

Main Idea: Six different kinds of worshippers went into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, according to John 12:12-36. As we look at them, we’ll see ourselves and the right way to respond to King Jesus.

- I. We see the ulterior-motive worshipper (12-13).
 - A. They’re emotional.
 - B. They quote Bible verses, but insert the meaning they want.
 - II. We see the perfect worshipper (14-15).
 - A. By His actions, Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures.
 - B. By His actions, Jesus prepared the way for His death.
 1. Jesus made it clear He is the King.
 2. Jesus made it clear He is the one of a kind king.
 - III. We see the confused worshipper (16).
 - A. Apart from grace, they don’t understand either.
 - B. Once they see the glorified Christ, everything else makes sense.
 - IV. We see the curious worshipper (17-18).
 - A. What they knew about Jesus caused them to spread the word.
 - B. What they knew about Jesus made them want more.
 - V. We see the spiteful worshipper (19).
 - A. This person is in love with himself.
 - B. This person, therefore, hates Jesus.
 - VI. We see the hopeful worshipper (20-36).
- Make It Personal: It boils down to this...
1. Everyone is a worshipper.
 2. Only those who see The King rightly worship rightly.

The event we’re about to consider is important, so much so that the Holy Spirit directed *all* four gospel writers to include it. That doesn’t happen very often, but it did in this case. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all record the account of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday.

Is that significant? Very. Why? Because those who knew Jesus knew very well that He was no ordinary man. He was indeed, not simply *a* king, but *The King*, and they made it clear in their gospel accounts that *The King has come*.

We don’t think about kings much. We hear the term “king,” and we likely think of a person who is sort of a glorified president, a leader, yes, but a leader who takes our opinions into consideration. It’s hard for us to imagine what life under a king would be like.

Of course, Jesus isn’t like any other king. He’s not a cruel despot, nor a harsh dictator. He truly is a unique king, for there’s never been another king like Him, nor shall there ever be. He truly is *The King of kings*, and the implications are comprehensive for all who put their faith in Him, and for those who don’t.

But nonetheless, He is *The King*.

When John tells the story of King Jesus’ triumphal entry, he puts the spotlight, not simply on what Jesus did, but on how people responded to Him on that Palm Sunday.

And this is key. John makes it clear that King Jesus made His public unveiling at *a worship event*. He tells us in John 12:12, “The next day the great crowd that had come *for the Feast* heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.”

What *Feast* is that? Verse 1 says, “Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany.” So it’s the Passover Feast. And why did people go to Jerusalem for the Passover? You say, “To remember how the Lord delivered their forefathers from slavery in Egypt.” And you’re right. The Passover holiday was a memorial, and as such was

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designed to remind the Jewish people how the Lord rescued them, how He sent the death angel to take the life of the Egyptian firstborn, and how He *passed over* their homes when He saw the blood and their faith in it.

So you went to this Feast to remember. But not just remember. Notice an interesting comment in verse 20, “Now there were some Greeks among those who went up *to worship* at the Feast.”

So this is a worship event. When a person traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, his aim was to worship. Don’t miss that. In a moment we’re going to see a crowd of people, but please realize these are worshippers. Everybody in today’s story is a worshipper.

For that matter, everybody in every story is a worshipper. But not all worshippers are the same. That’s true then and now. Worship has to do, fundamentally, with how you treat *The King*, and why.

Let me tell you up front what we’re going to see this morning. According to John 12:12-36, six different kinds of worshippers went into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, all of them heading for the Holy Feast. As we look at them, we’ll see ourselves and the right way to respond to King Jesus.

I. We see the ulterior-motive worshipper (12-13).

Notice verses 12-13, “The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 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!’”

John says this happened “the next day.” That’s the day after the event in verses 1-11, the dinner given in Jesus’ honor at Bethany. At that dinner Mary anointed Jesus with ointment worth a year’s wages. That upset Judas (and the rest of the disciples) so much that they objected, but Jesus defended Mary’s actions. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial (7).”

He knew what was coming. Indeed, it’s why He came into the world in the first place.

So this is the next day. What’s Jesus doing? John says that He is *on his way to Jerusalem*. It’s a couple of miles from Bethany to Jerusalem. Why’s He heading there? Because it’s Passover time, and He is the Passover Lamb.

John mentions *a great crowd* met Him. He’s not exaggerating. According to one commentary, the first century Jewish historian, Josephus, describes one Passover, just before the Jewish War (ad 66–70), when 2,700,000 people took part, not counting the defiled and the foreigners who were present in the city. Even if his numbers are inflated, the crowds were undoubtedly immense.¹

What do you notice about this crowd? They’re worshippers, for sure. That’s why they’ve made this costly, long trek to Jerusalem in the first place, to worship the Lord at Passover. But by their actions, particularly in what they do with Jesus, we learn these are worshippers with ulterior motives.

Two things stand out...

A. They’re emotional. Ulterior-motive worshippers often are. John says these worshippers are *shouting*. They’re also *taking palm branches* in hand and going *out to meet him*. Palm branches were a national, even nationalistic symbol. Just a couple

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (431). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

centuries before this, when Simon the Maccabee drove the Syrian forces out of Jerusalem, crowds met him with music and the waving of palm branches. A few decades later the Jews put the symbol of palms on their coins to represent their resistance against the Romans.²

So this crowd is worked up. They're excited about something.

What's that? Jesus is here. And what is it about Jesus that thrills them? For three years now He's been doing miracles, healing the sick, turning sack lunches into meals for 5,000 plus, raising the dead.

And they know their Bibles. In fact, here we see them quoting Bible verses. Actually, I should say this...

B. They quote Bible verses, but insert the meaning they want.

"Hosanna!" they shout, which means, "Save now, I pray!" or "Help, I pray!" Every Jew knew this term for it came from the group of Psalms known as the Hallel (Psalm 113-118). MacArthur explains, "The Hallel was sung each morning by the temple choir during the major Jewish festivals."³

They're also saying, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" That's from Psalm 118:26. They're saying that to and about Jesus for they believe that He is the fulfillment of this promise. He indeed has come in the name of Yahweh. He indeed is the Messiah.

And King, too, as they affirm in their shouting. "Blessed is the King of Israel!" In Matthew's account they also call Jesus "the Son of David." That's the conclusion they've drawn about Jesus. He is David's heir. He is the royal seed. He is the long awaited King!

So they're calling on Jesus to save—Hosanna! And they're calling Him Israel's king. Yes, they want Jesus to be their king! But save from what? And what kind of king?

Don't be fooled by this. They have ulterior motives. In Jesus they see the ticket to what they most want. They want the Romans gone. They want freedom and independence and prosperity. They want a king to give them a better life now, and in Jesus, they see this king. And once they learn He's *not* that kind of king, they'll be shouting something very different.

It's not that what they wanted was bad, just far too deficient.

The ulterior motive worshipper is still alive and well. In fact, he's sitting in church right now. He may be singing and clapping and saying a hearty "Amen!" And he does so as long as Jesus gives him what he most wants. But what happens when He doesn't? What happens when he prays for healing and Jesus doesn't produce, or when he asks the Lord to take care of some other need and He doesn't come through as requested? Then the singing stops, and there are no more "Amens."

You find out what you really think about Jesus, not when He does what you want, but when He *doesn't*. In the next scene John introduces us to another worshipper.

II. We see the perfect worshipper (14-15).

We see Him in verses 14-15, "Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, 'Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.'"

² Observation by D. A. Carson.

³ John MacArthur, p. 16.

Who is the perfect worshipper? It's Jesus. Now I know Jesus is also the worthy object of worship, for He is God. But He's also the perfect man, and as such He models perfect worship. In this account He does so in two ways.

A. By His actions, Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures. Before discussing what Jesus did here, let me remind you of something He did back in John 6. In John 6 Jesus performed the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. After the people saw that miracle, verse 14 says they tried to force Jesus to be king. Remember what Jesus did in response? John 6:15 says, "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

That's interesting. When the crowd in John 6 wanted Jesus to be king, Jesus resisted and refused to cooperate. But when the crowd in John 12 did, in essence, the same thing, Jesus didn't retreat. In fact, He didn't sidestep their attention at all.

Instead, He found a young donkey and rode it. Mark mentions the donkey was untrained, perhaps to highlight Jesus' sovereign control.

Why a donkey? Why not a war horse? The car commercials know the answer. What you drive says something. Your vehicle is a *status symbol*. You drive the minivan and it says you're a family man. You drive the sports car and it says you've got money and like power.

So what's it say if you're in first century Jerusalem riding a donkey? It says you're a king, but not a Roman Empire type of king. The donkey was a royal beast, but also one associated with humility and peace.

John says that Jesus' actions were predicted in the Old Testament. "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion," and seem to come from Isaiah 40:9. "See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt," comes from Zechariah 9:9.

Jesus knows His Bible, as any good worshipper does. And by His actions, Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures. That's why He has come, to do what sinful mankind has failed to do, live in line with the Scriptures. And so time and time again we see Him, as in this story, doing the things the Old Testament Scriptures foretold.

He is the perfect worshipper. In fact, He's the substitute, perfect worshipper, who has come to do for the believing sinner what he cannot do for himself.

But something else is happening here.

B. By His actions, Jesus prepared the way for His death. And here's the answer to our question, why now and not in John 6? Why in John 6 when the crowd tried to make Him king did He resist, and why now does He go along? For starters, because in John 6 it wasn't time. Now it is. So when Jesus climbed up on that young donkey...

1. *Jesus made it clear He is the King.* On this day He now officially presents Himself to Israel as their king. That's what they wanted, right? Not exactly. As they'll soon see, and even as His present actions indicate...

2. *Jesus made it clear He is the one of a kind king.* He's not like Alexander the Great, nor Caesar Augustus, nor any other king the world has known. He truly is a different kind of king, one of a kind in every way.

And by His actions here He is setting in motion the ultimate demonstration of His unique kingship. Doesn't He know this crowd will change its tune if He doesn't give them what they want? Oh, He knows. But He hasn't come to give self-absorbed sinners what they want. He's come to provide for them what they desperately need, salvation. Not salvation from Rome, but salvation from their own sin, and the wrath of God.

My friend, that's why this one of a kind king came in the first place. Is He powerful? Yes, there's none greater. Does He possess authority? Yes, all authority on heaven and earth is His. Is He exalted? Yes, one day every knee will bow before Him.

But on this day, at this Passover Feast, this one of a kind king came riding, not into Rome, but into Jerusalem, and not on a warhorse but on a donkey. Does He deserve man's applause and worship? Indeed He does, and He does not here refuse it. But even in the receiving of it He knows He's setting in motion the events that will lead to His death.

And that's why He has come. This King is on a mission, One given to Him by His Father in heaven. He's come to this city at this time with these people, because He knows what this fickle crowd will do to Him in just five days. And what He will accomplish, as He dies in the place of sinners, and eventually conquers death, and secures forgiveness and eternal life for all who repent and put their total trust in Him.

Do you know this king, my friend? Have you received the gift He now offers? Know this. Today is the day of salvation. This one of a kind king is coming again, and when He does, it will be on a warhorse.

We meet a third kind of worshipper in the text in verse 16. First, the ulterior motive worshipper. Second, the perfect worshipper. Third...

III. We see the confused worshipper (16).

That's verse 16, "At first his disciples did not understand all 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."

So here we see the confused worshipper. It's Jesus' own disciples. They too are heading to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. They have more light than the crowds, for they've been with Jesus for three years now, listening to His teaching, watching His miracles. But they don't understand what's just happened.

Oh, they have the same nationalistic longings the crowd has, and they believe Jesus is that king, too. But they don't understand why Jesus resisted the crowd's efforts to enthrone Him before, and now seems to be going along with them.

They know this crowd is dangerous. They remember what happened a previous time Jesus came to Jerusalem, and reminded Jesus of such in John 11. This was right after Jesus learned that Lazarus was sick, and He said, "Let us go back to Judea (7)." And they said, "But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there (8)?"

And of course, He did go, and raised Lazarus from the dead, and thrilled many Jews but infuriated the Pharisees and the high priest, Caiaphas, who made his infamous prophecy that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation (11:51).

To make matters worse, it was public knowledge that a trap was being set for Jesus. As John records in 11:57, "But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him."

So put all this together and the result is a confused group of disciples. Why is Jesus doing what He's doing? Why go public at the very time this trap is set?

It's now over fifty years later as John writes this biographical account. He's one of these disciples, and as he looks back he confesses, "At first his disciples did not understand all this." So it's not just the crowd that's confused.

A. Apart from grace, they don't understand either. In fact, apart from grace, *no one* does. Because of our sin problem, no one figures out God, nor His ways. Frankly, we don't get what our real problem is, and what Jesus came to do about it. We think we're good people, and that our biggest problem is the injustice we receive from others. Consequently, we don't mind Jesus being a king that's come to fix our injustices.

But He didn't come merely to fix our injustices, for our problem is much deeper than that. My biggest problem isn't out there. It's in here. It's *me*. That's why I don't merely need a King who will establish a good kingdom. I need a king who will make me fit for His good kingdom.

You see, that's a very different kind of king, and the natural man doesn't want Him. He doesn't think he needs Him. That's why Jesus said in John 6:65, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

Apart from grace, even Jesus' own disciples don't understand. That's why I call them *confused* worshippers. However...

B. Once they see the glorified Christ, everything else makes sense. Listen again to the end of verse 16, "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."

Once you see the glorified Christ, it changes everything. It did for the disciples, and it will for us. Of course, we can't see Him with our eyes, not yet. But we can see Him in this Book, for those who did see Him recorded the rest of the story.

He did die, like He said He would, in the place of sinners. And three days later He did leave His tomb alive, again as predicted. And He came forth with a glorified body, as a triumphant Deliverer. And when the disciples saw Him, their confusion fled. It made perfect sense. Everything now made sense.

My friend, you can't draw a final conclusion about Jesus by seeing Him on the road into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, or even as He's hanging on that cruel Roman cross, and certainly not as He's lying in that vault of a tomb. You must go further. You must see Him in His glory. Only then will the rest make sense.

The world is full of people who believe in a domesticated Jesus, a mere man who lived a good life, or a hero that died an inspiring death, or whatever. But that's not who He is. He's a king, a one of a kind king that won't make sense to you until, by the grace of God, you see Him in His glory on the other side of the tomb. That's who walked into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and died on the cross on Good Friday, God Almighty Himself.

Next...

IV. We see the curious worshipper (17-18).

Verses 17-18, "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. Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him."

So within the crowd there is another crowd. Back in verse 12 we saw the great crowd that waved palm branches, hundreds of thousands of Jewish pilgrims heading to Passover. But in verse 17 there's another crowd. This, says John, is the crowd that saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the tomb.

What's true of this crowd? John points out two things.

A. What they knew about Jesus caused them to spread the word. That's what the end of verse 17 says. They *continued to spread the word*. Which is only natural. It's not every day you see a man wrapped in burial cloth walking out of his tomb!

"You should have seen what I saw! I saw a dead man walk out of his tomb. It happened when Jesus called out his name, "Lazarus, come out (11:43)!"

And the effect of that testimony was powerful. Verse 18 says that *many people* heard it, and because they heard *went out to meet him*. In other words...

B. What they knew about Jesus made them want more. Hence, the curious worshipper. “Wow! If Jesus could do *that*, I want to see what else He can do!” And so they came. Again, these too are worshippers heading to Jerusalem for Passover, but they’re not true disciples, and so consequently, they’re not yet true worshippers.

This is an interesting crowd. They are fascinated with Jesus, and most likely they’re also shouting in His favor, at least today. But only time will tell what they will do with this One who is a very different kind of king.

You’ll meet the curious worshipper almost every Sunday. He comes to a church service because He’s heard some things about Jesus, and He’s interested in learning more. There’s a battle raging for his soul, too, for there are others who don’t want him to learn about Jesus. That brings us to our fifth worshipper in the story.

V. We see the spiteful worshipper (19).

Verse 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, of course, are Israel’s Bible men. They’re supposedly the most spiritual people in the country, “separated ones,” as their name indicates. They’ve developed an elaborate list of religious rules to help them live a God-fearing life. They love God. They love their country. They love their religion. They love their Bibles. They love their families. And they hate Jesus.

It’s true. Look again at the spiteful worshipper.

A. This person is in love with himself. And...

B. This person, therefore, hates Jesus.

You see, the Pharisee doesn’t see himself as a sinner, at least not as a desperate, I have nothing to offer God kind of sinner. He sees himself as a basically good guy that just needs a little help in his efforts to patch things up with God.

Notice the self-love in what the Pharisees say. “See, this is getting *us* nowhere.” It’s all about *us*. Back in chapter 11 the Pharisees and chief priests had a secret meeting and said this in 11:47-48, “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both *our place* and *our nation*.”

Religious people can say the most wicked of things in the most spiritual sounding ways. But if you listen carefully, you’ll hear what makes them tick, as in this case. *Our place. Our nation.*

Don’t miss this. The person who is in love with himself will necessarily hate Jesus. Why would that be? Because Jesus calls for us to die to self, and deny self, and until we do we’ll not love God and love others as we ought.

Which again is why we need Him to save us, to save us from our self-love, and turn us into lovers of God and others.

We mustn’t miss what’s happening here. King Jesus is offering Himself as king to Israel, and how do His citizens respond? They reject Him. In fact, those who should have known better, the Bible men who knew the prophecies, led the way and eventually persuaded the populace to call for their King’s crucifixion.

Did this catch the Sovereign King off guard? No. As Peter explained on the day of Pentecost, “This man was handed over to you *by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge* [so this was no unexpected response that led to “plan B”]; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Acts 2:23-24).”

The Pharisees drew an interesting conclusion. They said, “Look how the whole world has gone after him.” Not just Israel, but the whole *world*. By that word they simply meant *everybody*. Everybody in Israel is going after this man. But John includes this statement because in it he sees the King’s ultimate purpose being fulfilled. This king isn’t merely Israel’s king. He’s for the whole world. That’s who He came to save. Which brings us to the final scene.

VI. We see the hopeful worshipper (20-36).

I want to introduce you to this hopeful worshipper now, and we’ll return in a future study to explore him more fully. Notice verses 20-21, “Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’”

So here we meet some non-Jews, some *Greeks*. What are they doing? Heading to Jerusalem to worship. So apparently they are God-fearers, perhaps proselytes. Interestingly, they don’t approach Jesus directly. They contact one of His followers, Philip, a man from Galilee, and they bring a straightforward request, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”

In my home church those are the words inscribed on the inside of the pulpit. I remember seeing them when I first began to preach. *Sir, we would see Jesus*. That’s the preacher’s assignment. Not to tell stories, not to entertain, not to impress, but to help people see Jesus.

This is the request of the hopeful worshipper. What happened to these hopeful worshippers? How did Jesus respond to them? That’s for a future study. For now it’s time to take some inventory.

We’ve just seen six different worshippers heading into Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday. We’ve seen *the ulterior-motive worshipper*, in the crowd. We’ve seen *the perfect worshipper*, in the King Himself. We’ve seen *the confused worshipper*, in the disciples. We’ve seen the curious, the spiteful, and the hopeful worshippers, in the crowd that saw Lazarus’s miracle, in the Pharisees, and in the Greeks.

What do they all have in common? They’re all worshippers. Friends, it boils down to this, and I want to conclude with two simple thoughts.

Make It Personal: It boils down to this...

1. *Everyone is a worshipper*. From the common guy on the street, to the Bible quoting Pharisee. Everybody in the story is a worshipper. And that’s true of everybody in this room, and in this community, and all over this world. We’re all created in God’s image, and we’re all cut off from our God from birth due to Adam’s sin, and we’re all trying to patch things up with God, and we’re all unable to do so.

Which again is precisely why God in His amazing grace sent His Son, the King, into the world. Not merely to establish His earthly kingdom—that will come when He returns. But first, to rescue rebels and make them fit for His kingdom.

And that brings us to our final thought...

2. *Only those who see The King rightly worship rightly*. There is no acceptable worship apart from knowing Jesus, and responding rightly to Him. What have you done with the King, and what are you doing with Him now? Are you thankful for what He came to do, and trusting in it? And are you preparing now to see Him when He returns?