

Looking forward to Easter (2)

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] So we're looking at John's Gospel, chapter 12, verses 12 to 19, called the triumphal entry, but it doesn't say that it's the triumphal entry. The parallel passages we looked at except the Luke passage, which is quite a bit longer.

We might refer to that. So let's, I simply want to go through it and draw your attention to some features of it. But the context, as we said this morning, is that the popularity of Jesus is increasing. So if you look at the verses that refer to increase, verse 9, a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

Usually when he says Jews in John's Gospel, it's a little bit of a question whether he means Jews that are open-minded or Jews that are actually antagonistic. But certainly there's a large crowd of them.

Verse 11 says, on account of Lazarus, many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him. So popularity is increasing.

[1 : 13] Verse 12, the next day the great crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. So off they go. So there's a great crowd. Verse 18, many people, because they had heard that he had given this sign, went out to meet him.

So there's a momentum of popularity, but there's also a momentum of opposition. So the Pharisees, you see in verse 19, are saying, you know, last straw.

This is just getting worse and worse. It's getting us nowhere. We need to do something. Look, the whole world has gone after him. That's obviously an exaggeration.

But there's a truth in it, isn't there? That that is Jesus' target population. He wants the whole world to believe in him. God so loved the world that he gave his only son, and so on.

And in fact, the very next verse is an international verse. There are actually some Greeks there, and the narrative focuses on them. And opposition, verse 37, even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

[2 : 28] And there's a little meditation in the next verses on this whole matter of the hardness of heart, and how it is that some people don't believe. Very similar to Romans 9, 10, 11, which goes into a considerable detail about how it is.

Some people do believe. Some people don't believe. Is it free will? Is it what is it? How does God's sovereignty affect this? What are you supposed to do about it? And so on. So you've got a little section there on that.

But the overall impression is that time is running out. You know, the clock has been ticking. The clock has been ticking since the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee, where Jesus said, Woman, don't you know, my hour has not yet come.

And the clock keeps ticking all the way through John until the alarm goes off. In verse 23, the hour has come. And it's triggered by this, apparently, in the understanding of Jesus, by this inquiry by these foreigners.

We would like to see Jesus. Ah, the hour has come, says Jesus. So I was looking at the context, and I got ahead of myself, because in verses 37, no, in verse 35 and 36, you get what seems like a final appeal.

[3 : 45] Put your trust in the light while you have it. You have in verses 44 to 50, something that looks like a final warning, actually.

Not quite sure how you would characterize it, but it's Jesus crying out, or perhaps a repetition of what Jesus had cried out, because it doesn't actually say then.

Verse 44, the then has been added in, according to my notes here. Perhaps a summary of the fact that if you hear the words of Jesus, you've heard something very significant, crucial.

And if you've rejected those words, you really have rejected Jesus. Jesus, that's how close him and his words are connected. Verse 47, as the person who hears my words, but does not keep them, I do not judge him.

There is a judge, et cetera, et cetera. So there's something like a final appeal, and a final warning, and in between that, this reflection on the hardening of hearts. So something about the context and where it's going.

[4 : 51] And just thinking for a moment on the features of verses 12 to 19. I don't know what you thought when I read it out. Not quite the same as the other accounts of the triumphal entry.

I started to make a little list of what was missed out. Let me find my pen, and while I'm finding my pen, you could have a think of what you think is missed out.

Bear with me. What John doesn't bother to tell us, that the other ones do. Any thoughts? Where the donkey is? Yeah, this whole matter of how they obtained the donkey, the others give you quite a bit of detail, and John doesn't bother with that.

It just says, Jesus found a donkey. Yep. Anything else that's omitted that you might have noticed? The others thought. I'll tell you one thing.

In Matthew, there's two donkeys. An interesting, Matthew often gives you two of something.

Because, I think because in Hebrew thinking, if you've got two witnesses to something, that makes it even more definite.

[6 : 01] So you have two demonized men, whereas the other Gospels only tell you about one of them. And you've got two donkeys, or a donkey and a colt.

Not quite sure of the biology of this, but yeah. And I don't think this one says anything about cloaks and clothes, does it?

Just have a look. It's not unknown for me not to read it properly, but I don't think it says anything about cloaks and clothes. And although it talks about opposition, it doesn't do it in the way Luke does it.

Because in Luke 19, Luke picks up on the Pharisees, saying, teacher, rebuke your disciples. I tell you, he replied, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.

So you've got that particular rebuke. And in Matthew 21, you have, I think it's associated with this, the bit about the children crying out, Hosanna.

[7 : 13] They were crying, Hosanna to the son of David. And in Matthew 21, verse 16, the chief priests and teachers of the law say, don't you hear what the children are saying?

You know, shut them up. And Jesus says, have you never read from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise? So you don't get that particular, or those particular points of objection. anything in John's account that isn't in the others? Yes.

Well spotted. I was going to point that out in a moment. So we'll come back to that. Well spotted. That is not in the others. Do not be afraid. Correct. Well, what I got was, I don't think the other accounts tell you the exact day.

12, 12, the next day. So we're six days from the Passover. And 12, 12, the next day, the great crowd, et cetera. So this is one of the commentaries said this.

[8 : 23] I haven't checked it. I think it's right. It's John who gives us the exact day. And it's John is the only one who mentions palm branches. The other accounts just say branches.

And it's John who tells us they're palm branches. Interesting because in our sort of mental picture of it, we think palm branches. And we probably read it into all the other accounts.

But I think the others just say branches. So John is the one who tells us that there are palm branches. I did look that up. And I think that's correct.

So anyway, just a little thing to put us on alert there. And I'm going to do in a minute something about quotations from scripture.

And I thought I would try you out on quotations. So what would you say? What would be the next words that came to your mind if I said, she loves you? Blue.

[9 : 25] Ah, I see. Yes. Or if I said, you ain't nothing but a... Oh, we see. Yes. And then if Mark was here, I would just say blue.

Yeah, you see, you could even do it with one word. It's interesting that things are so ingrained in our consciousness that it only takes a little phrase to capture it and bring it back.

And I think with these quotes here, which we'll come at in a moment, he's... The quotes are... Just as surely as the quotes take us back to Elvis Presley or whoever it is, of course, that's where blue suede shoes comes from.

And if you weren't sure, that's where you ain't nothing but a hound dog comes from. Just as surely as we go back to that mentally, I think the people about whom he's writing and to whom he's writing would have picked up on these quotes and thought, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Anyway, let's do that in a moment. So let's just go through the passage a bit at a time. Verse 12. The great crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. [10:35] There are different crowds. Some have come for the feast. Some presumably live in Jerusalem. Some have been involved with the raising of Lazarus.

Others haven't. So there's different groups of people there, much as you'd expect. Probably different accents, different ideas in their minds.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, gave a figure of how many people there were at a particular Passover festival.

This is the figure. That's vast. That's vast. That's vast. 2.7 million. I did look twice at the figures before I wrote them down.

That's a huge number. Perhaps he exaggerated. I mean, he's not an inspired writer in the sort of biblical sense. That's a vast number of people, isn't it? I mean, even if he exaggerated by a factor of 10, we'd still be talking about a quarter of a million people.

[11:43] So it's like the population of Brighton and Hove. Am I doing something funny here? The population of Hove sort of descending on a place overnight.

2.7 million is half the population of Switzerland, isn't it? Half the population of London. Huge numbers. If he was anywhere near it, you'd think, this is a huge event.

Vast, isn't it? The crowds. Let's look at the palm branches. So he does say they took palm branches. And I have a reference to Leviticus 23, verses 39 to 43.

Leviticus 23, 39 to 43, which, as I understand it, is the only reference.

23. That is the only reference to palm branches in Jewish festivities or in the scriptures, in the Hebrew scriptures.

[12:51] It says Leviticus 23, 39. So beginning with the 15th day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days.

The first day is a day of rest. The eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.

Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. Celebrate it in the seventh month.

Live in booths for seven days. All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so that your descendants will know that I have made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt.

I am the Lord your God. This is the festival of tabernacles. When they remembered that they used to live in tents when God brought them out of Egypt, and they re-enacted it and went and lived in tents.

[13:54] That's what a booth is, a sort of tent or a shelter. And the palm fronds seem to be implements of joy and celebration as if much in the same way that we would blow up balloons, do you think?

And have bunting. Well, they didn't have balloons and bunting, but they had choice fruit and palm fronds and leafy branches and poplars, and you rejoice waving these things around and so on.

Now, some commentators have said, well, seeing as that's the Feast of the Tabernacles, then John must have got it wrong when he said it was the Passover, which is a different Jewish feast.

However, apparently, the palm became a symbol, a national symbol for Israel to be used at any time of the year.

So it was when there was a revolt against the Roman occupation, and the revolutionaries, the separatists, printed their own coins to put a national symbol, a national Jewish symbol on the coins.

[15:06] They put palm branches. Interesting, isn't it? And the Maccabees, who led a revolt against the occupying powers, some, I can't remember, is it hundreds of years before?

I don't know what date they were, but apparently, they had the palm as a national symbol too. So once you start thinking of that, it's actually quite a powerful symbol, isn't it? It's a powerful nationalist symbol. I'm just trying to think of any equivalent, I suppose for, well, I don't know, what does Alex Salmond have as the national symbol for Scotland, for Scottish independence?

Is it a blue cross or something, is it? Yeah, he must have one, mustn't he? So some sort of symbol that says, yeah, we're, you know, we're who we are, and nobody's going to mess about with us. And that's what the palm had that in it, that thought in it. And if you imagine then, this crowd taking palm branches. The other reference to palms is in Revelation 7, 9.

[16:23] Maybe you'd like to look at this. And in the light of what we've just been saying, it's rather an interesting use of palms.

So in Revelation chapter 7, we have, we have the 144,000, verse 4, and then we have a great multitude that no one could count, verse 9.

And I would like to suggest that they're exactly the same group of people, and that John loves to give us two contradictory ways of describing the same thing.

So the 144,000 in John 7, verses 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 is the, put in in Jewish terms, the 12 tribes.

And then in verse 9, after this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb, they were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

[17:38] Isn't that interesting that we have in that scene the sort of jubilation? And it uses a national symbol, which in olden days was a national symbol of God's people, Israel.

But these people are from every nation, tribe, and people, and language. And they're expressing that same sort of triumph and defiance and, I don't know, glory.

They're in heaven. Well, anyway, something there about the palm branches. Let's look at the shouts. So we're back in John chapter 12.

It's good to get a little whiff of heaven, isn't it? The idea that there will be this defiant jubilation. Now the shouts. They went out shouting, Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel. Let's look at those.

[18:45] So let's look first of all at Hosanna. So I've always been puzzled by Hosanna. I'm a little bit less puzzled, but not completely. It still isn't completely clear to me. Hosanna, I looked it up in Greek.

And if you're interested, that's what it looks like in Greek. So in Greek, so there's an O and an S and an A and an N and an N and an A.

So there's no H in the way the Greek is, so it would be Hosanna or however it's pronounced. So that's the word that's used in the text here.

And it's a quote from, it's a copy over from Hebrew. So the Hebrew is Hoshi A Na.

That's what it says in the commentary. Hoshi A Na. And the Hoshi A Na, from which comes into Greek, Hosanna, Hosanna.

[19:54] Now this is the bit that I'm mystified by because I don't understand enough of the languages to say why this happens. But the Hoshi bit means give salvation and is to do with Yasha, which is to save.

Now we knew Yasha was to save because you get names like Yahshua and Joshua and Jesus, of course, is a derivative from Yesu of salvation.

So that's the, but I can't, I don't know what's happened to the Y because it's turned into a H. Don't know why that should be. And the Na is, according to my computer, Ana.

It's part, something to do with Ana, which means now. So breaking it down, it means give salvation or save. That's the Yasha or the Hoshi bit.

Puzzlement on my face as to why that should be the way it is. That's what it says it is. And the Ana means now or it can mean please. I'm puzzled by that. How can now mean please?

[20:57] But that's what it says in the dictionary. So it's saying something like save now or save please. I don't know, I'm just thinking can now mean please?

I'm just thinking in a teacher you would say will you quieten, will you put your books away now? And that doesn't mean please in a rough sort of translation.

One of my colleagues I remember wonderful phrase and she said will you put your books away? And then she said I had now in mind. Wonderful, wonderful.

Now Hosanna just like blue suede shoes or she loves you rings a bell and the bell it rings is Psalm 118 verse 25 which Ben was commenting on in the prayer time this morning.

And you might say how can Hosanna take you back so definitely to one particular place? And to the best of my knowledge the answer is that this is the only place where you get these words in this combination.

[22 : 12] And if you knew your Hebrew Bible you would immediately have thought Psalm 118 and it's in 25 verse 25 and we read in English translation O Lord save us and then O Lord grant us success.

It doesn't look the same as Hosanna but according to my research it is. That's the bit save now O Lord save us now please or grant us success now Hosanna.

So the crowds are they know that they're quoting from Psalm 118 which means that we need to have a little look at Psalm 118 because they would have had all the rest of it in their minds as well. Psalm 118 is one of the pilgrim psalms give thanks to the Lord for he is good his love endures forever and it talks about traveling verse 19 open for me the gates of righteousness I will enter and give thanks to the Lord this is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter I will give you thanks for you have answered me and become my salvation.

You could imagine pilgrims using this psalm as they make their journey to Jerusalem verse 27 the Lord is God and he has made his light shine upon us with bows in hand join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar so it's a sort of processioning psalm and there are two ways of looking at it one to say it's a pilgrim psalm or a sort of traveling to meet God psalm and so verse 26 the one who's traveling is a pilgrim blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord welcome on your journey from the house of the Lord we bless you here you come we bless you this is what's going on in the psalm and it is that's one of the things they quote isn't it blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord am I right check it blessed is he who comes in the name of the

[24 : 32] Lord that's interpretation number one now interpretation line of interpretation number two is to say that it is particularly a psalm to do with the king the Messiah and the support for that I would imagine would come from something like psalm 118 verse 10 all the nations surrounded me but in the name of the Lord I cut them off the king could very much say that and it raises the whole question of who are the psalms about and I'm sure some of them are particularly if not all of them but some of them at least are particularly about the king!

in which case blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord from the house of the Lord we bless you might not be just a pilgrim a traveler a person coming to the house of the Lord but the pilgrim the traveler the king who comes to the house of the Lord so you've got interpretation number one it's a pilgrim blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord interpretation number two it's Messiah in the name of the Lord and if you turn back to John's gospel chapter 12 he actually tells you which of those interpretations is being meant so in verse 13 Hosanna we're quoting Psalm 118 blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord definitely quoting Psalm 118 blessed is the king of Israel we're quoting

Psalm 118 interpretation number two blessed is the king of Israel so John particularly quotes this interpretation and I think he endorses it but it raises the whole question here they are what sort of king are they thinking of blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord we mean the king blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord here we are with our palm branches get those Romans knock them in the teeth that's what we're we're the Jews we're the top nation you can imagine the sort of thing that's being thought and the ideas that are going around in people's minds so let's come on to one other thing to look at which is the donkey quote so this isn't verse 14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it as it is written now notice it isn't the crowd that's saying this it's not the crowd that's saying this it is

John our gospel writer saying this is the correct understanding of it this is the correct reference to go back to you were thinking blue suede shoes I want to say she loves you yeah yeah or whatever this is the way you should think back these are the things that ought to be chiming in your mind so please can we find where this quote comes from Zechariah 9 verse 9 now I wrote down the page number in my Bible because I didn't want to embarrass myself in public by not being able to find Zechariah but I'm not looking so you take as long as you like and you can look it up in the front pardon well I haven't got the same page numbers as you have my page number is 867 951 thank

you very much chapter 9 ok a little bit further on so while you're finding it 954 thank you while you're finding it we say that

Zechariah is the most fascinating prophetic book it looks forward to the coming kingdom in all sorts of visions and sayings which I think to me are quite difficult to see the meaning of and I think it would have been difficult for them to see the meaning of them too and it's got visions it isn't just plain speech it's visions and you think what do those visions mean and here in Zechariah 9 verse 9 it's not a vision but it is in more plain speech but it's still rather tantalizing what does it mean what would it look like Zechariah 9 9 rejoice greatly oh daughter of Zion shout daughter of Jerusalem see your king comes to you okay that's very much psalm 118 but notice where it goes now he is righteous and having salvation he is gentle and riding on a donkey on a colt the foal of a donkey [29 : 42] I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem and the battle bow will be broken his rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth and as for you because of the blood of my covenant with you I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit return to your fortress oh prisoners of hope even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you well it's some things there are perhaps a bit puzzling but look at the things that are clear this is the king yes but what sort of king is he he's a gentle king notice that word he's gentle his kingdom is not a wow bang people in the face king but he's a gentle king and he comes to bring peace he proclaims peace to the nations and he's a successful king his rule extends from sea to sea and from one landmark to the landmark at the other end of the world and not only does he do this but he sets his people free isn't that a brilliant thing he sets his people free and that's the donkey quote and we need to bring that into our thinking and I think that the crowds probably didn't have the right idea if they were focused on the palm leaves and all that represented they might well have missed out the gentleness of the king now there's one bit that

Julia spotted and I don't know whether you'd spotted it verse 15 do not be afraid oh daughter of Zion now then it doesn't say that in Zechariah does it it says rejoice greatly oh daughter of Zion it doesn't say do not be afraid and what he's doing is gathering in a quote from somewhere else and just gluing it on to another quote so that it flows but he's got several different strands that he's pulled all together so where does the do not be afraid come from hmm well I'd like to suggest that the do not be afraid comes from Isaiah 40 Isaiah 40 verse 9 so we've got another prophecy and Isaiah 40 is a grand grand chapter it's a chapter addressed to people who would be in exile to say the exile will be ended and you've been in disgrace and you've been estranged and the Lord will bring you back it's a wonderful chapter Isaiah chapter 40 do we need a page number anybody got a page number 724 and it's the chapter in which in verse 9 it says you who bring good tidings to Zion go up on a high mountain you who bring good tidings to Jerusalem lift up your voice with a shout the idea that it comes up in my mind is of going up on some big hill rather like suppose you were in Switzerland and you went up on a mountain and you shout down to the villages underneath some message and here the message is don't be afraid you who bring good tidings to Jerusalem lift up your voice with a shout lift it up do not be afraid say to the towns of Judah here is your God see the sovereign Lord comes with power his arm rules for him his reward is with him I think that's where the do not be afraid bit comes and it's if that's right it's bringing in this thread the redeeming wonderful comforting rescuing mighty incomparable God is coming to your rescue it's the chapter in which the Lord looks down is enthroned above the circle of the earth it's the Lord who says who can you compare me to and it's the Lord who carries the he tends his flock like a shepherd he gathers the lambs in his arms great big God who comes to shepherd his people and the little one the pregnant sheep get carried and the little lambs get carried because that's what they need and that's what happens when the Lord comes don't be afraid this is what's happening well that's the donkey quote and

I'll just finish by saying that in verse 16 it says they didn't understand it it all happened and the disciples did not understand this at all only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him and what was it they didn't get I don't think it was the acclaim that was very obvious you didn't need to be particularly insightful to realize that Jesus was being acclaimed and I don't think you needed to be particularly insightful to see that they were talking about him being a king blessed as the king of Israel but what I think you did need to be insightful about was the nature of his kingdom that's the bit they didn't get the full dimensions of how the redeeming God would redeem and the full dimensions of how the king that comes to his people will extend his kingdom from sea to sea and shore to shore and what

he will do to accomplish that and it says only after he was glorified did they get it now in [36 : 31] John's gospel the glorification focuses on the cross now is the son of man glorified is the cross and it's only after the cross could they see that's the way he redeems his people that's how this gentle powerful king does his kingdom only after that did they did they get it of course we're in the wonderful position we can look back with hindsight and see yeah here's my application point aren't we glad Jesus is who he is because here might I stay and sing no story so divine never was love dear king never was grief like mine he's a wonderful savior isn't he the more you look at Jesus the more you think about him you you don't find things that you say oh I never realized he was like that the more you look at him the more wonderful he seems to be and the more brilliant his salvation is the more classy he is isn't it don't you think let's sing together