd” to the specific “the Jews.” This is what he meant, of course, in his prologue, John 1:11-12

John 1:11-12 ESV

¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

Palm Trees & M.I.G.A

What's with the palm branches? Palm trees are significant symbols of the land of Israel's fertility and vibrance. They have the same symbolic power as a bald eagle to an American. Interestingly, only John includes the detail of the palm branches.

This is because throughout the gospel of John, he sets in relief how people reject the Son of God sent for them because they have lesser wants.

Palm branches in this particular moment in this particular city are explosively political. I am threading a needle here, but I think this risky analogy captures the moment. This is a M.I.G.A. moment, and Jesus is going to subvert it.

Two hundred years prior, when Simon lead a rebellion that liberates fortress Jerusalem from occupation, he instituted independence festivities with dancing and—you guessed it—the waving of palm branches (1 Mac 13). This is precisely public demonstration of fervor the Sanhedrin was trying to avoid.

But, these people will very soon be crying out for Jesus to be crucified! Why? Because Jesus is not ending Roman occupation. And he is not going to reverse their status as occupied.

What’s missing from the Psalm? “even the King of Israel!”

Now, Jesus is a king, but when you mix the palm branches and the inserting of this phrase, they’ve missed why Jesus was sent and they’re hoping to have another Simon on their hands. **This isn’t the first time the crowd has done this.** After multiplying the bread and fish, the crowd is ecstatic.

John 6:15 ESV

¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

To turn a Nolanism: he’s not the king they want, but he is the king they need.

Meaning of the Colt & the Fulfillment of Prophecy

Jesus rides in on a colt to fulfill prophecy. In the midst of all of this noise and fervor, Jesus rides into Jerusalem to show *he is in fact a king*. But, he does so on a donkey and not a war horse to show that he is a king of peace.

But some people who are present here are just here for the show.

3. We expect sensational experiences.

John 12:17–18 ESV

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.

There is a group of people who have also been following Jesus not because they wanted to know God but because they wanted to be entertained. Earlier, Jesus said about these people [John 6:26](#) “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” They didn’t want to miss the next best thing.

I know it’s crazy to think about it a bit, but Lazarus’s moment went viral. Word spread like wild fire, and people are hear because they don’t want to miss a moment—not because thy don’t want to miss the Messiah.

4. Jesus, however, expects disciples to want God’s glory.

Notice immediately what the Greeks want to see: they want to see Jesus. That’s their expectation of the moment: they hope to see Jesus.

1. Jesus was sent by God to glorify the Father (v. 28) but also be glorified as the Son of Man (v. 23).
2. Contra the nationalistic dreams, Jesus is going to die, and his death is going to bear fruit (v. 24)
3. John does not give us a scene from Gethsemane, but he includes this dialogue between the Father and the Son (v 27).
4. A voice comes down from heaven and thunders validation of Jesus’s ministry.

5. Jesus's death will open salvation to not only the Jews but the Greeks as well (v. 32)

This takes us right to the theological purpose of the book John highlighted in his first chapter [John 1:11–12](#) “11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,” [John 1:9](#)

John 1:9 ESV

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

Jesus ends this discourse with light. [John 12:36](#)

John 12:36 ESV

³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

It is at this moment, in John's gospel, when the moment is sealed: [John 12:37](#)

John 12:37 ESV

³⁷Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,

Jesus presents two paths of walking: in darkness or light.

You and I all know a guy who does not “know where he is going.” You might know someone like this!

This is why Jesus says that we must follow Him. To follow Jesus is to walk in true light, and if—as Christ says—we serve Jesus, we'll be too busy thinking about others' needs to think about our own expectations.

Conclusion

Because we all have expectations—expectations that need to die at the foot of the cross—expectations that cruciformity does not need to mark our Christian walk so we can keep status quo—expectations that Jesus ought to meet our every demand—expectations that Jesus would entertain us with the latest experience. Jesus wants more for his disciples. He wants them to see glory which is to see Him!

Let your cry be the same as the Greek men here: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

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