

Exegesis

Vs. 12-13 – John tells us that while Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, something extraordinary occurs: “On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” This is the famous Triumphal Entry, one of the few scenes recorded in all four gospels (cf. Mat. 21:1-11; Mar. 11:1-11; Lu. 19:28-44).¹ The "next day" would've referred to the day after the anointing in Bethany, known today as "Palm Sunday." Our faithful narrator mentions that "much people" had come to participate in the Passover "feast." As our discussion in 11:55-57 showed, a conservative estimate would've likely placed Jerusalem's population at around one million.² Interestingly, this is now the *third* time in a handful of verses that John has mentioned the crowds (cf. 11:55; 12:9). By every external metric, this appeared to be the pinnacle of Jesus' popularity, an observation not lost on the very ones who wanted to kill him (cf. vs. 19).

We're told that as the crowds came to meet Jesus, they took up two things: a plant and a chant. The "branches" they were holding were from a palm tree. Also called the "date palm," the plant provided a steady source of shade and fruit in the semi-arid Mediterranean climate. And while palms were more closely associated with the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Neh. 8:13-18) than with the Passover, it was generally considered a national symbol.³ This seems to have occurred during the Maccabean revolt in 164 BC when Simon Maccabeus was welcomed in Jerusalem by a crowd singing praises and waving palm branches after driving out the Syrians.⁴ And, even then, their use at that moment wouldn't have been surprising as the palm tree symbolized victory in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds.⁵ And with Israel being littered with palm trees, it was easily acquired and readily available. So much so, Jericho, a city over 20 miles east of Jerusalem, was known as the "city of palm trees" (cf. Deut. 34:3). In fact, “Tamar,” another

¹ Some of the other scenes recorded in all four gospels are as follows: feeding of the five thousand (cf. Mat. 14:21; Mar. 6:44; Lu. 9:14-16; Jhn. 6:10-11); Jesus' anointing at Bethany (cf. Mat. 26:6-13; Mar. 14:3-9; Lu. 7:36-50); Peter's denial of Jesus (cf. Mat. 26:69-74; Mar. 14:66-71; Lu. 22:55-62; Jhn. 18:15-18); Jesus' being crucified as the 'King of the Jews' (cf. Mat. 27:35-37; Mar. 15:25-26; Lu. 23:33, 37-38; Jhn. 19:18-19); and, most importantly, Jesus' resurrection (cf. Mat. 28:1-10; Mar. 16:1-14; Lu. 24:1-44; Jhn. 20:1-29).

² Kruse (2017), p. 306, quotes Josephus, who, using the number of sacrifices (250,000+), reckons that there were "2,700,000" in attendance at Passover just before the Jewish War in AD 66-70. However, Kruse points out that while the city was undoubtedly at capacity, it is unlikely it swelled to such an extent, given what is known about "the size of first-century Palestine."

³ Klink III, Edward W., *John*, The Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Academic, 2016), p. 535.

⁴ Thompson (2015), p. 264.

⁵ Köstenberger (2008), p. 369, footnote 8.

Hebrew word for palm (cf. Exo. 15:27; Sng. 7:7-8), was even a popular Jewish name for women (cf. Gen. 38:6; 2 Sam. 13:1).⁶ Today, the date palm still features prominently, as is evidenced by the fact that it shows up on both Israel's 20 new shekel banknote and its' 10 agorot coins.⁷ Thus, this crowd, spurred on by nationalistic fervor, takes branches from the palm tree (a distinctly Jewish symbol not unlike flags today) and meets Jesus on his way into the city. This act alone implies they viewed Jesus as their "messianic liberator."⁸

That this crowd viewed Jesus as the Messianic King is made apparent when with the waving palm branches, they begin chanting, "Hosanna...." The Greek term Ὡσαννά (Hosanna) is a transliteration of the Hebrew expression "yaw-shah' naw" which literally translates to "Please help!" or "Give salvation now!"⁹ But by the first century, it became less of a direct plea for help and more of an acclamation whereby people could express great joy.¹⁰ The term was most regularly heard in the "Hallel," a psalm (Psa. 113-118) sung during the mornings of Passover.¹¹ A bouquet of willow, myrtle, and *palm branches* would actually be used at the precise moment when the congregants reached the "Hosanna!" in Psa. 118:25.¹² This likely explains why the crowds were so well prepared at this moment. The palm branches plucked for use in the Hallel were repurposed and used to welcome Jesus. Interestingly, palm branches will be used again when an innumerable multitude from every nation will someday take up the chorus, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."¹³

The people also shout, "Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord." Save for the phrase "King of Israel," which appears to be inserted by the crowd, this line is a direct quote from Psalm 118:26. And though Psalm 118 originally was a blessing to those who were headed to Jerusalem for Passover,¹⁴ by the time of Jesus, it held a messianic understanding in the minds of the Jewish people. As Kink explains, "[Psalm 118] was used in royal processions, emphasizing the central role and leadership of the king."¹⁵ In fact, to bring this out, the verse is better translated as "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel." John

⁶ Youngblood, Ronald F., "Plants of the Bible: Palm," *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, New and Enhanced Edition, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson, 2014), p. 911.

⁷ General Editors, "Israeli new shekel," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_new_shekel, [accessed February 25, 2023].

⁸ Carson (1991), p. 432.

⁹ Kruse (2017), p. 307.

¹⁰ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 210; Carson (1991), p. 432; Kruse (2017), p. 307; Thompson (2015), p. 265; Köstenberger (2008), p. 369; Klink (2016), p. 536.

¹¹ Keener (2012), 2:868.

¹² Köstenberger (2008), p. 369-370.

¹³ Revelation 7:10

¹⁴ Carson (1991), p. 432.

¹⁵ Klink (2016), p. 536.

has already shown that the phrase “he that cometh” functions as his preferred title for the Messiah figure in the first century (cf. 1:15, 27; 3:31; 6:14; 11:27; Mat. 3:11; 11:3).¹⁶ And here, we find it on the lips of the people, as was often the case during Passover; except, this time, it is heard not in the temple precincts but in the city gates where it is heralding Jesus!.

Vs. 14-15 – That Jesus intended to be viewed as the Messiah is evident by his mode of travel. As John explains, “And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon....” He does not come walking or riding a war horse; the Lord rides a donkey as he enters Jerusalem. The donkey does not exude intimidation. In fact, this animal was so effective at putting people at ease that it was common practice for merchants and important dignitaries to travel by donkey to signal that their intentions were peaceful.¹⁷

Unlike the Synoptics, John does not mention where the donkey came from (cf. Matt. 21:1-4; Mar. 11:1-6; Lu. 19:30-34). He is far more concerned with what the donkey *represents*.¹⁸ Our faithful narrator says, “as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.” John is quoting Zech. 9:9, and by doing so, he is showing that Jesus accepted the crowds' accolades.¹⁹ Unlike before (cf. 6:15), the Lord would unashamedly receive the title of King.²⁰ This interpretation finds support in Luke 19:40, where after the religious leaders told him to silence the crowd, Jesus responded, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” Whether by earth or earthen vessels, Jesus intended to be hailed as King this day. But another critical point of Zech. 9 is that the Monarch of Zion will be characterized by peace.²¹ This ruler was a “gentle king;”²² so much so that the “war horses” will be stabled, the “battle bows” will be broken, and he will “speak peace to the nations...” (Zech. 9:10). Thus, the image of Jesus riding a donkey would've not only been a claim to the throne, but it would've epitomized humility and de-escalation. And it is for this reason that John, before quoting from Zech. 9:9 adds something new. He tells his readers to “Fear not....” The approach of King Jesus to the city of Jerusalem was not to be feared. He was an envoy of peace on a diplomatic mission to reconcile the children of God (cf. 14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21, 26). The

¹⁶ Keener (2012), 2:868.

¹⁷ Köstenberger (2008), p. 371.

¹⁸ This is not to say the Synoptics weren't interested in the symbolism of the donkey. John just gets to the point quicker.

¹⁹ ESV - “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.”

²⁰ Kruse (2017), p. 307.

²¹ Contra. Klink (2016), p. 537-540, seems to argue against this view and yet will still admit that a “purebred male donkey,” the kind that Jesus uses, was the “royal mount associated with peace rather than elitism and conquest.”

²² Carson (1991), p. 433.

Messiah was not a militaristic figure, as the people (including the disciples) thought, but a sacrificial one.

Vs. 16 – The meaning of Jesus' actions was lost on everyone. It wouldn't be until much later that the disciples put all the pieces together. As John himself explains, "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." John made this very same point in 2:22. It seems our faithful narrator wants us to understand that it was only after the crucifixion and resurrection that his followers understood everything (cf. 13:7, 12, 28).²³ And they lacked insight at the time all of this was happening because they lacked the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Because, as Jesus explains in 14:26, the Spirit would eventually "teach [the disciples] all things" and remind them of all things that Jesus had said to them (cf. 16:12-15). "The repetition suggests a key hermeneutical point for John: the biblical record and Jesus' ministry and glorification should be read in light of one another, led by the Spirit who continues his presence."²⁴ Without the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are rendered unintelligible. But with the Holy Spirit, the Bible imparts understanding.

Vs. 17-18 – "The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle." John here indicates that the factor which contributed to the Triumphal Entry was Lazarus' resurrection. Those who witnessed the miracle firsthand told others about it ("bare record"). And because of their testimony, because they had heard that "[Jesus] had done this miracle," the people went out to meet him with palm branches in hand and a song on their lips.

Vs. 19 – John ends this scene with a look at the religious leader. Weren't they set on capturing Jesus? Here he was, out in the open. Why didn't they take him then and there? It is doubtful the crowds would've let the Sanhedrin have Jesus. It is clear, at least at this moment, they were overcome by feelings of powerlessness. John explains, "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him." The Pharisees could see quite plainly their attempts to stem the tide of Jesus' influence had failed. They were failures. The entire "world," as they put it, was going after him. The sheer thought of trying to overcome Jesus at this point was daunting. And what is encouraging is that just as

²³ Kruse (2017), p. 309.

²⁴ Keener (2012), 2:870.

the Sanhedrin will fail to stop Jesus, as the Book of Acts proves, they will also fail to stop Christianity.²⁵

²⁵ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 211.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 33

Text: John 12:12-19

Tonight, we'll explore one of the few scenes recorded in all four gospels: the Triumphal Entry. And it should surprise us that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John mention this event as it is rich in meaning and symbolism. But undergirding those layers of meaning and symbolism is the principle that Jesus was a gentle King. He did not come riding in Jerusalem on a war horse, but a donkey, a beast of burden, an animal fitter for work than war. Though Jesus will be wrongfully accused of sedition, in reality, he came to us as the Prince of Peace. He did come fighting, nor did he come to condemn; the Lord came to make peace and save those who would become the children of God.

Pastor's manuscript can be found [here](#):