

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

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?

Psalms 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