

Morning Service | 19th Dec | John 12:12-19

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Date: 19 December 2021

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Now, can we read together once again in our Bibles from John chapter 12? We're going to read from verse 12 to verse 19.

As we think about welcoming Jesus, God's humble king. The next day, the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel.

Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, Do not be afraid, daughter Zion. See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.

At first, his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

[0 : 59] Now, the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they'd heard that he'd performed the sign, went out to meet him.

So the Pharisees said to one another, See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him.

So we'll think about that section together, recognizing as we begin that how we welcome someone often reflects a signal of the honor and value we place upon them.

And as we think about Christmas, we need to recognize the great truth that God the Father wants his son to be honored, wants his son to receive a welcome and to receive worship.

And we know this as we think about the familiar stories of Christmas. We think about the joyful welcome. The angels singing in heaven, the shepherds rushing to worship, Simeon joyfully holding Jesus in the temple.

[2 : 05] We think about the great messages that are announced about the kind of king Jesus had come to be. He's in the line of David. He's come to fulfill all those great promises of the king who would rule and reign for God forever.

He's come to be the Savior. He's come as Messiah, God's anointed, chosen king, to be his agent of salvation.

And he's come not just for some, but he's come to be the king for the world. And we see that as the Magi come to worship him that Christmas. And now, as we come to John 12, and we're just a few days away from his death, we see those same themes emerge.

And we see a massive crowd gathering. And in their words, they are praising King Jesus. They declare him as the promised Savior King.

And we hear even his enemies recognize this is a king not just for some, but king for the whole world. God wants his son to be honored and to receive a welcome.

[3 : 07] And so the question we'll ask ourselves as we think about this text is, what welcome do we give? What worship do we offer? What honor do we place on Jesus?

Because our text reminds us that because Jesus is God's Savior King for the world, we should all joyfully welcome and worship him. So let's think, first of all, about the welcome that Jesus receives in verses 12 and 13.

We are reminded that this is still in the context of the festival, the Passover festival. So a huge crowd is beginning to flock to Jerusalem. Josephus, the Jewish historian, reckons maybe over two million people might come to Jerusalem for this festival.

A time of great celebration, also a time of national hope. Every year wondering, will there be a new exodus this year? Will God send us a king who will free us from Rome this year?

And so national expectations then become centered on Jesus. Now two details to notice in verse 12 and 13. Let's think about the palms and let's think about the psalms.

[4 : 17] So in verse 13, they took palm branches as they went out to meet Jesus. And so we need to ask, maybe you've asked yourself the question, why palm branches? What's that about? Is this the equivalent of, you know, first century fireworks or rolling out the red carpet?

Or is there something more? Well, two historical facts that might help to give us a bit more insight.

One, back in 141 BC, there was a guy by the name of Simon Maccabeus.

And Simon Maccabeus led, I guess, an uprising against the Syrian empire who had taken over Jerusalem and the temple. And he booted them out of Jerusalem.

And when Simon came back into Jerusalem, he received this hero's parade. And he was greeted with singing and with people waving palm branches. So that's 141 BC.

And then, in the 60s AD, there was another group of Jews that sought to revolt and get rid of the Roman Empire once again. And when they had temporary success, what they did was they minted some coins.

[5 : 22] And on those coins, what did they put? They put palm branches. And so there's something in the Jewish, my Jewish understanding that is connecting the palm branch with this symbol of military triumph and victory and freedom.

And so there is significance in the way Jesus is being welcomed. Hope is high. Here is Jesus and he does miracles. And so there's the expectation. This, this one is the national deliverer.

And, of course, we understand in Jesus' teachers. Yes, he has come to be saviour, deliverer, but not in a political way, rather in a spiritual way. So there's the palms, but then there's also the psalms.

So there's shouting, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, blessed is the king of Israel. And so we need to ask ourselves why these particular shouts on this particular day. Well, a little bit more history and background.

When the Jews would gather for the Feast of Tabernacles and the Passover, each morning as they would congregated at the temple, they'd be singing Psalms 113 to 118, which we just sang, Psalm 118.

[6 : 31] And so the first cry there, Hosanna, which means give salvation now, we find that in verse 26. And blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, we find that in verse 25 of Psalm 118.

These words of welcome for a Messiah king. So the praises they were singing in the temple in the morning are the praises they now use of Jesus as he arrives into the city.

So let's just take a little pause and let's think about this for ourselves. Our welcome, our worship. Three observations. And the first one would be this.

When it comes to worship, we need to let God's word guide us. When we think about all the vital questions that are connected to faith and to religion, is there a God who is Jesus?

Why did he come? We know, I am sure, that there are so many voices, so many places, so many so-called experts. You can go on YouTube or if you read social media, you can go to a bookstore and you will find people claiming all kinds of truth.

[7 : 41] And what God's church needs to do is we need to make sure that in all of those voices that the word of God is our decisive final authority for how we understand who our God is and what he has done and how we worship him.

Because who we listen to will have that impact of disciplining us, giving us an understanding, give us an image of what God is like. And if it's not rooted in God's word, then it will be defective and it will be unacceptable to God.

Think about questions for the life of faith. How are we to praise God? How are we to pray to God? Where do I go to find wisdom from God?

How do I live to please God? Again, all of those questions we take to the word of God. We find our guidance and direction from a God who speaks, from a God of revelation.

But really interesting that the crowds were singing truth together in the morning and that led them naturally to express that truth when Jesus came in the afternoon. I think very practically as God's people, it's a reminder of the value of beginning the day with God's word.

[8 : 58] Of storing up that word in our heart, of meditating on it, of praying it through, of carrying it with us, to let God's word shape our day and how we approach it.

Another thing that we can say from this crowd, and this needs us to sort of move beyond John 12, is that we need to beware of wrong ways to welcome Jesus. Because many in this crowd who sound so excited now, are wrong on Jesus' identity.

Expect him to be a certain kind of saviour. When they don't get that, they'll reject Jesus. So a wrong way to welcome Jesus is to imagine, well, if I accept Jesus, then he'll then serve my agenda.

Here's Jesus, he'll answer my questions and he'll meet my needs and he'll sort of bring me what I'm looking for. But we need to understand, and we see this from the crowds, that Jesus is determined to follow his Father's will.

He's not here to please human expectations. They wanted someone who would fight the Romans and get rid of Caesar. And so we need to be very careful to humble ourselves, rather than to say, I'll accept Jesus if he serves my needs.

[10:15] I think another wrong way to welcome Jesus that we see so often in the crowds in Jesus' day, it is to admire Jesus, but never to truly worship.

There's so much of Jesus to admire in people who are not Christians, people even of other faiths, find there is much to admire of Jesus in his teaching and his character. And on top of that, we'll find some people who love theology, who love big ideas, and thinking about the complexities of big ideas about God.

But there's a big difference between knowing about God and knowing God, between knowing about Jesus and knowing him personally. Jesus says there's one thing that we need to do, and that's to believe in him.

The invitation is to follow him. Our willingness is to be ready to carry our cross, to follow him.

And all of that says there's a personal commitment, there's a personal involvement, there's a level of sacrifice. So it's not enough simply to admire Jesus. We need to submit to him as king and to worship him.

[11:19] And then the third thing to say at this point is, it's so important that we center our life on Jesus the king, to recognize that he is the one we need, and to recognize that he meets our greatest needs.

So again, many in the crowd thought their greatest need was political freedom. We might have our ideas of, here's what we need individually or as a society, here's our greatest need, here's our list of great needs. But the Bible would always say our great and ultimate need is for atonement.

What we need is that there would be someone who would wash us from our sin. That there would be one who would take from us the just anger of God, who would divert it away from us.

One who would restore peace and fellowship between us and God. And that is what Jesus came to do. Jesus was born in order to go to the cross, in order to make atonement for our sin.

That's our great need. And here we are reminded too in our text that Jesus is our great hope, because Jesus is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

[12:28] Jesus is the one who brings salvation now. And the wonderful thing about Jesus is that he still comes to his people. He comes to make us home in our hearts.

He comes so that we might live in the overflow of his wonderful love. He comes to supply us with his strength by his spirit. And so there is good news in the fact that we have a king who saves and a king who comes.

When we're confronted perhaps by our past sins and our feelings of guilt, we remember that King Jesus came to pay the price in full to wash us from all of our sins.

And he would come to us and say that the payment has been made. That we look to the cross and we remind ourselves that we are loved and accepted by God because of what Jesus has done.

Perhaps in all the joys and the chaos, the excitement, the busyness of everyday life, we need to remember that Jesus comes to be with us. And he would give us grace and he would give us wisdom and he would give us help for each moment.

[13:38] And as we think about the future, which sometimes can feel so uncertain and perhaps even scary, we remember the coming of Jesus for our future hope and glory. We are reminded in just a couple of chapters that the same Jesus who came once will come again in his glory and he will come to take his people to be with him forever.

So we're invited to center our life on Jesus, the Savior King. What kind of king is Jesus? Let's think next about Jesus, the humble king.

So here is Jesus, hundreds of thousands of people around him, in front of him, facing huge expectations as well. How does Jesus arrive in the city?

There's two surprises that we can find here in our section. First, in chapter 11 and verse 54, we learn this. It says, Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead, he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples. So we're moving from here's Jesus withdrawing to the wilderness, to a private place, to now making a very deliberate, public, bold entry into Jerusalem.

[14:59] We need to ask ourselves, why the change? Why has that happened? And the answer is because Jesus knows his hour has come, the hour of his rejection and suffering and death, but also the hour of his being glorified and resurrected and returning to heaven.

The hour is now. And so Jesus embraces that in obedience to his father, and he comes publicly. But the other surprise is Jesus' choice of transport, isn't it?

Verse 14, Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it. Just as a by-the-by, we probably all have our stories of brushes with fame.

When we were flying out for our honeymoon, easy jet flight from Inverness to London, we shared it with none other than Ross Kemp from EastEnders. Wow. Is Jesus just choosing a mode of transport that shows that he identifies with the poor people of the day, that he's ready to fly coach, as it were?

Or is there something more that's taking place here? And I think we understand and we can see that there's more that's going on in the mind of Jesus and in this story.

[16:17] Let's think about the parable that's taking place here. This is an acted parable. As Jesus finds this young donkey and rides in, this is a very deliberate choice.

The other Gospels tell us Jesus has deliberately sought out this young donkey to ride on, not a war horse. You know, you're deliverer kings.

They come in glory and splendor and pomp and ceremony. They come riding mighty beasts. Jesus has a lesson to teach in this. He wants to remove, on the one hand, false hopes.

He's not come for political freedom, but spiritual freedom. He's come as the prince of peace. He's come to make peace between sinners and God.

He's not come to wage war on Rome. And there's also a lesson in this journey because it so well reflects the life of Jesus on earth.

[17:14] From the cradle to the cross, what do we see of Jesus? We see humility. We see a humble saviour king. But there's more than just a parable going on here.

There's also prophecy being fulfilled. That's why it says, verse 14, As it is written, Do not be afraid, daughter Zion. See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.

So, Jesus, as he seeks out the young donkey, is seeking to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9.

Now, often, when a New Testament author quotes a little bit of a section of the Old Testament, we are intended to think more widely.

What's the context surrounding that quote? So, if you've got a Bible, paper, or on a device, you might want to turn back to Zechariah 9 just for a few minutes to just think about what's being said deliberately by Jesus as he comes riding this young donkey.

[18:27] So, in verse 9 of Zechariah 9, we read, Rejoice greatly, shout, daughter Jerusalem. And that's what we're seeing, isn't it? Triumphant entry, praising the king. See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey.

So, Jesus is announcing that he is the righteous king, he's the victorious king, but he's also telling us about his nature, that he's a lowly, humble king.

Just as when Jesus, the one time in the Bible, he speaks about his own heart, Matthew 11, he talks about his heart being gentle and lowly, the one who's come to give rest. It's the kind of king we have, a lowly, humble king.

Then verse 10, I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem.

What is Jesus wanting us to understand about him? Now he has come to end war.

And again, maybe some in the crowd would misunderstand and think, great, he comes to defeat Rome, but he's come to bring that physical, not physical, but spiritual end to war, that he has come to wage war against Satan and against sin and against death there on the cross to conquer over those great enemies of ours.

[19 : 46] And to conquer them, and the proof of that conquering is the resurrection. Jesus also, and it says here in verse 10, he will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea. Jesus wants us to understand that he has come to bring peace to the nations. He's come to rule as ruler over all the nations.

He's come to bring peace. He's come to bring wholeness and completeness and a restored relationship to God. And he opens the way for all to come through him.

And then in verse 11 of Zechariah 9, as for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

So this king is associated with the blood of the covenant. And then what happens just a few days later is we find Jesus sitting down in an upper room to share the Passover meal, which becomes the last supper, the Lord's supper, when he takes the bread and he says, this broken bread is my body broken for you.

[20 : 55] And then he takes the cup, this cup, this blood is this wine that represents the blood of the covenant, a blood that would be shed for his people.

And so here is Jesus, our king, and he knows full well that as our substitute, he has come to be the sacrifice to take away sin.

That he has come to be slaughtered so that we might be saved. Now the disciples, back to John 12, the disciples don't understand this at first, verse 16, only after Jesus was glorified did they realize these things had been written about him and done to him.

So there's something in the death of Jesus that represents the turning point in his life on earth.

That's why Philippians 2 is so important for us to hear.

To hear of Jesus, the humble servant king who became obedient to death, even to death on a cross. But then in the turn, what happens? Because God is pleased with him and God accepts the sacrifice and he is vindicated, then he is exalted to the highest place.

[22 : 15] Then he's given the name that's above every name, that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. There is a day coming when we will all stand before Jesus in all of his glory and we will all bow our knees and we will all confess that Jesus is Lord.

Some of us will do that gladly. Our Saviour has come. Others will do it to receive his judgment. So important to respond now to Jesus as Lord.

Now do you just think for a couple of minutes about the pattern of Jesus and what does this pattern say to us? It's basically, what does it say to us about how to live the Christian life?

Again, we read Philippians 2 and we're told to have the same mindset as the Lord Jesus. So Jesus is our model when it comes to humility.

Let's think about our relationships for a moment. we're being encouraged as those who are followers of Jesus Christ to live and to speak differently, to take a humble and a gentle posture towards others in our homes, in our workplaces, in our community.

[23 : 36] And we're called to that in the context of where we find ourselves now, a world that's very polarized, a whole number of issues where people are really quick to be angry and impatient and judgmental, especially with the separation that the internet provides.

But we are called to be different in our words, actions, and attitudes. And that's to be true for us in church in the way that we deal with one another and that's to be true also in our dealings in the world.

to think about which pattern defines how I deal with my relationships. Is it the pattern of the world? We're in it for what we want and we're pursuing our agenda, are we? Patterning our lives on Jesus, humble and gentle. Also, when we think about the journey of Jesus, I think it helps us to begin to consider our own pride and to think about how to put it today.

Because isn't the gospel, the gospel should always be killing our pride. Here is Jesus, he's left the glory of heaven to become one of us, to die for us because the only way that we can be saved is for us to have the God-man as our saviour, as our representative, as our sacrifice.

[25 : 03] We are so bad that there is no other way of hope for us. So there is no room for pride in the Christian life, rather, there is humility and there's grateful worship for what Jesus has done.

And then when we think about our lives of discipleship, of being followers of Jesus, I guess it makes us ask the question, what journey should we expect as we see Jesus here on the journey ultimately to the cross?

See, we find teaching in the world, perhaps we've heard of the prosperity gospel, believing Jesus, having our faith and health and wealth and happiness was all bound to be yours. That was never the pattern of Jesus.

The pattern of Jesus tells us we can expect suffering first with glory to follow. And so we need to have that realism about the Christian life. But also when we think about our discipleship, doesn't the journey of Jesus help us in our worship?

He is the eternal Son of God who left the riches of heaven in order to love us this way. That we would reflect on that, that we might be amazed by his grace, that it might fuel our worship.

[26 : 21] Last thing to think about, the wonderful reality that Jesus is king for the world. Verses 17 to 19. Again, notice that there are two crowds here. there's the crowd that was with Jesus when he called Lazarus from the tomb.

And they're continuing to spread the word. Excitement is building. The news is spreading about King Jesus, the one who is the resurrection and the life. And then there's this other crowd.

They've come out from Jerusalem. They're here for the festival. The reputation of Jesus has been spreading and so they come to meet Jesus. I don't want to push this too far but what we see at the cross and what we see in the church as well is that any crowd is often a mixed crowd.

There are some who truly worship Jesus in this crowd. Others who will within days be crying, crucify him. We have no king but Caesar.

So there's two crowds going on but there's also two phrases from the Pharisees that I was to think about. The Pharisees are saying to one another first of all see this is getting us nowhere.

[27 : 33] So we're being reminded that despite their worst efforts to get rid of Jesus confronting him, accusing him, trying to trap him with their words of wanting to arrest him, trying to have him stoned.

Despite all of that they cannot stop King Jesus. They cannot derail the Father's plan for Jesus. And then they say look how the whole world has gone after him.

So many times in the Gospels we find people saying far more than they ever intended to say. The whole world has gone after him.

They see this huge crowd coming out of Jerusalem and they're despairing. Ah, we really need to get rid of Jesus. They imagine the crowd representing the world. Indeed, in verse 20 which we didn't read we find there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. But when the fantasies say look how the whole world has gone after him we see that then being fulfilled, don't we? in the global church. And that's a wonderful reality.

[28 : 48] It reminds us that global church fulfills God's promises and God's purposes. We can trace that all the way back to Genesis 12. Abraham has promised one of his seed will be blessing to the nations.

That's Jesus. We can think about those wonderful stories of people like Rahab and Ruth foreigners, worshippers of other gods who become part of the community of faith and become part of the family line of Jesus.

We can think about the promise in Isaiah of the Messiah as the servant of the Lord, the one who would be light to the nations. Think again about the Magi coming from the east to worship, to acknowledge Jesus as the King.

Think about the great commission of Jesus just before he goes up to heaven. He says to the disciples you be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Think about the sending of the Spirit. What happens at Pentecost with the sending of the Spirit? The disciples are able to speak in other languages so people can hear the good news of Jesus. And then think about the spread of the church in the book of Acts and beyond.

[29 : 57] And then think of Revelation 5. I'm going to sing Is He Worthy? Again, because what do we have in Revelation 5? We have this picture of the throne room in heaven and there we have people from every nation, and culture and people group and language and they're all united in the worship of the Lord Jesus because the global church fulfills God's purpose and God's promise.

And we understand in the age that we're living in that brutal regimes have tried and are trying to destroy the church, to kill and to arrest God's people.

Some of us will remember Andrew McKeever was sharing with us of a pastor in Burma who was shot dead by the rebel army as he tried to save his burning church building.

This week I read of three elderly pastors in Eritrea all in their 70s arrested for sharing the good news of Jesus in their country. Regimes, individuals, communities will try to stop the church but still the church of Jesus grows.

As Jesus said, the gates of hell will not prevail. There's rapid growth in some parts of the world and sometimes when things seem hard here and people seem apathetic we need to remind ourselves of what's happening in Africa and parts of Asia and Central and South America where the gospel is spreading rapidly.

[31 : 21] But very practically it reminds us that God's mission matters and our support and our involvement in mission matters indeed. It's a privilege for us as the people of God to be looking to do whatever we can to make disciples of all nations.

So there's a big picture significance of Jesus being king for the world but the very personal significance of Jesus being king for the world means that Jesus would be saviour for you and me. When it says the whole world Jesus is saviour for the whole world it means whoever we are whatever our story whatever our background Jesus would be saviour for us. Jesus God's son God's king who lived died rose now reigns in heaven having acted on the cross to forgive sin to grant eternal life we're invited to turn from sin and to trust in him submit to him as king saviour for the world he would also be saviour for you and for me.

Just as we close then what kind of welcome do we give king Jesus this glorious son of God the one who left the throne of heaven to journey to the manger to journey to the cross in order to save us.

what welcome what worship what honour does he receive from us perhaps in this week in the run up to Christmas we can think about those two comings his coming into the world and his coming to the cross that we would welcome and that we would worship king Jesus as lord let's pray our father in heaven we thank you so much for your word your word that reveals to us Jesus as saviour and king reveals to us his heart as a humble king the one who would be saviour for any and for all who would put their trust in him so Lord we pray that in all the things that are going on in the next few days that you would give us the wisdom and the desire to set aside time to remember Jesus and to remember his coming into our world in order to make atonement for our sin and to think about him leaving glory in order to be that sacrifice that would take away your wrath against our sin that would bring us peace with our God so that you would give us deep joy and deep worship at this time of year and indeed for all of our lives we pray in Jesus name

[34 : 25] Amen So to help us to continue reflecting on the wonderful theme of Jesus our King we'll stand and we'll sing again Is He Worthy?

God . .

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