

## **The Un-Triumphal Entry**

### **John 12:9-19**

#### **Introduction**

Things are not always what they seem! The so-called “triumphal entry” of Jesus into Jerusalem is anything but a triumph. Many of those who enthusiastically welcome Jesus to Jerusalem as the “King of Israel” are some of the same people who, in a week, will be crying out, “We have no king, but Caesar!” Those who cry out, “Hosanna!” (Save now!), will be shouting, “He saved others. Let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one!”

The Triumphal Entry may not be so triumphal, but it is a very significant event in the life of Jesus and Israel’s history. It is one of the very few events recorded in all four Gospels. Let’s take a look at what is so important about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and examine its impact upon those early followers and upon us. The Gospel of John gives us one of the most unique accounts of the Triumphal Entry.

#### **I. John’s Unique Account**

John’s account of Jesus and His final days in Jerusalem is quite unique compared with accounts in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For example, Luke traces Jesus’ steps as He makes His way toward Jerusalem. Luke tells us that Jesus stops in Jericho, where He healed a blind man in Luke 18:35-43. He also says that Jesus invited Himself to the home of Zaccheus, the tax-collector 19:1-10.

By contrast, John’s Gospel gives us very few details concerning Jesus’ ministry in the weeks that precede His final appearance in Jerusalem. We know He healed the man born blind (John 9) and that He taught about the Good Shepherd (John 10). He also made a quick and dangerous trip to Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem, where He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). But John focuses on the time Jesus spent in more obscure places outside of Jerusalem to prevent the religious leaders from taking His life before it was “His time” (see 10:40-42; 11:54).

John doesn’t describe the triumphal entry itself in great detail. He devotes only 11 verses to the dramatic entrance into Jerusalem before His final Passover celebration. Matthew’s account has 17 verses, Mark’s 18 verses, and Luke’s Gospel 21 verses.

John doesn’t tell us how Jesus prearranged for two of His disciples to procure the donkey and its colt. John doesn’t tell us that the Pharisees insist Jesus silence those who are praising Him and that Jesus refuses. John doesn’t tell us that Jesus wept over Jerusalem or that He cursed the barren fig tree. Strangely, John doesn’t mention the cleansing of the temple or inform us of the miracles of healings Jesus performed in the temple that final week of His ministry. John doesn’t record any of the parables Jesus taught the final week of His earthly ministry, nor does he record

any of the numerous debates with His opponents. John doesn't mention the "Olivet Discourse" recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels.

John covers all the public ministry of Jesus during His final week in Jerusalem in one chapter (12). He doesn't even cover the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. John spends Chapters 13-17 revealing Christ's private teaching to His disciples, not found in the Synoptics. Chapter 18 then takes us to the arrest of Jesus and then moves right into His trial, condemnation, and execution.

John limits his focus to three significant incidents which occur in the final week of our Lord's earthly ministry:

1. Mary's anointing of Jesus in preparation for His burial (12:1-8);
2. Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" (12:9-19); and
3. the request of the Greeks to meet with Jesus (12:20-26).

He concludes with a divine explanation of human unbelief, rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures and our Jesus Himself's words (12:27-50).

The "triumphal entry" seems to surprise the disciples. Jesus' previous visits to Jerusalem have repeatably caused trouble. In John Chapter 2, during a visit to Jerusalem, Jesus "cleanses the temple," which really angers the Jewish leaders (2:12-22). Chapter 5 reveals that on the Sabbath, Jesus heals a paralyzed man who suffered for 38 years, which made the leaders furious. When Jesus defends His actions claiming to act with God, and as God, it sets the Jews off, and they are even more intent on killing Him (5:18). In Chapter 7, Jesus appears in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles which results in a failed attempt by Jewish religious leaders to have Jesus arrested by the temple police (7:30, 44-53). In Chapter 8, when Jesus says, "before Abraham came into existence, I am!" (8:58), they immediately seek to stone Him. The healing of the man born blind in John 9 also takes place in Jerusalem, and it further intensifies the hatred of the religious leaders toward Jesus. In John 10, Jesus says that He is the "Good Shepherd" and implies that the Jewish religious leaders are the wicked shepherds He has come to replace. The leaders again try to arrest and kill Jesus, so He retreats to a place along the Jordan River, where John the Baptist ministered (10:40-42).

By the time you get to chapter 11, the disciples are afraid to go to Jerusalem, fearing that they too will die there along with Jesus (see 11:16). Chapter 11 tells us that Jesus goes to Bethany, located just outside of Jerusalem, where He raises Lazarus from the dead, after being in a tomb for four days. Opposition from the Jewish leaders causes Jesus to again retreat from Jerusalem because His hour had not yet come.

## **II. Intensified Hopes and Fears (12:9-11)**

"Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because, on

account of him, many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.” (Joh 12:9-11 NKJV)

A fairly large group of Jews from Jerusalem (John calls them a “crowd” —11:42; 12:17) went to Bethany to join Mary and Martha in mourning the death of their brother Lazarus (11:19). All of these mourners witness the raising of Lazarus in a way that makes the report undeniable. Many come to faith in Jesus, but others rush off to report the miracle to the Pharisees (11:45-46). The Jewish Sanhedrin meets and concludes that Jesus must die. Jesus leaves Judea once again and spends time in seclusion with His disciples in Ephraim (11:54). The witnesses who saw Lazarus raised from the dead return to Jerusalem and start spreading the sensational news throughout the city. Lazarus, himself, was “living proof” the miracle did occur.

During the Feast of Passover, the population of Jerusalem would increase significantly. Estimates are that at least 100,000 Jews lived in Jerusalem, but the number of people would quadruple during the Passover. Imagine the excitement that surges through the pilgrims who have come for the Passover. As Passover draws near, all eyes are looking for Jesus. Everyone is wondering if He will show up since the chief priests and Pharisees have ordered that anyone who knows where Jesus is must inform them immediately. When word gets out that Jesus is coming from Bethany, a large crowd sets out from Jerusalem to meet Jesus.

The chief priests, however, have already determined that Jesus must die. And now they decide that Lazarus must die as well. Somehow they link Lazarus to Jesus and blame him for those who are turning away from them to follow Jesus. The chief priests and scribes aren’t concerned about the people; they’re worried about their own positions and power. They view Jesus as a real threat and conclude that it’s ok if they violate the law to kill Jesus because they convince themselves they’re acting in the national best interest. The decision to kill Lazarus, a completely innocent man, guilty only of returning from the dead, follows quite naturally and easily. One sin so quickly and so easily leads to another.

### **III. The “Triumphal” Entry (12:12-16)**

Finally, the important day arrives. John 12:12 says, “The next day, a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: “Hosanna! ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’ The King of Israel!” Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; 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 were written about Him and *that* they had done these things to Him.” (Joh 12:12-16 NKJV)

The sports world has developed the “instant replay” will usually clarify the facts whenever there is an objection about a play. It allows us to see the play in slow motion and stop the camera at the critical moment. We can also usually see it from

several camera angles. It is what the four Gospel accounts of Christ's life provide for us. Reading and comparing all the Gospel accounts of the same event gives us a view from several different angles. Each of the four Gospels contains the "Triumphal Entry," and each account has its own details, emphasis, and significance. When you look at the "triumphal entry" from each gospel writer's "angle," we get a kind of "instant replay" by taking all four of the Gospel accounts into consideration.

Here's what we see:

- Jesus arrives in Bethany by way of Jericho (Luke 18:35; 19:1).
- Before entering Jerusalem, He sends two of His disciples ahead of Him to procure a donkey and its colt (Matthew 21:1-6; Mark 11:1-6; Luke 19:29-34).
- This fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 (Matthew 21:5), although the disciples do not understand this at the time (John 12:16).
- As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, He rides the unbroken colt.
- A crowd comes from Jerusalem to greet Jesus, and they accompany Him into the city, spreading their cloaks and cut branches on the road before Him.
- The crowd calls out expressions of praise and celebration, hailing Jesus as the "King of Israel."
- The commotion reaches the ears of people in the city of Jerusalem, and many of them join in with welcoming Jesus.
- Some of the Pharisees become indignant, insisting that Jesus tell the people to stop their praise, but Jesus refuses, indicating that if they quit their praise, the stones would cry out (Luke 19:39-40).
- As Jesus looks upon the city of Jerusalem, He weeps, knowing that their reception of Him is superficial and momentary. (Luke 19:41-44).
- Once in the city, Jesus takes a look around the temple, and because it is late, he returns to Bethany with His disciples (Mark 11:11).
- On His return to the city, Jesus comes upon a fruitless fig tree, which He curses (Mark 11:12-14).
- He then enters the temple and cleanses it, greatly angering the chief priests and scribes (Mark 11:15-18).
- The cleansing of the temple makes room for Jesus to teach and perform miracles, which draws such crowds that His opponents can't arrest Him there (Matthew 21:13; Luke 19:47-48).
- Each day Jesus goes to the temple, and each evening He leaves Jerusalem and spends the night in Bethany. (Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:18-19).

John omits most of these details, focusing instead on Jesus' ministry to His disciples. John's account is dominated by Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (only his Gospel records it). John links the crowd's enthusiasm over the miracle with the intensity of the opposition to the raising of Lazarus. Jesus is the only one who fully understands what is happening at the time. In verse 16, John makes a point of telling us that the disciples do not understand the meaning of this event until after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus

The disciples are eager for Jesus to establish His kingdom, and so are the people. They are very aware of the opposition to Jesus and the dangers they face in Jerusalem (John 11:7-8). What a shock it must have been to see the entire city of Jerusalem welcoming Jesus (and them!) with open arms.

The words which the people cry out come from Psalm 118. It's a messianic psalm and one of the six Psalms most often referred to in the New Testament. It is one of the *Hallel* songs (Psalms 113-118) that the Jews would sing as they ascended to Jerusalem to worship at one of the feasts. It is a song that is sung at Passover every year. But this year, it had an extraordinary significance. "The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (vs. 6). The psalmist's confidence seems undaunted, even by death: "I shall not die, but live, And declare the works of the LORD. The LORD has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, *And* I will praise the LORD" (vs. 17-19).

The raising of Lazarus would give special meaning and certainty to these words. The people cry out "Hosanna!" (which means, "Save now!") as they welcome Jesus and recognize him as Israel's king. Their words are truer than they realize. If they understood Psalm 118 correctly, they would realize that Jesus will be their King, but only after His rejection by the nation. John informs us that even the disciples don't understand (verse 16) until Jesus is glorified after He is rejected, crucified, resurrected, and ascended. It is then that the Holy Spirit makes these things clear to them (John 14:25-31).

As John writes this Gospel, he understands what he did not grasp when these things were taking place, and he makes sure that his readers know it as well.

#### **IV. More Mixed Reactions (12:17-19)**

Verse 17 says, "Therefore, the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason, the people also met Him because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees, therefore, said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!" [John 12:17-19 NKJV](#)

Jesus' bold entrance into Jerusalem gets the attention of everyone. Those who witnessed the raising of Lazarus tell their story, over and over again, to the wide-eyed pilgrims. It greatly fuels the flames of messianic expectations. Some of these worshippers go to meet Jesus as He enters the city.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, have been watching Jesus with suspicion from the very beginning. They are continually monitoring the crowds and taking note of how many people are abandoning them to follow Jesus. They are in utter panic. In chapter 11, the Pharisees are already losing ground. It leads them to conclude that Jesus must die for their own preservation and the sake of the nation (11:49-53, 57).

After the "triumphal entry," they are forced to take desperate measures. Judas decides to betray Jesus at the same time the Jews are ready to do whatever it takes to be rid of Him. In their eagerness to put Jesus to death, they perfectly fulfill the will of God and the purpose that He must die during Passover as the Passover Lamb. God's timing is always perfect.

## Conclusion

The fact that every Gospel has an account of the "triumphal entry" of our Lord into Jerusalem indicates to us that it is indeed a most significant event. It is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. Jesus does not come as a conquering king, ready to lead Israel against the Romans, overthrowing their rule. He has come as the "Prince of Peace" and as the "Lamb of God," whose death will provide the cure for sin. It is a significant turning point in Israel's history. To joyfully welcome Jesus as "their kind of king," they refuse Him as the "Lamb of God," sent to "take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). When they finally grasp that Jesus has not come to fulfill their expectations, they will quickly turn against Him, rejecting Him as their king.

The "triumphal entry" is a tragic picture of Israel's unbelief. And things have not changed much in over 2000 years. We all want to identify with the triumphant Jesus, who overthrows the wicked and brings prosperity, peace, and freedom from pain to His people. But no one wants to identify with the "suffering Savior." We must always be careful of demanding in the present what God has promised in the future.

A time is coming when Christ will make another incredible "triumphal entry." John writes in Revelation 19, <sup>11</sup> Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness, He judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He <sup>[a]</sup>had a name written that no one knew except Himself. <sup>13</sup> He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

<sup>17</sup> Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the <sup>[d]</sup>supper of the great God, <sup>18</sup> that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, <sup>[e]</sup>free and slave, both small and great."

<sup>19</sup> And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. <sup>20</sup> Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. <sup>21</sup> And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh." ([Revelation 19:11-21](#)).

Are you ready for the day, when our Lord returns to this earth triumphantly, to deliver His saints, and to destroy His enemies? It is a much-awaited day for those who have placed their trust in Jesus and have accepted His accomplished work at Calvary at His first coming. It is a dreaded day for those who have rejected Him as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." May each of us be ready and waiting for Him when He returns to this earth in triumph.