

John on Jesus - Living for the Applause of One

May 5, 2013

As a church, we are studying our way through the Gospel of John. This morning, we pick up our study in John 12:12. Take your Bible and turn to John 12. Take out your outline. I plan to give you plenty of notes. If you are using a pew Bible, you will find John 12:12 on page 899.

If you were with us last week, you learned we crossed a significant point in the Gospel of John. In the first 11 chapters of this Gospel, the apostle John looked at Jesus' ministry using a wide angle lens. He looked at seven key miracles from Jesus' ministry, a ministry that lasted more than two but less than three years. John called those seven miracles "signs." They are miracles, that when taken together, lead us to the unmistakable conclusion that Jesus is God in the flesh. The last, and greatest, of those miracles was raising Lazarus, and his four-day-old putrefying corpse from the grave. It wasn't just a resuscitation, it was the complete reassembly of a body that looked, and smelled, like road kill.

In this new section of John's Gospel that we began last week, John moved from using a wide-angle lens to focus on the two plus years of Jesus' ministry to using a zoom lens that focused on the last week of Jesus' life. Last week, we began the 12th chapter by studying the grand party thrown by Mary and Martha, the M&M sisters, for Jesus. They lived in a bedroom community of Jerusalem called Bethany, just two miles outside the city. It was six days before Jesus' crucifixion at his third, and final, Passover.

This week, Mary and Martha's party is over. Jesus was coming into Jerusalem for Passover. Remember that Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, told us that in A.D. 64 and 65 there were 2.7 million people in Jerusalem for Passover, that is the population of Chicago. We don't know how many were in Jerusalem for this particular Passover, but there is no reason for us to believe the numbers were significantly smaller. Keep that number in mind as we read about the size of these crowds in the text. Before we look at John 12:12, let's look at John's final remarks about the size of the crowd that came to see Jesus at Mary and Martha's party for Jesus.

When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. John 12:9–11 (ESV)

These verses take place when Jesus was still in Bethany. What we have is people flocking to Jesus. They were not coming just to see Jesus, but Lazarus, who was still holding his death certificate. While the number of Jews coming to Jesus is not given, it was a large number.

We need to understand social science to capture the point of this passage. In social science, there is something called a tipping point. People are like sheep. They follow. We see this all the time when it comes to fashion with high school students. When enough people think a particular clothing line is fashionable, everyone else follows. Jesus was popular. Many people were turning to him. So many people were turning to Jesus that the Jewish leaders worried they were reaching the tipping point.

To solve the problem, they made plans to not just put Jesus to death but to put Lazarus to death as well because Lazarus was exhibit A of Jesus' power.

If you think about this, there is some good humor. What good would it do to kill Lazarus? You kill him and Jesus will bring him back from the dead... again? The plan of the Jewish leaders makes me laugh. It was a plan born of desperation.

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. John 12:12 (ESV)

I want us to notice it was now the next day. It was now Monday. In Passover week, Monday was the day the lambs were chosen for Passover sacrifice. The chosen lamb was kept by the family for Passover week until it was sacrificed by the family at the end of the week. 1 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that Jesus is our Passover lamb. He was sacrificed for our sins. I find it interesting that Jesus entered Jerusalem on a Monday, when he was chosen by the people to be their king, their representative. At the same time that Jesus was chosen by the Jews, the Passover lambs were being selected. At the end of the week, when the Passover lamb is slaughtered, is the same time Jesus died on the cross. The Passover lamb was slaughtered so the angel of death would pass over the Jewish home. Jesus died so that death will not touch us.

I love this symbolism that shows us the entire Passover was just pointing us to Jesus. Remember what John the Baptist said at the beginning of this Gospel about Jesus.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29 (ESV)

Jesus is our Passover lamb.

How big was this crowd? Most of the reenactments we see in low budget Christian films show a small crowd. I think this was a huge crowd. Jerusalem had roughly 2.7 million people for Passover. Jesus was so popular that the religious leaders of Jerusalem were afraid so many people would turn to Jesus they would reach the tipping point of society where everybody turned to Jesus en-mass. This leads me to believe thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of people were turning to Jesus. Everybody couldn't wait to see him.

As Jesus came into Jerusalem, this huge crowd gave Jesus a ticker tape parade.

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!" John 12:13 (ESV)

To understand this, we need a little historical background. In the inter-testamental period, something happened to the Jewish nation that would define its national identity for years to come. Some of you will remember this from our studies in the book of Daniel. In the second century, the temple was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanies, leader of the Syrian Empire. He sacrificed pigs in the holy of holies and turned the courts of the temple into a house of prostitution. Judas Maccabees, the son of a priest from the city of Modin, became the hero. Acting like a Jewish version of Robin Hood, he led a guerrilla war against Antiochus. The Jews eventually won their temple back. Later, Judas' brother, Simon Maccabaeus, drove the Syrians from Jerusalem entirely. When Simon returned home, they welcomed him to Jerusalem with a parade. A parade that

included a carpet of palm branches on the road. From that time forward, palm branches became the symbol in Jewish culture for independence, nationalism and patriotism, much like the American Eagle is in our society today. That symbolism was so deeply rooted in Jewish culture that 30 years after this, when the Jews revolted against Roman rule, as part of their rebellion, the Jews refused to use Roman money. They minted their own currency. On their money, they put palm branches to express their independence from Roman rule. Incidentally, rebellion against Rome didn't work. In 70 A.D., the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and killed about 100,000 Jews in the process.



The point is that when the Jews welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on a carpet of palm branches, they were welcoming him just like Simon Maccabaeus, their war hero. They were saying, “Just as Simon Maccabaeus threw out the Syrians, Jesus, we want you to throw out the Romans.”

You see this not just in the palm branch parade, but listen to the words they say to Jesus. First, they cried, “Hosanna!” What does that mean? It means, “Save Now!” If you were a Jewish boy that couldn't swim and you fell in the deep end of the pool, you would look at the lifeguard and say, “Hosanna! Save me now!” That is what they were shouting. This phrase comes from Psalm 118. Psalm 113-118 are part of the Hallel. Those Psalms were sung every morning during the Feast of Tabernacles, so the crowds knew them well. The second phrase they said is also found in Psalm 118, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” They were just repeating the words of this Psalm. They

were asking Jesus to save them and telling him it is biblical. They could quote Bible verses to support it. The last phrase they shouted is not found in Psalm 118, “even the king of Israel!” They were proclaiming Jesus to be king by popular demand. Do you see why the Jewish leaders were worried about the tipping point? This happened once before in John 6 after Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children. That time, Jesus ran away from the crowds. This time, Jesus was walking into the crowds! Jesus was walking into the city to receive the mass adulation of a huge crowd. If you were a leader of the Jews, you should be nervous!

Now John pushed pause and added a little aside. It is one of those things that made no sense to him at the time but made perfect sense later.

And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” 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. John 12:14–16 (ESV)

In this culture, when a king rode into town to the adulation of the people, he rode a war horse. Simon Maccabaeus rode a war horse into town after his military victory. Jesus inverted this. We know from the other Gospel accounts that Jesus sent his disciples to get a colt, the foal of a donkey, that had never been ridden. He rode that into town.

In this part of the world, a donkey is not an impressive animal. Middle Eastern donkeys are much smaller than the ones we have in the United States. Middle Eastern donkeys are so small that those who ride them need to lift their knees to keep their feet from scraping the ground. Jesus rode a colt. This

animal was so young, it had not yet been ridden. This thing was puny! People expected Jesus to drive a monster truck into town that crushes cars, instead he rode a tricycle. Jesus is a king, but he is not the kind of a king they expected.

Picture this in your mind. Thousands were throwing palm branches to the ground. They were calling to Jesus to save them from the Romans. They were proclaiming him their king by popular demand. They couldn't wait to see the Jesus of might and power. They couldn't wait to see the Jesus that fed the 5,000. They couldn't wait to see the Jesus that gave sight to a blind man. They couldn't wait to see the Jesus of might and power that brought a dead rotting body back from the grave. What came around the corner? Jesus, on the most unimpressive animal he could find.

One of John's points was that at the time this happened, it made no sense to the disciples why Jesus rode such an unimpressive animal. They didn't understand why Jesus was not grabbing this opportunity for power. It was only later, after the Holy Spirit came, that the Holy Spirit brought things together in their minds so they could understand. It was later when the light bulb went off and they realized this was to fulfill what Zechariah 9:9 said about Jesus, "Your king would come to you gentle and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Isn't this the way God works? In the book of Daniel, we learned nothing in our lives is left to chance. God is large and in charge. Many times it isn't until five or 10 years down the road when we look back and understand why God ordained things the way he did. Sometimes we will never understand why God ordained things this side of heaven. We know when we get to heaven we will

look at God's plan and we will not show him how he could have improved upon it. Many times things that don't make sense now will make sense to us then.

How many guys had a girl break up with them and they prayed to God she would reconsider? What happens to that guy five years down the road? The same guy is married to a different girl and he is praising God for not answering his prayer because he now knows God had somebody much better for him. Hindsight is 20/20. This what happened with the disciples. They looked back on Jesus riding a colt, and, at the time, they thought Jesus was nuts. Then they got it. Jesus was fulfilling Zechariah 9:9. Everything was inverted. Jesus was not coming as a warrior king.

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." John 12:17–19 (ESV)

The Jewish leaders were getting really nervous. Here we find that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead there was a large crowd. They were gossiping. Then, everybody wanted to see Jesus. I picture the Pharisees looking at the crowds from the top of a building. They saw the crowds were not just one street deep but many streets deep. The roads were packed like Times Square in New York City on New Year's Eve. There were tens of thousands of people. The Pharisees freaked out as they proclaimed, "Look, the world has gone after him." They thought the tipping point was crossed.

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. And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” John 12:20–23 (ESV)

Interesting section here. We find that at Passover some Greeks were in town. They wanted a private audience with Jesus. Why would John include this? If you look in the index of your Bible, you find four different stories about Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Why are there four? If you read them straight through, it feels like you are watching a television rerun.

The four different Gospel writers wrote four equally true but slightly different, stories about Jesus. Why did some writers include history about Jesus that other writers chose to ignore? It has to do with their audiences. The different Gospels were written for different audiences. Matthew wrote for the Jews, which is why his Gospel focuses on how Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, and this is why it quotes so much Old Testament. Matthew tried to show his Jewish readers that Jesus is the Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures that they were looking for. Mark wrote for the Romans. It is the shortest of the Gospels. Romans were busy people. “Just give me the cliff notes, I don’t have time to read the book,” was their motto. That is exactly why Mark wrote a Gospel that was short and sweet. Luke was written to the Gentiles. In addition, Luke was a doctor. He specialized in details and historical precision. Luke is a Gospel for those who love the details. John wrote last. We will remember about 28 messages ago, when we started this series, we learned John wrote his Gospel for a Jewish/Greek audience. I think that is why John added this detail of Greeks coming to Jesus, a detail the other Gospel writers don’t include.

John wanted his Greek readers to know that Greeks were there. They were at this Passover with Jesus. They played a crucial role. It was the moment the Greeks requested a private audience with Jesus that the countdown on Jesus' great work on the cross began. Earlier in the Gospel, many times Jesus has said, "My hour has *not yet come*." When the Greeks came to Jesus, he said, "The hour has come."

Tens of thousands were welcoming Jesus to town on a carpet of palm branches. They were asking Jesus to save them from the Romans. They were proclaiming him king. No longer Jews but now Greeks were seeking Jesus. Jesus was at the pinnacle of his popularity. What did Jesus do? He didn't grab for power the way we might expect. He began talking about paradoxes to a God-honoring life.

Paradoxes of a God-honoring life

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. John 12:24 (ESV)

Those in an agriculture society understand this. The only way for grain to multiply is to put it in the ground and let it rot. It is only when it dies that it can spring to life and produce a harvest. Jesus was predicting his death and saying that it is only after he died that there would be a harvest. Think of this from the disciples' perspectives. --- "Why die now? Jesus, you have tens of thousands of people following you. They want you to be their King. The Jewish leaders are shaking in their boots. Live a long time. Raise a few more dead people; that always produces a crowd. This is the time to make yourself into something." Jesus said, "No, that is not the way it is going to work. The way it works is I die."

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. John 12:25 (ESV)

I am sure this freaked them out. Stop loving your life so much. If you think it is all about maximizing your life right now, you will die and lose it. The key to eternal life is hating your life. Don't misunderstand this. Jesus doesn't mean we should hate ourselves. This is a Jewish way of speaking to communicate a point. What he was saying is a God-honoring life is not lived focusing on how we can be successful now. It is almost like you need to hate your life now because you are focusing on the day you stand before God the Father later. You exist to bring glory to God. If you live thinking your life is all about you, making yourself into a big shot right now, you will die eternally. Rather, you've got to think your life is not about making yourself a big shot in this world. If life isn't about us making ourselves into a big shot, then what is it about?

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. John 12:26 (ESV)

Jesus said, "If anyone wants to serve me, they must follow me." Life is about serving and following Jesus. It isn't about serving myself. Serving Jesus is wanting God the Father's applause on our lives more than the crowd's applause for your life.

You see, people will have a plan for your life and God will have a plan for your life. The crowd's plan is for you to be popular now. God the Father's plan is for us to serve him now, and that will involve sacrifice. Suffering for Christ now means we will be honored by God the Father later.

Jesus turned this all on its head. The applause we want is not from the crowds. The applause we want is the that which comes from God the Father. Most of the time, we need to drop the applause of the crowd to get the applause of our heavenly Father. Just like Jesus, we need to choose whose applause we want. Be king now or suffer now, according to God the Father's plan, and be honored by God the Father later. To get that applause, it means life will be hard. Just as Jesus denied himself, we will need to deny ourselves.

An audience of one

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' But for this purpose I have come to this hour. John 12:27 (ESV)

The English language masks what is happening. The word for troubled could be translated horrified. Jesus, in his mind's eye, could see how the week will end, with him upon the cross, one of the most brutal forms of death ever conceived. It was a horrifying thought for Jesus, who knew no sin, to become a sponge and have all of our sins put upon him. It was a horrifying thought when, for the first time, the clear unbroken communion between God the Father and God the Son would be severed as the Father turned his back on the Son when he became sin for us. It was a horrific thought for Jesus to bear the full fury of God's wrath against sin. Jesus could see the horror of the future but in that moment, he was the hero for the crowd. Jesus had to choose: Be a hero for the crowd now or go through a death that was more horrifying than anything in history, but be honored by God the Father later for doing it. He needed to choose whose applause he would live for, just like we do.

“Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.” John 12:28–30 (ESV)

Jesus, choose to follow God the Father’s plan. God the Father, affirmed Jesus’ choice.

I find it interesting to see the way people reacted. Even though God the Father just spoke in an audible voice, and it was obviously loud and discernible, most people didn’t hear it. Some thought it was thunder. Others thought it was the voice of an angel.

Aren’t we just like that? God speaks to us through his Word, when we hear it preached or when we read it, and how do we respond? Must be gas. I must be tired because I feel convicted. We ignore the words of God when we hear them.

“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. John 12:31–33 (ESV)

How was this all going to happen? How was God the Father going to be glorified through Jesus’ life? How would the Son accomplish his work? How would Satan be defeated? How would sin be conquered? How would death be overcome? Jesus would be crucified.

Yes, Jesus would be their king. Yes, he was coming to overthrow the ruler who had them in bondage. Yes, he was coming to not just be king of the Jews but the king of the Greeks. He was coming to do it all through the cross.

When he was lifted up on the cross, he drew all people to himself. The cross, which was horrifying for Christ to go through, was the way he conquered.

Everything went through the cross. The cross was where sin was overcome.

The cross was where Satan was defeated. The cross was where Jesus glorified his Father. When Christ and his cross were lifted up, God drew all men to him.

I had a comment on my preaching a few months back. A guy said to me, “This church is different. The church I grew up in always talked about God. At Faith Church, you keep talking about Jesus.” That is right. We talk about Jesus. That is my entire church growth plan. Keep lifting up Jesus and God the Father will draw people to him.

Sometimes people will ask why we keep putting our finger in the text and talking about Jesus instead of giving you six ways to a happy family or three tips of better time management. The focus of all history is not us. It is about Jesus. When we lift Jesus high, and what he did on the cross, God draws people to him. Good advice is not bad, but it needs to be put in perspective. The world is in short supply when it comes to talking about Jesus. The world is full of good advice on life, just pick up the newspaper.

We have Facebook and Twitter. We spend too much time talking about ourselves anyway. It is probably a good idea to spend more time talking about Jesus. We talk about ourselves too much, and our lives are boring and trivial. It is probably a good idea to talk about Jesus more because his life is not boring and trivial. To honor his Father and to save us he chose the most horrifying death conceived by man. He, who knew no sin, became a sponge that soaked up all of our sins. He endured the full wrath of God the Father against our sins. The unbroken communion between the Father and the Son was broken to save

us. That is something that is worth posting on Facebook! That is worth tweeting about!

In this text, Jesus had to choose. Whose applause would he live for? The thunderous applause of the crowd of 10,000 that wanted to make him King, or the applause of his heavenly Father, that would only come through the horror of the cross. Jesus chose to live for the applause of one.

When it comes to this text, one of the clear applications is to ask ourselves, “Whose applause are we living for?” As Jesus said in verse 26, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me.” Following Jesus means turning away from the applause of the crowd and living for the applause of one, God the Father. All that matters at the end of the day is what he thinks of you.

Friends, the plan that God the Father has for our lives, is not going to be easy. It will involve turning from sin, when it is so easy to give in. It involves turning from the applause of friends and family and looking just to our heavenly father. It will involve sacrifice.

My friends, just like Jesus, let’s live for the applause of one.



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