

Text: John 12:12-19; Revelation 7:9-12¹
 Title: Jesus: Misunderstood but Memorable
 Date: March 28, 2010 – Palm Sunday
 Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Today is Palm Sunday. One week from today we will celebrate the greatest event in human history, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Before we reach the glory of Easter Sunday, however, we must pass through the darkness of Good Friday, the day Jesus died on the cross. But today we celebrate the beginning of the week of events leading up to the great day of resurrection. A week before his resurrection and days before his crucifixion Jesus entered Jerusalem and was hailed by the people as their king. We call this day, Palm Sunday, because of the palm branches that the crowd waved to greet Jesus.

This morning I want to read two passages penned by the Apostle John. Both passages feature cheering throngs, both passages feature palm branches and both passages declared the glory of Jesus, the King of kings. I'm reading from John's Gospel, chapter 12, verses 12 to 19 and from The Revelation to John, chapter 7, verses 9 to 12. First, let's hear the Word of the Lord today from John's Gospel...

John 12:12 **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!'" ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁷ 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.'"**

And now, God's Word from The Revelation to John...

Revelation 7:9 **After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a**

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loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.’”

“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 12:16

Kids say the funniest things. Out of their misunderstanding about the world around them they utter some of the most memorable words. My mother was an elementary school teacher and she told me of numerous things over the years that kids had said in her classes. One young child, trying to grasp the words of “God Save The Queen” proudly sang with great gusto: “Send her victorious, happy and glorious, long train ran over us, God save the Queen!”

Sometimes grasping Biblical truth can produce misunderstanding in our minds, especially in our early years. These statements were made by elementary-aged children about Bible facts and Christian truths.

Did you know that...?

- Noah’s wife was called Joan of Ark
- Lot’s wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night
- Samson was a strongman who let himself be led astray by a Jezebel like Delilah.
- The Egyptians were all drowned in the dessert and then Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the 10 amendments.
- The First Commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
- Moses died before he ever reached Canada and then Joshua led the Hebrews in the Battle of Geritol.
- King David slew Goliath the Finklestein.
- Solomon, one of David’s sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
- Jesus taught the Golden Rule which says: do one to others before they do one to you.
- St. Paul cavorted to Christianity. He preached holy acrimony, which is another name for marriage.

But sometimes children say the most memorably truthful things. Out of the mouth of babes came these wonders...

- Dear God: I didn’t think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool!
- Dear God: I think about you sometimes, even when I’m not praying.

- Dear God: We read Thomas Edison made light. But in Sunday school we learned that you did it. So I bet he stole your idea.
- Dear God: I don't think anybody could be a better God. Well, I just want you to know that I am not saying this just because you are God already.

It is wonderful when kids say something either inadvertently funny or oddly wise! It seems so natural and honest. It seems so wonderfully wise – almost like somebody else was speaking through them.

There are times in the Bible when people say things that seem wonderfully wise and strangely out of character. In the events surrounding the final days of Jesus' life and ministry there are two groups of people that say things like that about Jesus.

First of all, John records two statements by **Jesus' enemies** that were strangely true about Jesus.

In John chapter 11 we find the wonderful story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus, the brother of Mary & Martha and a close friend of Jesus, had died while Jesus was on a preaching trip. He delayed his return to Bethany, Lazarus' hometown, so that he could demonstrate his power over life and death by raising Lazarus to life again.

Because of that wonderful miracle, John tells us that many of the people who had come to comfort Mary & Martha in their grief over their brother's death and who witnessed the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection, "believed in" Jesus (John 11:45.)

In fact, so many people came to faith in Jesus that the Jewish religious leaders who opposed him met to consider how to respond to the situation. "If we let him go on like this," one of them said, "everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (John 11:48)

John tells us that the Jewish High Priest, a man named Caiaphas, responded to that observation by saying...

"You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." John 11:49-50

And then John informs us...

"He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death." John 11:51-53

Out of the mouth of an enemy came involuntary truth about Jesus!

And again, when the religious leaders saw the crowd's thunderous greeting of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday they said to one another:

**“You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”
John 12:19**

And soon they would be more correct than they realized! In the very next verse, in chapter 12 and verse 20, John tells us that there were some Greeks in Jerusalem for Passover. They were people who were attracted to the high moral values of Judaism but who weren't full converts to the Jewish faith. They asked Philip, one of Jesus' disciples for an interview with Jesus, probably to ask him questions about his teaching.

These few, incidental Greeks were just the beginning of what would later become a flood of nations coming to Jesus!

Again, out of the mouths of his enemies, came truth about Jesus!

But it wasn't just Jesus' enemies that spoke greater truth than they realized about Jesus.

John tells us that the “great crowd” that had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and they went out to meet him. Many of these people would have heard about Jesus by word of mouth but now they had a chance to see him. The people who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead had been spreading the news about Jesus far and wide and there was great excitement.

They had a question they desperately wanted answered: **“Could this man be the promised Messiah King who would free us from the Romans?”** Like the people of Iraq were longing to be free from the oppression of Saddam Hussein, the Jews of Palestine were looking for God's Deliverer to free them from Rome.

You need to get some idea how large “the great crowd” could have been. One contemporary of Jesus estimated the Passover crowd one year as 2.7 million pilgrims! Jewish people came from everywhere in the Roman world to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. Even today, when Jews celebrate Passover outside of Jerusalem they say the words: “This year, here, **next year in Jerusalem.**”

When they heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, this crowd of pilgrims got very excited! Just imagine, being right there on the day when God's Messiah came! They wouldn't have to depend on CNN for the pictures – they'd be eye

witnesses to history! When that expectation was added to the usual excitement of being in Jerusalem for Passover, the crowd got pumped!

Somewhere the crowd got some palm branches. Palm branches were used for two main purposes.

First, they were used as part of the festival in Jerusalem. Waving them in the air helped to create a joyous atmosphere – kind of like fir trees at Christmas or stalks of corn at Thanksgiving create an atmosphere of celebration. In the Old Testament, they were part of God's commands for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall (Lev 23:40), but by Jesus' day it seems they were used at all the major festivals in Jerusalem.

Second, palm branches were a symbol used to celebrate the victory of kings. About 100 years before Jesus, a Jewish king by the name of Simon Maccabeus returned to Jerusalem after conquering the Syrian city of Accra and people waving palms greeted him. In the Book of Revelation chapter 7 – the passage we read earlier – there is a “great crowd” gathered before the throne of God in heaven, celebrating the victory of the Lamb through the battle of the great tribulation, waving palm branches and shouting their praise to God!

This huge crowd in Jerusalem, waving palms in celebration and victory, are singing to Jesus words from Psalm 118 that they sang during the Passover celebrations. This song was as familiar to them as our Christmas carols are to us because they sang it every year during the feasts. Psalm 118 is part of a group of psalms called the “Praise God” psalms (Hallel Psalms 113 to 118) that would be part of the first memory work that a Jewish boy would accomplish.

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" John 12:13

When you read the other Gospel accounts of this event you read other words they shouted as well ...

**"Hosanna in the highest!"
 "Hosanna to the Son of David!"
 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"
 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"
 "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"**

And as so often happens today when people sing Christmas carols, this crowd had no idea of what they were really saying! They hailed him as their conquering warrior king – but he came as the Prince of Peace!

In fact, John tells us that it was only after “Jesus was glorified” (John 12:16) – in other words, after His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, his

ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit – it was only then that even the disciples, Jesus’ closest friends, understood what all this meant!

But even though they didn’t understand what they said, like words from the mouths of babes, they were speaking truth about Jesus.

There were **three truths about the Prince of Peace** that this crowd declared and they spoke better than they knew.

First, they declared Jesus’ royal purpose
“Hosanna!” John 12:13

The word “Hosanna” means **“save us!”** It’s taken from Psalm 118:25...

“Save us, we pray, O LORD!” Psalm 118:25

Do you know what the expression, “Good bye” means? We use it all the time as a simple departure expression that we’ve lost a sense of what the words originally meant. “Good bye” is a shortened form of “God be with you.” It’s really intended to be a blessing.

“Hosanna,” by Jesus’ day, had suffered the same fate as “Good bye” has in our language. People used it as a simple exclamation of praise without really understanding it as a call for salvation.

The crowd spoke better than they knew. They may have been calling Jesus to “save” them from the Romans, but Jesus was going to save them from an even greater problem. In just a few days he was going to die on a cross to take the punishment for their sin and ours upon him. He was going to “save us” by dying for us.

The people of Jerusalem wanted saving from the Romans. But they faced an even greater danger than the Romans – they faced the wrath of God against their sin and that was what Jesus had come to save them from.

Jesus had warned the people many times during his ministry:

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” John 3:36

Why did the Father send Jesus into the world?

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:17

Jesus was sent to save mankind from God’s anger against sin!

What was the essence of having a relationship with Jesus?

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” John 10:9

Going in and out and finding pasture is the day to day life of a sheep and when we come to Jesus we experience his day to day care, a care that is designed to preserve us now and for all eternity. Forever we will be sheep in the care of the Good Shepherd.

What was Jesus purpose in life?

“If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.” John 12:47

When we cry to Jesus, “Hosanna, save us!” what are we really saying?

First, we are admitting we need saving. “Hosanna” means we’ve got a problem or situation that is threatening our lives! Everything isn’t OK and just fine! We’re aware that we stand under God’s wrath and judgment for our sin.

Second, we’re admitting that we can’t save ourselves. One of the things that keeps us from going to Jesus is a false sense of self-reliance. We think we can handle the situation, we can resolve to do better. But “Hosanna” means that we need God’s help now!

Third, we’re admitting that we need God to save us. When we cry “Hosanna” we’re calling out to the only One who truly can save us.

God says to us...

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” Isaiah 45:22

Have you cried, “Hosanna” to Jesus?

That’s all it takes – with a sincere awareness of your need for a Saviour, simply cry to Jesus, “save me!”

**Second, the crowd declared Jesus’ royal identity
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord...!” John 12:13**

The people spoke better than they knew.

Jesus came “in the name of the Lord” in a very unique way. While other prophets of the Lord came bearing God’s name as their authority, only Jesus came **bearing God’s name as His identity!**

If you study the Gospel of John you’ll find that the name of God keeps getting attached to Jesus. From the very first verse of this Gospel, John is concerned to make sure we know who Jesus is.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1, 14

John tells us that the his purpose in writing the Gospel was...

“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31

And most astounding of all, John quotes Jesus actually using the name of God revealed in Exodus 3:14 and applying it to himself.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’” John 8:58

Jesus was referencing the great self-revelation of God to Moses, recorded for us in Exodus. God spoke to Moses from a bush that appeared to burn without actually burning up and commissioned Moses to go to Egypt and to lead the Jewish people out of slavery under the Pharaoh. When Moses asked the One who spoke to him what he should tell the people of Israel if they asked the name of the God who had commissioned him to deliver them,...

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Exodus 3:14

Why is it so important that we know Jesus’ identity?

This is what Jesus said...

“You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” John 8:23-24

Unless we believe that Jesus is God come in the flesh to be our Saviour from sin, we are still under the judgment of God against our sin!

Jesus isn’t just a prophet sent by God.

Jesus isn't an angelic being serving in God's name.
Jesus isn't second fiddle to God – he is the great "I Am."

Do you believe it?

**Third, the crowd declared Jesus' royal character
"Blessed is ... the King of Israel!" John 12:13**

They spoke better than they knew!

They wanted a King – and they probably would have preferred one riding a horse into battle against the Romans, but instead they got a king riding a donkey!

Jesus knew he would never be able to be heard by so large a group – thousands upon thousands of people! And so instead of a sermon in words he gave them a sermon in a picture!

As he approached Jerusalem Jesus asked two disciples to arrange a donkey for him to ride into the city. You find that recorded in Matthew 21. Jesus intention was to fulfill the prophecy recorded in Zechariah chapter 9 and to give the people the this picture, a picture of a king of peace entering Jerusalem...

“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. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” Zechariah 9:9-10

In the world of Jesus' day, when a king came riding a horse he was coming to do battle! Like riding on top of an Abram's battle tank or flying an Apache helicopter!

One day, Jesus will ride a horse into Jerusalem! In Revelation 11 it tells us that one day He will come again, riding a white horse at the head of the armies of heaven and he will put an end to sinful rebellion for all time! (Revelation 11)

But not today! In Jesus' day, when a king came riding a donkey he was coming to make peace. He came to Jerusalem humble and gentle.

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” Isaiah 53:7

He came to die! And in His death, to make peace between God and man.

“But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.” Isaiah 53:5

The crowd spoke better than they knew!

There were **three crowds of people** who responded to Jesus' that day.

There were **the committed**. (John 12:17)

The crowd people who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead were convinced that Jesus was who he said he was and they “continued to spread the word” about him.

There were **the curious**. (John 12:18)

Many people there were simply interested to see this unusual person. In a few days, their curiosity would change to contempt as they called for Jesus to be crucified.

Finally, there were **the condemning**. (John 12:19)

Although the Pharisees had seen the evidence of the resurrection of Lazarus, although they'd heard the testimony of the crowds, they refused to believe in Jesus.

Which crowd are you in?

Know this – only the committed will see the life that Jesus promises to those who believe in him.

- **Invitation to Prayer**
- **Song:** Lion of Judah
- **Benediction**