

“WHAT AN IMPRESSIVE ENTRANCE!”

John 12:12-19

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“Back in the day,” when I was in college, I worked a couple of summers for Mr. Armstrong. He owned one of the largest excavation and road construction companies in the Province of Ontario, Canada.

I drove one of his hundreds of bright orange construction trucks.

I didn’t know anyone who was pleased when Mr. Armstrong’s dark green Cadillac limousine pulled into a job site.

His chauffeur would open the rear door, and out would step the portly, red-faced, cigar-puffing Mr. Armstrong. He was quite a disagreeable fellow, known to fire workers on the spot if he saw something he didn’t like.

Workers were upset when he arrived and elated when he left.

I had a face-to-face with him only once. I was in the garage to get something fixed on my truck. He growled, ‘*You work for me, son?*’ I answered, ‘*Yes, Mr. Armstrong. I drive that truck to haul A gravel or B gravel from Caledon to Bramalea.*’ ‘*You the student who’s working for the summer?*’ ‘*Yes, Mr. Armstrong.*’ He grunted, turned away, puffed a plume of smoke—and I survived, to drive another day.

- Shortly before Passover Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. That would be the equivalent of a stripped-down moped, not a Cadillac Fleetwood limousine.

Many of the Passover pilgrims were overjoyed to see Jesus, the miracle worker from Galilee.

But he was the last person Jerusalem’s religious leaders wanted to see in town for Passover.

The remarkable thing is that both those who were elated to see him and those who were infuriated misunderstood Jesus.

- Now, almost 2000 years later, Jesus still affects people the same way. Some welcome him, and others want nothing to do with him.

The majority of Americans know that Jesus Christ came to die for our sins, but many are not interested in getting to know Jesus personally.

Knowing Jesus will change your life, and not everyone wants this.

- Today is Palm Sunday. It’s the observance of Jesus Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem at the start of the week that would culminate in his crucifixion and resurrection.

John’s Gospel describes the perspectives of three distinct groups of people on Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem.

But Jesus was still the only one who knew what it meant.

12. *The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.*

13. *They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Blessed is the King of Israel!”*

14. *Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written,*

15. *“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”*

16. *At first his disciples did not understand this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.*

17. *Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word.*

18. *Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.*

19. *So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”*

The account of Christ’s triumphal entry to Jerusalem in John 12:12-19 illustrates people’s reactions to Jesus’ entry into their world today.

I. ELATION. John 12:12-13, 17-18

Lots of people who are attracted to Jesus, still have some unanswered questions about him.

The younger generations are not interested in the Jesus of religious ceremonies—the “Sunday Jesus.”

They want to know the Jesus who bucked religious traditions.

- People today are interested in Jesus only if he makes an obvious difference in people’s lives.

Jesus must be at the center of a lifestyle that is authentic and vibrant.

That's how many people come to faith in Jesus. They are attracted to the real, life-changing Jesus, not the Jesus of religious stuffiness.

- A large crowd of Passover pilgrims was waiting for Jesus to enter Jerusalem.

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13. *They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Blessed is the King of Israel!"*

"Hosanna" was the standard greeting pilgrims gave to one another as they traveled to Jerusalem for the religious festivals.

It meant "Save now!" They had a longing in their hearts for Israel's savior, or deliverer.

- The custom was that those who arrived early would go out to the city gates to watch for friends and relatives, and shout *Hosanna!*

Some were actually on the lookout for Jesus. They hoped he was the long-awaited Messiah who would liberate God's people from oppression.

On their way up the mountain to Jerusalem for the Passover they may have been thinking of Jesus as they sang the song, *'Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! (Psalm 118:25-26)*

- They took palm branches and went out to meet him. Why palm branches?

Palms were an emblem of victory. The crowd welcomed Jesus as the Conqueror they had been expecting.

And besides, it was a safe way to do an "in your face" to the soldiers of the Roman occupation force that were everywhere, watching for any sign of trouble.

17. *Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word.*

18. *Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.*

Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead in nearby Bethany.

Raising the dead was a sign to them of greater works to come.

They had great expectations of Jesus.

- I never cease to be amazed by the expectations many people have of Jesus. If something seems reasonable or desirable to them, they believe that's what Jesus will surely do for them..

What they expect of Jesus may have nothing at all to do with his real purpose in coming into the world.

But Jesus came to do exactly what he had recently told Zacchaeus in Jericho—seek and save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

He came to change people's lives—to rescue them from the power of evil and to give them eternal life.

But this crowd that cheered as Jesus entered Jerusalem would be bitterly disappointed a few days later when Jesus was executed just outside the walls of Jerusalem.

- Some people are attracted to Jesus for the right reason. They realize that they are spiritually lost and that Jesus came to save them.

There are also people who are excited about Jesus for the wrong reasons. Some of them expect Jesus to make life smooth for them.

They've been deceived by a false gospel that portrays Jesus as the giver of financial prosperity.

You may have heard it called the '*Name it and claim it,*' or '*Blab it and grab it*' heresy. All they have to do is tell Jesus what they want and he has to provide it. That's his job!

- Jesus' teaching contradicted that sort of silly nonsense.

He said that those who were truly his followers had to deny themselves and take up their cross (Matthew 16:24; Mark 3:34; Luke 9:23).

The biblical truth is that the Christian faith is not about self-indulgence. It involves self-denial and sacrifice.

But many cling to this false expectation, and they end up bitterly disillusioned about the Christian faith.

- Was Jesus the promised Messiah or not? He was!

Jesus came to save people from their sins, by suffering on the cross the penalty they deserved, and by rising from the dead to give eternal life to all who confess their sin and place their trust in him as their Savior.

But the people who welcomed Jesus as he entered Jerusalem clung to their Messianic hope of a conqueror who would liberate Israel from the Romans and reign supreme over all the nations.

This longing smelled so sweet to the adoring crowd; they could almost taste it.

Remember, a rose smells much better than a cabbage, but it doesn't make better soup.

What the people had in mind for Jesus was so puny compared to what he really came to accomplish.

They were elated by Jesus' arrival. They were sincere, but they were wrong.

II. CONFUSION. John 12:14-16

Most people underestimate Jesus. Their concept of Jesus is far too small.

Even Jesus' disciples sold him short. They had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:16), but they became confused and upset when he spoke of going to Jerusalem to suffer and be killed and then raised to life on the third day (Matthew 16:21-22).

His disciples had said they would follow him anywhere. But as they entered Jerusalem with him to the shouts of *Hosannah!* Jesus was still a mystery to them. Time after time they were confounded and confused. What would he do next?

- Just look at his choice of transportation.

14. *Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written,*

15. *“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.”*

- There's nothing regal about a donkey.

A donkey was the transportation of a common man, not a conquering king.

Here in verse 15 John cites the prophecy of Zechariah (9:9), who announced that the king of Israel would appear in *humility gentle and riding on a donkey.*

16. *At first his disciples did not understand this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.*

Jesus' followers rode an emotional rollercoaster from his entrance to Jerusalem to his resurrection from the dead.

The disciples couldn't fit it all together until after Jesus was glorified—after his resurrection. Then they understood that it was a confirmation of Jesus as the true Messiah.

- Jesus entered the city to inaugurate a new era, but it wasn't the glorious new political era they had in mind.

They made Jesus into a celebrity because of the miracles he had performed, as in the raising of Lazarus.

Without a doubt his followers would have preferred Jesus to enter with great pomp, riding a war horse.

- This fallen world cannot survive Jesus coming on a horse.

At the end of the age, when Christ comes as *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* he will appear riding on a white horse to judge and to rule the nations (Revelation 19:11-16).

Today Jesus is being gentle with this sinful world. He is extending his mercy to sinners through the good news—the gospel.

The Apostle Paul explained that God didn't choose celebrities or influential people of noble birth. He chose the weak and lowly to confound the mighty (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

Until he comes again in glory our Lord the King is using humble, ordinary, awkward people like us to do great things.

But still we try to bring out the horse for Jesus. We want Jesus to show the cowardly terrorists of the world who is really in charge.

In 1948 the Chinese Communists shot the “Christian horse.” They expelled all missionaries from China. What happened? Jesus went throughout China on a donkey. The number of Christians in China in 1948 was estimated at 1 million. Today no one knows exactly, but over 100 million true Christians in China is a modest estimate.

That's how God is working in the world today.

- There are lots of people believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

But they keep on trying to make Jesus be what they think he ought to be.

- No matter how long you have been a devoted Christian, Jesus may still disappoint you if you try to write the script for him to fulfill your expectations of him.

III. FRUSTRATION. John 12: 19

When Jesus comes into your world, change happens.

Jesus didn't conform to the religious protocols of Israel.

The religious leaders were frustrated and afraid when they realized that Jesus was more than they could handle.

He was a force to reckon with. He was a threat they had to eliminate.

- The Pharisees were part of the religious establishment. They were the conservatives—the religious and political right wing. In Israel, religion and nationalism were inextricably intertwined.

19. *So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”*

The Pharisees were incensed when they saw the crowd giving Jesus a Messianic welcome. We read in Luke's gospel, *Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"* (Luke 19:39)

- The Passover celebration was sacred. It commemorated God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and his punishment of those who oppressed his people

The Pharisees were annoyed that a crowd of Galilean peasants had the nerve to shout "Hosanna!" in welcoming a nobody from Nazareth as the hoped-for deliverer of the people.

Jesus was becoming too popular and too dangerous.

The Pharisees were alarmed because it seemed the whole world (*kosmos*) was caught up in *Jesus Mania*. (19)

- It's estimated that every 24 hours almost 80,000 people on earth are placing their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. I quote again the Pharisees in verse 19, *'Look how the whole world has gone after him!'*

- I think this group of judgmental Pharisees typifies some upright and up-tight Christian people today.

They don't want anything to upset their nice, comfortable, safe way of practicing their religion.

Wherever you find religion that makes tradition and respectability their highest priorities, you will find proud people who have little tolerance for hurting, humble people who follow Jesus because he alone has given them hope.

Jesus came to seek and to save lost people whose lives are messy, and they're not too proud to admit it. He could do nothing for the proud religious folk.

- Christians who have become comfortable in their religion tend to be frustrated when surrounded by people who are enthused about Jesus.

Are you attracted to Jesus? You know Christians whose faith is the real thing. They don't reek of religiosity.

If you have grasped the truth that Jesus is the Son of God who came to take care of your sin problem and to give you new life, I invite you right now in prayer to admit to him that you are a sinner, and put your faith in him as your Savior.

- Are you a Christian who is confused about Christ? . If he's real then why doesn't he show the world—and some people in particular—who's Boss. You want your "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" to come charging in on his white horse. He will one day.

Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey and went on to accomplish the greatest act in the universe since creation.

But at first it seemed so small and disappointing.

Don't be confused. Expect Christ to do things his way.

- Have you become comfortably religious?

If we commit ourselves to Jesus completely as our Lord, we'll find that Jesus is way too much for us to handle. We'll be in for quite a ride.

Our passion, our longing, is to say with enthusiasm, *'Look how the whole world has gone after him!'*

Have you joined the millions all over the world who have decided to follow Jesus? He is the Savior of the world.