

John 12:12-19

“The truth about Palm Sunday”

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I. Intro.

All four gospels record the only public demonstration that Jesus allowed in His earthly ministry; commonly referred to as Palm Sunday. John’s gospel chapter 12 verse 2 records that Jesus was at a quite dinner party at Lazarus’s house held in His honor after the resuscitation of Lazarus. Then starting in verse 12 John skips to a few months later as Jesus is seen heading up a public parade. John’s account of the triumphant entry it is abbreviated when compared to the other gospels and knowing that John had the other gospels I suppose he knew that it was well covered so he doesn’t cover it as thoroughly as the others. In fact, the only detail he adds is the use of palm branches. *John’s account spends more time speaking of the reaction to this event from three groups as he does telling us the event itself.*

The first thing that strikes me when looking at all four accounts is that this event does not seem to be as spontaneous in fact it seems as though Jesus orchestrated it. Jesus is the one that made the arrangements for the donkey as well as the timing of the event. I can only guess that He did so based upon the prophetic word. Since John’s account centers more on the reaction to the parade we need to ask ourselves what this mean to three groups of people:

- Jesus
- Romans
- Jew’s

“What did this act mean to Jesus”:

- Certainly, was an act of obedience to the Father.
- Then it was a fulfillment of the Word.
- Finally, Jesus was openly announcing to the people that He indeed is the King of Israel (John 1:49), the promised Messiah.

“What did this act mean to the Romans”:

To the Romans, (*who would have kept a special watch on this day*), it must have been quite comical to watch a poor peasant riding a donkey to the shouts of *save now*, as there was nothing triumphal about it to them. Whenever a Roman general was victorious he was given a “*Roman triumph*” when he returned to the city our equivalent in American would be a “**ticker-tape parade**”. The victor would be permitted to display the trophies he had won and the enemy leaders he had captured but as these Roman soldiers watched they saw none of that. Had they had the spiritual eyes of Paul that day they would have seen behind Jesus what Paul comments on in Col. 2:15 when he says that Jesus “*disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*” How did Jesus do that? Well according to the 14th verse He would nail it to the cross.

“What did this act mean to the Jews”:

That is a more difficult question to answer as it involves three different groups, the **disciples**, the **pilgrims**, and the **people from Jerusalem** (religious leaders included), all of which we will look at in detail. But to some up these three Jewish groups let me just say that Jesus riding a young donkey that had never been broken seems to indicate that the young donkey had greater understanding of who his master was then did everyone else that day.

II. Vs. 12-15 The hour has come

Vs. 12-15 We left off in verse 11 with the words, “*Because on the account of him (Lazarus) many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus*”. This is the first time Jesus will say “*My hour has come*” (verse 23) up until this time He has always said “*My hour has not come*”. It is only when we go back to verse 12 and get the timing of this event that the significance comes into focus. John told us that it was 6 days before the Passover which would make this the tenth day of Nisan or Sunday the April 6th A.D. 32. There are two significant points to make about this one **practical** the other **prophetical**.

A. **Practical**: According to Exodus this was the day that every Jewish family celebrating the Passover was to choose a lamb to sacrifice. They would then give the lamb to the priest who would watch it for four days to make sure it was without spot (flaw) or blemish (defect). So, on this day as thousands of lambs were being selected by families for the sacrifice came the “*Lamb of God*” without spot or blemish into the city to the cries of “*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!*” Perhaps the people were thinking of Psalm 118:25-26 “*Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.*” But as the people were doing that according to Luke 19:41 Jesus wept as He saw the city. Now you know what “*Hosanna*” means don’t you? Well, it means **save now**. Ah but before those words the psalmist say’s in verses 22-24 “*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*

This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” At Jesus birth the angels announce that there was “**peace on earth**”, and in Luke 19:38 as Jesus’ rode towards Jerusalem the “**city of peace**” the people said that there was “**peace in heaven**” but without the “**Prince of Peace**” in their hearts there would be no peace. You may remember that in Luke’s account in 19:39-40 that “*some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, Teacher, rebuke Your disciples. But He answered and said to them, I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.*” They were selecting a lamb that was going to be sacrificed for their sins at the very moment when the Lamb of God could “Save now”. The author of Hebrews in 10:4 says, “*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.*”

B. **Prophetical**: Ah but that is not the only significant point to the timing of this. Here we have to go back to Daniel 9:25 where the Lord spoke through Daniel saying, “*Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.*” If you do the math you will come up with 483 years and Daniel said that those 483 years would start at the command to restore and build Jerusalem. It just so happens that we have the date according to Neh. 2:1 that this decree went forth as Nehemiah went before king Artaxerxes on the “*month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes*”. We know that King Artaxerxes reign began 465 B.C. and 20 years later makes it 445 B.C. So, the first of Nisan would have been our March 14th 445 B.C. The Jews used a 12 month 360 day calendar and then they would put in a 13th month when necessary to correct the calendar and if you place the use of that calendar with the date of March 14th 445 B.C. and count out the 483 years or 173,880 days the date according to Daniels’ prophecy when Messiah the Prince would come would be on April 6th A.D. 32 and that was this very day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey to the cheers of Hosanna and the waving of palm branches. No wonder Jesus cried out in Matthew 23:37 “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!*” In Daniel 9:26 the prophet said “*And after the sixty-two weeks **Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself**; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.*” So, Daniel clearly saw that Jesus entry was one linked to the cross.

There are there are two other things that are remarkable about this event and has to do with what **people were waving** and what **Jesus was riding**.

A. Vs. 13 “*A great multitude...took branches of palms and went out to meet Him*”: Every year we celebrate this event as Christians calling it “*Palm Sunday*”, but this was not some spontaneous event for the Jews as they had done this before. You see around two hundred years before this after a successful revolt led by Judas Maccabee (*whose name means the hammer*) over the blasphemous Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes the people celebrated the victory over oppression by waving palm branches. In fact, it became such a symbol that it was minted on the back of their coins. The **palm branches were a symbol of Jewish nationalism** as such this was little more than a patriotic rally, and the crowds looked to Jesus as a political and national

savior, but not a spiritual savior. So, 200 years later a multitude gathered and cut down palm branches to celebrate the coming victory when they thought a new “hammer” had come thinking He would come and break the yoke of bondage and oppression of the Romans. Oh, friends don’t miss this truth as Jesus came into Jerusalem to defeat a much greater oppressor than the Roman’s, He came as the “**Savior**” not the “**Hammer**” to break apart the bondage that our sin has upon our lives. Folks the greatest oppressor in our lives isn’t some political force, it’s not the economy or some outside enemy, NO it’s that fellow you see in the mirror each and every day! So how did these people respond when Jesus wasn’t the hammer but the Savior? Well, they changed their words of “**Save now**” to “**Die now**” and little did they know that in order to “**save now**” He needed to “**die now**”. I find the response interesting as it is always easier for you and I to praise the Lord when we think He is going to do what we think He should do and whole other thing when what He does is tell us to go wait at the foot of the cross.

B. Vs. 14-15 The final remarkable thing about this is the fact that Jesus came riding a donkey. In Zech. 9:9 the prophet said, “*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! 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.*” But why not a horse as Kings didn’t ride donkey’s they came on horses? Well, the rabbis had a theory that said that the Messiah would come riding on a white horse if the nation was ready to receive her Messiah, but He would come riding on a donkey if they weren’t ready. So, when will the nation be ready? When will the Messiah come riding upon a white horse? Well, the prophet predicted that the nation wouldn’t be ready but in the next chapter he said, “*And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.*” (Zech. 12:10). So according to Rev. 19:11 that will happen at the end of the tribulation as John declares that he “*saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.*”

III. Vs. 16-19 A donkeys’ testimony

Vs. 16-19 The traditional view of the “*Triumphal Entry*” is that it was long overdue, and the people’s response was a genuine expression of their understanding of Jesus right to rule the nation. But the first thing that indicates that this may not be accurate is that this multitude had come to the feast and as such were not residents of Jerusalem but were pilgrims many from other countries. In Matthews account we are told that Jesus drew near the city from the Mount of Olives and upon this route these pilgrims cried Hosanna and waved their palm branches. Matthew goes on to tells us when the whole multitude arrived in the city the reaction of the inhabitants of the city was far from the “**save now**” that they had chanted along the way as they only asked, “*Who is this*” to which the pilgrims said, “*This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of*

Galilee". (21:10-11) A further indication that not very many understood the significance of the event at the time is John's own words in verse 16 where he admits that "*His disciples didn't understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him.*" Apparently the pilgrims who started the parade did so because they had heard of the sign Jesus had done in raising Lazarus from the dead. The people saw Jesus raising of Lazarus as a sign that He was indeed the Messiah. "*One who could summon a dead man back to life would certainly be able to deliver the holy city from the yoke of Caesar.*" And the Pharisees, well they too didn't get what was going on as they saw the crowds and commented, "*Look, the world has gone after Him.*" In fact, it was this reaction that changed the plan of the Pharisees not to take Jesus during the feast to arresting Him out of desperation at the time they didn't want to.

Jesus also knew of the 9th chapter of Daniel as to the specific day of the event.

John records three responses to Jesus triumphal entry:

1. Vs. 16 First we have the group that John himself belonged to and he says, "*His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.*" They were stupefied until He was glorified, "*What's all the commotion, waving of branches, the shouting of save now?*" Friends there are a lot of things going on in our lives now that seem to be confusing and causing lots of commotion don't they? Hey but wait a minute perhaps the problem lies in the fact that we aren't noticing Who's riding through it all, Jesus. Hear me out on this one it is when we look at Jesus glorified that all the commotion will clear up in His glory. There are a lot of times that it takes me seeing Him glorified for me to understand the things written.
2. Vs. 17-18 That brings me to the next group those that had been their when Jesus had raised Lazarus testified. The multitude was recognizing Jesus to be the King but the king they wanted Him to be and soon they will reject Him. Sense the time of Jesus there has always been folks who have watched Jesus bring back folks from the dead and because of that some have come asking Him to "save now". Friends this Christmas as we gather let's not forget that we are still the greatest proof that Jesus' words are true, that He has come as the "Savior" not the "Hammer"! All of us according to Paul's words in Ephes. 2:1 "*He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, were once dead*" so why not come out of the tomb of the world and start living in freedom and joy.
3. Vs 19 Finally we are given the last group, the Pharisees who in 11:57 said "*if anyone knew where He was, he should report it*" now have found Him and calls it too late as all the "*world*

has gone after Him". They viewed Jesus a threat instead a savior and because of it they were bummed out.

Oh, the Irony as the crowds cried "*save now*":

- **The disciples didn't** "*understand now*"
- **The Pharisees couldn't** "*find how*"
- **The multitudes would in four days would change their shouts from** "*save now*" to "*die now*"!

Finally, it appears the triumphal entry wasn't "triumphal" as far as Jesus was concerned as we are told in Luke's account that as He entered the city He wept. So as the tears ran down His face He said in 19:42-44 "*If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.*" Jesus came on a donkey; His crown was made of thrones, his scepter a broken reed His triumphal entry is really ours's, friends.