

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Triumphal Entry

By Dan Trygg

"The next day, when the large crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³ they took palm branches and went out to meet Him. They kept shouting: 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord -- the King of Israel!' ¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written: ¹⁵ 'Fear no more,' Daughter Zion. 'Look! Your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.'" John 12:12-15

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. ²⁶ If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." John 12:24-26

In this chapter John records not only the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but he brings Jesus' public ministry to a close. **Up to this point in this gospel, most of Jesus' teaching has revolved around His identity.** There have been surprisingly few instances where He strongly challenges or invites people to follow Him. **This passage, then, brings to a climax His public claim to be the King of Israel, and His final call and challenge for disciples.**

Vs. 12 begins with, **"On the next day..."** This comment, along with vs. 1, pinpoints the time of the triumphal entry as the Sunday before the Passover. The other gospel records (Matt. 21:1-11; Mk. 11:1-11; Lk. 19:29-44) do not give enough information to determine the timing of this event. John mentions that **there was a "great multitude who had come to the feast."** It was mostly religious pilgrims, not the locals of Jerusalem, who participated in this procession. This makes sense, since the people of Jerusalem would probably be busy with their daily affairs in the city, while pilgrims would be milling around in a festive mood with few demands upon their time. The other gospels record that Jesus had sent His disciples find a colt for Him to ride on. This appears to have been set up by Jesus beforehand.

"...when they [the crowd] heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they began to take palm branches and went out to meet Him" (vs. 13). Palm branches were a symbol of victory and celebration. They readily grew around the city. John does not mention anyone laying garments or branches in the road before Him. That information is gleaned from the parallel accounts. From John's account alone we would have supposed that the crowd was simply waving the branches in celebration. **The disciples had already started laying their garments before Him, so the crowd also began to spread their garments in the road before Him (Lk. 19:29-36), a sign of deference and honor before a king.** This spectacle would have attracted peoples' attention, as well as set a precedent for their response to Jesus' coming.

"...and began to cry out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.'" "Hosanna" is an exclamation in Hebrew, meaning "Save now". Their cry was reminiscent of Psa. 118:25,26, a cry of the worshipper to God in the temple. **This last phrase, "...even the King of Israel..." was added by the crowd to clearly signify their intent: to proclaim and welcome Jesus as their king and Messiah.** In this context, "Save now!" would have been expressing more of a hope in a *political deliverance* than in a *spiritual one*. This is confirmed by the crowd's proclamations recorded by the other gospel writers. "Hosanna to the Son of David..." (Matt. 21:9); "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David..." (Mk. 11:10); and, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord..." (Lk. 19:38) were all shouted out by the crowd as they approached the city. **No wonder the Pharisees, motivated by a sense of outrage, as well as fear of Roman reprisal, told Jesus to rebuke his followers (Lk. 19:39).** If they had felt that His popularity had become a threat before, they must have been horrified at what looked like an open declaration of their worst fears. This procession was making enough noise that the entire city was stirred as He came into the city (Matt. 21:10).

"And Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat upon it" (vs. 14). From the other gospels, we know that Jesus *initiated* His procession into the city riding upon this donkey. **John mentions this detail here, because it is a demonstration that further qualifies His claim to be King.** Instead of approaching Jerusalem on a war horse, **He came seated upon a young donkey, the symbol of peace.** Even while the people were proclaiming Him King, His very demeanor established that He came *in peace*, not *for war*. **"...as it is written..."** -- John quotes from the OT. **The fuller quote portrays the character and intent of this messianic King: "Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.** And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and 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, and from the River to the ends of the earth*" (Zech. 9:9,10).

"These things His disciples did not understand..." (vs. 16). In spite of the fact that these men had been raised from childhood to know the OT Scriptures, they did not recognize these things until afterward.

In vss. 17,18, **John informs us that some of those who had been eyewitnesses of Lazarus' resurrection were testifying about Him** and "...for this cause also the multitude went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign." Again, apart from John, we would not know about the significance of this event.

"The Pharisees therefore said to one another, 'You see that you are not doing any good; look the world has gone after Him.'" (vs. 19). This experience only more strongly convinced them that things were hopeless *unless He was removed from the picture entirely*.

"Now there were certain Greeks among those going up to worship at the feast..." (vss. 20-22). Undoubtedly, these were proselytes to Judaism. "...these therefore came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee..." They probably approached Philip because, as a Galilean, he would have been a fluent speaker of Greek, and his name was a Greek name. Philip of Macedon was the father of Alexander the Great. **"Sir, we wish to see Jesus."** They had already been truth seekers in order to become followers of Judaism. Evidently, they were drawn by what they had heard and seen of Jesus. **"Philip came and told Andrew... and they told Jesus..."** One of the characteristics of Andrew is that he is often portrayed as bringing people to Jesus (cf. Jn. 1:40-42; 6:8,9). **"Jesus answered them, saying, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'"** (vs. 23). Jesus apparently did not spend any amount of time with these Greek proselytes. **The time had arrived for His true mission and character to be seen.** His words prepare them for some understanding of the events that would soon take place. However, He extends to them all the call and challenge of discipleship (cf. Matt. 10:24-42; Lk. 9:23-26). **"Truly, truly, I say to you..."** -- Important saying coming up! Listen up! **"...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"** (vs. 24). This is a symbolic reference to what Jesus' death would produce. More than that, however, it is a principle of the Kingdom of God, as Jesus goes on to explain.

"He who loves his life loses it..." (vs. 25). The Greek for "life" is *psuchē*, meaning "soul, self, person or natural-life." It is the same word as in Genesis 2:7 in the Greek Septuagint translation of the OT, "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust from the ground (body), and breathed into his nostrils the breath (spirit) of life; and the man became a living being (*psuchē* - soul, self, individual)." The word for "loses it" can also mean to "destroy, spoil, ruin". Jesus is saying that **if anyone loves, likes, delights in, or cherishes his natural life (his life apart from God), or his individual person, he spoils or destroys it.** "...and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal." The word for "hates" can also mean "to be indifferent to, disregard, despise, to love less, or to lightly esteem." The word for "keep" can mean to "guard, keep safe, preserve, protect, or defend." **What Jesus is saying is that if one lives only to himself, he destroys, ruins and loses his very self. If however, he is willing to disregard himself, ...if he is willing to give away his natural life as a seed-like investment..., he will preserve his self unto/into life of the age to come.** One of the interesting things about this statement is that *the self*, the very thing in danger of being ruined or destroyed by our inordinate self-love, *is the same thing that will be preserved* by being in some way disregarded. **This "soul, self, person, individual, natural life" remains a valuable commodity in God's plan. He does not want to destroy it. Spirituality does not entail the eradication of self. He wants to guard, protect, and preserve it unto or towards eternal life.** If we try to cherish, coddle, or focus on it in an unhealthy way, we will spoil it. **The tendency is to overprotect it, to focus on self too much. This ruins the potential self that God created.** The *self*, the unique root personality and giftedness that each one of us potentially can be, is *not* the problem. **Selfishness somehow perverts or distorts who we are.** Each one of us has been uniquely designed to express certain aspects of God's personality and character that no one else can. **We are all in the image of God in some fashion, but that likeness is expressed and fulfilled especially as we give and serve.** The life that is in us is *meant* to be given away, or expressed outwardly, in order for our full potential to be fulfilled. When we live to "get life" for ourselves, we pervert and truncate who we really were intended to be. When we hoard up our life energies and resources, we become miserly, distorted, and small. **When we generously share our life energies and resources with others, God's image in us finds expression, and He gives us more of His life to share. He Himself becomes our Source of life, ...and we grow, mature, and are fulfilled.**

"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me..." (vs. 26). Actually, the Greek is more pointed, "If ever anyone might serve Me...". Jesus is not saying that following Him is a higher level offered to those who serve Him. He is stating that **if anyone might desire to serve Him, the kind of service He wants is that they would follow Him, i.e., they would be active disciples.** **"...and where I am, there shall My servant be also..."** -- A promise for the future. In a practical sense, however, the one *following* Jesus will be available *when* and *where* He is desiring to work. **"...if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."** God does not forget or take for granted what we do in our pursuit of Jesus. He will value, regard, and acknowledge our faithful service to Jesus.