

John 12:12-26 “Where’s the War Horse?”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

What a great way to enter into this passage today. Y'all, I'm excited to be up here. If I haven't met you, I'm Derek and looking for the clicker. I'm one of the pastors here. Really excited about this passage today.

Okay, it's a familiar one to you, but maybe we can see some new elements to it. It really rocked my world when I got to study it, and I'd heard it many times.

But I want to start today by discussing three different scenes that will help us. First would be a military welcome.

July 26, 46 BC, a historic military welcome took place. Following his decisive victory in the Gallic Wars, Julius Caesar astride, a majestic warhorse led a triumphant procession through the streets of Rome.

[1 : 11] Okay, and the spectacle of Caesar's triumph embodied the power and the glory of Rome's military conquests. Scene number two, a celebrity arrival.

In February 1964, a historic celebrity arrival took place. The world stood still as the Beatles, the legendary British rock band, touched down on American soil for the very first time.

Amidst a frenzy of screaming fans and flashing cameras, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr stepped off the plane at JFK Airport in New York City, ushering in a new era of music and a cultural revolution.

Scene three, a homecoming parade. On January 13, 2018, a historic homecoming parade took place in, you guessed it, Will, Clemson, South Carolina.

Tigers 44-16 victory over the Alabama Crimson Tide, which won them the 2018 College Football National Championship.

[2 : 31] Led by Coach Dabo Swinney and star quarterback Trevor Lawrence, the team waved to the adoring crowds, basking in the glow of their hard-earned victory.

Well, in today's passage, another crowd is gathered for an exciting event, a welcoming event, and with all the excitement and all the elements of a military welcome, of a celebrity arrival, and of a homecoming parade, there's a crowd that's followed Jesus to Jerusalem to welcome him and to try and figure out what he's all about.

So maybe today we can join in. They're chanting, they're praising, they're singing, but they're also trying to figure out what he's all about. So let's join in.

We're going to start by reading verses 12 through 16. The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

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. And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as this is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.

[3 : 59] 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.

So the first thing we're going to look at here is the triumphal entry. So it's Passover time. And Passover, if you remember, this was a large spring festival.

It's at the heart of Jewish life. And Passover celebrates when God set his people free from slavery in Egypt. Okay? You remember there was the lamb's blood was painted on the doorposts.

Also God parted the Red Seas that they could pass over. So excitement is in the air. The crowds are gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles. It's like the Disney World fireworks show of the Passover

celebration.

The grand event. People are traveling from all over. And instead of signs in their hands, they're waving, holding, and waving palm branches.

[5 : 04] And then they're laying them down on the road as Jesus enters in. So it's a military welcome. It's a celebrity arrival. It's a homecoming parade.

But why palm branches? So palm branches had been used as one of the national symbols of Judea since the days of the Maccabees.

Okay? So in 164 BC, after Judas Maccabeus had defeated pagan invaders and had cleansed the Jewish temple, his followers entered Jerusalem, waving palm branches in celebration.

Now this is commemorated in the Jewish holiday, Hanukkah, when the Maccabees became the quote-unquote kings of Israel. Now, it's not Hanukkah here in the Scriptures, because Hanukkah is usually celebrated in midwinter.

But now Jesus' followers here in spring are waving palm branches and laying them down as he enters. Why? Because it's that same symbol, but now redefined in Jesus, of victory and triumph.

[6 : 22] The people are creating a military welcome for the conquering Messiah King, the King of Israel. And they're chanting, Hosanna! Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel. Now, why Hosanna? Because Hosanna is referring back a bit to Psalm 118.

Hosanna means, O save! O save! Psalm 118 says, Save us, we pray, O Lord. O Lord, we pray, give us success.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. Now, why are they so excited?

Why so excited? This is a fulfillment of Zechariah 9, 9. Okay? Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

[7 : 19] Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King is coming to you, righteous and having salvation as he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Okay. It's 500 years later after this was written. And the prophecy is fulfilled when Jesus, after being welcomed as the conquering Messiah King of Israel, in verses 14 and 15, he finds a young donkey and he sits on it and he rides into town while receiving the praises of all the people gathered.

And they say, Fear not, daughter of Zion. Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.

Okay? The words fear not mostly, most likely are referring to this in Isaiah 40.

Go up on a mountain, O Zion, herald of good news. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news. Lift up. Fear not. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold, your God.

Behold, the Lord God comes with might and his arm rules for him. Behold, his reward is with him and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd.

[8 : 40] He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young.

It's about 700 years after this was written. And now the one who will tend his flock like a shepherd, the one who's descended from the tribe of Judah, rides into Jerusalem on a donkey to gather his lambs into his arms.

This is a really big deal. That is why everyone is so excited. I want to talk about something really awesome for a second.

The Bible. Okay? Among all the books ever written, the Bible is absolutely unique. It's not just a book.

In fact, it's 66 books. And the Bible was written over a period of roughly 2,000 years by 40 different authors from three continents who wrote in three different languages.

[9 : 48] And one of its most remarkable qualities is the complete unity of the overall message, despite having so many different authors writing over so many centuries on so many different subjects.

Natural explanations fail to account for the Bible's unity. Statistical impossibilities exist for the Bible to be so unified.

It's because it is a supernatural book. Okay, this chart right here is by a guy named Chris Harrison.

The bar graph that runs along the bottom from left to right represents all of the chapters in the Bible.

So, starting with Genesis 1 on the left, then the books alternate in color between light and dark gray. With the first book of the Old Testament in white, and the length of each bar denotes the number of verses in that chapter.

So, the one in the middle, the longest bar, is the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119. Each of these lines up top or threads number 63,779 cross-references that the Bible makes to itself from Genesis to Revelation.

[11:02] The length of each bar, sorry, the length of each line is colored depending on how far it is from the other reference, and it's noted in a single arc. So, the color corresponds to the distance between the two chapters creating this rainbow-like effect.

One well-known speaker has said that the Bible can be thought of as the first ever hyperlinked book. It's supernatural. How could this unity exist across so many thousands of years and so many different authors, different languages, and different continents?

The answer is an author outside of those human beings. His name is God. The Bible is what we need to instruct us today.

It's amazing. It's absolutely amazing. Okay, so back to the passage. Did the disciples know all this was coming together?

Did the disciples realize all of these prophecies being fulfilled? It says they didn't. Not at that moment. Right? 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.

[12:15] So it wasn't until after Jesus was resurrected that they start to put all the things together. We get the privilege of looking back at the entire picture. What are we doing with it?

Where are we putting it? The amazing, amazing Bible we have in our hands and we can do something with it. So let's talk about the crowd now.

Who's in the crowd? 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. The reason why the crowd went to meet Him was that they heard He had done this sign.

So the Pharisees said to one another, You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him. Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

So these came to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee and asked Him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

[13:22] So besides the disciples, this crowd is made up of Jewish people who lived in Jerusalem, Greeks, which could also be referring to Gentiles, not necessarily people from Greece, but God-fearing people of non-Jewish descent who had come to town to worship at the Jewish festival.

Then there's the Pharisees who were the Jewish leaders who interpreted the scriptures. And then what I'll call the resurrection paparazzi. Okay? Do y'all know what paparazzi are?

They're the people who want to be in the it places taking all the pictures because they just need to know what's going on. Okay? There was a lot of resurrection paparazzi at this event.

In fact, it was the bulk of the people. They're people who heard about Lazarus being raised from the dead, which happened right before this. And imagine that.

They've heard about it. They've seen Lazarus walking around. They want to go see who Jesus is for themselves. And in fact, we see in the verses we just read, they actually want to go talk to him.

[14:28] So, because Lazarus' resurrection occurred, a lot of people started to believe Jesus and as verse 17 says, started to bear witness about Jesus. And as verse 18 teaches us, that was the reason why the crowd went to meet him and why it was such a large crowd.

But then in verse 19, you see the Pharisees, they're mad because they fear losing their power. So, they come up with a solution. And that was, that was a, how the verses ended right before this text. But here was their solution, right? Destroy the evidence of the miracles. Let's get rid of Jesus and let's get rid of Lazarus. Then we kill the story.

That really didn't work out too well, did it? So, then the Greeks in the crowd, they get word to one of Jesus' disciples, Philip, and they ask if they can speak with Jesus.

And Philip goes to tell Andrew and then they both go to tell Jesus and what does Jesus say? The hour is here. And Jesus answered them, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

[15:38] Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it.

And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there will my servant be also.

If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Jesus predicts his crucifixion here. Remember, so many times he says, it's not yet my time.

Here he says, the hour is here. He calls it the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. And then he uses the metaphor of a grain of wheat needing to die alone in order to bear much fruit.

So it's all starting to come together. This is the King. This is the Messiah. This is the one who will lead us into victory, who will overthrow Rome and restore our nation to power, rule, authority, and all of the prophecies are being fulfilled right now.

[16:50] Victory! is what they're thinking. Victory! Victory! It's all making sense. Except for one thing. There's a very big thing missing here. Where is the war horse?

Where is the war horse? Kings are supposed to ride war horses in the victory parade. Okay, war horses were bred and trained for combat.

They symbolized strength and power and military might and throughout history they charged into battle with courage and agility and they played significant roles in military tactics.

In contrast, donkeys embodied endurance, humility, peaceful service. They were known for their resilience. they navigated harsh terrains and they carried heavy loads but they did it with patience and they represented the virtue of humility and the willingness to serve others.

The conquering king should be riding on a war horse leading his troops to take over the Romans and setting his people free. but here he's riding on a donkey.

[18:07] The conquering king should be restoring rule and dominion for his people and giving them the best life in this world but he's telling them that he must die and that they should hate their lives in this world if they want to have life that they love in eternity.

So where's the horse king? He's seated on the donkey. His victory will be realized through humility. The victory that we need then is so much larger than a political takeover that the Jews actually were seeking.

That's just a surface battle. That's the one that we think is going on. The true king has come to fight a much larger battle. The true king has come to set his people free from a much larger slavery but the lion that they are seeking now must first become the lamb of sacrifice.

The lion is the lamb. The war horse king is the humble sacrifice and he must lose his life in this world in order to offer and protect eternal life for his followers.

Now why does all of this matter? what if strength isn't what you think it is? I say that Christ is my king that my life is bowed to him but how quick am I to take his seat?

[19:40] I want to be riding on the war horse rather than bowing to King Jesus who rode humility. I want to make my life about living like a king and asking people to bow to my will rather than following King Jesus the servant Messiah who laid down his life that God's will would be completed.

This undeserving human he laid his life down for. You know a few weeks ago I was going through an unforeseen week one of those weeks that just beats you down and I was like I caught myself praying to God and saying well this shouldn't be happening to me and I was like and I started actually acting like he owed me something because I had done this and this and this it's not the gospel how quickly am I to abandon the gospel to create my own gospel than to throw it back at God and tell him what to do you know saying save me save me Hosanna Hosanna but really trying to make myself the king of the story and holding God in debt to me by using his promises and works that I've done in his name to bow him to my will I'm too quick to do that I need a savior to forgive me of that

I need the Holy Spirit to live the way that he calls me to and that pathway always involves sacrifice always of our own wills and our own comforts and our own choices what if strength isn't what you think it is and what if it's found in following Jesus into the things that are humiliating like admitting weakness like making space for people who you don't like and who add no value to you in fact they insult you and annoy you what if it's found in following Jesus and loving others while looking for absolutely nothing in return you know some of the hands that are waving those palm branches would later be the voices yelling crucify them and perhaps even holding crucifixion hammers how quick are we to switch sides what if strength isn't what you think it is let's think about the gospel here what is the gospel how is the gospel preached to us through this so King

Jesus is riding in Jerusalem and he's saying my triumph is my weakness I'm the lion and the lamb the lamb who must die in your place and this is a battle that you cannot fight you are dying in your slavery to your sin and I'm the only one who can free you the only one who can save you you are dead in your sins and only I can give you life but in order for that to happen I must die in your place I must be sacrificed substituting my life for your life and I'm going to do it on a cross and that's your only hope of salvation that's how strong I am what if strength isn't what you think it is we all have a

much bigger problem than the need for a change of political management in our lives that the Jews were looking for and Jesus didn't come to get rid of the Romans he came to get rid of death Jesus didn't come to give us a life that we tell him to give us he shows us the life that we're really looking for only God can provide the sacrifice that ends death itself we can't earn it and that's what grace is God's riches at Christ's expense unmerited favor we didn't earn it it's given to us as a free gift that's what grace is and we're meant to not only receive it but we're meant to give it and that will never happen if we don't give our lives to Jesus as verse 25 is talking about and what happens when we do verse 26 tells us we will be where he is and the father will honor us but it's all because of our king our conquering king so the way of the world says this it's always look for ways to gratify yourself at the expense of someone else the way of Jesus is to give our earthly lives away to him and then ask him to use us in this world as instruments of his eternal mission sacrificially giving our lives to

[24 : 17] God for the sake of his purposes dying to our own that's the doorway to true life y'all and that's where the adventure that we're all seeking begins if you're coming to church and you're wondering where's God so me may let me let me say something I'll take a risk saying this okay here's the thing I've observed feel free to do what you want with it 20 something years in churches this is a math formula thinking plus thinking equals more thinking thinking's going to drive you mad we've done a lot of thinking we've got a lot of information what you're seeking is a different formula and I've discovered this in my own life maybe I should say what I'm seeking thinking plus field work living these things out equals discoveries which goes back and re-informs the thinking which leads to more field work which leads to more discoveries and you grow in

Jesus as you do that the field work is going out and living this in places that are uncomfortable perhaps you only have a friend group of Christians maybe the start is to get outside that friend group perhaps you are inundated by non-Christians in your workplace perhaps the start is to start talking about your faith there and taking a step out and having a community around you to help you do that but we have all of the knowledge in our minds that we need to go and live but the discipleship that you're seeking to become like Jesus what Jesus was saying there is it happens through suffering you don't go seek suffering but when we live for him we will suffer and we don't do it alone as Christians you're not going to find it in a really neatly packaged lesson you're going to find it in a very messy life filled with death and suffering that God uses for his glory continuing to give you joy and hope and peace in the midst of it and a community of people looking forward to a future hope as you walk in this broken world until he makes it brand new that's what will form you in the image of Jesus that's who you need we find him in his word we find him in his spirit by his people working in our lives and his spirit working in our own lives start there start there only God can provide the sacrifice that ends death itself but imagine y'all one day you're in heaven and someone in heaven comes and cross references you in a chapter of your life that impacted their life to say now we're here together that's real that actually can happen but it starts with you going out and living where you are and taking these steps of faith one theologian says the altar is a place of sacrifice the altar is at the center of the church and the church is at the center of the community why because sacrifice is at the center of community what did God the father sacrifice for the community of heaven his only son and Jesus is about to win the battle and the battlefield is a cross the grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die in order to bear much fruit what does that mean it's a metaphor for the end of death and the hope of the resurrection the honor of the father and the place where Jesus is okay that y'all that's the hope of salvation that we talk about in Christianity that we will be resurrected that we too are going to conquer death and the hope is found when we follow him or we serve him we lay our lives down as living sacrifices as Galatians 220 says I've been crucified with Christ it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me what if strength isn't what you think it is and this is the beautiful thing that we come to end on our king may have ridden in on a donkey but he's going to return on something far more powerful than a war horse he will return on the clouds with the army of angels on a mission to make things brand new and to take his servants home he's coming back and the next time we won't need palm branches because the trees themselves will be clapping their hands for you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands amen amen so what if strength isn't what you think it is here would be my challenge where and how do you hold space for God's strength in your life that's a good

question to start to ask before we can serve we've got to know who we're serving and God offers us his strength and his purpose on this earth until we're with him in honor but the cost he says is our life and maybe you've never done that today can be the day that you actually ask the king to ride into your heart offering your life to him asking him to be your king and to save you and to set you free and to give you true life by his life giving spirit my challenge to you would be make this the day of salvation give your life to Jesus he's who you're seeking and watch the great adventure that he sends you on as you give your life to him stepping out into the world that's all around you it now becomes something brand new people aren't just passing by they become opportunities for you to share the love of

Christ and it happens right where you already are maybe you already know him my challenge would be this look for the spaces in your life where he's calling you to serve others in his strength maybe that little tug that you've got that person at work you just think about maybe mention it to maybe it's that person that's cutting your hair and you're like I just want to say something when they ask this question maybe it's that neighbor across the street that drives you crazy and runs a boat factory does that sound like I'm speaking from experience runs a boat mechanical shop in the driveway across from your house that you need to love and die to yourself to love him Derek but look for those spaces in your life perhaps they're new spaces perhaps they're old and they're forgotten spaces that you need to revisit he's got a purpose for you and all those that's why you're there that's why you're there and get ready for what happens when you start taking those steps of faith because it it will blow your world to pieces in a great way and the stories bring them back and share them bear witness bear witness as they did to the resurrection of Lazarus okay our God is a strength he's a strength that you can't find anywhere else and he offered his life for you and he offers you the opportunity to serve him in his strength a life-giving spirit that will live in you forever and if he's your king then one day he's going to welcome you and it's going to be something far greater than a military welcome or a celebrity arrival or a homecoming parade he actually will give you an invitation to call what's called the marriage supper of the lamb where we sit with him at the table in eternity and joy right next to Jesus so go invite somebody and watch him work and remember that if you are in Christ that's your future hope so only if he's your king though only if he's your king

I hope that that encourages you in some way today wherever you are and I'd say if you want to talk about any of that kind of stuff just come down front afterwards because that's real easy or call us we're here because walking through life is tough and y'all are getting beat down every single week and you need encouragement and I hope that you find it here but sometimes it means reaching out and saying hey I need encouragement we're here for you we do too right this world is a rough place but God has got something bigger for you and the hope of the resurrection is real and remember the Bible is real start reading it start spending time with your savior watch what he'll do with you we love you I'm gonna end there I could talk for hours I'm not going to because you know you're hungry I love you and let's pray father oh goodness you're amazing thank you that we can stand in freedom we can love you but Lord we can admit weakness that that's what you say strength is your power is made perfect in our weakness so God

[34 : 07] I embrace weakness and I pray that we do too that we don't fear it will you use the people in this place to change this city will you show them father the love that you give them as they love one another will you give us the encouragement from the Holy Spirit will you show us this week the people that you've called us to impact by simply just loving and showing up in your name thank you Lord Jesus I pray this in the holy name of Christ amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org