



The Gospel of John

Session 26: The Triumphal Entry

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

This week we will examine the starting point of the last week of Jesus's life: His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The crowd joyously celebrated His arrival by waving palm branches, declaring, *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."* Palm branches were used to welcome a coming king or military leader, and the people cried out "Hosanna," or "please save."

While they desperately sought deliverance from Roman oppression, and welcomed Jesus as King of Israel, they did not yet realize that Christ's eternal kingdom would far surpass any earthly one.

This week in your discussion time, look for ways that Christ has been more than you could have asked for, and better than what you thought you needed. Encourage one another to find ways to share the good news of Jesus this week.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 12:12-19

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus's entry into Jerusalem fulfilled prophecy and publicly declared His Kingship. While the people rejoiced, the Pharisees doubled down on their intent to kill Him.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How have you seen Jesus prove His faithfulness in your life? How can you celebrate Him this week?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 12:12-13 As Jesus and His disciples made their way into Jerusalem, a spontaneous celebration broke out. People lined the streets, waving palm branches, and declared, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." When we reflect on who Jesus is and what He has done, the posture of our hearts should be to worship Him.

John 12:14-16 Jesus arrived not in a military parade on a horse or mule, but like a humble servant, riding a lowly donkey. The Old Testament prophets pointed to this type of king—one who would lead in humility and kindness—ushering in God's Kingdom that would stretch beyond Israel to the end of the world.

John 12:17-19 Those who had seen Lazarus raised couldn't stop telling what Christ had done. Each of us bear a responsibility to share the good news of Christ. The Pharisees weren't persuaded, and some people we share with won't be persuaded either. Being a witness to Jesus is not about conversions, but faithfulness. This week, reflect on how you can not only celebrate Jesus, but actively share with others what He has done.



START HERE

Parades aren't random celebrations. They are carefully designed moments of civic and public declaration. Whether it's the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York, where the entire event crescendos with the arrival of Santa Claus, or a military parade meant to display strength and national pride, every parade communicates a message: This is who we are, this is who we celebrate, and this celebration unites us.

In the ancient world, triumphal entries functioned the same way. When a king entered a city, his arrival commanded recognition and respect. This crowd responded accordingly, with reverence, awe, and sometimes, even fear.

In John 12, Jesus entered Jerusalem in what looked like a parade, but it was more of a coronation, or triumphal entry. Even though many took to the streets, their vantage points differed greatly. The crowd celebrated, the disciples were confused, and the Pharisees were threatened. Everyone saw the same event, but not everyone saw the King.

DISCUSS

Imagine you attended Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. What would you do? What would you want to shout in honor of the arrival of the King of kings?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Worship is the right response to the presence of Jesus.

John 12:12-13: *The next day, when the large crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 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!"

Unpacking John 12:12-13

Parades are meant to unite people sharing a common experience and celebration. In ancient cultures, palm branches symbolized victory and national pride. This moment resembled a royal welcome—a spontaneous parade declaring that Jesus is King.

But like modern parades, the interpreted meaning behind the celebration varied based on the expectations of the crowd. The people weren't just praising. Their bold declaration that Jesus is King was a dangerous statement in a city governed by Rome.

The morning after Jesus dined with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 12:1-11), He and His disciples began to make their way from Bethany into Jerusalem. Mary anointed Him with



fragrant oil the previous evening, a symbolic preparation for His burial. The Pharisees had placed a bounty (quite literally) on His head and declared that Lazarus must also die with Him (John 12:10). There was nothing left for Jesus to do but go up to the city of Jerusalem for His final journey—and His final week—toward the cross.

A large crowd came out to witness Jesus's arrival to Jerusalem. It was Passover week, so many people had already ascended to the city in preparation for the Feast. No doubt the air was abuzz with what had happened in Bethany, just a couple of miles away, and the people in Jerusalem clamored to catch a glimpse of this miracle worker, Jesus.

This wasn't the first time the crowd had identified Jesus as a King. In John 6, after Jesus fed the 5,000, the people wanted to coronate Him on the spot. Frustrated with Roman occupation, and wanting to usher in a restored national identity, many saw Jesus as the answer to their prayers. John 6:15 says, *"When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself."* Jesus knew not only that His time had not yet come, but the people had a misplaced objective for His ministry.

The Jews desperately wanted their period of waiting to end. They had endured exile and occupation. All the while, they clung to the hope of God's anointed One coming to save the day. Seven hundred years before Jesus's birth, the prophet, Isaiah, foreshadowed the eternal king they longed for:

*For a child will be born for us,
a son will be given to us,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
The dominion will be vast,
and its prosperity will never end.
He will reign on the throne of David
and over his kingdom,
to establish and sustain it
with justice and righteousness from now on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)*

They knew they were not yet living in the Messianic kingdom God had promised. Roman occupation only strengthened their resolve. When many of the people saw the miracles Jesus did, they drew the conclusion that He must be the King God promised long ago. In one way, the crowd was correct. Jesus is the promised King and eternal Prince of Peace. However, He came not to release the people from Roman occupation, but to free them from the bondage and consequences of sin and death.



After His resurrection, even the disciples were unsure what kind of kingdom Jesus would inaugurate. In Acts 1:6, they asked Him, “*Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?*” It was not until after His ascension and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the disciples that they began to understand the eternal Kingdom Jesus was ushering in—a kingdom not just for the Jews, but one that expanded to include people from the entire world.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people waved palm branches and shouted, “*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!*” (v. 13). The word Hosanna means “*save now*”, or “*please save*”, and it shows the people’s desire for a king to save them. This chant wasn’t made up on the spot, it came from Psalm 118:25-26, which has a strong messianic message:

Lord, save us!
Lord, please grant us success!
He who comes in the name
of the Lord is blessed.
From the house of the Lord we bless you.

When Jesus was a baby, King Herod killed all the infant boys in Bethlehem over the magi’s testimony that they had come to worship the King of the Jews (Matthew 2:16). From birth, Jesus’s presence threatened the political and religious leaders of the day. As He made His way into Jerusalem, the religious leaders took notice. A celebration of this magnitude wasn’t easy to ignore.

Jesus is the Lord who saves us. He is the One who gives us success—not a victory of earthly political triumph but ultimate eternal victory in Him and peace with God (Romans 8:37). The people in the streets rightly praised God’s anointed—they just did not yet understand how God would fulfill this messianic message.

While the peoples’ view was limited, God’s perspective is eternal. Their ambitions were short-sighted; God’s plans are perfect. When we come to Christ as Savior and Lord, we find a King who comes not just to fix our circumstances but confront and forgive our sin.

DISCUSS

- *What kind of salvation were the people looking for from Jesus?*
- *Where might we praise Jesus while still expecting Him to meet our own agenda?*
- *How can you shift from asking Jesus to meet your expectations to trusting His mission?*



2. Jesus revealed His Kingship through humility.

John 12:14-16: *Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written:*

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

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.

Unpacking John 12:14-16

At the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the entire parade builds to one climactic moment: the arrival of Santa Claus. His entrance marks the whole event and tells the audience what the celebration is all about—the Christmas season (and Christmas shopping) have officially begun!

In the same way, Jesus's mode of arrival was a message. Instead of riding into Jerusalem on a war horse with an army band behind Him like a conquering military hero, He chose a donkey—an intentional and symbolic act.

As they made their way into Jerusalem, Jesus *"found a donkey and sat on it"* (v. 14). The trip from Bethany into the city was a short two miles. Jesus did not ride into town because He was fatigued. He and the disciples frequently walked far greater distances. His action showed intention—this was not an arrival, but a procession.

Conquering kings would come into a city to declare victory and establish their power. Often, they rode in on a mule, an Old Testament image of royalty and power. Solomon, for example, rode into Gihon on a donkey for Nathan to anoint him as king (1 Kings 1:33-36). Mules showed power and authority. Jesus, on the other hand, entered in a procession, but His message showed humility, gentleness, and surrender. It's little wonder that when John described this moment, he paraphrased Zechariah 9:9, *"Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion."*

In reality, the Jews living in Jerusalem had much to fear. Roman occupation threatened their existence and access to the temple, and high taxation threatened their livelihood and ability to feed their families. Additionally, 400 years had passed since God last spoke through the prophet, Malachi: *"Remember the instruction of Moses my servant, the statutes, and ordinances I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse"* (Malachi 4:4-6).

For hundreds of years they awaited a Savior or God's judgment, in a period of deep longing and uncertainty. The fact that Jesus presented Himself as a gentle, humble King was a purposeful



and loving choice. John Stott, in *The Cross of Christ*, wrote, “*Jesus did not come to conquer by the sword, but by the cross.*” In Christ, we find true humility—power under control—and we don’t have to be afraid.

In today’s text, John referenced an important passage from the prophet Zechariah, who ministered alongside Haggai during King Darius’s reign (522–486 BC). The Israelites had returned from exile in Babylon, and the prophets urged them to return and rebuild the temple as they were rebuilding their lives. What was at stake was more than a place to encounter God—it was an opportunity for their hearts to truly belong to God. In Zechariah 1:3, God spoke through the prophet, saying, “*Return to me—this is the declaration of the LORD of Armies—and I will return to you.*”

When Zechariah looked with prophetic eyes through history, he pointed to the moment God would return for His people and declared:

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem!
Look, your King is coming to you;
he is righteous and victorious,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the horse from Jerusalem.
The bow of war will be removed,
and he will proclaim peace to the nations.
His dominion will extend from sea to sea,
from the Euphrates River
to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)*

Zechariah said their king would come in righteousness, victory, and humility. He would not come to rule over them with a heavy hand like Babylon or Rome but would draw them to Himself in lovingkindness. He would model humility and sacrifice. However, Zechariah pointed out the Messiah, though meek, would not be powerless. This promised one would strip the bow of war from Israel and would through His own power make peace—not just for Israel, but for the world. His rule and reign would never end.

Zechariah wasn’t the only one who foreshadowed the humble nature of God’s anointed one. When Jacob, whom God named Israel, approached death, he gathered his twelve sons around him. They would be the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jacob spoke prophetically over each son, and the impact his tribe would have on the nation. When he blessed Judah, the leader of the tribe from whom Jesus would be born, he said:



*"The scepter will not depart from Judah
or the staff from between his feet
until he whose right it is comes
and the obedience of the peoples belongs to him.
He ties his donkey to a vine,
and the colt of his donkey to the choice vine.
He washes his clothes in wine
and his robes in the blood of grapes.
His eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth are whiter than milk." (Genesis 49:10-12)*

Jacob looked beyond his lifetime to the arrival of God's anointed One. He saw Jesus coming in humility and power. Even more, he looked ahead to Jesus's second coming, when we will see Him return with the saints and angels to judge sin and death forever (Revelation 19:15; Jude 1:14-15). Jesus came in humility, but He also came in power. Those who proclaim Jesus have nothing to fear. Those who reject Christ are in danger of His eternal judgment over sin.

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 (John 12:16). Even Jesus's disciples did not understand His entry into Jerusalem. Perhaps they expected something grander, or more militaristic. Perhaps some had hoped to enter Jerusalem quietly, as to not raise the Pharisees' attention.

Jesus entered as a King but would die for His subjects, wearing a crown made of thorns. He would not yield a sword, but He would bring peace to the nations. He alone is the King eternal and worthy of our praise!

DISCUSS

- *How did Jesus display humility in His entrance to Jerusalem?*
- *Why is it difficult according to human perspective to embrace a King who comes in humility rather than a show of power?*
- *Where might God be working in ways that don't meet your expectations—but still require your trust?*

3. The same evidence can lead to different responses.

John 12:17-19: *Meanwhile, the crowd, which had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify. This is also why the crowd met him, because they heard he had done this sign. Then the Pharisees said to one another, "You see? You've accomplished nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"*



Unpacking John 12:17-19

Ancient military parades were powerful public displays. They were meant to communicate strength, influence, and dominance, not just to citizens, but also to watching enemies. Similarly, Jesus's miracles, especially raising Lazarus, were undeniable displays of power. The "parade" surrounding Jesus's entry into Jerusalem was fueled by eyewitness testimony. No matter how hard the Pharisees tried to silence the crowd, those who had seen Lazarus couldn't stop telling people—Israel had a new King!

R.C Sproul, in his book *Essential Truths for the Christian Life*, wrote, "*Unbelief is not the absence of evidence, but the refusal to submit to the truth.*" The Pharisees had plenty of evidence of Jesus's power and His fulfillment of Scripture as the Messiah. They lacked faith, not information.

Meanwhile, the crowd, which had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify (John 12:17). Those who had seen Lazarus continued to tell others about Jesus. They couldn't stop sharing what they had seen and experienced. Verse 18 tells us that the power of their testimony is the very reason the crowd came out: *This is also why the crowd met him, because they heard he had done this sign.* News of Christ's power isn't easily stopped.

Throughout Jesus's public ministry, people frequently testified to what Christ had done. John's Gospel opens with the bold claim of John the Baptist: "*I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God*" (John 1:34). In John chapter 4, the Samaritan woman ran back into the very town that had shunned her, saying, "*Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?*" (John 4:29). And when questioned by the Pharisees, the man born blind whom Jesus healed declared, "*One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!*" (John 9:25). When Jesus moves powerfully in someone's life, the most natural and appropriate response is to testify to what He has done. The crowd who had seen Lazarus witnessed firsthand what Christ can do, and they couldn't stop talking about it.

Scripture is full of reasons believers should testify to what Christ has done:

Telling our story allows us to share God's mercy and power: "*Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you*" (Mark 5:19).

Telling our story thwarts the enemy's plans: *They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony* (Revelation 12:11).

Telling our story reminds us and others of God's redemptive nature: *Let the redeemed of the Lord proclaim that he has redeemed them from the power of the foe* (Psalm 107:2).



Telling our story is an active and intentional way we proclaim publicly our faith in Christ: *“And I say to you, anyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God”* (Luke 12:8).

Telling our story makes God’s works known: *Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; proclaim his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell about all his wondrous works!* (Psalm 105:1-2).

Telling our story testifies to the Spirit living inside of us: *“When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. You also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning”* (John 15:26-27).

We should share our stories, not for an outcome we are trying to achieve, but because it glorifies God. In truth, we may not know this side of heaven the impact telling someone about Jesus might have. The Pharisees heard this witness testimony but hardened their hearts in disbelief. *Then the Pharisees said to one another, “You see? You’ve accomplished nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”* (John 12:19) The irony is the Pharisees also testified to Christ. The world has indeed gone after Jesus. The death they sought for Christ would not extinguish God’s plan but would accelerate the Holy Spirit’s fire falling on mankind. There is no stopping the gospel.

In Matthew 24:14, Jesus declared, *“This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”* When we share boldly what God has done, we share in His kingdom purpose that all the nations will hear the good news of Jesus. We do not know when the end will come (Matthew 24:23-27). Our job is to testify to Christ while we await our redemption or His return, so that as many people as possible can hear of Christ and respond—to welcome Him as King or reject Him as the Pharisees did. We can’t control others’ response, but we can, and should, take responsibility for faithfully and joyfully sharing the good news of Jesus where and when we can. We want everyone to grab a palm branch and join the parade!

DISCUSS

- *What caused the crowd to testify about Jesus? What leads you to testify about Jesus?*
- *How did the Pharisees see the same evidence but reject Jesus?*
- *How is God calling you to faithfully witness to what Christ has done? What fears or uncertainty threaten to hold you back?*



DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- When have you seen God fulfill a promise in your life—especially in a way you did not expect?
- Are you currently waiting on God in a specific way? How might He be working differently than you imagine?
- Where do you need to trust Jesus as King—not just celebrate Him as Savior?

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

Spend some time reading Zechariah 9:9-10 and reflecting on God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises. When have you seen Him prove Himself faithful in your life? Spend some time reflecting in prayer and thanksgiving.

APPLY

How can you be encouraged to testify boldly and enthusiastically to what Christ has done? What needs to shift to find the courage or make the space to share Jesus with others?

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