

I am taking a break this morning from my sermon series on 1 Corinthians for this week and next Sunday to look at John's account of the last week of Jesus' life. This morning, I will be looking at John 12:12-33, the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem that has become known as Palm Sunday.

**John 12:12-33** - *The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.* <sup>13</sup> *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!"* <sup>14</sup> *Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written,* <sup>15</sup> *"Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."* <sup>16</sup> *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 they had done these things to him.* <sup>17</sup> *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.* <sup>18</sup> *Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.* <sup>19</sup> *So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"* <sup>20</sup> *Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast.* <sup>21</sup> *They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."* <sup>22</sup> *Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.* <sup>23</sup> *Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* <sup>24</sup> *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.* <sup>25</sup> *The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* <sup>26</sup> *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.* <sup>27</sup> *"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.* <sup>28</sup> *Father, glorify your name!"* <sup>29</sup> *Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."* <sup>30</sup> *The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.* <sup>31</sup> *Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine.* <sup>32</sup> *Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.* <sup>33</sup> *But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."* <sup>33</sup> *He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.*

Lord, help us to understand this passage and apply it to our lives and to our current situation.

This passage, in which Jesus enters Jerusalem to the cheering crowd, only to have that same crowd chant for his crucifixion 4 days later, has a lot to teach us about

**expectations** – specifically the expectations we place on God, and how our **misguided expectations can cause us to miss what God is actually doing**. Let me say that again – in this passage we are going to see how the misguided expectations that the crowd placed on Jesus caused them to miss what Jesus was actually coming to Jerusalem to accomplish. And in the process, I believe God is going to teach us about the expectations we place on Him, and how our misguided expectations often cause us to miss what God is actually doing.

Many of us don't often think about it, but the reality is that **our expectations have a big impact on our perception of a situation and our reaction to what happens**. Your expectations going into marriage – our love will never fade, my husband will be my best friend, my wife will be an amazing cook - or a new job – my boss will mentor me, my coworkers will be like a team - or new class – my teacher will be interesting and the work will be easy - or the expectations you have on your children – they will do what I tell them to do - can cause you a great deal of anger or frustration when those expectations are not met. Our expectations have a big impact on our perception of a situation and our reaction to what happens.

In the passage, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, he was welcomed by a crowd that had specific expectations on him. Let's read the first few verses again:

**John 12:12-15** - *The next day the great crowd that had come **for the Feast** heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> 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!" <sup>14</sup> Jesus found a **young donkey** and sat upon it, as it is written, <sup>15</sup> "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."*

What were their expectations? They are shouting out "**Hosanna**," which is an exclamation anticipating that Jesus had come to save them. They call him the **King of Israel**, displaying a clear expectation that Jesus is more than just a good teacher or miracle worker. John references an Old Testament prophecy that Jesus is fulfilling here:

**Zechariah 9:9** - *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a **donkey**, on a colt, the foal of a **donkey**.*

So what were their expectations? To the crowd gathered, this scene meant that the long-awaited Messiah King had arrived, who would deliver them from their

Roman oppressors and restore the kingdom of Israel to glory once again. They believed that the arrival of Jesus meant that Rome would be overthrown, and Israel would be a free nation again. This Jesus, who had raised people from the dead, who had taught wonderful things and performed miracles - He was the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior, the King, and he had come to rescue his people from Roman oppression. They expected victory, and deliverance in this world, and a restoration of nationalistic prominence. In fact, even after Jesus died and rose again, remember what his disciples asked of him in *Acts 1:6* - *So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* Clearly there were expectations on what Jesus was going to accomplish.

But what happened instead? Jesus, instead of overthrowing the Romans, entered the temple and overthrew tables, driving out those who had turned the temple of God into a marketplace. He spoke harshly against the religious leaders, who got upset and had him arrested. The religious leaders handed him over to the Romans, put him on trial, and eventually the same crowd that had welcomed him with shouts of Hosanna as the long-awaited Messiah King called for Him to be crucified. Because of the crowd's misguided expectations, they were blind to the fact that Jesus was a different kind of Messiah King, come to save them but not as they expected, and they missed out on what he was really doing.

**Where did their misguided expectations come from?** It seems like it came from a combination of bad theology and Bible-reading, and from a temporal, or this-worldly, focus. They misunderstood the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, and they were so focused on deliverance from the problems of this world that they did not see their bigger need.

Because of the crowd's misguided expectations of who Jesus was and what he had come to do, they missed what God was doing. Worse still, they rejected Jesus, who really was the Messiah King who had come to save them, and had him killed.

So what were the clues, hiding in plain sight, that explained what Jesus was really up to?

### 1) Jesus enters on a donkey

<sup>13</sup> *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!"*

<sup>14</sup> *Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, <sup>15</sup> "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."*

<sup>16</sup> *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 they had done these things to him.*

What would this clue mean? Yes, he is the king, but not the kind of king you would expect. How many heroic war movies have you seen where the hero rides in on a donkey? If he had come to conquer, he would have come in on a horse. It would seem that whatever victory Jesus has come to bring will not be by military might.

## 2) Jesus enters among lambs

<sup>12</sup> *The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.*

The crowd has gathered in Jerusalem for a specific reason: the Passover feast. Passover was the annual commemoration of the exodus, God's rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt. Way back in the book of Exodus, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and although God sent Moses and Aaron to the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to tell him to let his people go, Pharaoh refused. God sent 9 plagues, but still Pharaoh refused. For the tenth plague, God sent the angel of death to kill the firstborn son from every household. The only way to be saved was to take a lamb, kill it, and spread the blood on the doorposts. If this was done, then the angel of death would pass over the house – this is where the Passover feast comes from. And so, in the morning, every house would either have a dead son or a dead lamb. And the sons who were alive could look at that lamb and know that this lamb died for me.

So in John 12, Jesus enters Jerusalem four days before Passover. **Passover took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month (Nice-Ann) Nisan.** In Exodus 12, God gives instructions regarding Passover to Moses and the people of Egypt, telling them that on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of (Nice-Ann) Nisan, they are to take a lamb without defect, and care for it until the 14<sup>th</sup> day, when the lamb would be killed and its blood put on the doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over their house. Every year the Israelites celebrated Passover, and what that meant is that on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of **Nice-Ann** Nisan, thousands of lambs would be driven up to Jerusalem throughout the day. The historian Josephus tells us that one year a census was taken of the number of lambs slain for Passover and the figure was **256,500**. That means that Jesus is entering Jerusalem surrounded by lambs who are about to be slain for the Passover. Symbolism, anyone?

<sup>31</sup> *Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die*

Jesus enters among the lambs, telling them that he has come to die to save them from the angel of death, the prince of this world, Satan, to bring about a greater exodus, by which God will rescue not the Israelites from Roman oppression but the whole world from slavery to sin and death. By Jesus' blood, the angel of death will pass over all who look to the Lamb and believe.

So those are the first two clues – Jesus on a donkey, and Jesus surrounded by lambs. Here is the third:

### 3) Those who saw him raise Lazarus have told the crowd about him

<sup>17</sup> *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. <sup>18</sup> Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.*

The crowd believed on the basis of his miracles that Jesus was the Messiah, for He had raised Lazarus from the dead. And yes, they were right – He was indeed the Messiah – but they had missed the greater point of the miracle of Lazarus being raised: not just that one man had been raised, but that death is not the end, for Jesus is the resurrection and the life for all who believe. At the tomb of Lazarus, he had told Martha:

**John 11:25-26** - *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*

Jesus has come not to overthrow Rome with military might, but to die, and by his death to destroy the power of death itself.

<sup>23</sup> *Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*

The misguided expectations the crowd placed on Jesus caused them to miss what God was really doing. They thought he had come to overthrow Rome and restore

Israel to national prominence. But they missed what was really going on, which was so much greater: Jesus, coming as a King but in weakness, riding on a donkey. Jesus, entering on Passover along with hundreds of thousands of lambs, about to be slaughtered in order to bring about a greater Exodus. And Jesus, the resurrection and the life, about to overthrow the devil, destroy sin and death, and bring eternal life to all who put their trust in Him.

And then, in verse 25, he continues to explain why he has come by shifting the focus to his followers:

<sup>25</sup> *The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* <sup>26</sup> *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.* <sup>27</sup> *"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.* <sup>28</sup> **Father, glorify your name!"** *Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."*

The crowd was correct that Jesus was the Messiah King who had come to save them. But their bad Bible-reading and temporal focus had caused them to seriously misunderstand what it meant that Jesus was the Messiah King. He had not come on a conquering horse to defeat the Romans by military might. He had come on a donkey, surrounded by lambs, to suffer and die and set the world free from slavery to sin and death. **And now, Jesus tells us that those who follow Him need to adjust their expectations as well.** Jesus' disciples are not going to conquer through worldly means of power and military might. Instead, Jesus says that the man who loves his life in this world will lose it. Jesus tells the crowd that if you are seeking your best life now, you will end up in Hell. When Jesus says "the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life," he does not mean "hate yourself," but do not love this world so much that you put your hope in things that will not last and can not save you and in the process miss out on truly knowing God and having eternal life, life to the fullest.

And then Jesus continues: *"Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be also."* Following Jesus is going to mean loving and serving others and being willing to love sacrificially, even to the point of death if necessary. Death is not the end. Eternal life is. And then Jesus exclaims, "Father, glorify your name." In the end, Jesus wants His Father to be honored, so that all might know and worship Him, because that is where life to the fullest is found.

This story shows us how misguided expectations of who Jesus is, of who God is, can cause us to miss what God is really up to, and worse yet, to even reject the God who has come to save us. And those same misguided expectations can also cause us to misunderstand what kind of life God has called us to.

So let's take this truth and consider it in your life and in our current context. I've argued that the misguided expectations we have of God tend to come from bad theology or Bible reading and from seeing God with a temporal, this-worldly focus. As a result, we often end up seeing what we want to see, and hearing what we want to hear, but in the end up we miss the real God who is hiding in plain sight. We miss out on what God is really up to because of our expectations of what we think He should be doing.

We are currently in a worldwide pandemic and recession unlike anything most have us have experienced in our lifetime. We have always known in our heads that tomorrow is promised to no one, but these days that statement carries a little more truth and a little more gravity. And we have also known that there is no guarantee of a comfortable financial life, but once again that reality seems a bit more real for many of us these days. So what is God up to? And what does He ask of us? And what misguided expectations do we need to expose?

First of all, I think we need to be careful not to assume or proclaim that God's will for our lives is that all our diseases would be healed and that we would live lives of financial and relational success, untouched by the troubles of the world. This is one area where bad theology and bad Bible-reading, along with a focus that is too much on this world, can cause us to have misguided expectations. The reality is that while we pray and walk by faith, we may still die, or lose our jobs, or face other hardships. But just because God does not meet our misguided expectations does not mean that God is not up to something far greater. Let me show how two important and beloved verses can cause us to place some misguided expectations on God.

*Jeremiah 29:11 - For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

When you hear that verse, what do you hear? What do you think God means when he says "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"? I would argue that most people believe that it means that God is going to bring good things into your life and will protect you from harm. That God has a

wonderful plan for your life that does include viruses or job loss or relational struggle. In fact, this is how one well-known Christian author interprets this verse:

*I prosper in everything I put my hand to. I have prosperity in all areas of my life—spiritually, financially, mentally, and socially. — Jeremiah 29:11*

But in its context, this is what Jeremiah 29:11 means: the people of Israel have been conquered by the Babylonians and taken off into slavery. Their temple has been burned down, the city walls destroyed, and most of the people are now in captivity. Among the Israelites in exile are prophets who are encouraging them that God will soon overthrow the Babylonians and restore them to Israel. In response, Jeremiah sends a letter to the leaders of Israel, in captivity, giving them a word from God.

**Jeremiah 29:5-14** - *"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup> Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." <sup>8</sup> Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. <sup>9</sup> They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD. <sup>10</sup> This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

So what does Jeremiah 29:11 really mean? What would you expect “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” to mean if you were in exile? Would you not expect it to mean, “I’m going to get you out of there and restore you to your home soon”? But that’s what the false prophets were telling them. And God tells the Israelites that he did not send them; they are prophesying lies. And what are the plans to prosper them that he has, plans for hope and a future? They will be in Babylon, in captivity, for 70 years, but they will

be safe there. And so he tells them to settle down, build houses, plant gardens, get married, and seek the peace and prosperity of Babylon instead of seeking to overthrow it and get out. 70 years in captivity! In other words, most if not all of the individuals will die off in exile. But overall, for the nation of Israel, God has good plans to bring them back from exile and restore them to their land.

Do you see what I mean about expectations, and how when we hear what we want to hear, we miss out on what God is actually doing? Yes, God has plans to prosper and not to harm us, plans for hope and a future. But apparently to God, spending 70 years in exile and dying before you ever make it out of captivity, and letting it be enough that your children or grandchildren will one day make it back to Israel, is a plan to prosper and not to harm, a plan for hope and a future.

What about another popular verse, **Romans 8:28** - *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

What did you think it means that God works all things for our good? Does it mean that every disease would be healed and every marriage would be saved and every child would follow the Lord and you would never lose a job or get cancer?

Let's read it in its immediate context and see what it actually says:

**Romans 8:28-32** - *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* <sup>29</sup> *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* <sup>30</sup> *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.* <sup>31</sup> *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?* <sup>32</sup> *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

When you read Romans 8:28 in its context, what is the good God is working for? The good, according to verse 29, is to **conform us to the likeness or image of His Son**. God promises here that no matter what comes our way – good times or bad times, victory or suffering, disease or cure, marriage, singleness or divorce, obedient or disobedient children, job or unemployment – He will work through all of it to make us like Jesus. You know, the man who was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, and murdered. Evidently God's definition of "good" does not line up with our definition of good.

But, he goes on to promise in verse 30 that those he has called will not only be freed from their sin – justified – but will one day be perfected – glorified. And he promises in verses 31-32 that if God is for us, who can really be against us? Paul encourages us that if God gave us His Son, He will provide us with everything we need. **So the good that God is working for here is not a promise that everything will go the way you hope it will go, that every disease will be cured and every marriage restored and every promotion granted, but instead that if you would trust in Him, that He will use everything that happens in your life to make you more like Jesus.** He will mold you into a person of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It's a promise that your sins have been forgiven, that one day you will be perfected, without sin or brokenness. And it is a promise that He will give you everything you need in this life, and that nothing can ever separate you from His love.

What is my point? Just like the crowd on the first Palm Sunday, we often come to God with misguided expectations of who God is and what He should do, and these misguided expectations can cause us to miss what God is actually up to. And just like that crowd, our misguided expectations are often the result of bad theology or Bible-reading and having too much of a temporal, this-worldly, focus. We can be so focused on the comforts and desires of this world that we miss the bigger picture of what God has done for us and is still doing for us. And worse, those misguided expectations can cause us to reject God when he does not meet those expectations, just like the crowd that turned on Jesus.

For a moment, let me speak to those of you who are not sure you even believe in God. Perhaps you have intellectual doubts, or you have experienced things that have caused you to question the goodness or even the existence of God. I want to challenge you this morning that I believe you are missing the God who has been hiding in plain sight the whole time because of the misguided expectations you have placed on God. Whether those expectations came from bad theology and Bible-reading, or from a temporal focus, I want you to know that God has already done something much greater for you than you realize. By His death on the cross, He has given you eternal life, forgiveness of sins, the love and self-worth and meaning that your heart has been searching for.

***Hebrews 2:14-15*** *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil--<sup>15</sup> and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

In a time where tomorrow is promised to no one, this is what we need to know more than anything else. We need someone who has defeated death, turned it from an executioner into a gardener, given us a way to eternal life. I encourage you this morning to let go of your misguided expectations and to ask God to show you who He really is.

For the rest of you, let go of your misguided expectations. Watch out for bad theology and bad Bible-reading, and be aware of your temporal, this-worldly focus. Jesus is calling you to follow Him, and that will mean walking in the footsteps of the one who sacrificed His life to save the world. He has not called you to a life of temporal happiness and comfort, where every disease is healed and every promotion is yours, and every relationship is restored. He has called you to something greater, to join Him in restoring people to a right relationship with Him, reconciling the world to Him.

*Philippians 3:7-11 - But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Yes, not only knowing God in the spiritual high moments, but even sharing in his sufferings and becoming like him in his death. This is no pie in the sky religion. This is real answers and real hope for real hard times. This is a Messiah King who came and by His death conquered the power of the devil, sin, and death, and by his resurrection has paved a way for all who trust in Him to have eternal life. This is a Savior who, even if he does not rescue you from disease or increase your financial savings, or restore every relationship, has promised to give you everything you need, to never separate you from His love, to give you a peace that passes understanding and a joy that can not be touched by circumstances. This is a God that calls you to follow Him in loving courageously sacrificially, so that God might be glorified and many people might be saved from eternal death.

Lay down your misguided expectations and come afresh to the Messiah King, Jesus.