

Title: King? or KING!!!!
Date: April 10, 2022
Subject: Palm Sunday reveals the ways people relate to Jesus.
Scripture: John 12:12 - 19

How long have you waited for a store to open on Black Friday? What time did you get there so that you could be up close and get one of those fantastic bargains? In 2013, shoppers in Akron, Ohio lined up nine-plus days before Thanksgiving at a Best Buy. The record was bested in 2014 by two California women who camped out 22 days before Black Friday. In 2015 Kevin Sutton started camping outside an Orlando Best Buy on October 25, 33 days ahead of Black Friday. He wanted to snag a doorbuster or two, but more importantly, he was on a mission to raise awareness about homelessness. He collected toys and other items that were given to children at Christmas. Where did he get the time? He's a radio host in Orlando and had done a similar event the previous year when he collected three tons of food in fifteen days. He helped in other ways during his record stretch as a week into his endeavor he rendered first-aid to a gunshot victim in the parking lot, using skills he says he picked up from watching *The Walking Dead*. (Source: dealnews.com/features/A-Man-Is-Waiting-in-Line-33-Days-Before-Black-Friday-but-NOT-for-the-Reason-You-Think/1493779.html).

Another story. A little boy was standing at the end of an escalator. A sales lady asked, "Son are you lost?" "No ma'am, I'm waiting for my chewing gum to come back."

Black Friday shoppers and the little boy had a certain amount of excitement as they waited. The same was true of the people in Jerusalem who were waiting for Jesus to arrive. They had gotten to the city days earlier and we're buzzing in anticipation. They asked one another, "What do you think, isn't he coming to the feast at all?" (John 11:56).

It was if there was a massive game of hide and seek. People were looking for Jesus and couldn't find him. He hadn't yet showed up anywhere in the city. They felt Jesus wouldn't miss this opportunity to cause more trouble for the religious leaders. They also anticipated his appearance and put a bounty on his head hoping someone would turn him in so they could arrest him.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived in a village two miles outside of the big city. The news spread like a prairie wildfire. The view from a drone would have revealed people scurrying like ants to leave Jerusalem and go to the village to see Jesus. There was another attraction - Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead.

Earlier we heard from one of the historical records of Jesus entering Jerusalem. That one was written by Luke, a doctor who researched the life of Christ and was very precise in his language. Let's look at another account. This one comes from the person who was perhaps the closest to Jesus - John.

Read John 12:12 - 19.

The time had finally come for Jesus to make his grand entrance. The feast mentioned is Passover. It was an extremely important date for the Jewish people. The annual festival commemorated God's dramatic deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. At the time of Christ, it had been celebrated for almost 1500 years. Passover continues to be celebrated and this year it begins this Friday, Good Friday, at sundown.

The crowd was excited to part of the welcoming committee for Jesus. The Scripture from Luke adds the detail of the people along the road Jesus traveled placing their cloaks on the road in front of Jesus. Spreading of cloaks in such a manner was a symbol of submission to a superior. It was performed for a conquering hero returning from a monumental victory. It was a way to treat a person like a god. Some of the people were probably only caught up in the moment. Others understood the significance and held that Jesus was not just a god but The God. Jesus was entering as a victor, a victor who was going to die...and three days later rise from the dead.

John is the only one of the four historical narratives to mention palm branches which are now associated with "Palm Sunday." The only other time palm branches are mentioned in the New Testament is the victory celebration in heaven when "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10).

Two centuries before Christ palm branches were used to celebrate a military victory and became a symbol of Jewish nationalism. The earliest Christian palm processions have been traced back to 300 to 350 years after Christ.

Those factoids are interesting, but the main thing is we need clarity about whom Jesus claimed to be. He didn't say he was only a good man, a superb teacher with deep thoughts, an extraordinary person with unique faculties, a great spirit, a prophet from God maybe with a touch of the supernatural, someone who is nice to hang with. Jesus repeatedly and boldly claimed he was the Son of God come to earth, that he is co-equal to God the Father, every part God that God is. It's summarized by the two word statement - "I AM."

In addition, he proclaimed himself to be God through the miracles he performed - healing the crippled, the blind, the lepers and raising the dead back to life. The Bible only gives us a puny amount of the miracles Jesus performed declaring he did many other miracles but the ones recorded are sufficient for people to understand he is God (John 20:30, 31; 21:25).

There are three options when it comes to following Jesus.

I. Outright antagonism and opposition

This group is indicated in verse 19. The Pharisees were one of the leading religious groups during the time of Jesus. They were mainly interested in upholding their view of getting to God was through keeping of laws and their interpretation of the laws. They didn't want anything to do with Jesus or his message of how people could become God's children.

They had kept a close watch on Jesus and could see the winds of change were rapidly turning against them. They felt everybody was following Jesus. The reception during the Triumphal Entry given to Jesus was added proof. They were wrong in their estimate but were correct in feeling Jesus was a force with which to be reckoned.

Jesus' enemies had previously made up their minds they wanted to get rid of Jesus. The procession into Jerusalem added fuel to the fire of their desire to do something sooner than later. The plot against Jesus would involve false accusations, lies, bribed witnesses, and a traitor. It didn't make any difference what weapons they used as long as they could get rid of this nuisance. They were entirely opposed to Jesus and all he stood for. In a few days they would lead the call to crucify Jesus. The king of peace was not welcome in Jerusalem, the city of peace.

There are people today who are staunchly opposed to Jesus. They don't want anything to do with him. They consider him to be a menace. They push ideas and belief systems contrary to who Jesus claimed to be and is. We see this in the attempt to push Christianity out of the public square.

The second option when it comes to following Jesus is . . .

II. Allegiance based upon things that are temporary.

This seems to be the attitude of the bulk of the crowd. They enthusiastically greeted Jesus as he made his entrance into Jerusalem. They shouted proclamations of praise and worship. They'd heard of the miracles Jesus had performed. Some may have witnessed them. This is part of what drew them to the scene of Christ entering Jerusalem (Luke 19:37).

This is as good a place as any to bring in the donkey. Not a real donkey but the donkey mentioned that Jesus rode on. It would have been really cool if I would have had a donkey and rode in it so I could deliver the message that way. There are a couple reasons I didn't. One, I don't know how to ride a donkey and the only horse I've ever ridden was around in circles at the County Fair. Second, I don't know where I could find a donkey. I'd toyed with the idea of giving the message from the perspective of the donkey but. . .

Corrie ten Boom, hero of WWII for hiding Jews from the Nazis and enduring the horrors of a concentration camp. She went to be a dynamic and well known witness for Christ. She was once asked if it were difficult for her to remain humble. Her reply was simple. "When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments onto the road, and singing praises, do you think that for one moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that was for him?" She continued, "If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in his glory, I give him all the praise and all the honor."

"Jesus found a donkey." That's how it's reported in John. The other accounts tell us how Jesus found the donkey. He told his disciples to go to a specific place in town where they'd find a donkey with her colt. They were to untie the donkey and if somebody were to ask them what they were doing, they were to explain

that the Lord needs it and would send it back shortly. The disciples found the donkeys and the owners asked what they were doing. Jesus may have contacted them earlier and asked about using the donkey.

Some people might think it's strange Jesus rode in on a donkey. Wouldn't it have been more of a show stopper to straddle a white stallion that by its very presence commanded attention? That would have been more in keeping with the common feelings that the one promised by God would come as a political king and ruler.

Jesus did come as a king... but as one who rode a donkey. In the ancient world donkeys were used by kings to convey peace. Though the crowd may have been anticipating a different kind of king it seems they recognized Jesus' claim and proclaimed: "Blessed is the king of Israel!" They sang the songs that had been sung for centuries, year after year after year, in anticipation of God one day delivering his people.

The enthusiasm of the crowd was bolstered by the desire to see the one who had raised from the dead a man named Lazarus. They heard the stories - Lazarus had been dead for four days and placed in a tomb and that his sister tried to prevent Jesus from opening the tomb because of the foul odor after that length of time. People couldn't help but chatter away about such a spectacle as a former dead man walking out of the grave. Maybe they wondered if Jesus had more miracles up his sleeve.

Unfortunately, it seems many of the people didn't see what they hoped to see. They wanted a Messiah more in keeping with their agenda, one who would initiate a rebellion, even if it included a blood bath to free them from domination by foreign rulers. Within a few brief days they joined with religious leaders and called for the crucifixion of Jesus.

In their excitement, they had mouthed words of praise when things were going the way they wanted and the way they expected Jesus to be. Out of those same mouths came words of hatred. In the end, they wanted nothing to do with Jesus and were the same as those who had outright antagonism.

The attitude of willingness to follow Jesus as long as things are good and happening the way a person wants sometimes carries over to those who have truly placed their trust in Jesus as Savior. The disciples at first didn't understand what was happening when Jesus entered into Jerusalem. They didn't grasp the significance of it. They enjoyed being with Jesus during those heady days when the crowds cheered and adored him. But later, when things got tough, when Jesus was arrested, they ran away like children scared by loud a thunder clap.

Tom Barnard writes, "The crowd was clueless. They never got it right. They shouted praises. He wept. They looked for a warrior-king riding a white stallion. They got a carpenter riding a donkey. They wanted hype. They got a healer. They wanted a prophet. They got One who fulfilled prophecy. They wanted a scepter. They got a Savior. They got nothing they asked for but everything they needed. Only they never got it. They were clueless. Jesus was the only One there who really knew what was happening on that first Palm Sunday. It's so easy to become like those people in Jerusalem. We think we know what's going on, but we really don't have a clue...we don't recognize Him for who He is. We think He will be impressed with our boats and our businesses and our stuff. He is not. He wants our hearts. That's what Palm Sunday is all about." (preaching.com/sermon-illustrations/illustration-palm-sunday/).

The disciples wavered and wobbled in their understanding and faith that Jesus was who he said he was. The good news is they returned to Jesus after he had risen from the dead. They point to the third option of how people approach Christ.

III. Commitment

The disciples placed their trust in Jesus and determined to live in a way that pleases God.

Earlier I said the crowd turned against Jesus and cried out for his murder. It's probably too harsh as probably not all of them made that switch. There were no doubt people who greeted Jesus who genuinely believed what they were saying and remained true to their convictions.

There were people at the triumphal entry who declared from the depths of their heart, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" and not just in a crowd fueled frenzy. They saw Jesus riding on a donkey and believed him to be King, not a political one but one who sought to rule and reign in their hearts. They were familiar with Old Testament Scriptures which foretold the coming of the Christ, the Messiah. One of them is encapsulated in the passage.

Read John 12:15. No doubt this energized the heart of Jesus as He knew what people were thinking and could tell if people truly meant what they were saying or if they were just parroting lines.

For us. Steven J. Cole states it well (bible.org/seriespage/lesson-65-following-jesus-right-reason-john-1212-19): "Don't follow Jesus only because of the temporal benefits you think He might provide for you. The application is that your faith will be shaken and perhaps even destroyed if you follow Jesus because of what you think He can give you in terms of financial prosperity, good health, and other temporal benefits. But what if you contract a serious illness? What if you suffer a severe financial loss? What if your marriage isn't the storybook, ideal romance that you thought He would give you? What if your children don't follow the Lord or if they turn against you? We shouldn't follow Jesus because we think He will give us all the goodies we want in this life."

"So, why do you follow Jesus? Someone may say, "I am following Jesus because I want Him to give me a godly marriage partner." That's a legitimate need that He can supply, but that shouldn't be your main reason to follow Jesus. Or, you may follow Jesus because you want Him to heal your marriage. Again, He can do that, but that's not the main reason you should follow Him. Some may say, "I follow Jesus because I have many deep emotional hurts from my past, and I want Him to heal me." Again, He can do that, but it's not the main reason to follow Him.

"The right reason to follow Jesus is because of who He is: God's Anointed One, the rightful King over every heart and life. He died for your sins, arose from the grave, and is coming back in power and glory to reign over all. So whether you struggle with tribulation, distress, persecution, poverty, health issues, or death itself, you can overwhelmingly conquer if your faith is in Him as your Lord and Savior (Rom. 8:35-37)! Follow Jesus because of who He is, not for the temporal benefits that He might give you... Your faith does not rest on happy circumstances, but on who Jesus is and on what He has promised His children throughout eternity."