



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 12: 12-19

Winter 2023

"Behold Your King"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are in the Gospel of John. We've been in chapter 12 since last week and you'll remember it's a great text where Mary anoints the Lord's feet with perfume. The scent of it fills the room, and a controversy followed.

It was a great act of worship that most did not understand for she was anointing Him in anticipation of His death on her behalf, and behalf of all of His people.

Well, next we read verses 12 through verse 19,

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

John 12: 12-19

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father, it is a great privilege to be together with Your people on a Sunday morning and to see one another, to visit with one another, and then to join our voices and sing praises to You and Your goodness and Your grace, as we've done, (and as we will do), and worship You in that way, and then take a text of Scripture as we've done, read it, consider it, and consider it in light of what we have been studying in this great fourth Gospel.

Father, we pray You'd bless us to understand the things that are before us, the things we have read, and things that not even the disciples really understood. This great event of the Lord Jesus; on the colt of a donkey, a small donkey, riding into Jerusalem being hailed as king—and yet He was giving a different message from what they thought. Give us understanding of these things: The significance of them and the significance of this great event. And in that understanding, give us greater confidence in You and trust in You and appreciation of what You have done for us through Your Son, through the humility that He experienced, (and that He accepted), in order to raise us up to be sons and daughters of Yours and to have a glorious future.

So LORD, bless us. Give us understanding of the texts that we've read, and sanctify us, conform us increasingly to the image of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a privilege to be with Your people to do that; to read the Scriptures, to consider their meaning together, to worship together. It's also a great privilege to do this: To pray together for these things and for the needs of Your people.

LORD, there are so many of us that we all need prayer; and we are all vulnerable to all of the things that are around us. It's true what Calvin wrote in the *Institutes of the*

Christian Religion, that if we understood the thousands of dangers that face us whenever we step outside, none of us would do that. We would stay sheltered— and we would fear. But we understand that You're in control of everything. You're sovereign and You protect us. And You guide us, (just as David wrote in that great 23rd Psalm), You guide us "in the paths of righteousness." You provide for us and You're going to bring us safely into Your Father's house someday. We thank You for that. We thank You that we have a glorious future and we have a secure present; and in Your providence, You protect us, You take care of us, and You guide us.

So we pray for all of ourselves, Father. We pray for those who are dealing with issues that haven't been mentioned, but You know our needs, and You know our situation. We pray that You would give healing, give encouragement, give strength, and we pray that You'd bless us now, prepare our hearts, as we'll study this text together, and bless us through it. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) In Shakespeare's play, *Henry VI*, one of the characters is named Jack Cade—an historical person who led a popular rebellion in an attempt to seize the government. At one point Jack says, "When I am king, as king I will be; there shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score and worship me—their lord."

Well, the rebellion failed and was brutally put down; but that was a man who understood human nature. Lots of people want a government and a king who will take care of them from cradle to grave; and they will worship the man who does.

Many in Christ's day thought He was that man, that kind of king when they accompanied Him into Jerusalem crying out "Hosanna." That's our subject, and it's one of the best known events in the life of Christ. All four Gospels record it. But it was an event misunderstood by all of those who witnessed it. The masses of people who hailed Jesus as King that day, expected Him to crush Rome and usher in a worldly kingdom of Jewish prosperity and power. The Jewish authorities who witnessed it feared that Jesus

would attempt to do just that and ignite a rebellion that would result in the destruction of the Jewish state. The reality was completely different. He came to Jerusalem as king, but a King unlike the one that people expected. He came for peace: He came to be the Passover Lamb.

It was the week of the Passover when Jerusalem filled up with pilgrims from all over the land and from all over the world. Josephus wrote that one year, three million people, (just under that), took part in the celebration. The crowds at Passover were huge, and on this occasion the topic of everyone's conversation was Christ. The authorities were looking for Him, looking to arrest Him, and the people were wondering if He would appear at the feast. Anticipation was building when on Sunday, news began to spread that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem—that He was on His way. The people poured out of the city; they cut down palm branches from the date trees along the road, and they went to meet Him.

John didn't give all the details. There was already a crowd of people accompanying Jesus from Bethany as He made His way along the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. He describes the crowd as "large". Many people who had heard about the Lord's miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead wanted to see Him. And so, as Jesus made the two mile journey to Jerusalem, people began to gather, wave palms, and shout, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD, even the King of Israel." It was a quote from Psalm 118, (vs26), which is a Psalm of thanksgiving to God for the victory that He gave His people over an enemy that had overwhelmed them.

When the deliverance occurred, Jerusalem was under siege; "All the nations surrounded me", the psalmist wrote. (vs10). "They surrounded me like bees." (vs12). And for the Jewish people of Jesus' day, that seemed to have a special relevance for them with Roman legions occupying the land and Roman soldiers garrisoned in Jerusalem. They, too, were surrounded by a pagan enemy.

But now Jesus had come: a miracle worker, a man who had such great authority that He could even raise the dead with a simple command. And so, as He left Bethany

for Jerusalem, the crowd greeted Him with words of this Psalm as, "He who comes in the name of the LORD." They interpreted that of the Messiah and they declared Him to be "the King of Israel", with the shout of "Hosanna!" which means, "save now," or "save I pray."

It was the time of the Passover, when the nation remembered that it was delivered from slavery in Egypt: When Israel became a nation and hope of freedom was on the people's minds. There was great anticipation of that. Their shout of "Hosanna!", of, 'Salvation!', expressed their longing to be liberated from the yoke of Rome with a victory that was like the ones celebrated in Psalm 118. And they expressed that, not only with their words but also with their actions—with palm branches, which according to Leviticus chapter 23, signified 'Joy!' (vs40).

But also, since the time of the Maccabees, 200 years earlier, palms had a political significance. The palm was a symbol of the nation, and when the charismatic leader, Simon Maccabeus, drove the Syrians out of Jerusalem the people honored him with music and waving palm branches. Well that's the same national pride that was on display here. The people believed that Jesus was that kind of leader, a conqueror; so they saluted Him as "the King of Israel."

They were right. He is their King—and Psalm 118 is about Him; it is a Messianic Psalm. So to that degree, they interpreted it correctly. What they failed to understand is the kind of King He is and what the Psalm revealed about Him, because it also speaks of. "The stone that the builders rejected, has become the chief corner *stone*." (vs22). So it is a prophesy about Christ—but it's a prophesy about His rejection by the nation, and His crucifixion and resurrection.

But the people hadn't studied the Scriptures carefully and missed its meaning. So instead of looking for a spiritual Savior, they were looking for a national hero, just as the crowds had done earlier, in chapter 6 in Galilee, when they intended to make Him King.

There He had fed them loaves and fishes—and they wanted more of that. They wanted that kind of care, ‘from the cradle to the grave’; ‘Every day give us this food,’ they said. (Jn 6:34). Well at that time, the Lord ... He knew exactly what was going on and He diffused the situation by sending the disciples away in a boat and then He dismissed the crowd because His time for being rejected, going to the cross, was not yet at hand; it had not yet come at that point in His ministry. And all through His ministry you see this; You see that He refused to openly reveal His identity as King, so as to prevent a premature conflict with the authorities that would short circuit His ministry. He never denied that He was King. In fact, He used a title that would suggest that He's the Messiah, “the Son of Man”—and you see that all through the synoptic Gospels in particular. And that's a title that comes out of Daniel chapter 7, the reference to the Messiah—but it also has the sense that He is a man. And you see that all through the prophecy of Ezekiel; He's referred to as “Son of Man”.

So it has both meanings and both were true of Him—and yet it was somewhat ambiguous. So He's, in a sense, using it of Himself as ‘the Messiah’—but also as a man. And He was, somewhat, deliberately ambiguous to keep things from happening prematurely; and, as I said, cutting short His ministry.

But here, His response was very different. You see, His public ministry was now at an end—and the time had come for Him to die for the sins of the world. And so instead of withdrawing from public notice, He accepted the enthusiasm of the crowd and He openly revealed Himself to be Israel's Messiah and King.

But in a very significant act, He made known the kind of King that He was. John states simply, "Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it." (vs14). Matthew recounts how He sent His disciples to a village to find the animal. They returned with both the colt and its mother. They “laid their coats on them”, (Mat 21:7), and Jesus rode the colt, this very small donkey, into Jerusalem. It was at the Lord's direction, which showed that He was in complete control of this situation; as much control of those crowds on Mount of Olives as He had been with those crowds in Galilee.

He had foreseen the people's response, their excitement, and had already arranged for His ride on the donkey in a conscious fulfillment of prophecy—a specific prophecy. "...as it is written," John wrote, " 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.' " (vs15). Now that is a quotation from the prophet Zachariah, in chapter 9 and verse 9, which prophesied that Israel's King would be, 'Humble, a lowly King coming in peace', as symbolized in the donkey He rode.

And it's "a colt"! It's probably about the size of a German Shepherd and His feet would have been dragging on the pavement—so it was a symbol of His humility in coming to Jerusalem. The British New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce called His ride, "An acted parable, intended to correct the misguided expectations of the people." He didn't mount a horse. That's significant, because the horse was the ancient animal that kings rode to war. He came on a donkey, an animal used for peaceful purposes.

So without rejecting the title the people gave Him of King, (for He couldn't reject it; He is their King. He is the King of Kings), but He accepted the title in a way that rejected all of the political ideas that were associated with it. He came as the "Prince of Peace", (Isa 9:6), and as a King who had put aside His glory in order to be a humble servant. He came to serve—not to rule. He came to be slain—not to slay. He was a servant king, the King of Zachariah chapter 9—and He revealed that by coming to Jerusalem on a donkey's colt.

The next verse in Zachariah 9 is verse 10, which John didn't quote. It speaks of the blessing that He would bring: The end of war and the kingdom that extends to the ends of the earth; "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." —Worldwide peace.

That's not true today. In fact, that has never been true in all of human history. That is a prophesy of the millennial kingdom. But John stops short of that, because its fulfillment is still future. It will occur at the Lord's second coming, when He will appear in glory; will appear in power with a sword. But it indicates that Israel had reason to look

for a glorious kingdom on earth and the reestablishment of the throne of David—and its promise that was given throughout the Old Testament.

It's revealed, for example, in Daniel chapter 2, where Daniel interpreted the king's dream of this great statue that represents the empires of history: the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, and then a yet future empire. Then, in this dream that he had, (and that Daniel interprets), 'a stone appeared, not cut out with human hands', supernaturally appears, and it struck the feet of the statue, crushed it to dust which the wind blew away. The stone then "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." (Dan 2:34-35).

Well that is Christ; He is 'the stone which the builders rejected'; who will, in the future, come again, smash the kingdoms of this world, and fill the earth with His kingdom—an eternal kingdom of righteousness.

That's the promise of the Old Testament; a kingdom on the earth—it's the hope of God's people. But in order to be a part of that kingdom, a citizen of that kingdom, we must be fit for it. Only righteous people, those who have been forgiven of their sins and made right with God, '*justified*', can inherit the kingdom of God.

And to make us right with God and fit for His kingdom, He went to the cross to suffer the judgment of God on our behalf, to cleanse us of our sin and guilt, and establish peace between God and man. Before Christ could wear the crown, He had to bear the cross. Before there could be a kingdom, there had to be an *atonement*, a *satisfaction* of God's justice, a sacrifice to bring God and man together.

And that was His purpose for coming to Jerusalem—and coming as He did. He didn't come on a war horse, stirring up the people into a political frenzy. —No, He presented Himself as the King who came in peace; "gentle and riding on a donkey." (Mat 21:5). So John wrote, "Fear not, daughter of Zion." (vs15). It wasn't a warrior approaching, it wasn't a rabble-rouser coming, (wasn't a rebel like Shakespeare's Jack Cade)—it was their King, who came in peace.

[Now, the Hebrew text in Zechariah chapter 9, verse 9 is actually, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion." The words "fear not" are not in the text, at least not the extant text that we have. John may have combined a couple of passages, or added these words, because the Lord used them so often that he thought they fit the prophecy about the King of peace.] Either way, the point is, 'Rejoicing over the salvation that Christ has brought, the salvation that He has achieved, removes fear.' You can't rejoice and be afraid. So, 'What was there to fear?'

Well, one could say there's a lot of things to fear. The uncertainties of life: Privation. Poverty. Hunger. Sickness. But when we are at peace with God, we can never be overwhelmed: If He is for us, who can be against us?

In Matthew chapter 6, verse 33, Jesus said, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." In Philippians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7, Paul told the church, 'Rejoice always and be anxious for nothing.' Peace with God gives the peace of God. He is our fortress; He is our help in time of trouble; He never fails us.

But this crowd and nation wouldn't seek His kingdom. They wanted their kingdom. They wanted a conqueror for a king, not a Savior. In spite of all their excitement, they did not understand Jesus. In fact, the donkey seemed to understand better than they did: Mark and Luke explain that it was a donkey on which "no one had yet sat." That indicates that it was reserved for sacred use. Yet, it did not rear up, it did not resist. It was docile. It obeyed Christ as though it understood fully that it was carrying its Creator.

But Israel, His people, 'did not know Him'. Isaiah said that. Early in the Book of Isaiah, in fact in the first chapter, in the third verse Isaiah declared, "An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, *But* Israel does not know, My people do not understand." And Jesus knew that. For all the excitement the people showed, He knew it was 'zeal without knowledge'.

Enthusiasm should never be confused with faith. Faith is based on truth. Faith, genuine faith, is based on the Scriptures, the Word of God—and that leads to a stable life; that leads to perseverance through trials. Excitement is enjoyable, it's exciting—but it burns out quickly, especially when times get tough. And in a few days, the "Hosannas!" would be replaced by "crucify Him!"

Again, Jesus knew all of this. Luke wrote that as Jesus came over the western slope of the Mount of Olives and saw Jerusalem before Him, "The city of the great King", (Ps 48:2); "He...wept over it." (Luk 19:41). People are cheering for it; there's all this acclamation, this enthusiasm—and Jesus weeps in the midst of all of it. He said, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." (Luk 19:42).

He then prophesied judgment: An army would soon surround the city—but there would be no deliverance like that that's celebrated in Psalm 118. It happened in AD 70, when Rome conquered Jerusalem and burned the temple. It happened because, as He went on to say, "You did not recognize the time of your visitation." (Luk 19:44). They did not recognize who it was who was visiting them when He came, when He had His ministry, or when He visited Jerusalem that day. And the terrible consequences of that failure continue down to this very day.

In 1839, Robert Murray McCheyne, the young Church of Scotland minister went to Palestine to investigate for the Church of Scotland, the possibility of a mission to the Jews. They believed Romans 11 taught a future for Israel, that "all Israel will be saved". (vs26). So, 'If the Jewish failure, (as Paul explains in that chapter), meant riches for the Gentiles, how much more blessing will Israel's salvation be for the world?' It will be what Paul calls, "life from the dead", (v15), —universal blessing. And the Scots believed that—and they wanted to do whatever they could to facilitate the fulfillment of that blessing.

So McCheyne and Andrew Bonar and one or two others, (I know one doctor went with them), were sent to investigate the Jews in Israel; "Palestine", as it was called then. They found the Jewish community in Jerusalem small, poor, and oppressed by the

Muslims. In one of his letters to the church home in Dundee, Scotland, he wrote of a conversation that he had with a Jewish man at what he described as “the large stones” — (the only remains of God's temple).

It was the Western Wall that he was referring to, the “Wailing Wall”, where the Jews gather every day to pray. And this man was there praying and reading his Bible. McCheyne described him as, “Looking very sad.” He asked the man what he was reading, and he showed him Psalm 22 in the Hebrew Bible. McCheyne read it to the man, (who had told him that it was a Psalm about David), but McCheyne showed that that could not be: The Psalm says, “They pierced my hands and my feet.” (vs16). And then he said, “David was never pierced in his hands and feet.” He then explained the Gospel, and he showed the man the only way of forgiveness.

His last comment in the letter was, “The man looked very sad, sitting on the ground.” Now that's a picture of a sad Hebrew by the ruins of the temple. That's a picture, really, of the Jewish people down through the ages. Zachariah said, “Rejoice!” —but they cannot. John said, “Fear not!” —but they cannot because they rejected the King of Peace when He came. And there is no peace, and there is no joy for anyone outside of Jesus Christ.

Now that will change some day. The same prophet, Zachariah, prophesied later (in chapter 12, verse ten of his prophecy) that God will someday “...pour out...on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication...”. And then they will be changed: “...They will look upon Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him... and they will weep bitterly over Him...” It will be the mourning of repentance, because what's poured out is “the Spirit of grace and supplication” and they will be given faith at that time—and they will come to salvation and rejoice in all that the prophet spoke about.

But they will not rejoice until they weep; until they turn in repentance to Christ. That day is still future. In Christ's day they, ‘didn't recognize the time of their visitation.’

Not even the disciples understood what was happening. We saw that in the previous passage last week; Mary understood, she was anointing Him for His crucifixion, His sacrifice, and His burial. —They didn't have any idea, (they should have—they had been given revelation—but they didn't).

And they didn't understand what was happening here. John wrote that it was only later, after Jesus was glorified, that they understood; understood everything that took place. But at the time of the procession down the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, it seemed to them that Jesus was entering the city to claim His crown and establish the kingdom.

In fact, when they go up into the upper room to celebrate the Passover and Jesus gives 'The Upper Room Discourse', they entered that upper room arguing with one another as to who's going to be the greatest in the kingdom. They didn't yet understand what was taking place here, so they were caught up in the excitement which continued and increased as the crowd entered the city—where one group who witnessed the event was not excited at all.

The Pharisees were discouraged by what they saw, and they, "...said to one another, 'You see that you are not doing any good...', (in other words 'nothing that you have done has stopped this, in fact'), "...look, the world has gone after Him.' " (vs19). Everything they had feared would happen seemed to be happening. All their plots and efforts to thwart His ministry and diminish His popularity had failed. He had only increased in popularity.

And now they were in a panic. Something needed to be done quickly before a popular movement became a full blown rebellion. That was their fear.

It was completely unfounded, of course. But even in their ignorance, they did what we often see people doing in this fourth Gospel: They spoke better than they knew. "The world has gone after Him." —Now that was a deliberate exaggeration. What

they were saying was, 'Everyone in the city', (not *everyone*, but most everyone in the city was going after Him), 'was enthusiastic about Him.' But Christ's mission was, in fact, a worldwide mission in its purpose and object. And so, 'They spoke better than they knew'.

The world, the *cosmos*, is one of the great subjects of this fourth Gospel: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jn 3:16). "God so loved the world", well, the Samaritans understood this. At least they had a great confession, (in chapter 4), after His ministry to them: They called Him, "the Savior of the world." (Jn 4:42b). —And so He is.

Even though the nation as a whole would reject Him, many in Israel would believe—and many among the Gentiles would believe, just as many in Samaria had believed. He would win multitudes from every part of the world.

He could have conquered the world as these people had anticipated or had hoped: He could do it with brute force. He's God almighty, the second Person of the Trinity—all He needed to do was 'speak the word', as He told His disciples, and He would have had "legions of angels" at His command. (Mat 26:53). He didn't need one angel at His command—He could have routed the Romans with just a Word. He could have spoken the Word and they would evaporate.

But He would have done that while saving His own life at the expense of our souls—at the expense of our salvation. It was necessary for Him to suffer the pain and shame of the cross in order to purchase us and save us. The day will come when He will return and establish His kingdom, not as a humble King riding on a donkey, but a conquering King who will appear in the sky on a white horse—literally or figuratively.

John wrote of that in Revelation 19. He "is called Faithful and true." (vs11). "His eyes *are* a flame of fire." (vs12). His head is 'covered with crowns'. (vs12b). He will come to judge and wage war; that's the picture that's given. He's coming as a righteous, conquering King in the future. And when He does, He will regenerate the earth, and

make, "justice roll down like waters." (Amos 5:24). It will be an age of righteousness and glory, when all of God's people will rejoice.

Today, we live in the age of grace. It's a time of gathering souls when we announce peace by proclaiming the Good News of salvation that is in Christ for all who believe in Him—whomever they may be, whosoever they may be. Whatever their background, whatever the weight of sin they have, whoever they may be, through faith alone they have life in Him, and forgiveness, and a great and glorious future. And that's what we do; that's what the Church of Jesus Christ does in every age during this age of grace; we announce the Good News.

And we announce it here: If you're without Christ, if you've not believed in Him, understand this, that you do not have peace. You may have things, you may have physical health and material prosperity, but you do not have peace with God—and you cannot have that; for you are still in your sins and guilt.

But Christ has promised to remove guilt from everyone who believes in Him; He who separates our sins "as far as the east is from the west." Everyone who receives His sacrifice through faith and faith alone are counted as righteous, and you have peace with God for all eternity.

Israel missed their visitation, their opportunity. Don't miss yours; Christ is offering you salvation. It is received through faith alone in Him alone. Believe; Trust in Christ and be saved. May God help you to do that—and then, with His people, serve Him, serve Him faithfully.

Father, it's a great thing to be able to confess, as we just sang, "You have loved and purchased me." What a great thought that is, that You would love a sinner, that You would love someone who was born into this world as a rebel, in full blown rebellion against You. And yet You set Your love on a vast multitude of lost people, and You saved

them at the cross. You loved them from all eternity, the Triune God did, and You saved us through the sacrifice of Your Son at a moment in time.

And now Your grace extends down through the ages, as in every generation You gather your people to Yourself. And we look forward to the day when Your Son will return, and there will glory that will fill the earth. We have a glorious future, and we thank You for that.

And we not only have a glorious future, we have an absolutely secure present. Whatever trials we go through in this life, and we will go through trials, they're purposed for a good purpose. They may not seem that way at the time, LORD, but they are and we need to put our faith in You every moment and know that You're leading us as a good shepherd leads his sheep—to good pastures and quiet waters, in paths of righteousness. And eventually You will lead us into Your Father's home, a glorious place, His house.

So Father, encourage us and strengthen us with that, and bless us as we go. Give us a good week. Put Your thoughts within our minds. Help us to think deeply about You, and consider You. So we ask Your blessing.

The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace—the peace that we can only have in Christ. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)