

## FALSE UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE KIND OF WORSHIP THAT DOESN'T CORRECT IT

**John 12:12-19** - "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.'"

Here's the central idea of this teaching. *Excitement* about Jesus for the *wrong* reasons is no better than *indifference* toward Jesus. For this crowd in Jerusalem, and for each of us here today, *worship* must be properly informed to be of any worth. The *reason* for adoration is more important than the *emotion* behind that adoration. That doesn't mean emotion in worship is wrong. It is Biblically encouraged. It only means that emotion must be *informed* by accurate thinking.

This principle lies behind the difference between *John's* account of the Triumphal Entry and the accounts recorded in the *synoptics* (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). John isn't interested in any of the details leading up to the preparation of the event. There's no mention of how they will find the young donkey or get ready for Jesus' entry. John focuses on the *response* of those who are moved - one way or the other - by Jesus' arrival. John continues developing his theme of *belief* versus *unbelief*.

John makes it clear the people are thronging around Jesus because of His raising Lazarus from the dead - **Verses 17-18** - "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." Obviously Jesus had incredible power. And these adoring worshipers want to set Jesus up as their earthly Messiah bringing deliverance to Israel.

We have seen this kind of "*belief*" before in John's account - **John 2:23-24** - "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. [24] But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people"

Again, It's not how you feel about Jesus that's all-important. It's how Jesus feels about you that matters.

Then John turns the tables and records the response of the religious leaders and power brokers at Jesus' Triumphal Entry. As always, they are filled with rage and envy. They regret not having done away with Jesus earlier. They resent those who are praising Jesus. And John means for us all to see the end is coming for Jesus - **John 12:19** - "So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'"

This is a great text. There are some treasures here that lie just under the surface, waiting for someone to dig them out:

1) **SEE THE LOVING LENGTH TO WHICH OUR LORD GOES TO DRAW ALL ATTENTION TO HIS COMING DEATH**

There is no denying Jesus is drawing attention to Himself. But it's *love*, not *pride* that's motivating Him. We can remember the way Jesus had wanted *not* to be noticed in entering Jerusalem for the earlier Feast of Booths:

**John 7:1-9** - "After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. [2] Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. [3] So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. [4] For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." [5] For not even his brothers believed in him. [6] Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. [7] The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. [8] You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." [9] After saying this, he remained in Galilee."

But in today's text Jesus clearly *wants* to be seen. He's drawing attention to Himself. But it's not for the reason the crowd thinks. John's account explains:

**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!'**"

You'll notice the quotation marks around the last sentence in **verse 13** - "...**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!**" That's because the people weren't just making these words up. They are quoting from **Psalms 118**, which was one of a cycle of Psalms sung during the Passover Season. The people would know this psalm well and sing it frequently.

But look at the words they sing from the Psalm itself - **Psalms 118:25-26** - "Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! [26] **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.**"

The difference isn't where you might think. The crowd shouts, "**Hosanna!**" rather than "**Save us, we pray, O LORD!**" because that's what "**Hosanna**" means. We have rather carelessly used the word "Hosanna" as an expression of **worship** to God. But that's just not accurate. The word isn't meant as **praise** to God. It's **petition**. It's a **request** to God. Whenever we cry, "**Hosanna,**" we are saying, "**Please save us, O God!**"

No. The difference lies elsewhere. The difference between the shouts of the crowd and the Psalm they are quoting comes with an **addition** the crowd makes that is nowhere included in the Psalm. The phrase added by the palm-waving crowd is in that last phrase, "**even the King of Israel**" - **John 12:13** - "...**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!**" The Psalm simply says, "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD**" (Psalm 118:26).

This is more than Sunday morning hairsplitting. The Jesus cheering crowd wants Jesus to accept their nomination as **King of Israel** right on the spot. They are sick of Roman oppression and know Jesus has miraculous power to deliver them. That's why they're so excited in their worship. Jesus can solve their problems right now!

And the chasm between what they're clamoring for and the reason for Jesus' arrival on that little donkey couldn't be greater. Their praise isn't grounded in reality. They are excited, but they're totally out of touch with the One they're worshipping.

I know we all have our blind spots. None of us knows all there is to know about the One whom we worship. But that's not the issue here in our text. The psalm they were singing pointed to a very different **kind** of Messiah than the one they were expecting. **Three verses** before the ones they were singing the psalmist prophesied these powerful words - **Psalms 118:22-23** - "**The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. [23] This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.**"

There was going to be an earth shaking **rejection** of the Messiah **by His own people** (that's what the psalmist meant by the "**builders**") before He would become the "**cornerstone**" of God's great redeeming work. These enthusiastic worshipers have left this out. As is often the case, there's a huge theological hole in their worship that no amount of excitement can repair.

And that leads right into the riding of the donkey. John labors to make it clear that this wasn't just accidental - **John 12:14-15** - "**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!'**"

The prophecy to which John refers is **Zechariah 9:9** - "**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.**"

In his wonderful little book, "**Readings in John's Gospel,**" **William Temple** points out that a king or chief rode on a magnificent stallion when his purpose was **war-like**, but on a donkey when coming in peace. Says **Temple**, "**Thus the Lord, by deliberately fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy, at once claims to be the Messiah and declares in part the kind of Messiah that He would be....**"

So yes, this is the text where Jesus goes public. This is where He clearly comes out of the Messianic closet. But He chooses this very public manifestation to coincide with the celebrated **Passover**. He comes when the blood of Passover lambs would be shed. He's coming at the very moment the people were celebrating God's delivering work from bondage on their behalf. He's riding that donkey in love. He's making the **gospel** the center of His procession.

2) **WE DESPERATELY NEED OUR PRAISE AND WORSHIP CONSTANTLY INFORMED AND SHAPED BY AN EVER-EXPANDING UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF REDEMPTION**

This flows out of the same verses and I can't overstate the importance of it. Then and now worship will either fall flat or turn into psychological manipulation when we start to speak and sing about God **apart** from His saving work in Christ Jesus.

Look at these people. They **know** Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave. They **know** He opened the eyes of the blind. They fully expect that He has the divine power necessary to alleviate their present suffering. And all of that has them pumped up in praise and excitement. It looks like a revival, but it isn't. What they're missing is Jesus' coming death. What they're missing is an understanding of the problem of their sin and the solution of Jesus' shed blood and subsequent resurrection - triumphing over death in a way the resurrection of Lazarus never did or could.

Do you see Jesus riding that donkey into Jerusalem? There's a huge disconnect between what that crowd **thinks** Jesus is all about and what Jesus is **actually** all about. And their worship **isn't helping them see their mistake**. Their praise isn't **correcting their perception** the way all worship should.

What I'm saying is worship **separated from redemption** isn't worship in Spirit and truth. And it isn't worship received by Father God. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul was proclaiming in **Acts 17:30-31** - **"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."**

Noah never had to know anything at all about Jesus. Moses never had to come to the Father through an appreciation of the death of Jesus Christ. God **"overlooked"** their limited understanding. But, says Paul, those **"times of ignorance"** are no longer accepted. Paul says the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ have permanently changed the terms of favor with Father God.

And that means excitement about God separated from Christ-centered redemption isn't divinely valid excitement. At least in your mind, even if not specifically mentioned in every song, always ponder the blood of Jesus in worship. After all, you have no other way of even **approaching** God without it, let alone worshipping Him.

I'm zeroing in on this because there's much talk afoot, especially in the emergent church, about the **example** of Jesus and the **humanitarian compassion** of Jesus and the **pacifism** of Jesus. And the mistaken implication is we can just tap into Jesus with our own admiration and praise and good deeds. It is painfully easy to forget that we have no **approach** to Jesus as teacher or example or even friend unless we constantly stand in His primary work of **Redeemer** of a fallen and sinful humanity. Jesus keep me near the cross, indeed.

### 3) **WHEN YOU DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF GOD'S WORK JUST CONTINUE FOLLOWING IN HIS STEPS**

**John 12:16 - "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."**

These are interesting words. John has pointed this out before. There's no mistaking his intentional repetition of these temporary blind spots in the understanding of Jesus' disciples:

**John 2:18-22 - "So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" [19] Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." [20] The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" [21] But he was speaking about the temple of his body. [22] When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken."**

**John 13:3-7 - "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, [4] rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. [5] Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. [6] He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" [7] Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."**

John seems to want his future readers to know that while these disciples may have been the **first** to not immediately grasp the meaning behind Jesus' actions they would not be the **last**. There come **gaps in apprehension** when we walk in discipleship. And it is not a **sin** to experience them.

The key take-home-from-church lesson is disciples must **follow** as if they **did** understand, even when they **don't**. Understanding never comes to those who won't move until they have it. It grows gradually farther down the path of faithful obedience. When you don't have complete understanding of the way of God, **obey** the portion of His will you **know** as though you understood **everything**. This is not **hypocrisy**. It's **trust**. More light will come down the road.

And what I want to do in closing is **prove** this truth to you:

#### 4) THOSE NOT CELEBRATING JESUS WANT TO KILL JESUS

The closing verses of today's text are hardly cheering. John makes it clear that the whole crowd has got Jesus wrong in one way or the other:

**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."**

As we've seen, the excited crowd was pumped because of the miracles they saw Jesus do and wanted immediately to make Him their political leader. That's mistake number one. The religious leaders are **envious** of Jesus and want to kill Him. That's mistake number two.

And notice, it's not just **Jesus** whom these leaders resent. They resent the **people** who start to follow Jesus. In other words, the hatred they have for **Jesus** becomes the hatred they have for His **followers**. So they hate Jesus. And they hate the people who **choose** Jesus.

So it ever is. John wants His readers - the future church - to be **prepared** for this. He wants them anticipating **unfair** treatment because of their attachment to Jesus. Please think about that as you leave this lovely church service and enter what John describes as a hostile world.

Back to my closing point. There is nothing absolutely right in the response of any of the people gathered around Jesus. In a sense, it's all a mess. But I want you to see the glory and wisdom of God here. This is what I meant when I said just keep following in faith when your understanding is muddy.

Jesus is going to give all these sinful people what they so desperately need. He will do it **in spite** of themselves. The world will see God's mighty salvation in spite of the ignorance of the excited branch wavers and the wickedness of the mob plotting His death. Just when you can't imagine it looking any more hopeless, that very death will be God's plan to redeem mankind. You can trust God even when you can't see the light of day. And **that's** a great truth to take home from church. It will reinforce your faith all week.