

John 12:12-28a
(Zechariah 9:9-12; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17)
“The Hour Has Come”

Introduction

We celebrate today with the church around the world the fact that, on one particular day, Jesus rode into Jerusalem to do the one thing needed to set us free from sin and death. He came to give himself in our place – a perfect life in place of our brokenness – and to conquer death from the inside out. But those who greeted him did not recognize what he had come to do. They greeted him according to their own perspectives, their own estimations of what they needed from God on that particular day.

I suspect that each one of us can find himself or herself in the crowds that surrounded Jesus that first Palm Sunday. Like those in the crowd around Jesus, we are looking and longing for a leader who is different from those we have known, those who make grand promises that somehow never seem to come true. The ugliness of this election season stems from disappointment with a political system that insurgents on the left say is rigged to favor a few rich and powerful people, and that insurgents on the right say has robbed us of our greatness and made us look weak and foolish to the nations of the world. Of course, there is nothing new or unique in these perceptions. It has always been such. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).

Let's walk around this familiar scene of Jesus' so-called "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem and look at it from the different perspectives of those whom John particularly describes in our text.

Body

- 1. The perspective of the crowds: Expectation (12:13f).** Those who are looking and longing for change, longing for fresh answers to the pressing problems of today.

The crowd celebrates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. He has come in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah, and they expect him to overthrow the Roman Army and

reestablish the throne of David. In other words, they are expecting a political and economic miracle. They are hoping for a radical change in their situation.

So too, many who hear the good news today expect Jesus to ride into their lives and free them from everything that is holding them back from fulfillment and joy. And he aims to do just that. But it may look different from what we expect. It may be different from what we want – just as it was that first Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into the city to establish his kingdom by dying the painful and shameful death of the cross.

- 2. The perspective of the disciples: Confusion (v.16).** Those who profess Jesus, but want victory without cost, resurrection without suffering and death. The disciples want some measure of glory, but the spotlight is on Jesus, and they are confused by some of the symbolism: why the humility of his entrance into the city?

All the way up the road to Jerusalem the disciples have been arguing over which of them will be the greatest when they reach the city and Jesus establishes his kingdom. He has been telling them that he will die, but they have refused to take him literally. Surely he will set up the throne of David, place them in positions of authority. No more living off the gifts of other followers. Soon the riches of the Promised Land will again fill Israel's coffers, and they will reap the rich rewards of having followed Jesus from the earliest days of danger and difficulty.

But soon they will watch in horror as the mood of the crowd changes, as winds of danger and betrayal begin to blow. Soon they will see the one in whom they have placed all their hope, whom they have sworn to follow to the end, arrested, stripped and beaten, see him mocked and humiliated, and tortured to death like a common criminal.

So too, today, disciples greet him with joy and expect that when he comes everything will immediately begin to get better. And in the deepest, truest sense, they are right. But it usually doesn't happen the way we thought it would. There is always a cross, a death that must be died, not only by him, but also by all of us who would follow him. Our present felt- needs, therapeutic-oriented churches are not faithful to the reality of the gospel at this crucial point.

- 3. The perspective of the religious leaders: Consternation (19:19).** Those who hold the values of the world, not the kingdom, and who therefore hold God's word in contempt, drawing their own image of god, one that is manageable, that doesn't challenge the pride and presumption of their hearts.

The religious leaders had a completely different perspective. "He's actually pulled it off! The crowds are ready to make him king. All of our efforts to expose him as a false prophet and blasphemer have failed. The whole world is going after him."

So, too, today: The most subtle danger I've ever witnessed against the Lord and against the gospel has come, not from secular people, but from reputed religious leaders whose contempt for the Bible and for the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, and whose persistent attacks against the law of God, assure them places of honor among educators, publishers and pundits, who delight in mocking Christianity. It is so often from within that the greatest damage is done. Yet, in the end, they are often forced to concede with consternation that a needy world holds out its longing arms in wistful hope that Jesus is the king of life, the one who can make all things new. The gospel is weak and foolish to those who consider themselves wise and strong. But it alone is the very power of God for salvation.

- 4. The perspective of the outsiders: Fascination (19:20-21).** Those who cruise in for the holidays, surfing the religious scene, hoping to experience something interesting or unusual.

There were gentiles in Jerusalem for the festivities. They had heard of Jesus, and were fascinated with the idea of meeting him and perhaps seeing him do something out-of-the-ordinary. "Let's try to interview him and see what he's like. We'll have a great story when we return home." Many gentiles turned to the God of Israel, abandoning their idols and worshiping in the outer court, the so-called Court of the Gentiles. But they always worshiped from afar, refusing to follow the more fervent in proselyte baptism, circumcision, and submission to Jewish law. They came close enough to see, hear, even smell the aroma of the sacrifices wafting over the wall, but never close enough to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus." A lovely thought, a stirring sentiment, but do they know what they are asking? Truly to see Jesus is to fall on one's face before him and cry out, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man!" and to confess with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

How many come to church, especially in this season, just hoping for a look, without comprehending what is really involved in seeing the Lord of glory.

- 5. The perspective of Jesus: Consummation (19:23-28).** The only one who knew what was happening, who had counted the cost and stood ready to do whatever it took to glorify his Father by saving his rebellious creatures.

For the one at the center of all this, the perspective was different still. "The hour has [finally] come [for] me to be glorified." How? By ascending the throne and receiving the adoration of the crowd? By overthrowing Rome? No! "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single seed..." (Read v.22-26).

A Picture: "Unless a grain of wheat..."

A Principle: "Whoever loves his life loses it ..."

A Promise: "Where I am, there will my servant be also ... [and] the Father will honor him"

Conclusion

What, then, should be our perspective: Identification (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). Those who are serious about following Jesus.

At last we come to the only perspective that truly sees what is going on. This is where we need to stand if we would not miss the moment. We are simply called to identify with Jesus as he entered the city in order to bring it salvation, though it cost him his life. Paul tells us that the Christian life is a triumphal procession, but that God's people may well be at the back of the parade, drawn along toward death in the arena. We will be understood or misunderstood depending on the perspective of those around us. This, of course, is true of everyone.

But the point that Paul is making here is that God wants to spread the knowledge of Jesus through us, the body of Christ in the world today. We are the aroma of Christ to the degree that we faithfully display his character, the so-called "fruit of the Spirit." To some, it is the aroma of life, to others the aroma of death. But it is their only hope of knowing the salvation of the Lord.

How fitting that we go now to the Lord's Table, to a meal made possible only because of our Lord's willingness to give himself for us. He rode into the city to die, in order that you and I might eat and drink the salvation he purchased with his own body and blood. He will feed you here with his life in order that you might go from this place bearing his salvation to a world that will die without it.

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