

John - Part 39 - Sermon Manuscript - Understanding Jesus

Today's passage is in John 12:9-19. And, before we get started, I wanted to throw this out there: Our passage today has some major political overtones - I'm not talking about the Republican or Democrat party, or any other American political party.

I'm talking about the politics of Jesus' day when He entered into Jerusalem during the last week of His life.

So, if you remember from our time in John, it wasn't that long ago that Jesus raised a man from the dead. This guy's name was Lazarus - He was a good friend of Jesus, but he had been dead for four days!

Jesus had raised some people back to life before, but four days after death?! So, when Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out of his tomb, people there were shocked, and many came to believe in Jesus because of this.

[MAP] Then word began to spread... the news of Jesus raising Lazarus in a town called Bethany reached the religious leaders in the city of Jerusalem, which was barely 2 miles away.

The religious leaders in Jerusalem already wanted to stop Jesus. For almost the past three years Jesus had been kind of a thorn in their sides. Sure, He did a lot of good, but Jesus was gaining such a large following that they were concerned He would start an insurrection, which the Roman soldiers would never tolerate.

[Blank 1] Rome had stopped several Jewish rebellions in the past, and now that the religious leaders had sort of a good working relationship with Rome, they wanted to keep it that way. So, they're on edge because they're thinking Jesus might start an uprising against Rome!

So they decided to do something about it. They got together with the top Jewish officials from Jerusalem and it wasn't long before the decision was made to put out an arrest warrant for Jesus. And ultimately, His arrest would lead to His execution because in their minds, the only way to prevent another Jewish rebellion, was to kill Jesus.

So, all of this is happening in the background during the time that Mary anointed Jesus with an extremely expensive bottle of perfume. We figured out the other week that if we were to buy that perfume today, it would cost over \$40k!

We might think that was a bit excessive. I think if I was there in the room with the disciples, I probably would have agreed with Judas in that we could have sold the perfume and helped the poor!

Jesus turned the tables on everyone and said that what Mary did was *beautiful*...

But Judas didn't agree. We know that Judas was the keeper of the money and that he was in the habit of stealing out of the money bag. So, when Mary poured a \$40,000 bottle of perfume on Jesus, Judas was upset! He was so upset that when Jesus said this was a beautiful act, Judas just walked out.

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Judas left at that moment and went to the Jewish chief priests. He went there to strike a deal with them. If they would pay him, he would let them know when a good opportunity would be to arrest Jesus.

The thing was, there were so many people that approved of Jesus that the religious leaders were kind of afraid to arrest Him in public - especially with the Passover Festival only a couple days away.

Thousands of Jews from all over the world were arriving in Jerusalem for the festival. Just to give you an idea of how many - Jerusalem during this time had a population of about 50,000 people. But during Jewish Festivals, that number more than doubled to around 120,000 people - maybe more...

A first century Jewish Historian named Josephus writes that one of these festivals had about 2.5 million people there; but that was probably an exaggeration...

[Kidron Valley Video]

Back in the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was a lot smaller back than it is today. So, people either stayed with family and friends, or they just camped outside in the

Kidron Valley and hillsides surrounding Jerusalem. Imagine tents being put up all over this valley. And many of these people... possibly thousands... heard about how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

[Blank 2] Look at what John 12:9 says about this...

John 12:9 - Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

Imagine hundreds, maybe thousands of people flooding into the little town of Bethany, just to see Jesus and Lazarus!

John 12:10-11 - So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, 11 for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

The religious leaders were so bent on extinguishing the “Jesus movement” that they decided they might as well kill Lazarus too! But again, they couldn’t kill Jesus and Lazarus during the festival because they were afraid people might get angry and start a riot. So, they waited for Judas to give them the signal to arrest Jesus.

But while they were waiting, more and more people were starting to believe in Him. And that sounds great to us! But, unfortunately, most of them were believing in Jesus for the wrong reasons.

We’ve seen this happen before back in John chapter 6 where Jesus fed the thousands. Many decided to believe in Him, but they also wanted to *force* Him to be their conquering King (John 6:15). We’ve seen in our study of John that there’s this recurring theme of misunderstanding who Jesus was. They misunderstood who He was because...

Their belief in Him was based on His power, and not the fact that He was the Savior of their souls.

They were thinking: *Finally, here's someone that can lead a Jewish rebellion against the Roman Empire. With Jesus as our King, maybe now we can take back the land that God gave our ancestors!*

That's what the crowds were thinking when Jesus fed the thousands, and it's what they're thinking in our passage today when Jesus made His last trip to Jerusalem. **In John chapter 12, Rebellion was in the air.**

[Blank 3] So, our passage this morning takes place on a day we call Palm Sunday. It's the first time Jesus entered Jerusalem during the last week of His life. We sometimes call it His "Triumphal Entry" because everyone was cheering for Him and waving their palm branches as He approached Jerusalem.

But, have you ever wondered what the deal is with the palm branches?

Well, hold on to that question as I read the next several verses...

John 12:12-19 - The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!"

14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: 15 "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

17 Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. 18 Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. 19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

Honestly, as a modern day reader, this sounds awesome! It sounds like something I'd want to see! I could imagine waving my palm branches and yelling

with the crowd: *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!”*

It sounds exciting! **It sounds like the kind of party you’d throw a king after they return home from a victory in battle!**

Actually, it sounds like that because that’s pretty much what was going on here...

In the ancient world, this kind of “Triumphal Entry” was common. Whenever a king would return from a successful battle, the people would go out to meet him as he approached the city.

And in ancient Jewish culture, they’d not only go out and meet the king, they’d shout “Hosanna!” as a royal “welcome home” - Hosanna means “saves” - They were not only praising the king for winning his battle, but they’re praising him because he saved them from destruction! Again, welcoming a king home was a common thing in the ancient world...

But not only that, during the time of Jesus, palm branches were a national symbol in Judea!

It was like our American flag - Our flag was first made about 245 years ago and ever since it’s been a symbol of our nation. Palm branches were similar because by the time of Jesus they had been a national Judean symbol for about 200 years. In fact, they even had it printed on their coins...

Coins 1 (note the palms) [A Procurator was sort of the chief financial officer of a Roman province. He’d have his own team and would be in charge of the city’s financial things like taxes, rent on imperial land, and paying the soldiers and public servants. He’d work alongside the governor and his only superior was the Roman Emperor.]

Coins 2 (these coins were created after Jewish rebellions against Rome)

So, again, during the time of Jesus, palms were a national symbol.

[Blank 4] And knowing that, I hope we're getting the picture that when Jesus approached Jerusalem with everyone waving their palms and praising Jesus as their King, I hope we're seeing that this is a very politically charged scene!

People thought this was it! They thought Jesus would be the one to finally overthrow the Roman government so they could take back their land.

[Luke 19:39-40] Now, in the midst of all the commotion, some religious leaders in the crowd came over to Jesus and ordered Him to rebuke everyone and keep them quiet. But Jesus said if they keep quiet, *then the stones will cry out.*

Have you ever wondered why the stones would cry out? I mean, *was Jesus meaning that literally? Would creation cry out and sing His praise like the crowd?*

[Blank 5] That's possible. But I think there might be a better explanation.

There's a little 3 chapter book in the OT called Habakkuk that was written over 600 years before Jesus lived. Habakkuk was a prophet of God, and in his book we see him crying out to God because the nation of Babylon was waging war on his country, Judea.

So, Habakkuk's like: *How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? There's destruction and violence all around me. Strife and conflict abounds! Why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*

Well, God answers in chapter 2. He promises that He will eventually take care of the Babylonians. But look at what the Lord says *about* the nation of Babylon...

Habakkuk 2:9-12 - "Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin! 10 You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. **11 The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.** 12 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice!

[Blank 6] So, here we have the nation of Babylon invading Judea... they're increasing their kingdom through war and bloodshed. And God pronounces judgment on them...

It's as if God is in a courtroom and the nation of Babylon is on trial. God presents His accusation, and then He says...

Habakkuk 2:11 - The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.

The point is that the stones and beams are *witnesses* to Babylon's wickedness - Babylon is *guilty*.

And the fact that there are two witnesses is important because in the ancient Hebrew world you needed at least two witnesses to pronounce someone as being guilty.

Now, this is what I believe Jesus had in mind when the religious leaders tried to get Him to quiet the crowds, but Jesus said in Luke 19 that "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

In other words: **The stones are the *witnesses* of the people's guilt.** This is why right after Jesus said this, He wept (Luke 19:40-41). While He's in tears, He pronounced judgment on the cheering Jews because they didn't recognize the time of God's coming to them (Luke 19:41-44).

This tracks well with what John has been saying all along...

John 1:9-11 says, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

[Blank 7] That's the picture of the so-called Triumphal Entry. People weren't praising Jesus because He was the Savior of their sins. They were praising Him because they thought He'd be their national Savior. They were ready for a rebellion, and they wanted Jesus to lead the charge as their conquering King.

Interestingly, **Jesus was and *is* a conquering King**. But not in the way that they were thinking. Jesus is a conquering King in that He would go on to conquer the spiritual forces of wickedness and even death itself! Jesus was the King of kings and the Savior of the world! And that's what most people misunderstood about Jesus on Palm Sunday.

But John's writing so that we don't misunderstand who Jesus is. We can know *exactly* who Jesus is!

We can *know* that He is our King of kings and our Savior. And His Kingdom is different from the world's kingdoms in that it was built out of a selfless act of love. Jesus chose to die for our sins so that we don't have to die in our sin. Our own sin deserves to be dealt with one way or another...

Even Habakkuk said in 1:13 that God's "eyes are too pure to look on evil; [God] cannot tolerate wrongdoing."

Why doesn't God tolerate sin? It's because He's perfect. He's pure. There's no sin in Him.

But there's sin in us. And every time we sin, we're choosing to actively rebel against God. That's what sin is: It's a rebellion against God. It's us being disloyal to our King. It's us missing the mark. It's us choosing what we want over what God wants.

But ... all of us sin. We're incapable of living a perfect and sinless life. But the good news of Jesus is that...

Romans 5:8 - "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

His death paid the price for our sin. And because of that, we are justified through the blood of Jesus when we put our faith in Jesus. Even as believers, we still sin - Faith in Jesus is not about us trying to work hard at being a good person so we can be allowed into Heaven someday.

Faith is about putting our trust in God.

Following Jesus is about living a life of believing loyalty and allegiance to our King of kings: Jesus!

And that kind of allegiance comes out of our love for Jesus and what He's done for us - our devotion to Jesus isn't out of mere obligation. It's out of our love for Him, because He first loved us.

As Christians today, we don't have to misunderstand who Jesus is. He's the Lord of heaven and earth! He's the Lord, our Savior. He's God. We can't force Him to be something that He's not in order to justify our own agendas. We don't change Him - He changes us.

Let's Pray