

## John 12:12-50

I was out for a walk in my neighborhood last week, when something happened to me that has never happened before - I got bitten by a neighbor's dog! It just ripped my coat and didn't do any physical damage to me, but it was pretty disconcerting. It took hours for the adrenaline rush to subside and so I texted a close friend to ask her to pray. She reminded me that there was often spiritual warfare going on as I prepared to give a talk. It's usually that someone in my house gets sick, but this is the first time I have been physically attacked. She said, "Well Satan is getting pretty creative." But the good news is that Satan didn't win and I'm here to bring you the word and the even better news is that in our passage today we see Christ telling us that He will conquer Satan on the cross and we can rest in that.

I did read all the commentaries that we have available on this passage, but I also listened to three different Tim Kellers sermons where he covered this section of scripture. I just want to name that, since I lean on his sermons often for this talk.

These verses record the final phase of Jesus' public ministry before his death on the cross. The rest of the book of John records Jesus' more intimate and personal words to the disciples and his interaction with God the Father. This section may seem disjointed at first, but it is really all about the gospel and Jesus wanting the people to see him as the Messiah that he truly is.

### 12:12-19

**12** The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. **13** So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" **14** And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

**15** "Fear not, daughter of Zion;  
behold, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey's colt!"

**16** His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. **17** The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. **18** The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. **19** So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Verses 12-19 describe what we now call the triumphal entry. Large crowds of people would travel to Jerusalem each year for the Passover celebration. One historical record of the time says that over 2.5 million people would be in the city for Passover. And this particular year many in the crowd had heard news of Lazarus being raised from the dead and were eager and excited to greet the person who had done this great wonder - Jesus. They wanted to see the man who wielded such power over death. They must have thought that a man who could raise someone from the dead certainly would have the power to throw off their Roman oppressors.

The people greet Jesus with a great procession - waving palms and singing praises. This procession is equivalent to a ticker tape parade or the confetti that rains down on the super bowl champs. The cry of Hosanna directly translates to "give salvation now," but had become a general term of acclamation or praise.

Their desire to see Jesus crowned as a victorious national leader is shown by their use of palms. The palm branch had become a nationalistic symbol for Israel at the time. They were also quoting Psalm 118, a psalm of the Hallel sung during the feast of tabernacles, but this time they add the line "King of Israel", which further reveals that they want Jesus to be an earthly king. The crowds are specifically pronouncing a blessing on the King of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord - a clear messianic identification. I think it's safe to assume that they expect Jesus to be the kind of Messiah who would rescue them from Roman rule and reign as an earthly king.

Ok, so the people clearly express that they see Jesus as a King who will save them in their current historical context, but how does Jesus make himself known. It seems like an odd move for Jesus, who has disappeared every time the people want to make him king up to this point. It seems out of character for him to allow them to give Him such an obvious procession associated with mighty kingship. He allows their praise, but makes a pointed decision to ride on a donkey, and a young one at that. The other gospels make it clear that Jesus sought out a colt specifically for this purpose. Jesus did not ride a warhorse, which is what would have been expected of a military ruler. He comes not as a conquer, but as a king of peace. DA Carson says, "Jesus refused to reinforce their political and nationalistic aspirations by riding on a war horse."

Instead he chose to fulfill OT prophecies that show the Messiah as a gentle and humble leader who brings peace. Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Zech 9:9 to a T. It says your king will come "humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Not just a donkey, but a colt - a young donkey. Jesus points the people to a better kind of ruler, one who brings not political freedom, but freedom from sin. Rest for our souls. Jesus

gives the crowd so much more than a temporal deliverance from Rome. He gives us eternal deliverance from our broken human condition.

Tim Keller He makes the point that Jesus is the one and only ideal king who is both all powerful and mighty, but also humble, gentle and sensitive. He mentions that Jesus was looking into the future to his return when the palm trees will themselves wave their fronds in worship. Isaiah 55:12 “all the trees will clap their hands.” Christ is the perfect King who all the earth and heaven will bow to and yet the one who cried with Mary at Lazarus’ tomb. He is both the Lion of Judah and the sacrificial lamb. His sacrificial death is what Jesus points to in the upcoming verses.

After seeing this triumphant procession the Pharisees' comment that “the whole world is going after him.” Their remark is unknowingly prophetic. They are exaggerating when they say “the whole world” - at this point in history it was only those in Jerusalem and the surrounding area who were following Jesus. But soon, after his death and resurrection, the whole world would know about Jesus and people from “every nation and tongue” will be counted among his followers.

12:20-26

**20** Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. **21** So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” **22** Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. **23** And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24** 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** Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem in this triumphal way. Then some Greeks come and want to talk with Jesus. The Greeks here were most likely God-fearing people, who even though not Jewish, had come to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast to worship God. They had heard the buzz about Jesus and wanted to interact with him. We are not told if their request is fulfilled at this time or not, because Jesus responds by saying that His hour has come to be glorified. Everytime John talks about “the hour” it means the hour of Jesus’ death. We now know that Jesus’ death was the one thing that would open up the kingdom of God to all believers, Jews as well as Greeks.

Jesus first talks about his own death when he says in verse 24 “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.” He recognises that He is the only one who knows God intimately and has a deep unhindered relationship with Him. And unless Jesus takes our place on the cross and dies bearing the weight of our sin, then he will remain the only one who knows God in such a way. But since he died on our behalf now there is much fruit because of his death - us! People who have been reconciled to God b/c of his death for us. We now enjoy the intimacy of family with the living creator God if we put our faith in Christ. We can be called sons and daughters of the Most High God because Jesus took our sin and paid for it by His death on the cross.

Understanding this amazing sacrifice - this gospel - good news - is the key to living the life that Jesus calls his follower to in the next verse.

He calls us as his followers to live a similarly self sacrificial life. He says in verse 25, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Let me be clear: this is not a call to be depressed and suicidal. It does not mean to literally hate our life and be miserable. Jesus uses a Jewish idiom to compare two things. He means that our love for Him and His Kingdom should so far outweigh our love for this earthly life that by comparison it looks like we hate our life here. In contrast DA Carson says, “to love one's life is a fundamental denial of God's sovereignty, of God's rights and a brazen elevation of self.” There is no room in Jesus's kingdom for such self love.

Jesus is saying that we also, like him, must die to ourselves and our own desires in order to glorify God. It is the same concept that Jesus talks about in Matthew 16:24-25 when he tells the disciples “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

How do we value His Kingdom above our own? We have to see The Gospel - Jesus's death and resurrection - as the pearl of great value.

Jesus tells these parables in Matthew 13:44-46

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Ok, so you guys know that I'm garden obsessed and I've really gotten into growing cut flowers. In my world, it would be like me spending way too much money on dahlia tubers, just because I think the flowers are so beautiful. I do think the flowers are just so pretty and I dream of owning certain varieties, but I don't actually act on these impulses. It reminds me of the great tulip mania of the 1600s where people would spend a year's salary for one exotic bulb. Because the bulb is a promise of an exquisite flower. Something so beautiful and so unique.

The key to living this way is to see the exceptional beauty of what Christ did on the cross - that He who knew no sin became sin for us! He took our place and suffered agony that we can only imagine so we can have eternity with God in perfection when we accept his sacrifice on our behalf.

Tim Keller talks about how important it is to serve God out of love of His beauty and not in order to earn His favor or for what He can give us. He is not a cosmic vending machine that we pray and we obey in order to get what we want from God. You are just practicing religion if you obey to avoid hell or gain God's favor. You are only a true disciple of Jesus if you see and love Him for who He is - not what He can do for you.

It's like what we saw with Mary last week. Mary got it! She valued Jesus more than anything, even more than the very expensive nard perfume, which was likely her most precious possession. She was willing to die to herself in order to honor Jesus and show in a public way how much he was worth to her.

Tim Keller says the way up is down. In order to be rich, we need to be radical in our giving. In order to receive honor, we humble ourselves. In order to be filled, we fast. The way to get power is to serve. The way to true fulfilling self esteem is to admit that you are so sinful and needy that someone had to die for you.

What can this look like in your life? Is there something God is calling you to scale back on so you can use the time in a way that better glorifies Him? Is he calling you to serve in the children's ministry? Or with a refugee family? Or give up something you value too much? Something that has become more important than God? Is he calling you to step out in boldness and share the gospel with someone even though they might reject you?

But if we just focus on serving, how do we not burn out and become serve-aholics? How do we live fully for God and not fall into the ditch of just caring for ourselves or the ditch of just caring for others? The simple answer is to abide in Christ and serve out of His power. Pastor Anthony often uses the example of being plugged into the outlet of Christ,

not our own generator which will run out of gas. Jesus is the seed who died first and He is the one who was raised by His own power. We have been raised into life with Him by that same power and get to live life out of that power.

Now I have to give a plug for the Women's Retreat coming up the first weekend of April - this is the exact topic we are tackling. We are going to flesh out how we stay balanced and rest in God's power to love and serve Him. So come on the retreat to hear more about this!

12:27-36

**27** "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. **28** Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." **29** The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." **30** Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. **31** Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. **32** And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." **33** He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. **34** So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" **35** So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. **36** While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."

In verse 27 Jesus has a moment of agony when he thinks about what his death on the cross will cost Him. He is having a garden of gethsemane moment. It's not death itself that he is afraid of. Tim Keller points out that many human beings have faced death bravely without this level of angst, so why would the God of the universe be afraid of death. No, it is the separation from God the Father and the Spirit that he is agonizing about. He has always been in perfect unity with God. God has always been the arms to catch him, but on the cross that relationship will be torn away and he will fall into the terror that is the of the absence of God.

We can't really grasp how devastating this is because all of our relationships are tainted by sin. But imagine the worst betrayal you possibly can, that someone who promised to always be there for you just abandons you when you need them the most. This is a small taste of what it was like for Jesus on the cross. Now realize that He went through that horror out of love for you! Because he had to take the weight of our sin upon him.

It's like the words of the song "How great the Father's love for us"

How great the pain of searing loss!  
The Father turns His face away;  
As wounds which marred the Chosen One  
Bring many sons to glory

Doesn't it make the gospel that much more beautiful? If Jesus didn't have to give anything up to save us we would have cheap grace, but we have costly grace that shines like the pearl of great value.

Jesus weighs the cost in verse 27 and then affirms that His death and accompanying separation from God are why He came to earth. "Should I say "Father save me from this hour?" No, it is for this purpose that I came. Father, glorify your name." He sees the Father being glorified as of greater importance than his suffering. Then God's voice comes from heaven and affirms Jesus. "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." This is what God's work through all of history is about glorifying his name.

Then in verse 32 he says that when he is lifted up, he will draw all people to himself. This is a reference to being physically hoisted up on the cross as vs. 33 confirms "He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die." So how will a gory death as a criminal draw all people to himself? It is because on that cross he paid the cost for our sin. And when we people understand what he did for them they are drawn to Him out of love for him. As Tim Kellers says, the cross makes us realize that we have a God so holy that he HAD to die, but so loving that he was GLAD to die.

The crowd even understood in real time that he was talking about his death because they say "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?" They correctly quote the scriptures, but miss the meaning. It wasn't even on their radar that Jesus could conquer death and raise HIMSELF to eternal life. Lazarus, yes, ok, that was truly amazing, but no one could raise themselves. Who has that kind of power? The answer is that God has that kind of power! Jesus doesn't bother giving them this answer, instead He urges them to faith. Believe! Walk in the light now!

JC Ryle "The lesson of these words is generally applicable to the whole professing church of Christ. It's time for doing good in the world is short and limited." Let us live our lives with the urgency Christ gives to the people in our text today. Let's walk fully in the light, which requires not only sharing the beauty of the cross with urgency, but also living in true community with one another. It reminded me of 1 John 1:6-9 "6 If we say

we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” And Heb 12:1 (NIV) “let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

This is a call to be in real relationship with one another, asking one another the hard questions, confessing sin and holding each other accountable. This is how we live in the light and push back the darkness. It takes consistency and vigilance to root out sin.

It made me think of this plant-y analogy: so I am battling pests on my house plants. Sigh. My large collection of plants has acquired thrips. I keep thinking I’ve gotten rid of them, but then I find them on another plant. My kids will tell you how often the cry of “Ack! Thrips!” has been heard in our house the past few months. But to really get rid of them, I need to be consistently and closely evaluating all my plants and treating them as soon as I spot the dang pests. If I let up and just do a cursory glance or say “I’ll treat this plant later” that’s when they multiply and spread. So it is with sin. We have to be vigilant and constantly asking the Lord to reveal the depths of our hearts and constantly asking one another where are you struggling to live fully in the light? How is your thought life?

Unbelief of the Jews 12: 36b-43

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. **37** Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, **38** so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

**39** Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

**40** “He has blinded their eyes  
and hardened their heart,  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and understand with their heart, and turn,  
and I would heal them.”



**41** Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. **42**

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; **43** for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Jesus then once again hides Himself from them. And we have this sad commentary in verse 37 that “Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.” Like Jan said last week, our natural human state is unbelief. Without the Spirit’s work of regeneration how can we have faith? Jesus is confirming what was prophesied before that, by and large, the Jewish people would reject Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus was once again fulfilling a very specific prophecy, but this one doesn’t sit well with us in our individualistic view of the world. Why were their eyes blinded and their hearts hardened so they could not believe?! Once again it’s helpful to remember that both God’s will and human will are at play here. Tasker says “We have to remember the Hebrew idiom...the Jews did not believe, therefore they could not believe.” DA Carson “God’s sovereignty in these matters is never pitted against human responsibility.”

I don’t profess to fully understand this, but have wrestled it out for myself personally and come to a place of submission to the scriptures. If this is an area of confusion or struggle for you - you are not alone. I would highly recommend you go back and listen to the talks from last year on Romans 9-11. Paul spends three chapters in Romans dealing with this very topic. You can find the talks on the church website, but I will also send out the links for these talks via email.

Vs. 42 tells us of the sad state of some of the authorities who believed in Jesus, but were afraid of their belief being made known. They were on the inside of the ruling crowd, and valued their status there more than their love of Jesus. They had not yet come to see Jesus as the Pearl of Great Value. The one worth giving up everything for. The commentators think that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were among this group and then after Christ’s death they did come to see Him as more valuable and become His true open followers. But likely there were others who did not let their faith become full grown because of their fear of man. Because they valued the praise of man over the praise of God. As Milne says, “They stand in stark contrast to Jesus, who constantly disavowed all honor except that of his Father.”

It is a warning to us all, to not just proclaim Jesus among our church friends but to live one consistent life of faith and be willing to take ridicule from a world that doesn’t understand and acknowledge him. To be willing to think of God’s praise as more important than man’s praise. I can say personally that I have struggled and do struggle with the fear of man in different ways in my life. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to be there

but I heard that Charlotte Gleason gave a great talk during ASOD this past Sunday about how to battle the fear of man in our lives. And I'm sure if you reach out to her she can share her slides with you. I would also recommend Ed Welch's book "When People are Big and God is Small." I just read this in my devotional "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day" and it resonated with me, "We can become trapped in living a pretend life - always seeking the approval of others. True freedom comes when we no longer need to be special in other people's eyes because we know we are lovable and good enough in Christ." Christ love gives us the security to step out and live fully in the light for His Kingdom.

Final call to believe  
12:44-50

**44** And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. **45** And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. **46** I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. **47** If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. **48** The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. **49** For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. **50** And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

Jesus gives his final public call to believe in Him as the saviour of the world, as God's own son. He affirms His unity with the Father. When we understand that it is God the Father who stands with Christ both as the object of our faith and as the final judge should make us consider the claims of Christ seriously. This passage also gives a sense of urgency to sharing the gospel. JC Ryle says, "let us live like those who believe in the truth of judgement, heaven and hell. So living we shall be Christians in deed and in truth and have boldness in the day of Christ's appearing."

Let's pray...

Dearest God, Thank you for these beautiful truths of Jesus, of what you did on the cross for us and how it brings us such freedom. Lord, please let us live in the light that you bring. Let us see you as the Pearl of Great Value and as JC Ryles concluded "Forever let us make much of Christ...We can never trust you too much, follow you too closely, or commune with you too unreservedly. Amen.