

Let Your Hosanna Ring

John 12:1-19

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday which marks the beginning of the week that leads up to Jesus' death and resurrection.

It is the day that the Lord enters into the city of Jerusalem on His way up to the temple.

As He makes His way from Bethany along the hilly terrain He is joined by a large crowd.

During that time of the year the population of the city dramatically increased as people from all over Israel came to celebrate the Passover.

Many of them have heard about Jesus and the miracles He has performed and they flood the streets with a celebration.

As the LORD makes His way through the streets riding upon a donkey the shouts of the people echo through the streets.

How amazing would it have been to be there with the shouts of 'hosanna' ringing in our ears?

Jesus' entering into the city with this great parade of people is recorded for us in all four gospels which tells us something of the importance of the event.

This morning we are going to direct our attention to the gospel of John.

[Turn there in your bibles if you would to chapter 12:1-19. These verses begin by telling us about what happened the day before that first Palm Sunday which helps us understand why the people are so fired up about Jesus coming into the city. There are some helpful lessons for us here that should inform our worship of Christ. I believe there is an exhortation for us to let our hosannas ring. First, a personal friend to the Lord shows us why we should be wanting to join the shouts of celebration that we read about here. We should be fired up about praising the LORD because...]

Point #1 – Jesus is worthy of our highest honour.

No one should command our appreciation more than Christ.

Looking ahead to the Passover and to His cross, Jesus has made His way to Bethany a small town just a couple of miles outside the city of Jerusalem.

We are told this about His arrival in **verses 1-2.**

In chapter eleven John gives the reader the impression that Lazarus was a well-known part of the community in Bethany and that his death came with much sorrow.

After being dead for four days Jesus showed up and raised him from the dead as we are told here at the beginning of chapter twelve.

It is easy to see why a dinner/supper/banquet is given here in Jesus' honour.

Who is more worthy of praise than someone who can raise people from the dead?

Likely everyone at that meal had been to Lazarus' funeral, they all knew beyond doubt that he was dead and now here he sits eating a meal with Jesus.

Given that fact it would seem obvious to have a banquet in His honour.

There is more than just supper that takes place here though, look with me at verse 3.

This is not the first time Mary has made her way to Jesus' feet.

Luke 10:39 teaches us that earlier in the LORD's ministry Mary sat before the Lord earnestly listening to Him.

She loved Christ for His wisdom, but as Lazarus' sister she also witnessed His power and had the great experience of her sorrow turning to joy in receiving her brother back from the dead at Jesus' command.

With these things on her heart she comes to the table and pours a jar of expensive scented oil upon the Lord.

While Mark's gospel tells us she poured it on His head as well, John is focused upon the feet.

Washing feet is one of the lowliest jobs of the ancient world. On top of that letting down her hair in order to wipe His feet would have been considered quite unbecoming of a woman and yet here she is in utter humility for the sake of exalting Jesus.

This is highlighted by the value of the expensive of the perfume.

We learn in verse 5 that it is worth a year's wages.

For a fair equivalent in today's dollar we could use minimum wage as a baseline and that would mean this jar would cost just over \$30,000.

That is an enormous sum for a jar of perfume weighing 3/4 of a pound.

Either Mary came from a very wealthy family or this was a family heirloom of some kind.

Whatever the case she uses it all on the Lord and she does it for all to see and experience.

It seems pretty clear that the reason she does this is to bestow as much honour on Jesus as possible.

[We know what it is for people to be honoured with extravagant expense. According to ABC news the Oscars in 2019 cost a whopping 44 million. The ensembles of the A-list actresses topped 10 million. Just for the red carpet it was 25 thousand. Now stop and think about that for a moment. All that money to honour people who pretend to be someone else for a living.]

Compare that with Jesus, He raises people from the dead!

Mary has it right here.

The Lord is worthy of the highest possible honour.

It is very easy for us to give Jesus our left overs and be satisfied with that.

When do we open our bibles? When we are at our best or when we have nothing else to do?

Do we reserve our praise of Jesus for our closets or are we willing to praise Him for others to see?

Do we give to the cause of Christ with begrudging hearts, or do we give joyfully with hearts full of the knowledge of the treasure of King Jesus?

[Mary's humble act of adoration puts on display for all to see her high affection and adoration of the Lord. The very fact that He called Lazarus from the tomb is enough to prove that He is most worthy of such honour. As we look ahead to the season of Easter we know that He will do even more than that. He will endure death to make a way for our sins to be forgiven, and He will conquer the grave giving us a certain hope for the future. And so the angels cry out in heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev 5:12). Oh that our hearts desire would be to honour Jesus! Sadly, not everyone feels that way. We can see that here and it gives us a second important lesson about honouring Jesus...]

Point #2 – Honouring Jesus may bring criticism.

Acting out of love for the Lord can stir up a response from those who have little or no affection for Him.

With the scent of the perfume filling the house and likely with Mary still at the feet of Christ, some at the supper show contempt for her actions (Verse 4-6).

Judas makes it pretty clear what he thinks of what just happened.

It is a waste of money. Why in the world would you use that \$30,000 perfume on Jesus?

Notice he tries to appear pious in his objection because he says that the money should have been spent on the poor.

Even if he is genuinely concerned for the less fortunate, his argument is theologically bankrupt.

Did he not witness Jesus feed thousands?

Has he not read of God providing for an entire nation in the desert for 40 years?

What about the never ending flour and oil of the widow who cared for Elijah during 3 ½ years of drought?

God is never short on supply!

Besides his theological short sightedness, Judas isn't even being honest about his reasons for criticizing Mary's actions here.

John having the gift of hindsight is able to tell us what was really going on.

His concern is for himself rather than the poor.

He wanted to be able take some of the money for himself.

Do you see his problem? His selfishness has left no room for loving Christ.

Jesus responds to him in verse 7.

According to the Lord here, Mary has likely done more here than she realizes. Her focus appears to be on the exaltation of Jesus declaring that she believes Him to be the Messiah/Saviour of Israel, and while that is true she is probably like the other disciples in that she is missing the part about His upcoming death.

Nevertheless Jesus receives this act of humble adoration and relates it to what is soon to take place.

He says nothing here about Judas being a thief or of a traitor, but instead responds to his objection directly.

Clearly according to what He says here it is important to care for the poor.

But we must keep in mind that it is entirely possible to care for the poor without an ounce of affection for Jesus.

Don Carson puts it like this, “If self-righteous piety sometimes snuffs out genuine compassion, it must also be admitted, with shame, that social activism, even that which meets real needs, sometimes masks a spirit that knows nothing of worship and adoration. (“The Gospel According to John” p. 429).

[Several years ago I was asked by two different organizations to serve as a chaplain. On both occasions I said I would agree on one condition. The condition was that I would declare that Jesus Christ is the only way to be right with God. On both occasions the people were upset and decided they didn’t want me to serve. They were so focused on doing other things for people that Jesus didn’t matter anymore.]

When our desire is to hold Jesus as most precious in our hearts, it is normal to be criticized by those who have no love for Him.

It also seems that the more costly are devotion to the Lord, the greater the criticism becomes.

How many missionaries have been called fools for leaving the riches and safety of North America to go to dangerous places to tell people about Jesus?

If a rich man sells all that he has and gives his money to missions, how many people would call him a fool?

If you pass up career advancement so that you can be free to be at church for worship, how many people will think you have lost your mind?

If you lose your job because you refuse to compromise your integrity you end up working for minimum wage instead, how many will mock you for it?

[That is the nature of loving Jesus more than stuff. People will question and criticize you for it, but just as Mary’s act of love delights the heart of our Saviour so does every act of adoration by His people. You can be sure that anything that is lost or spent for Jesus’ sake is more than worth it in light of the eternal reward that awaits. The fact is that if you love Him you will desire to honour him. If that is our desire than we need to see what the Lord has for us in the last part of this text. Here we find a great crowd of people honouring Jesus, but they are honouring Him in ignorance and they show us that...]

Point #3 – Rightly honouring Jesus depends on truly knowing Him.

If our worship of the Lord is rooted in a self-centered conception of who Jesus is, then our praises will not endure.

John tells us here about a large crowd gathering to see Jesus and also to see Lazarus and this crowd is instrumental in drawing people out into the streets as Jesus makes His way to the temple on Palm Sunday (Verse 9-15).

I find it interesting that no one here denies the miracle of Lazarus being raised.

The time in the tomb is far too long and there are far too many witnesses, so instead of denying the miracles the ‘chief priests’ plan to kill Lazarus along with Jesus.

They reject Jesus as the Messiah because they want to hold on to their position and power.

Their hard hearts make it impossible to truly know Jesus and therefore they have no desire to honour Him.

The crowd that is accompanying Him is different though.

John makes it really clear that they believe He is the Messiah their long awaited King.

That is why they take Palm branches when they go out to meet him.

Palm branches were not normally part of the Passover feast, they were used most prominently in the feast of tabernacles, so why are the people carrying them here.

Commentators point to 200 years prior when Simon Maccabee had freed Jerusalem from foreign oppressors and he came into the city to a parade of palm branches.

After that the branches became a national symbol for the Israelites.

It is a way of saying this is the one who will win a great victory over the oppressors of our nation.

The shouts of the crowd make their intentions clear.

They are crying out ‘hosanna’ a word that literally is a cry for rescue but had also become a word of praise.

They are quoting psalm 118 which they understand to be a reference to the coming Messiah, and they remove any doubt whatsoever by calling Jesus “the King of Israel” and the end of verse 13.

Throughout these verses John keeps bringing up the resurrection of Lazarus, which tells us that the fervor of the crowd is fueled to a great degree by that miracle.

Think about it. Which is easier, to kill a man or to raise a man from the dead?

If Jesus possesses the power to raise a man from the dead, then He must also possess the power to take out the Romans.

They are thinking, “This is it, He’s the man, a great victorious battle for the freedom of the country is right around the corner.”

Now they are right to say the He is the Messiah, they are right to call Him the King of Israel, but they are missing the cross.

Instead of a war horse, the LORD comes into the city on a donkey which according to the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 quoted here in verse 15 is a sign of peace rather than war.

Instead of leading a rebellion against Rome, Jesus has come to surrender His life to bear the wrath of God so that those that believe upon His name might escape eternal damnation and gain eternal life.

Even His closest disciples miss what is happening in the shouts of the crowd (**Verse 16-19**).

Like the crowd the disciples did not realize what was happening.

Oh when they are walking here with Jesus they believe He is the Messiah, but their conception of what that truly means is lacking.

They understand that Jesus deserves this honour, but their vision is small in comparison to the reality of what He truly deserves.

[In June of 2000 CBS news reported a story about an amateur collector who in 1989 found a painting at a yard sale. At the time he paid \$4 for the painting which had a tear in it. When he got it home he discovered one of the original copies of the US Declaration of independence. He sold the document at auction in 1991 for 2.4 million and it sold again a few years later for a little over 8 million dollars. If all that was seen was the torn painting it was worth next to nothing, but looking deeper there was discovered something of great value.]

On that first Palm Sunday only seeing Jesus as a means of being saved from the Romans kept the people from seeing the Jesus as He truly is.

That is why in less than a week the shouts of hosanna fall silent and are instead replaced by mocking voices.

As Jesus makes His way through the streets of Jerusalem carrying His cross no one saw a conquering King, they saw a weak and humiliated man.

It is still the same way. When people fail to see Jesus as He truly is, they either refuse to praise Him at all or their praise is short lived.

Thankfully God does not leave the disciples to themselves.

Verse 16 tells us that while they didn't get it at the time, "after Jesus was glorified" they came to understand the significance of what had happened on that first Palm Sunday.

They came to see that Jesus is not defeated at the cross.

They came to see that the cross is not a display of the weakness of Christ, but rather of His all surpassing strength.

They came to see that Jesus' purpose in laying down His life is not surrender, but a glorious victory against sin and death and hell.

Brothers and sisters that joy is ours as well on this side of the cross.

God opens the hearts and minds of His people to see that Jesus is indeed our Messiah.

How can we respond with any less enthusiasm than that of the crowd in the streets of Jerusalem?

Let your hosannas ring for your King has come, He has rescued your soul, and He will come again to the eternal praise of His Great Name.

Honour Him because He is most worthy, honour Him no matter what people might say, honour Him as He truly is the One Who stands in the place of sinners so that we might gain His righteousness.

Let your hosannas ring both in your heart and out of your mouth on this Palm Sunday! Let your hosannas ring!