

John 12:12-26

As we reflect on this passage I ask you in the midst of all that is going on in the world; What kind of saviour are you looking for? What do you hope Jesus has come to save us from?

Perhaps we're praying that Jesus will protect us from getting coronavirus or those we love and care for to be safe. Maybe we are anxious about the effects of this virus and the indirect suffering that it has caused people in terms of finance and family problems. Perhaps we think that the nation's greatest need is to be protected from death. Perhaps our prayers reflect this. Many of us might be hoping that Jesus has come to save us from disease, from suffering and from death.

What kind of saviour are you looking for? What do you hope Jesus has come to save us from?

This Palm Sunday we remember the first Palm Sunday when Jesus came to Jerusalem and was welcomed as King. In John 12 there are different groups of people who respond to Jesus with different expectations of how he would save them and what his glory would look like.

The First group are found in John chapter 12:12-14; where John recalls the great crowd that came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival and on hearing that Jesus was on his way; they took palm branches and went out to meet him shouting 'hosanna' – which means 'save now'; and 'blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'; 'blessed is the king of Israel.'

The second group are some Greeks who are there for the festival in Verses 20 to 22 and have heard about the resurrection of Lazarus and probably Jesus' other miracles. Verses 17-18 recall that there were some among the crowd in Jerusalem who been with Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead; calling him out of the tomb. And that they have *continued* to spread the word about this. Consequently many others went out to meet him because they had heard of this sign he had performed. These Greeks wanted to see for themselves this Jesus who they had heard such amazing things about.

To help us find out, what kind of saviour Jesus is and what he saves us from, we will break our passage into two sections: 1st verses 12 to 16 and 2nd verses 17 to 26.

Verses 12 to 16:

The great crowd, presumably too big to count; have heard that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and so take palm branches to wave and throw on the ground before him as he enters. Every country has its own national emblem many of which are plants: For example England's red rose, The Welsh leek or daffodil, Scotland's purple thistle; and the Irish pint of Guinness, I mean Shamrock. The palm branch is the crowd's national emblem. Waving them as Jesus enters into Jerusalem and shouting 'blessed is the king of Israel', is like waving the Union Jack ask the Queen parade's through the streets of London. The crowd are shouting hosanna which means save us now! The people are expecting King Jesus to be a powerful political saviour who will save them from the oppression of Rome, the

occupying force in Jerusalem. What better time can there be to welcome him than when they are celebrating the Passover festival in which they are remembering how Moses liberated the people from slavery in Egypt!

The crowd quote Psalm 118:25-26 saying 'Lord save us'; 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'. Here they are claiming that Jesus is the fulfilment of this passage and believe as in Psalm 118 verses 6 and 7 that Jesus will triumph over their enemies because His miracles demonstrate that God is with him.

Before coronavirus, Brexit was the major headline for what seemed like forever. As we consider the kind of saviour we are looking for, is it possible that some of us have thought of Jesus as a national hero. In the 2001 film: A Knight's Tale, Heath Ledger's character William is to fight in a French tournament. William's Squire, Roland argues with the French Squire who says that "an Englishman will not win this French tournament. English legs are unsteady on French soil." He continues; "And most importantly, because the Pope himself is French!" Roland finally gives in and responds, immediately with: "Well the Pope may be French but Jesus is English!" Perhaps for some of us our prayers in recent months whether dealing with Brexit or Covid 19 - reveal that we hope God will protect the interests of Great Britain above the rest of Europe. Is this the kind of saviour he is? Would this be in line with Jesus' agenda for salvation?

The question is how will Jesus respond to the crowd's welcome and shouts, will Jesus accept their claim of him being King and saviour. If we were to read all of John's gospel in one go, as John intended, we would have seen that there are a number of times where Jesus has not stepped up to claim his Glory. For example in John chapter 6:15 after feeding the 5000 they tried to crown him King, but instead he slipped away into the crowd. So as the people welcome him into Jerusalem we the readers are primed to see how Jesus will respond, will he simply slip away into the crowd like he has before?

Jesus' next actions demonstrate that he acknowledges and accepts their claim to him being king and saviour, here the time has come for Jesus to begin his journey towards glory. In verse 14, Jesus finds a young donkey sits on it and rides into Jerusalem; as he does so he fulfils the prophecy from Zechariah 9 verse 9: 'do not be afraid daughter Zion see your King is coming seated on a donkey's colt.' By this direct action Jesus is acknowledging his position as King. John recorded that there were 5000 men who were fed from the bread and fish, not including women and children. But in this passage he does not able to record how many people there were except that they were a great crowd; potentially in their millions. Jesus would not have been able to explain over their shouts and acclamations that whilst he was their King and saviour, his glory was not in being their political saviour and that he had not come to defeat Rome but an even greater enemy. Instead Jesus makes a bold statement in his choice of steed. A Royal King or military commander would never be seen riding a humble and somewhat pathetic looking donkey. There's nothing impressive about a donkey, it's not a particularly powerful animal, so little so that we let our young children ride them on the beach. No, there was no oomph in Jesus' response; this was a sign that he was a saviour and King who comes in humility. At the end of this scene, which closes beyond our passage in verse 36 – we see that Jesus does not allow the people to crown him as king and instead for the last time in John's Gospel, he slips away into the crowd.

The crowd didn't get it, they hadn't understood the kind of saviour Jesus really is. Not only so, but as in verse 16 at the time Jesus' own disciples did not understand all of this. It was only after Jesus had been glorified that they realised that he had fulfilled the prophecies that had been written about him. The glorification of Jesus, was not him being crowned king and defeating the Romans with his political power— but his true glory is to be found in his death on the cross. Jesus himself speaks of his glory in his death in verses 23 and 24, which will we look at in our second section, in a moment. However, before we rush on to get there, it is important for us to acknowledge the warning that verse 16 presents us with as Evangelicals: The crowd had the scriptures- that had been written about Jesus centuries before, they knew them well and yet they came to the wrong conclusion. The disciples did not understand these events and what was written until they had seen Jesus die and rise again. So, neither can we properly understand the scriptures without also having the glory of the cross in mind! When we understand his death correctly, we see the true nature of the powerful God who loves us, who uses his power for us, to save us from sin, even though we don't deserve it; and this shows us the kind of king and saviour Jesus really is.

Our second section is verses 17 to 26.

In these verses - there are many people seeking after Jesus because they have heard about the miracles he has performed, about raising Lazarus from the grave. The crowd of witnesses have continued to spread the word. The Pharisees- who were religiously pious were out to kill Jesus; especially because of the incident in John 10:22-39, when Jesus was last in Jerusalem. They had tried to stone him (v31) and later to seize him (v39) because of Jesus' answer to the Jews saying to him, *"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."*— Jesus answers them; verse 25: *"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* Jesus' Jewish opponents are clear in verse 33 *"We are not stoning you for any good work,... but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."*

The Pharisees in John 12:19 recognise that their efforts to silence this blasphemer, who claims not only to be the saviour of the Jews, but also the Lord God, Yahweh himself; are getting them nowhere. To them it seems as if the whole world has gone after Jesus. As the writer John, reflects on their words it seems that they are declaring more truth than they know. The Greeks, in verse 20, is more likely to be a reference to Gentiles who speak Greek than people from Greece. They are pilgrims who have come to worship at the Passover festival because they have converted to Judaism. Until this point John has not mentioned the Gentiles in his gospel; he introduces them here to show us, perhaps that Jesus is not only King of the Jews, but king and saviour over all the nations – over the whole world! And the Pharisees recognise that even those from outside the Hebrew race are now seeking after Jesus.

The Gentiles who are seeking after Jesus, not just to see him, but to speak to him; approach Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee. According to commentaries, John is telling us this because Philip is a Greek name and was from

Bethsaida near Decapolis, where the Gentiles were a majority. Somehow this made Philip approachable. Anyway... Philip goes with Andrew to tell Jesus that they would like to see him.

In the last part of our passage verses 23-26 Jesus replies. It is not clear if the Gentiles do see him, but Jesus is definitely responding to their request by speaking about himself. The Gentiles are a good example for us - If we want to see Jesus, we should not seek after a seeing a miracle for ourselves to believe what we have heard about him, but seek him out; to hear what he says about himself. If you have never read through John's eyewitness account of Jesus' life and you've suddenly found yourself with a lot of time on your hands; can I encourage you to read through John's Gospel and hear what Jesus says about himself and the kind of saviour he really is. [Put John's Gospel online link on website].

Jesus replies to them in verses: 23-4; *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."*

Anyone who knows me, will know that that I don't claim to be a gardener, but even I understand what Jesus is saying here. Unless a wheat seed dies, unless a hole is dug in the soil and it is buried, it will only remain as a single seed. But if it is planted it will produce much fruit and many more seeds. Jesus' greatest glory is not seen in him being a powerful and mighty ruler, but in laying his life down to die on the cross for us. If Jesus does not die, no one will be saved. He will suffer and die by crucifixion to save us from sin and death. By his one death, many will have eternal life. Remember Jesus' words from John 10: *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* – This is his glory – that he will take the punishment we deserve, he will pay our debt, he will purchase us from death and instead we will receive everlasting life that can never be taken away! This is the kind of king and saviour Jesus is!

If you want to see my glory says Jesus, then there's no shortcut. I must die, so that you and many will live.

This free gift to us at Jesus' expense does not come easily, however. In verses 25 and 26 Jesus turns his reply from himself to others. He explains that there is a cost to following him in this life, but that the benefits that start now and that will last into eternity far outweigh them.

Verse 25: *"Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* Notice how black and white, how binary this statement is... there is no grey area. Either you love life in this world and you will lose your life; or you hate your life in this world and so receive eternal life. Now the word hate here doesn't mean that literally we have to hate our life, after all; *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it"* [Psalm 24]. This is a deliberate exaggeration to contrast loving God against loving the world. Christians don't have to be negative and down about living in the world or enjoying this life. The question here is do I love this world more than I love Jesus?

If we so love this life we will be reluctant to live in a way that honours Jesus if it will put our love of this world in jeopardy. In times of great suffering our certain hope that we have in Jesus shines brighter to the world around us. Suffering provides us with a unique opportunity to speak about Jesus with our neighbours and to share the hope that we have in him. At times this can be difficult, we're often told to keep our religion to ourselves. For some speaking up at work could mean risking the loss of their job; it could mean losing the respect of family and friends; it could mean our neighbours think we are weird.

And yet, we have the knowledge of the truth and without it they're lost! Because we are running our services online; it has never been easier to invite our neighbours, friends and family to come to church with us. Yet, if we are unwilling to invite them to church because of the fear of losing our position in their esteem or assumed financial security that allows us to pay for the things of this world that we love— then are we not loving this world more than we love Jesus? If we choose to not speak about Jesus when we have the God given opportunity then we dishonour him and those we call our neighbours could remain lost. Jesus died so that his one death would bring many lives to glory. Let us live lives in accordance with being his followers. We cannot love this world and keep our lives, we must love him more and lose them!

Verse 26: "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me." Last week Steve shared about Martin Luther's wisdom on the plague in his own day. Martin Luther said that we are not to be condemned by a bold or fearful temperament, and with this I agree. In applying this, I would challenge us to consider, as we follow Jesus whether in specific situations our tendency towards our temperament whether bold or fearful reflects Jesus's actions in the similar situations. If we are fearful where Jesus is bold we are to die to self. If we are bold when Jesus comes in humility we are to die to self. This is the life of the Christian to die to the world like Jesus, to be imitators of him, to humble ourselves as his lowly servants, sometimes to suffer as he suffered in going to the cross.

Do not misunderstand me; I am not advocating that we should be rash or unwise by putting ourselves or others at risk in order to honour Jesus. We are simply to be good news in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

This way of life is hard. We will be stretched daily we will need to rely on him and the Holy Spirit for strength to be empowered to live like Jesus, we know we cannot do it by our own power. We have the promise here that wherever we are as Jesus servants he will be with us with his power and presence. But joy and glory can be found in our suffering! If we live to serve Jesus, the Father himself will honour us. He will say on that day: "Well done good and faithful servant." Our death to self and living sacrifices are never in vain. The promise to lose our life now and to keep it for eternity is sure. Loving Jesus means we can focus on all that is to come in eternity rather than on the suffering we might expect to encounter in this temporary life.

This is not this is not easy and we all fall short of this, myself included. But, remember we are saved by grace, by Jesus' actions and not our own. There is always opportunity for us to repent, to turn back to him and to ask him to help us. Remember how Peter was reinstated, even after he denied knowing Jesus three times.

There are some who are already living like this and I encourage you to press on. However, I think this needs to be the response of whole church in the West to bring their nations back to Jesus. Wherever in the world Christians have been willing to suffer and die the church is growing exponentially. China and Nigeria are examples of where 100's of churches are being planted every year and they're training 100's of pastors to lead these new churches, because Christians there have laid down their lives in this world to keep it for eternal life.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I am sorry if this has been hard to hear this Palm Sunday. Please consider what Jesus says to us in this passage in John 12 about the cost of following him. Count the cost; see the eternal benefit and follow him gladly wherever he leads you, until we die or he comes in glory!

So, as we reflect on this passage today, I ask you in the midst of all that is going on in the world; What kind of saviour are you looking for? What do you think Jesus has come to save us from?

He is the saviour and Lord whose greatest glory is found in having laid down his own life to pay for our sins and to save us from the consequences of sin – eternal death. He is the king of all nations and of the whole world. He does not save us from suffering or illness or death, though he may protect us and heal us; and God is able to provide for all of our needs. He saves us for eternity with him; and empowers us with his Holy Spirit to live like him and for him now. There may be temporary suffering in this life, but there will be glory later and for eternity.

Let us pray: Our heavenly father, you have loved us and saved us.

Thank you for sending Jesus to die for us to give his one life as a ransom for many.

I ask that you would change our agendas for Salvation to match your agenda, enable us to pray for more than what is best in terms of health, security or our own country's interest. Help us to pray for what is best during these difficult circumstances for the salvation of the nations and for your glory.

Change the heart of the church in the West. Use this time of testing to wake us from our slumber. Enable us by the power of the Holy Spirit to live sacrificial lives that honour you in all we think, say and do. Teach us to depend on your provision and grace. May we follow Jesus in the example he set for us in his life, in his suffering and in his death. Thank you that our hope in you and our future is certain. In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, Amen.