

# Session 6

**April 5, 2020 (Palm Sunday)**

**Unit 1: Jesus Is . . .**

## **The Messiah and Redeemer**

Jesus accomplishes God's plan for himself as Messiah and Redeemer.

### **The Word**

John 12:12-26

### **Session Outcome**

To acknowledge and embrace Jesus as the Messiah and Redeemer.

### **Discover:**

Illustrated Bible Life summarizes the four gospel accounts of the Palm Sunday events, and gives verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

### **Last Week:**

We examined the truth and example for us to follow contained in Jesus' prayer.

### **This Week:**

We will examine the ways Jesus fulfills the role of both Messiah and Redeemer.

### **Listen:**

This week's Illustrated Bible Life podcast on FoundryLeader.com compares and contrasts the four gospel accounts of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

### **Discover:**

The account of Jesus riding on a donkey into Jerusalem on the day we call "Palm Sunday" appears in all four gospels. One notices immediately that John's account is easily the shortest. In fact, we can say that John's narration of this incident differs significantly from the other three.

Read this week's Illustrated Bible Life article, "The Triumphal Entry," for more about these differences and what they reveal about that unusual day.

## **Engage the Word**

The celebration of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is one of the great traditions of the church. The week following Palm Sunday, suffering and death become the predominant themes both in the life of Jesus and in the worship of the church. The triumphal entry offers an opportunity to celebrate Jesus' messiahship and lordship before we turn to the cross.

### **Jesus Comes to Jerusalem John 12:12-15**

According to John's account it was the news that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem that stimulated their celebration. For almost two centuries waving palm branches had symbolized the triumph of Israel. The crowd's waving of palm branches recognized Jesus as their national hero. The song they sang proclaimed the same message. Their song was a portion of Psalm 118. "Hosanna" is a Hebrew word meaning "the Lord saves," and the phrase "the one who comes" had become code language for the Messiah. In Jewish hope the Messiah would be the king who would restore Israel to glory known in the days of King David. The triumphal entry celebrates Jesus' messiahship and the king who redeems and restores.

But the acclamation of Jesus as king can easily turn into self-serving nationalism. The Gospels guard against such a misunderstanding of Jesus by the account of His riding a donkey into the city. Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 make the reference to the donkey clear by quoting from Zechariah 9:9. Yes, Jesus is coming as a triumphant king, but He comes "humble and riding on a donkey." The kingship of Jesus will not be declared with the symbols of earthly power like war horses and military weapons. Rather, Jesus demonstrated His kingship with the humble beast of burden that symbolized carrying rather than conquering. We do not know if there was a donkey at the stable where Jesus was born, but such humble service has always characterized the incarnation of Jesus.

### **Jesus' Coming has Varied Responses John 12:16-19**

It is easy, but wrong, to oversimplify the way people respond to Jesus. People have always responded to Jesus in a variety of ways. Misunderstanding is not opposition, though it falls short of what both God and we want when people encounter Christ. John is consistent in pointing out that misunderstanding was a common first response of Jesus' disciples and that understanding did not come until later revelation clarified the meaning of Jesus' actions and words.

It is easy, but wrong, to attribute rejection of Jesus uniformly to the Jews. All the first disciples were Jews. All the 3,000 and 5,000 believers celebrated in Acts 2:41 and 4:4 were Jews. When

we carefully read John we see many Jews responding favorably to Jesus. The crowd that had been in Bethany when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead “continued to testify” and their testimony led to the triumphal reception of Jesus as He entered Jerusalem.

It is true that some Jews, mostly religious leaders, rejected Jesus. That rejection varied from ignoring Jesus by turning away to verbal abuse to the crucifixion. There are many ways that people reject Jesus today. Often people (both in and out of the church) simply ignore the teachings and expectations of Jesus. Occasionally, there are those who speak or write hateful words in response to Jesus. However, rejection of Jesus has never stopped the fulfillment of His mission.

## **Jesus’ Long Anticipated Hour Has Come**

### **John 12:20-26**

Throughout John’s gospel Jesus has said that His hour had not yet come. The words of John 12:23, “The hour has come for the son of Man to be glorified,” strike a note of anticipation. Something important is about to change. Jesus spoke these pivotal words upon hearing that some Greeks had come to the Passover festival and wanted to see Him. It is possible that these “Greeks” were Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora, but it is more likely that they were Gentiles. The pivotal hour for Jesus comes with the possibility of Gentiles hearing the gospel. A door open to win new people to Christ is always a pivotal hour for the church.

Jesus then connects His “hour” with His coming death. The years of ministry were over; the week of suffering and death had come. He compared His death to a grain of wheat falling into the earth, dying, and then producing much fruit. The cross would be the pivot point from Jesus’ life that would be the single grain by which His death—through the Spirit and the church—can touch the whole world.

However, the pivotal hour for Jesus is not pivotal for Him alone; it also impacts His followers. John 12:25-26 speak to Christ’s followers then, and now. Trying to hold onto our own lives to possess for ourselves means life will slip through our fingers. Only by giving our lives can we finally experience eternal life. The true pivot point in the life of a follower of Christ is the turning from self-serving to serving others.

The Jesus who rose triumphant from the grave is the same Jesus who commands us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). The celebration of Palm Sunday and the triumphal entry into the city that will crucify Jesus helps us find the right balance. It’s the same balance of suffering and victory that Jesus experienced.

## **Did You Know?**

Psalm 118 was often sung by pilgrims making their way up the mountain to Jerusalem. It was used as part of the final song of Passover celebration. It provides the song of praise to Jesus as He triumphantly entered Jerusalem.

## **Think About It**

The 3,000 and 5,000 believers mentioned in Acts may have included people who ignored Jesus during His ministry and even some who called for His crucifixion. As long as a person lives it is never too late to turn to Christ.

## **Reflect**

This Palm Sunday, consider ways to celebrate Jesus as Messiah and Redeemer.

Roger Hahn

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Insight**

Jesus issues a very clear call to those who would be His disciples: they must follow Him. In today's story, Jesus is on His way to the cross. Jesus did not conquer by force, but through love and grace. We as believers must follow His example, showing what the kingdom of God looks like in our world.

### **Connect to My Experience**

“There's always a man on a horse.” I've heard a well-known American preacher share this thought numerous times. After visiting almost any large city across the world, this preacher notes that these cities always boast of their local or national hero with a bronze statue in the city center. The bronze statue is always a man on a horse, because a man on a horse signifies power, strength, and victory.

In what ways are local or national heroes remembered or commemorated where you live? For what reasons do we celebrate cultural heroes?

Can you think of any persons who are memorialized for reasons that run contrary to those mentioned above (power, strength, victory)? What was it about that person's life or character that made him or her noteworthy?

### **Transition:**

In today's session, we are going to explore the unique ways Jesus' life redefined what it meant to be Messiah and Redeemer.

### **Connect to the Word**

Invite a group member to read John 12:12-15, then discuss the following,

At first glance it appears that the crowd that has gathered for Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem really "gets" Him. They recognize Him as king, as one who comes in the name of the Lord, and one deserving of praise and recognition. Jesus was deserving of praise for these reasons, but the people did not fully understand how Jesus fulfilled these roles.

What expectations did the people have for Jesus as the Messiah? (restore Israel to power; return Israel to former glory; bring judgment on Israel's enemies)

What are some preconceived ideas people have of what Jesus should do for them and against their enemies? Are these ideas based on biblical truth?

Jesus' triumphal entry was made upon the back of a donkey. (See Zechariah 9:9.)

In this text, how did Jesus challenge the prevailing thought of what the Messiah would be like? (In the ancient world, leaders rode horses if they rode to war, but donkeys if they came in peace. Jesus' kingdom would not be a political kingdom.)

In our culture, are we still prone to misunderstand the nature of Jesus' kingship? If so, in what ways?

Do you think most people would rather see Jesus up on a war-horse defeating our enemies instead of calling us to take a posture of service? Why or why not?

Invite a group member to read John 12:16-19, then discuss the following,

The disciples are often an easy target for us because they never quite seem to get it. After all, Jesus was right there with them and spent considerable time with them. Yet their understanding always seems to be lacking.

Verse 16 says, "At first his disciples did not understand all this." What could have prevented the disciples from understanding what Jesus was doing?

What prevents us from fully understanding what Jesus may be doing among us or in us?

How might humility be essential to this discussion? (We need to recognize that we don't fully understand everything; we need to admit our view is limited; we need to confess that we have certain biases that affect our perceptions)

Not only do we give the disciples a hard time, we see the religious leaders in Jesus' day in a bad light, often seeing them as one dimensional, "bad" characters.

What lead these religious leaders to reject Jesus?

What would have to change for them to be able to follow Jesus?

Invite a group member to read John 12:20-26, then discuss the following,

Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” For Jesus, the “hour” for His glorification pointed to His impending death by crucifixion.

In verse 24, Jesus is referring to His death. Why did Jesus use this type of illustration? (A grain of wheat that is buried dies, producing more wheat. Jesus would die, and through His death would produce fruit. Jesus being lifted up on the cross would draw people to himself [John 12:32].)

What is Jesus’ message, in verses 25-26, to those who would choose to follow Him? (Those who follow Jesus must love God above all else and totally surrender their lives to His lordship.

Following Him means going His way.)

In what ways does God honor those who serve Him (v. 26)? (As we follow and serve, God gives us His loving presence.)

## **Connect to My Life and the World**

One of the gifts this text provides for us is a clear depiction of what it meant for Jesus to be Messiah and Redeemer. Jesus did not enter Jerusalem on a warhorse with a full arsenal of weapons; rather, Jesus approached the festival on a donkey—a symbol of peace. Soon Jesus would be glorified through death and resurrection,, not through military victory.

What does this tell us about Jesus? What does this tell us about the kingdom of God?

Jesus is God incarnate. To know what God is like we simply look at Jesus. There isn’t some other side of God not displayed in the life of Jesus. With this in mind, what does this story tell us about the character of God?

The people waved palm branches and shouted “Hosanna,” which means “God save us!” They also exclaimed, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” and “Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Silently consider,

If you were in the crowd that day, what would you have shouted? What is the cry of your heart today?

In what ways can we acknowledge, celebrate, and serve Jesus as our Messiah and Redeemer?

As you close in prayer, ask God to help you and your local church to embody the way of Jesus in your community.