



Community Group Discussion Guide

March 24, 2024

John 12:12-19 | The Misunderstood Entry

MOTIVATE

Starter Question:

- ⇒ ***What is the biggest public celebration you have ever personally experienced? Describe what it was like. (Examples: athletic team accomplishment, political victory rally, family vacation, holiday celebration)***
- ⇒ ***How can a crowd celebration become excessive and disgrace the purpose of the celebration?***

DISCUSS

John 12:12-19 records Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. The timing was during Passover--the great spring festival at the heart of Jewish life. In Bible times and even today, Passover celebrates the Exodus when God set His people free from slavery in Egypt. Through the sacrifice of the lamb and the crossing of the Red Sea the Israelites went from captivity to freedom.

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem was a "staged arrival" that is mentioned in all four Gospels (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19). This is a New Testament event that Christianity has come to call "Palm Sunday."

During Passover, Jews came from all over the world annually to remember the Exodus from Egypt. Messianic excitement ran high. Population in Jerusalem doubled during Passover so the social dynamic was immense. Crowds brought tension to both Roman and Jewish leadership who knew any social disruption that began at the festival could explode violently.

"The Triumphal Entry is of vital significance in understanding the messianic mission of Jesus. Prior to this moment, Jesus had refused to allow public acknowledgement of His being the Messiah. By conducting His ministry outside Jerusalem, He had avoided further intensification of conflict with the Jewish religious leaders. Now, the time was at hand. The opponents of Jesus understood the strong messianic implications of His manner of entry into Jerusalem—all of which pointed to Jesus as the Messiah." —Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

- ⇒ ***Identify any correlating themes between the Passover celebration and Jesus' Triumphal Entry.***
- ⇒ ***Why did Jesus finally present His messianic identity, mission, and Kingship?***

John 12:12-13 *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!"*

John described the large crowd in verse 12 as one expecting a typical monarch who would establish a political, earthly kingdom. News of Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus from the dead caused a frenetic jubilation about the prophesied Messiah's arrival (John 12:17-18).

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people went wild. They thought this was their new king who would usher in another golden age for Israel and bring the Jews peace and freedom from the oppression of Rome. The crowds were expecting a typical monarch rather than understanding that Jesus came as their humble servant.

- ⇒ ***What reasons did the Jewish crowd have to celebrate so vigorously?***
- ⇒ ***How were the Jewish expectations of a political Messiah different from Jesus' actual divine messianic purpose?***
- ⇒ ***How is modern Christianity tempted to mistake Jesus' mission and purpose?***

Jesus forced a "messianic reinterpretation." At that moment, with several hundred thousand pilgrims assembled in Jerusalem, it looked as if the king had arrived in force to claim His throne. However, Jesus came to defeat a much greater enemy than Rome—Satan, sin, and spiritual death. The crowds anticipated the sovereignty of God but overlooked the needed sacrifice of the Lamb.

- ⇒ ***What "messianic reinterpretation" was Jesus calling for?***

It's noteworthy that Hanukkah is the Jewish celebration that commemorates a victorious Jewish conquest from Hellenist domination. In 164BC, Judas Maccabaeus defeated pagan invaders and cleansed the Jewish temple. The Jews entered the city waving palm branches in celebration. Anticipating another Jewish conquest, Jesus' followers waved palm branches to welcome Him. Jesus' followers were mixing two Jewish celebrations together, Hanukkah and Passover. They were saying both that Jesus was the true king, come to claim His throne, and that this was the moment when God would set Israel free once and for all.

- ⇒ ***In what way did the crowds misunderstand Jesus' Triumphal Entry?***

Palm branches were also associated with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:40) at which they waved branches to rejoice before the Lord. Palm branches were a symbol of Jewish nationalism and symbolized Israel's national hopes. They were a longstanding sign of victory in the Greek world.

The large crowd praised Jesus using words from Psalm 118:25-26 (A Thanksgiving Psalm that celebrated deliverance from captivity).

- “Hosanna” = “Save us now!” or “Save, we pray!” The crowds were greeting what they believed to be a national liberator. They were making a plea for action against the authority of Rome.
- “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” An image of a king coming to lead the people to worship God at the temple.
- “Even the King of Israel!” The Jewish crowd thought their conquering king had finally arrived to liberate them from Roman Rule.

⇒ ***The word “Hosanna” means “Save us now!” What has Jesus saved you from? How is Jesus saving you now?***

⇒ ***The crowd proclaimed Jesus as their king. How is Jesus your King? Is He King of your heart? Is He King of your future plans? Is He King of your free time? Is He King of your relationships? Explain your answers.***

John 12:14-16 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.

Until this moment, Jesus appeared to have walked everywhere, but in this passage we find Jesus riding on a donkey. In the synoptic Gospels, there are noteworthy stories about Jesus intentionally sending His disciples to find and untie the donkey and bring it to Him. Jesus indicated that if anyone questioned them, they were to say, “The Lord needs it for now, but He will send it back.” This is the first time Jesus referred to Himself as the Lord.

In Jesus’ day, rulers rode horses in times of war and donkeys in times of peace. The donkey represents a Messiah of humility and service. Jesus’ ride on the donkey, with its echo of Zechariah 9:9, made the same point. John adds other echoes of prophecies and psalms which all point in the same direction: Jesus is the true King, coming at last to set His people free.

By riding on this donkey, Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9: Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. This image of a king on a donkey approaching Jerusalem was consistently understood to signify the arrival of the Messianic King. Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah and proclaiming that the age of restoration was dawning through Him.

⇒ ***What is the importance of Jesus riding on a donkey?***

⇒ ***How does Zechariah’s prophecy about the coming King as “righteous and having salvation, gentle” contrast with the description of a political king?***

In John 12:16, John described the disciples lack of comprehension: His disciples did not understand at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

- ⇒ ***What would likely change for Jesus' disciples if He were, in fact, coming to be a political king and deliver them from Roman tyranny?***
- ⇒ ***Do you find comfort or discomfort when you read that Jesus' disciples, even after eye-witness training from Jesus Himself, didn't understand at first?***
- ⇒ ***What is something about your spiritual journey that you are having difficulty understanding?***

John 12:17-19 *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."*

John framed Jesus' Triumphal Entry within the continuing story of Lazarus (John 11). Jesus set Lazarus free from death itself. The great crowd that followed Jesus into the city came partly because news of this event incited them into action and celebration. It was this sign that made the people put the whole picture together in this way (John 12:17-18). This was the last of the "signs" which Jesus performed during His public ministry. As John will shortly say in John 12:37, it was this sequence of signs that communicated who Jesus was and what He had come to do.

But there is a darker side to this framing of the story. Because Lazarus became a primary reason for people to believe in Jesus, the chief priests and the Pharisees wanted to kill him, too. As Jesus will warn in John 15:20, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

- ⇒ ***Do you think the modern church in America is prepared for persecution if it comes?***
- ⇒ ***How are you personally prepared for persecution?***

In John 12:19, the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him." The religious leaders scoffed at Jesus and His supporters. One can almost hear the derisive and pretentious tone of their voices. They regarded themselves as infinitely superior to the common people, arrogantly distancing themselves from Jesus' followers.

- ⇒ ***What causes religious people to become sarcastic and pretentious?***
- ⇒ ***When are we tempted to regard ourselves as superior?***
- ⇒ ***Besides confessing the sin of pretentious superiority, what are some steps we should take to repent of it?***

John may have intended his readers to understand their words in a much more positive sense. Jesus came into the world because God so loved the world (John 3:16). His death will deliver not only the nation of Israel but also the children of God throughout the world (John 11:52).

It is no accident that immediately after this contemptuous statement of the Pharisees, Greek Gentiles approached the disciples, wanting to see Jesus. Jesus understood that God's love for the world and the questioning Gentiles was a sign that the moment was fast approaching when He would complete His work. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).

- ⇒ ***How do we learn to love the world for the same reason that God "so loved the world?"***
- ⇒ ***Are we as excited as the crowd who followed Jesus because His power over death? Explain your answer.***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: As we read and study this story, we must understand that each of us lives in "the world." We must understand this well enough to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. We are commissioned with the message that Jesus was and is the true King, the true Rescuer, the bringer of true freedom. As we experience His Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, and on to meet His fate on the cross, we must ourselves be drawn into the action, and the passion, that awaits Him. And we must ourselves become part of the means by which His message goes out to the world.

- ⇒ ***What are you doing to spread the Gospel message to the world?***
- ⇒ ***What are some ways our Community Group can spread the Gospel to the world?***

2. Pray: Thank Jesus that He is the true King, the true Rescuer, and the bringer of true freedom. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you boldness to spread the Gospel message to the world. Pray that Henderson Hills would seek to be a church that proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *ESV Bible.*
Wright, T. (2004). [John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21](#) (p. 25-26). Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*
- *Holman New Testament Commentary, John.*
- *The NIV Application Commentary, John.*
- *Shepherd's Notes, John.*