

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

John 12:12-26

Pastor Vern Simms grew up in a family of nine children in a rough Boston housing project called Columbia Point. “Although I'd been a hardworking student, paying for college seemed impossible. But my mother's favorite expression was ‘*Pray, and the Lord will make a way somehow.*’ I viewed that as good advice for other people. But when I decided to go to college and seminary because I believed the Lord had a call on my life, I had no other choice!

“I packed for college and even went to orientation, but still didn't have any money. I'd have to pack up my belongings and make the hundred-mile trip back home. But an heir to a corporate fortune heard about my plight and paid for my college and seminary education. After I graduated, I went to my benefactor's office to thank him for all he had done for me and asked him what I could do to pay him back.

“Imagine my saying to a multimillionaire, ‘*What can I do to repay you?*’ The man responded, ‘*Help somebody.*’ I've spent the last 20 years in the ministry with that goal in mind. I've pastored in the drug-ridden, crime-infested inner city as well as well-manicured suburbs. And I've learned that the blessing of God is like a boomerang. As I've tried to help somebody, the Lord has blessed me.”¹

From Pastor Simms' comments we can rightly infer that he has found happiness, which he has called blessing, in his life. And he found it by serving others.

We will clearly see what true servant hood is like as we move through this chapter, and how important it is to our being blessed by God. Look ahead a little bit to John 12:26: “*If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.*” That is Jesus' promise and it is repeated several times in the Scripture. Let us begin now in verse 12 of John 12.

John 12:12-19 NAS:

¹² *On the next day the **large crowd** who had come to the feast, when they*

¹ “Citation: Vernal E. Simms, senior pastor of Morris Brown A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia, *From One Brother to Another*, edited by William J. Key and Robert Johnson-Smith II (Judson, 1996),” in – *Perfect Illustrations: For Every Topic and Occasion*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "SERVICE".

heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

¹³

took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel."

¹⁴

Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written,

¹⁵

"Fear not, **daughter of Zion**; behold, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

¹⁶

These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was **glorified**, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.

¹⁷

So the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify about Him.

¹⁸

For this reason also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign.

¹⁹

So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him."

What a powerful one-two punch Jesus put together to draw attention to what would soon be His death on the cross. Here was Jesus, the miracle worker, the One who had the power to raise the dead. And here walking with Him was the living proof of the miracle, Lazarus, the one who had been brought back to life. That Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowds. His entry fulfilled prophecy and gave evidence to the elders and priests that "*the world has gone after Him.*" It appeared that what the Jewish leaders had feared all along was actually now happening, the people were accepting Jesus' message.

But the hero's welcome for Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem that day was to be short-lived. You see He was just a curiosity for many because He had performed so many miracles, and the most recent, involving the raising of Lazarus, was the granddaddy of all miracles. The crowds wanted to get a look at the main celebrities in this ongoing saga. It had all the elements of a real action adventure, and you know how that attracts people today who like to watch TV programs filled with violence and evil, and that is just how the stage was set for Jesus' final days. A man who claimed to be sent directly by God was performing miracles all over the place. And the man who had been raised from the dead was with Him. The Jewish leaders had resolved that they would kill Jesus. Jesus and His followers were headed for Jerusalem for one of the biggest celebrations of the year, and the Jewish leaders were waiting for them.

You might wonder what Jesus had planned for the next few days. If He could work miracles, perhaps He would perform an even bigger miracle than raising the dead. Maybe He would declare Himself to be king and that would certainly be interesting if He had to take on the Roman army as well as the Jewish leaders. How could He possibly do that? The odds were overwhelmingly against Him. If you had the average mentality of those attending this feast, you probably would not want to miss a second of the action. So the

people gathered to welcome this potential source of entertainment during the festival. Only a handful of people knew, however, what was actually about to happen.

The waving of *palm branches* was a sign of honor for a victorious person. The chant of *Hosanna* comes from Psalm 118:25–26. In fact let us look at verses 21–26 in order to get a feel for the praise theme of this Psalm that is clearly prophesying Jesus coming into Jerusalem on this very day.

Psalm 118:21-26 ESV?

²¹
*I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.*

²²
*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.*

²³
*This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*

²⁴
*This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

²⁵
*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*

²⁶
*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.*

Now if you were listening carefully, you may be thinking that you did not hear the word “*Hosanna*” in the Psalm. However, the phrase, “*Save us,*” in verse 25 is the Hebrew word which is translated into Greek as “*Hosanna.*” So the Greek version of Psalm 118 and the Greek in the New Testament both read, “*Hosanna.*” That gets lost in the English versions.

The title *King of Israel* in John 12:16 shows clearly the Messianic significance of the chant. In verses 14 and 15 John refers to Zechariah 9:9 where it was predicted (prophesied) that Jesus would enter into Jerusalem on a young donkey rather than on a war horse.²

This was the only mass demonstration of public support that Jesus allowed while He was ministering on earth. And His purpose for doing so was to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 which reads:

⁹
*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, **your king** is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, **Humble, and mounted on a donkey**, Even on a colt, the*

² Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary*: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 12:12.

foal of a donkey (NAS).

Seeing these large crowds lining the road to receive Jesus only added to the mounting hatred for Him on the part of the Jewish religious leaders, and this would eventually lead to His crucifixion. Because of their paranoia it must have appeared to them that Jesus was planning to start a revolution and establish Himself as king over the whole nation.

Jesus riding into the city on a **young donkey** was a sign of peace. He did not ride a war horse or carry a sword or wear a crown. Nor did He ride in a wheeled vehicle, as did many kings. His manner of entry fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy which contrasted Jesus' coming (Zechariah 9:9) with the coming of Alexander the Great (Zechariah 9:1-8).³

The inhabitants of Jerusalem were identified as the **Daughter of Zion** (Zechariah 2:10; Isaiah 1:8) and the **Daughter of Jerusalem** who, representing the whole nation of Israel, were encouraged to welcome the coming King not with fear but with glad rejoicing. The announcement that "*your King is coming to you*" refers to the long-awaited King and Messiah.⁴ The phrase "*with salvation*" means that He will come as a Deliverer, as One to give salvation to others (Isaiah 62:11). His peaceful entrance, "*mounted on a donkey,*" was fulfilled when He presented Himself to Israel in the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-5). In the ancient Near East, if a king came in peace, he would ride on a donkey instead of on a war stallion. Christ rode on a colt, the foal ("son") of a donkey. Like some other Old Testament prophecies this one (Zechariah 9:9-10) joins two events, separated by at least two thousand years, within the short space of two verses—It describes both the future first and second comings of Christ, the first in verse 9 and the second in verse 10.⁵ In His First Coming Jesus rode on a donkey and presented Himself to the nation of Israel, but they would not accept Him as their King. So His universal rule will be established when He comes again, which means that when He returns again He will rule over the entire universe forever.⁶

Zechariah 9:10 NAS:

¹⁰
*I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem;
And the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations;
And His dominion will be from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends
of the earth.*

In John chapter 12, Jesus is clearly and openly announcing to the people that He indeed is the **King of Israel** as Nathaniel declared Him to be in John 1:49, the promised Messiah. Many of the people would have taken this to mean that Jesus would seize power, throw out the Romans, and restore Israel to her glory days as a world power. What they did not realize was that Jesus was "*forcing their hand*" so that the **Sanhedrin**, the governing

³ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:317

⁴ Isa. 9:5-7; Micah 5:2-4; Luke 1:32-33.

⁵ Isa. 9:6-7; 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-21.

⁶ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1562.

body of the Jews, would have to take action sometime during the feast. The Lamb of God had to give His life when the Passover lambs were being slain, which would represent Jesus' slaying as the same sacrifice for sin, but this time the sacrifice would be for all time rather than being temporary and having to be repeated again and again.⁷

While the people were celebrating Jesus' arrival and rejoicing in what might be their new found freedom from Rome, Jesus was not having quite as good a time. Luke gives us the following account in Luke 19:37-44 NLT:

³⁷ *When they reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen.*

³⁸ *"Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!"*

³⁹ *But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!"*

⁴⁰ *He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!"*

⁴¹ *But as they came closer to Jerusalem and Jesus saw the city ahead, he began to weep.*

⁴² *"How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes.*

⁴³ *Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side.*

⁴⁴ *They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not accept your opportunity for salvation."*

The nation had blown its opportunity to accept the Messiah when He came. They were ignorant of their own Scriptures.

Once again John also mentions a case of a lack of understanding on the part of His followers. It was only after Jesus' resurrection, here referred to as the glorification of Jesus, that any of the disciples understood.⁸ The twelve disciples, though close to Jesus and participants in these events, did not understand them. They lacked the perspective of the Cross and the Resurrection (when He was glorified). They were unaware that Zechariah's prophecy had been written about Jesus. Their faith was weak and they needed the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-14).⁹

⁷ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 12:12.

⁸ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 12:12.

⁹ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:317.

As a result of their rejection of Jesus the Jews would suffer the events described in verses 43 and 44 when Rome destroyed the city in A.D. 70. If these folks had true faith in Jesus as the Messiah, however, they would not have turned against Him so quickly, demanding that Pilate crucify Him. There were some of course that did believe, but it would seem that the majority of the people hoped Jesus could be the One who would become king and free them from Roman oppression. But when they saw that was not going to happen they soon lost interest in supporting Him.

Jesus Predicts His Death

John 12:20-26 NAS:

²⁰ Now there were some **Greeks** among those who were going up to **worship** at the feast;

²¹ these then came to **Philip**, who was from **Bethsaida of Galilee**, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

²² Philip came and told Andrew; **Andrew** and Philip came and told Jesus.

²³ And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

²⁴ "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.

²⁵ "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

²⁶ "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; **if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.**

The **Greeks** who expressed a desire to see Jesus were representative of **the world** at large, beyond the control of the small group of legalistic Jewish leaders who made up the Sanhedrin. Now before proceeding, if you are not familiar with Bible wording, it will probably be helpful for you to be able to equate the use of the term "Greek" with "Gentile." Both terms simply refer generally to anyone who is not a Jew. You may recall that Gentiles came to see Jesus when He was a young child (Matthew 2), and now Gentiles came to see Him just before His death.

It is significant that these Greeks appear at this time because they are representative of those Gentiles who will also be allowed to share in the gift of salvation by the sacrifice Christ is about to make. They must have believed in the God of Israel because they were on their way to worship Him at the Temple, and at this time Gentiles were restricted to worship in the court of the Gentiles. Even though they believed in the God of the Jews, they had not converted to Judaism. Soon, in Christ, the middle wall of partition would be broken down, and the Jews and Greeks would be looked upon as equals in the eyes of God.

Philip is a Greek name and so is **Andrew**. It seems only natural that they would be the contacts between the Greeks and Jesus. People just have a natural instinct to seek out their own when in a strange place.

When His disciples came to tell Jesus that some Gentiles were asking to see Him, He may not have spoken to the Greeks directly, but He announced that the time had come, which meant the time had come when everyone who believed in what He was about to do would have the opportunity for salvation and eternal life in Heaven.

The word, *glorified*, in John's Gospel begins with Christ's death and includes His resurrection. Indeed much of the rest of the gospel will emphasize the glory of God. Jesus relates the growing process of a seed to what is about to take place at His death. Jesus spoke symbolically of his approaching death. Just as a grain of wheat must be planted and die to produce more wheat, Jesus must now die to give spiritual and eternal life to all who believe in Him. In the same manner His followers must die to their own lives to produce the fruit of God's Kingdom. If they do so, they will be richly rewarded at a time determined by God.¹⁰ A person who seeks only the pleasures of the world, which are perishable, will one day perish along with those things. A person who seeks only to please God is preparing himself/herself for the riches of God's eternal reward, which could also begin right here in this world and continue on into eternity. Serving Christ involves following Him, even to death. This will be rewarded by sharing a glorious eternity with Him, and will include special rewards from God.

This is the opportunity that is about to be opened to **all** mankind, both Jew and Greek (Gentile), upon Jesus' death and resurrection¹¹

If you are anything like me, verse 24 of John 12 might confuse you. You might be able to understand it better if you were a botanist or a farmer or a backyard gardener. The only thing I know about growing things is that if I want something planted that will eventually grow, I have someone else do it. But once you understand the planting and growing process you begin to see the connection more clearly. I do not intend to stretch the meaning of this verse beyond its original intent but I do believe Jesus might be saying that there can be no glory without suffering, no meaningful life without death, and no victory without surrender.

In and of itself, a seed is useless; but when it is planted, it "*dies*" and becomes fruitful. When a seed "*dies*" it fulfills its purpose. If a seed could talk, it would no doubt complain about being put into the cold, dark earth. But the only way it can achieve its goal is by being planted.¹²

¹⁰ Willmington, H. L.: *Willmington's Bible Handbook*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997, S. 617.

¹¹ Pfeiffer, Charles F.; Harrison, Everett Falconer: *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, S. Jn 12:20.

¹² Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 12:20.

God's children are like seeds. They are small and insignificant, but they have life in them, God's life in the Holy Spirit living inside every believer. However, that life can never be fulfilled unless we yield ourselves to God and permit Him to "*plant us.*" This is not talking about literal, physical death. It is an illustration to show us that we must die to self so that we may live unto God. We must die to self so that we may live unto God (Romans 6; Galatians 2:20). The only way to have a fruitful life is to follow Jesus Christ in death, burial, and resurrection.¹³ We do this in spirit in this world. When we tell Jesus that we know we are sinners and that we are on our way to judgment and eternal Hell if someone does not save us; and we tell Him we believe that He died for us by His sacrificial death, then we cease to exist as the person we were. We in effect die to our sinful nature, our old sinful nature is buried, and we rise to newness of life in Jesus Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit who now lives within us as our counselor and protector. We are no longer prisoners to the sinful nature of our old selves.

We have therefore died with Christ, were buried with Christ and have risen to a new nature with Christ. That is the one and only path to eternal life.

Now keep in mind that we will sin even after we are saved because we are still in our physical bodies. But after salvation we now have God's power through the Holy Spirit to resist sin. It will be a lifelong battle to resist the temptations of the devil because he becomes furious when someone chooses to follow Jesus, and he may come after you with all kinds of temptations because he wants you back. But you can resist doing what he wants you to do if you only call upon God in your time of need. For those who are Christ followers, when they die physically they will go immediately to Heaven and be totally free from sin forever.

In these words in John 12, Jesus challenges us today to surrender our lives to Him. The story is related by Warren Wiersbe about "some Christians who visited a remote mission station to see how the ministry was going. As they watched the dedicated missionary team at work, they were impressed with their ministry, but admitted that they missed 'civilization.'"¹⁴

"You certainly have buried yourself out here!" one of the visitors exclaimed. *"We haven't buried ourselves,"* the missionary replied. *"We were planted."*¹⁵

"Dying to self" (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20) is not a popular concept in our current culture, which is so full of me-ism. We are a narcissistic culture and if you do not believe it just notice some of the commercials we are exposed to hundreds of times a day: products to beautify you in one way or another, products to lose weight, have shiny hair, pamper yourself, eat the best foods, drive a classy car, use this cream to take those lines out of your face, buy this equipment to have "washboard abs." We still hear the line from Frank Sinatra's song, *"I did it my way."*

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

It is all so contrary to the call of Christ who calls us to “lose [your] life for My sake and the Gospel’s” (Mark 8:35). Jim Elliot, one of the missionaries who was martyred by the Auca Indians in South America while attempting to evangelize them, said before leaving for the mission field: “He is no fool who loses what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Now, when Christ gave us this call, He did not necessarily mean dying, even though that has been the case for some. Rather, He means giving up our selfishness, our self-indulgences, giving up having your own way in order to pursue His way.

The irony is that people who are constantly doing things to suit themselves and to find their own pleasure are in reality the most miserable. The people who obey Christ, who are obedient to His Word, and follow His plan for their lives are the ones who have true joy and peace. That is what is meant in John 12:25: “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.”

If we are looking for comfortable lives, then we will protect our plans and desires, save our lives, and never be planted. But if we yield our lives and let God plant us, we will never be alone but will have the joy of being fruitful to the glory of God. “If anyone [Jew or Greek] serves Me, he must follow Me” (John 12:26).¹⁶

Many Gentiles were attracted to Judaism’s ideas because of its higher moral emphasis compared with paganism. It may be assumed that their quest to see Jesus was prompted by a desire to learn from Him rather than mere curiosity. Maybe John sees them as examples of the ‘world’ going after Jesus.¹⁷

Are you attracted to Jesus and His ideas? Are you willing to trust Him to guide your life step by step? Ask Him to show you where He wants you to be and what He wants you to be doing. Let Jesus plant you where you can blossom into all He wants you to be.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary*: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 12:20.