



Jesus: Confronting Expectations

John 12:12-33

INTRODUCTION

Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and the beginning of Holy Week. In many ways this event was the final catalyst for the conflict ahead. Jesus intentionally took center stage to force the hand of the Pharisees and to fulfill God's plan.

The other Gospels give us a clearer picture of what Jesus was intentionally orchestrating. Jesus' arrival for the Passover was not random or spur of the moment. It was a well-planned demonstration of Jesus' identity.

Luke records that Jesus had carefully planned for this day.

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.' " Luke 19:28-31

This is the first and only time that it is recorded that Jesus rode on a donkey. He intentionally chose to enter Jerusalem that way on this occasion to declare His true identity. He was fulfilling the prophecy about the coming Messiah recorded 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.*

The crowds of people recognized what Jesus was doing and responded with shouts of praise and affirmation. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He intentionally downplayed the praise of the people. On this day, He openly accepted it as His rightful due. This made the Pharisees uncomfortable. They rebuked Jesus for

allowing the people to praise Him in this way. But this was to be Jesus' day.

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." Luke 19:39-40

Jesus chose to ride on a donkey, instead of a horse, because it symbolized that He came in peace. Yet the people heralded Him as a conquering hero. They were looking for a political savior who would rescue them from the oppression of the Romans.

Tensions always ran high during the Passover. Everyone was on edge. Jesus' exuberant entry into Jerusalem only heightened the tension that the Pharisees felt. They saw Jesus as a major threat to their position and power. Matthew tells us that the religious leaders decided that Jesus had to be eliminated.

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people." Matthew 26:3-5

On Palm Sunday, Jesus took a public stand that would culminate in His death. He entered Jerusalem fully aware of what was before Him. He entered with determination and resolve. Nothing that happened during Holy Week surprised Jesus. From the moment Jesus mounted the donkey, He took control of the situation. He knew exactly where this procession would lead, and He willingly, purposefully headed in that direction.

Philippians 2:8

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Study 1: John 12:12-16

Only John records the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This event helped to set the stage for what was to follow. On the day before Jesus' Triumphal Entry, Jesus stayed in Bethany, where Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived. A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor, raising the awareness of His presence. At that dinner, Mary anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, symbolizing His impending death.

On the next morning, Jesus began His journey into Jerusalem for the Passover.

1. What does verse 12 tell us about the attitude of the crowds toward Jesus?

2. Verse 13 tells us that the people greeted Jesus with palm branches. The palm branch was used as a symbol of nationalism by the Jews. It was the symbol on their coins during the Maccabean period of their history.
 - a. What does the use of palm branches say about the expectations of the crowd?

 - b. How do the things that the people shouted also demonstrate their expectations of Jesus? (Hosanna means save us now.)

3. Why does John say that Jesus rode on a donkey to enter Jerusalem?

4. What information does John give about the disciples?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. Expectations are powerful. What expectations do you have of Jesus?
2. In what ways were the expectations of the crowd both correct and incorrect?
3. Why do you think Jesus intentionally made Himself the center of attention on this occasion, when up to this point, He had avoided that?
4. How does Palm Sunday challenge our expectations of Jesus?
5. The disciples didn't understand this event until after Jesus' resurrection. How does our ability to look back on this event help us to understand it more clearly?
6. What difference does it make for you that Jesus fulfilled some of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament in His Triumphal Entry?

Study 2: John 12:17-19

John's focus shifts from the response of the crowd to the response of the Pharisees.

1. What was part of the motivation for the people to praise Jesus so exuberantly?
2. What was the effect of the crowd "spreading the word"?
3. How did the Pharisees react to the crowd's praise of Jesus?
4. What do you think was behind the Pharisees' complaint?
5. How did the Pharisees' attitude toward Jesus differ from the crowd?
6. In what ways did Jesus' entry into Jerusalem create a volatile situation?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. In what ways does some amazing, public event stir people's emotions?

2. In what ways can a small, but enthusiastic group stir up a much larger crowd of people? What are some of the outcomes of this?

3. What questions or expectations do the accounts of Jesus' miracles stir up for you?

4. Why do you think people today respond negatively toward Jesus?

5. In what ways might Jesus be a threat to you?

6. When faced with a threat, how do you respond?

Study 3: John 12:20-22

This is an odd, unexplained interlude in John's account of the Triumphal Entry.

1. What information is given about the people who sought an audience with Jesus? What might you deduce from this?
2. Why do you think they approached Philip?
3. Why do you think Philip went first to Andrew?
4. Why do you think that Jesus did not directly address this request?
5. Why do you think that John included this incident?
6. How does verse 32 link with these verses?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What does this passage tell us about the scope of Jesus' influence?
2. This passage implies that these men were seeking God. How does that relate to the Gospel and the way God draws people to Himself?
3. In what ways might we be like Philip and Andrew?
4. What would you do if someone approached you and wanted "to see Jesus"? How would you respond?
5. It is implied that these men approached Philip because he had a Greek name and came from Galilee. How does God use our background as a bridge to sharing the Gospel with others?
6. What does this passage imply about developing good relationships with other believers?

Study 4: John 12:23-33

This section gets at the very heart of why Jesus orchestrated this event.

1. What reason does Jesus give for His Triumphal Entry in verse 23?
2. What is the point of the kernel of wheat?
3. What truths is Jesus teaching in verses 25-26?
4. What does verse 27 tell us about what was going on for Jesus?
5. How did God affirm that Jesus was on the right path?
6. How did the crowd react to God's voice?
7. What did Jesus say about the voice?
8. What do verses 32-33 tell us about Jesus' purpose in entering Jerusalem?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. Why is it important for us to know that the events of Holy Week were all a part of God's eternal plan?
2. What does this passage say about the depth of Jesus' love for us?
3. What does this passage say about Jesus' expectation of us?
4. What does it mean for us to hate this life?
5. Why is it important to understand that Jesus struggled with the path that was before Him?
6. Why is it important for us to understand that Jesus was determined to fulfill His ultimate purpose, no matter what?