

# Why does Jesus act in a peculiar way?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, can we open the Bible in the passage we read, John chapter 12. Looking at the story, it's called the triumphal entry of Jesus.

So that's John 12 and verse 12 onwards until verse 19. This passage this morning actually is a very peculiar passage.

Because we see here Jesus acting in a way which is really quite extraordinary. Let me illustrate this by way of contrast. Remember, the picture here is that the Pharisees are looking to kill Jesus.

You see that indeed the previous chapter, chapter 11 verse 45, the plot to kill Jesus. So there they are, they want to kill Jesus. Let me contrast this.

There's a movie called the Pelican Brief. And the Pelican Brief is about someone who discovers a conspiracy in the oil industry. And the main hero is a girl called Darby Shaw.

[ 1 : 10 ] And she is at risk. People want to kill her. The bad people have already killed two Supreme Court judges. They have killed her boyfriend.

And they are out to get her. So all these folk are pursuing Darby Shaw to kill her. What does she do? She changes her appearance.

She cuts her hair. She never goes to the same place twice. She never uses her credit card. She uses cash everywhere she goes. She uses a false identity.

That's what you do when you don't want to get caught. That's what you do when there is a plot out there to kill you. You just evade people.

You try and hide your identity. Now to a certain extent that's what Jesus had been doing. Look at chapter 11 verse 54. Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews.

[ 2 : 10 ] And so for a long time there Jesus was very low profile. But one commentator J.C. Ryle says this. He says the Lord's behavior is very peculiar.

J.C. Ryle said it not me. The Lord's behavior here is very peculiar. What's happening here? Jesus had normally been, shall we say, low profile.

The Bible says he will not quarrel or cry out. No one will hear his voice in the street. So that is the way of Jesus.

Low profile. No ostentatious show of power. The Lord Jesus Christ taught quietly. That's our picture of Jesus. He was someone who really just very, very much kept himself under the radar.

He was really, really quiet in all that he did. His way was the way of a suffering servant. His way was the quiet, gentle way.

[ 3 : 14 ] A bruised reed he would not break. A smoldering flax he would not extinguish. So all of a sudden we see from this gentle Jesus, meek and mild, the quiet voice.

All of a sudden here from verse 12, we see Jesus parading into the town of Jerusalem. And he is surrounded by this entourage.

And they are pouring palm branches. And they are crying, Hosanna, the son of David. And this is really extraordinary.

And indeed so extraordinary that the Pharisees get worried. Verse 19, look, they said, the whole world has gone after him. So what I want to do this morning is to look at this peculiar passage in the story of Jesus.

And ask ourselves, well, what is going on here? We find that this is a point of no turning back. The point when he entered into Jerusalem willingly on his own timetable.

[ 4 : 21 ] And as we look at the passage this morning, I want us to notice three very simple things. Number one, let's notice that large crowds do not always equal spiritual life.

Large crowds do not always equal spiritual life. Now in many ways that would be counterintuitive. We would love this building to be packed.

We would love every square inch of the pews down there in the gallery to be full of people. Folk leaning over in every word. We would love folks sitting on the floor there, sitting on the pulpit steps. We would love that. And the singing would literally raise the roof. We would love big crowds. That's the way we're built. There's an excitement, isn't there, when you're among big crowds.

If there were 15 of you here, the atmosphere would be very different to that of over 100. If there was, I don't know, 600 in here, the atmosphere would be even more different.

[ 5 : 22 ] And so what we have here is a big crowd. Jerusalem is heaving. They reckoned that there were 2 million people in that small city of Jerusalem at this time.

I don't know if you've ever been in Edinburgh in August during the festival. It's just packed. The population doubles. You can hardly move. There's a sense of action. Things are happening. That was what the Passover was like in Jerusalem.

It was like a religious festival. The historian Josephus said that at least a quarter of a million lambs were sacrificed in one day. It was absolutely huge.

Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. And so that was in the minds of folk here was a miracle worker. We read here that the folk in Jerusalem had heard he was going, he was coming. And the crowds poured into Jerusalem. And Jesus of Nazareth was at the center of attention. Now they were waving palm branches.

[ 6 : 26 ] And that was a real signal. The palm branch was an authority of kingship. It was a symbol of royalty here. And they were shouting, Hosanna.

Hosanna. The palm tree was a symbol of strength and vitality. You read in Psalm 92, like the palm tree flourishing.

You know, the idea there of power, of vitality. So there's all this symbolism. And the historians, the theologians tell us that there was a Jewish feast called Hanukkah.

And Hanukkah was all about royalty. So you have here Passover, which is a religious feast, meets Hanukkah, which is also religious, but it means royalty.

So you've got these two feasts colliding, as it were, elevating the priestly nature of Jesus in the Passover. And showing that the regal nature of Jesus, that he was a Hanukkah king.

[ 7 : 31 ] He was the one who would be raised from the dead. So he is seen here by Messiah and king. Do you remember the story of, remember New Labour?

Do you remember that conference when Tony Blair's star was rising? Do you remember that Labour Party conference? What was the noise in the background?

Things can only get better. There was a messiah. There was a messiah.

They were under the yoke of Roman occupation. They were people who had been trampled into the ground. They were people who had been humiliated nationally.

And here at last was one of their own, a Jewish messiah. One who would ride in and one who would stamp on the Roman oppressors.

[ 8 : 41 ] And who would bring liberty once again to the Jewish people. Here was this great cry of political freedom. Here was this great expectation that the messiah had arrived.

And so you had this great movement. And so different to the way Jesus had been. He had been quiet. And now there is this noise.

And yet there's irony going on here. The irony is they wanted a warrior. He was going to bring peace. They expected a killer.

One who would annihilate the Romans. And yet they had before them not a killer. But one who was to be killed.

And so they are crying out, Hosanna, which means Lord help me or Lord save me. So there was this massive crowd. But the key was in their earthly expectation.

[ 9 : 42 ] They expected him to meet their earthly expectations. So remember what we're saying. A large crowd and great excitement does not always equal spiritual life.

And the point here I suppose is there is a massive crowd. But they only wanted political liberation. And the question this morning for us and for this community, for maybe the 80% of the community who are not here is, what do you expect of Jesus?

What do you see Jesus to be? And we find here that he is not come to be a politician. The statistics say that 80% of folk worldwide, 80% of folk worldwide who profess the Christian faith, then fall away from that profession.

Why is that? So often it is because they feel that Jesus is not giving them what they wanted. And so you had a big crowd here.

You had excitement. You had them shouting, Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna. And yet they have got this warm feeling. But they have forgotten why he came.

[ 11 : 05 ] And so let's get to the core message here of why Jesus came. He did not come to be the star. He did not come to be the celebrity of all celebrities.

He did not come to be the arch political Messiah. He came to be the suffering servant to atone for the sins of his people.

He came not to heal the pains of the past only, but the primary reason why he came. They shall call his name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

So we're seeing the point here. A large, excitable crowd does not always equal spiritual good. The question here is, what must I do to be saved?

Do you know what's really scary? What is really scary is that an almost identical crowd in the same city a few days later were shouting, crucify him, crucify him.

[ 12 : 20 ] A near identical crowd was saying, we want Barabbas. We want someone else. How shallow love is when it turns so quickly to hate if it doesn't get its own way.

Isn't that a principle? That love turns to hate if it doesn't get its own way. If Jesus doesn't give me what I want out of him, therefore, I will move from Hosanna to crucify him.

If Jesus doesn't give me my own personal satisfaction, my own personal Jesus, as the song says, then I will evict him from my life and not only evict him with apathy, but I will evict him with some vehemence.

And so it's a very powerful thing. Do we see him for what he can give? Or do we see Jesus for who he really is?

So we've seen that, haven't we? Large, excitable crowds don't always lead to good things. The second thing we notice here is that Jesus may not be our sort of king.

[ 13 : 41 ] Jesus may not be our sort of king. Look at verse 4. Verse 4 says this, And Jesus found a young donkey and sat in it, just as it is written.

Now that's really quite effective. Jesus found a young donkey and sat in it. Imagine the scene. There's the cries of adulation.

There's the palm trees. There's the carnival atmosphere. There's everybody wanting to proclaim him king and king and king. They want to see him.

It's like the 50th anniversary of the coronation of the queen. Can you imagine the scene? Take yourself to London. Horse guards parade.

The crowds are on either side. Her majesty is about to come. They're waited with bated breath.

[ 14 : 42 ] And there all of a sudden comes Her Majesty the Queen round the corner in a 1952 Fergie tractor that's rusting away.

Folk would laugh. Her majesty does not drive a rusty old grey 30. Her majesty rides in a coach of royal stateliness.

And that's the equivalent here. Here is this king and he is riding on a donkey. A donkey even today is a comic figure.

Apologies to anyone who loves donkeys. It's what you ride along the beach. It's a comedy animal in many ways. And here we have the king of kings the lord of lords.

Remember lord of the ring Gandalf what did he ride? He his horse was called Shadowfax a lovely beautiful stallion. That's what people of significance ride.

[ 15 : 54 ] those of you who may be familiar with King William and the battle of the Boyne remember that classic image of King William crossing the Boyne and his big white horse not on a donkey.

And Jesus is saying remember I am a king but I'm not your sort of king. this was prophesied of him they should have known it says it as it is written it's straight from Zechariah chapter 9 see your king comes to you righteous and having salvation gentle and riding on a donkey on a coat on the foal of a donkey and so Jesus is a king but he may not be our sort of king everybody wants to kidnap Jesus the peace protesters want to kidnap Jesus and promote him as being some kind of you know anti-CND you know anti-nuclear icon the radical politicians want to promote him as being a kind of Che Guevara guerrilla freedom fighter the prosperity gospel people want to portray him as being some kind of huckster who can make you really really wealthy he is a king but he may not be your sort of king he is a special sort of king you need to go to Zechariah to realize what's happening here

Jesus is saying yes I am the king and righteous and having salvation and I am the king who is going to conquer the world not through military defeat but through being crucified on the cross not through killing but through being killed not through shouting the loudest but not opening his mouth as a sheep before her shears dumb so he did not open his mouth a radical peace a peace that reverses the fall of eden a peace the like of which no one has ever seen before he is a king but he may not be your sort of king again what do we want from Jesus do we want someone who's going to provide everything a kind of lottery ticket

Jesus who's going to make us rich who's going to make us wealthy who's going to make everything in the garden rosy that's what our king does and Jesus says no no in one sense I'm smaller than that I ride in a donkey but the paradox says he's bigger than that oh yes he's much bigger he is the king of kings and the lord of lords here we have the mystery of the incarnation here we have the creator of the universe riding on a inconsequential comedy donkey it is really a wonderful picture you cannot ignore the cross here because this is a picture of the cross the one who was great making himself small the one who could have ridden in a charger like William of Orange like Shadowfax like the great conquerors of the past and yet he made himself of no reputation yes he is a king but he may not be your sort of king what are you looking for today in life are you looking for everything to be put together perfectly well that's not Jesus he is not that sort of savior so we've seen here that noise and excitement are all good we've seen here that

Jesus is a king but he may not be your sort of king the third thing we notice here is that genuine Christianity is challenging to the world one of the things you notice about Jesus is he is constantly annoying people he is constantly annoying people we see here the Pharisees are annoyed aren't they they say the end of the passage so the Pharisees said to one another look you see that you're gaining nothing look the whole world has gone after him we have an expression in our circles and the expression we have is the ordinary means of grace this great expression what are the ordinary means of grace the ordinary means of grace things like prayer the bible preaching the sacraments it's the ordinary means of grace there is a sense in which very few things have been more misnamed than that they're not ordinary they're extraordinary like

[ 21 : 20 ] Elisha's servant remember Elisha's servant and they're all alone and the Arameans are coming after them to conquer them and Elisha servant says to Elisha you know kind of dad's army like we're doomed we're all doomed and Elisha says no we're not open your eyes and he opened his eyes and remember what he saw in the sky he saw chariots of fire so we are here in this ordinary plain simple Hebridean building it's not ostentatious it's very very simple and here we are ordinary people open your eyes open your eyes the skies are filled with chariots of fire there is the power of of God have we forgotten that are we living like practical atheists denying that power and we see it here the presence of Jesus challenges the world the two main groups were the

Sadducees the Sadducees were like the kind of religious liberals of the day the Sadducees cast doubt in scripture the Sadducees amended scripture the Pharisees were the opposite they were the legalists they wanted a kingdom according to their own terms but we find here that Jesus challenges the world Jesus makes a difference Jesus we see here is challenging to the world is that the Jesus that we believe in or how you know folk talk about our church and churches like us as being conservative beloved we are the least conservative force in this island we are the force of radicalism the force that raises the dead the force that brings new life the force that brings peace when there is no peace and we are ashamed sometimes that we don't live according to these principles but we are subjects of this king who makes this difference and it's challenging to the world and notice how it ends and this is very very typical of John the passage ends with the great thing about John's gospel is one of the things is

John is a master of the double intention John is a master of saying things that can mean two ways like Pilate saying what is truth there's a double mind there and so you see this exciting thing here he says here look the whole world where is it the Pharisee says look we are gaining nothing the world has gone after him the Pharisees spoke more than they knew in John's gospel the world means everybody without racial discrimination everybody who is lost and is in rebellion against God that's the idea of the world the world in its entirety the world in its racial variety the truth is that the Lord Jesus Christ's mission was not confined to narrow ethnic

Israel have you ever been to Israel it's about the size of Scotland it's not very big maybe even the size of Wales it's that small it's a tiny land but John speaks of the Saint one and the Pharisees here see immediately that Jesus has come and his message is going to go all through the world and the

global reach of Christianity is jaw dropping you see it there even in this passage it really is quite marvelous there when we see the picture of Jesus notice the previous chapter verse 52 it says 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 what's the application well we often speak of folk who say well

I'm not the type we look at a community like this and a church like this someone moves into the community and we just say well they're not the type for our church they don't buy into what we buy into in terms of the gospel there is no type who is not fitted for this good news indeed the global reach of Christianity is jaw dropping Christianity is the only world religion if I can call it a religion with a major presence in every single continent amazingly there are even more Christians in the Asia Pacific region than in North America you know the kingdom of God is on the move there are more percentage wise Christians in China than there are in Scotland he's on the move the [ 27 : 11 ] Nigeria which is half Muslim has got more Christians than that is absolutely amazing 68 million Chinese Christians it's only what is it here it's only a small 5% of the country's population and yet it's the largest religious Christian country in the world this is what they are saying he's saying look we're not careful the whole world is going to go after him they could not stop him and indeed verse 20 says that now among them among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks Greeks folk who weren't Jews it's the spread the influence of the gospel is really spreading now this is all framed the background to this passage of course is in what we call the Lazarus narrative this is all happening it all kicked off after

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead so there's all these plots going on there's the plot to kill Jesus and notice in verse 9 there's the plot to kill Lazarus and it all kicks off because they realize that this Jesus had the power to set free from death the Pharisees simply did not realize his power what about us this morning are there some among us believers and unbelievers who simply don't realize his power his irresistible love what was C.S.

Lewis called the most reluctant convert in all England he didn't want to follow Jesus friends of mine you know the old him I have decided to follow Jesus no turning back no turning back friends of mine have rewritten that I never wanted to follow Jesus he rescued me he rescued me and isn't that exciting exciting first of all for those of you who are not believers that you find yourself all of a sudden being drawn irresistibly to the king of kings and the lord of lords sometimes screaming sometimes kicking but he's drawing you and drawing you and drawing you and you say what is happening to me what is happening to you is that your heart has been opened and the love of Christ has been poured in what about those of you who are believers what about the potential of a group of God's people in this area realizing that he has the power to awaken the spiritual dead that's what makes you people and people like you the most potent change agents in this community spreading in spite of all the hassles if we are honest about ourselves our failings we have this message of peace love reconciliation and life no one can stop the unconquerable conqueror riding in a donkey but he's king of kings let's pray father we better