

Message #47

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John

11/18/2018

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY:  
EXPECTATIONS ABOUT JESUS

JOHN 12:9-19

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago Philip Yancey wrote a book entitled *Disappointment with God*. If we have some kind of belief in God, most of us have had a feeling of disappointment about how God has handled things or not handled things. We assume that God is good and all-powerful. But there are bad things that happen in the world around us, and we have difficulty determining how they fit in with the plan of a loving and all-powerful God.

Yancey's book is subtitled *Three Questions No One Asks*. Each of the three questions has multiple ways in which it can be asked. The first is: Is God unfair? If God is good, why do bad things happen? The second is: Is God silent? Why does He not seem to answer my prayers? Is He listening? The third is: Why does He seem distant? Why do I not sense His presence?

The people of first century Judea had a variety of expectations about God and about Jesus. This Jesus, who claimed to be from God, failed to meet almost everyone's expectations. We will find evidence of that in the passage before us today. We will also find important information about what we should expect from this Jesus and what He might expect from us.

In our study of the Gospel of John, we are reaching the end of His earthly life. The rest of the book will deal with events in the last week of Jesus' life on earth followed by a postscript describing events that followed His resurrection. The coming of Passover has brought Jesus and His disciples back to Jerusalem. The raising of Lazarus from the dead just a week or so earlier has increased tensions between the religious establishment and Jesus.

Last week we saw the hatred of the religious leaders contrasted with the love of Mary, who anointed Jesus in Bethany in an act of love and worship and appreciation for what He had done for her brother Lazarus. Today we will pick up the story in #12 and examine the expectations of several groups of people as the drama of Easter week unfolds.

I.

In v. 9 of #12, which is found on p. 898 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we encounter THE CURIOSITY SEEKERS: EXPECTING A MIRACLE WORKER. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE CURIOSITY SEEKERS...) Verse 9 reads, **“When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.”**

The “there” in v. 9 is Bethany. (BETHANY MAP) Bethany was two miles east of Jerusalem. It was the home of Lazarus and Martha and Mary. The suspicion is that Jesus and the twelve disciples stayed at their home during their visits to Jerusalem for the required annual feasts.

This Lazarus was an attraction of considerable interest. There were a couple of examples in Biblical history of people being raised from the dead. But Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. There was no precedent for this kind of miracle. It happened about a week earlier, when some religious pilgrims were already beginning to pass through Bethany on their way to Jerusalem. Then also representatives of the religious establishment had come to mourn with Martha and Mary over the death of their brother. So when Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth from the tomb, there were many witnesses to this miracle, including representatives from the religious establishment. Word got out to this growing multitude that was showing up in Jerusalem for Passover. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Jesus withdrew with His disciples for a few days to a more remote area to avoid this attention. But then they returned to Bethany on Saturday for this supper. It was on this occasion that the incident with Mary anointing the body of Jesus occurred. At the same time, or perhaps on the next morning, this crowd of curiosity seekers showed up.

They are described as “the large crowd of the Jews.” This could be a general reference to the people who were coming to Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus. Most often in the Gospel of John the term “the Jews” refers to the religious leaders of Judea who mostly opposed Jesus and His claims. So it could be a reference to these leaders and the people associated with them.

It is hard to know the motive of all of these people in coming to see Jesus and Lazarus. It strikes me that many of them were curiosity seekers. The Apostle John has mentioned several times in this book that the Jews were always looking for signs, for miracles. In #6 we saw that the crowd fed at the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes wanted to see more miracles (6:30). In #4 v. 48 Jesus told the Jewish crowd, **“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.”**

This crowd which gathered in Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus was expecting a miracle worker. Many of them recognized that Jesus must have some kind of connection with the God of Israel. It was increasingly evident that Jesus could perform miracles. But there was little recognition that He was God in the flesh. There was little evidence that these people were willing to be committed to Jesus as His followers. They just were looking for a show, or perhaps for some way to benefit from his miraculous powers. Some were hoping that this Jesus would be the Messiah who would kick the Romans out of Judea.

There is some of that kind of curiosity in most of us. We may have enough interest to stop the channel changer on a program about UFOs or Bigfoot sightings or ghosts or Long Island mediums or prophets who claim that they can predict the future. But we are not inclined to pledge our allegiance to such characters.

It is also true that in times of personal crisis, we may turn to Jesus for help. In the midst of a health crisis or loss of a loved one or financial turmoil or family instability we may seek a miracle. We are in the market for a miracle worker. But we may not be looking for a Messiah. We may not be looking for someone to change our lives. We may not be looking for someone to deal with our sin problem and our separation from God.

II.

The second cast of characters in this drama is THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT. They seem to be EXPECTING A TROUBLEMAKER. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT...) These people are described in vv. 10 & 11 and v. 19. In vv. 10 & 11 we read, **“So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.”**

Back in vv. 47-50 of #11 we saw the initial reaction of the Sanhedrin, the high council of Judaism, to news of the story that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Beginning in v. 47 we were told, **“So the**

**chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, 'What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.' But one of them, Caiaphas who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.'"**

The chief priests and the Pharisees had a dominant role on the Sanhedrin. They already had decided that Jesus needed to be killed. Now more people seem to be turning to this Jesus as His followers. This could lead to civil disorder. The Romans might be prompted to intervene. They might take away our position of leadership and influence. Our pocketbooks might be affected. This Jesus is a real troublemaker. He is threatening our position.

The new thing here is that now they are deciding to kill Lazarus. In v. 50 of #11 the high priest said that it is better that one man die for the sake of the whole nation. Now the leaders see a need to kill a second man. Once people start down an evil path, the crimes and the victims multiply.

Skip down to v. 19 in our passage. This describes the reaction of the Pharisees after the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. **"So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'"** The Pharisees are the traditionalists and the conservatives. They have sought to apply the Old Testament law to every aspect of daily life. The rules that they have developed have come to be regarded by them as sacred and absolute. Most of the rabbis belong to the party of the Pharisees. They also have a strong position in the Sanhedrin.

According to Mark #14 v. 2 the Sanhedrin had decided to wait until after the Passover feast to apprehend Jesus. They feared that nabbing him before then could lead to popular unrest. That could prompt the Romans to intervene. The Jewish leaders did not want that.

But now with the popular reaction to Jesus in His entrance into Jerusalem, the feeling of danger for the Pharisees has increased. They use hyperbole to describe the response of the crowds to Jesus. The world has gone after him. The "world" that the Pharisees were talking about was the Jewish world. The Apostle John in his Gospel often recognizes ironic and unwitting statements from the players in this story. The Pharisees may have been talking about the Jewish world. John from his vantage point decades later recognizes that many Gentiles have also embraced Jesus. In what immediately follows our passage, we will see next week that Gentiles come to the disciples to express interest in Jesus. But the main point here is to see that the religious establishment is expecting a troublemaker.

That is the way in which some people look at Jesus today. He may cause me trouble. To embrace Him would shake up my world. It might change my relationships. It would affect my standards. It would mean that I can't live with my boyfriend or my girlfriend. Some of my habits would have to change. My friends might change.

Perhaps my friend, my mate, my child, or my coworker has embraced Jesus. His or her change has affected my relationship with that person. He or she does not hang out in the same places that we used to hang out. He or she does not want to do the same things that we used to do together. I perceive that this Jesus is a troublemaker.

III.

A third group that we encounter in our story is what I call THE POPULAR OPTIMISTS. This group is EXPECTING A POLITICAL MESSIAH. (III. THE POPULAR OPTIMISTS: EXPECTING...) We find this described in vv. 12 & 13 and vv. 17 & 18. According to vv. 12 & 13, **“The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 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!’”**

All four of the New Testament Gospels provide a description of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. John's Gospel has the briefest treatment. I suspect that this is because John's Gospel was written decades after the other three. The Apostle John knew that the other writers had covered this event.

Traditionally this entrance has been regarded as happening on Sunday. It appears that Jesus had the meal with Lazarus and Mary and Martha in Bethany on Saturday evening. Putting all four of the Gospels together, it would appear that the chronology of the Triumphal Entry went something like this: On Sunday Jesus and the disciples and additional supporters headed toward the city. Jesus sent two disciples off to a nearby village to get a donkey and its foal. The two returned with the donkeys. Jesus sat upon the foal. His supporters put their garments and palm branches on the road before them as they approached Jerusalem.

Other religious pilgrims already in Jerusalem, perhaps many of them Galileans, went out of Jerusalem to greet the approaching entourage. There was much noise and expressions of joy. The Jews from

Jerusalem recited Psalm 118. The two groups converged outside of Jerusalem. The Bethany contingent shared the news about Lazarus with those who did not yet know the whole story. The commotion attracted the religious leaders from Jerusalem. They went out of the city and called upon Jesus to stop all of the acclamations from the crowd calling Jesus the King of Israel. Jesus responded by saying that if He tried to stop them, even the stones would cry out.

Thus, for the first time in His public ministry, Jesus encouraged His supporters to acknowledge His true identity. Thus the Pharisees in v. 19 in our passage expressed their concern about the public adulation of Jesus.

Estimates of the number of religious pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the Passover vary greatly. Ancient sources range in their estimates from 500,000 to 12 million. Josephus claims that at a Passover some years later 2,700,000 people showed up. Another source claims that at one Passover 256,500 lambs were killed. Assuming one lamb for an average of ten people, that would amount to over 2 ½ million people. Skeptical scholars think that all of these numbers are inflated. Some of them estimate that there were 30,000 permanent residents of Jerusalem in the early first century. Perhaps six times as many people showed up for the feasts.

Jerusalem residents may have been more closely aligned with the religious establishment in their views. The wording of our passage suggests that visiting pilgrims may have played a more dominant role in the welcome of Jesus to the city. Many of the Galileans had regular exposure to Jesus and His ministry. They probably had a more positive view of Jesus than did the residents of Jerusalem.

The use of palm branches was only required by the Old Testament law at the Feast of Tabernacles. There were many date palm trees near Jerusalem that could provide these branches. The palm branch had become a symbol of Jewish nationalism. At the liberation of Jerusalem from Antiochus IV a century and a half earlier, Jerusalem residents had welcomed the triumphing Maccabees with the waving of palm branches. The popular optimists on this occasion were hoping that Jesus might be the political Messiah who would liberate their people from the domination of the Romans.

Psalms 113-118 were recited and sung at these three annual festivals. Here the words of Psalm 118 v. 26 are quoted by the crowd. "Hosanna" means "save now." The crowd is calling upon Jesus to save them. Their expectation, however, is for a political salvation, a salvation from the Romans, a salvation from the Gentiles. Perhaps some people in the crowd are also hoping for a salvation from a corrupt religious leadership.

This is how the text of Psalm 118 vv. 25 & 26 read (PSALM 118:25): **“Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success! (PSALM 118:26) Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.”** Originally the blessing upon the one who comes in the name of the Lord was applied to the worshipers who came to Jerusalem for the feasts. Here the pilgrims seem to apply it to Jesus. He is the Messiah who comes to His people in the name of the Lord.

The text of Psalm 118 does not describe the one who comes to the feast as a king. But these worshipers express their hope that this Jesus is, and will be, their king. They want Him to be their liberator. He is the king. He is the Messiah. He is their liberator. But He is not providing the kind of salvation which the crowd is seeking. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Skipping down to v. 17, our passage says, **“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.”** This is not the Jerusalem crowd. These are the people who have been hanging around Bethany. These include the disciples of Jesus and other supporters who witnessed the raising of Lazarus. They tell the Jerusalem crowd about what they saw in this miracle.

Verse 18: **“The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.”** So this is the Jerusalem crowd. They have been greatly influenced by the story of Lazarus. These are the popular optimists. Their expectation and hope is that Jesus is the great Messiah. He is the king who will provide a political salvation. But their support is shallow and conditional. If He does not meet their expectations, all bets are off.

There are some today who are tempted to view Jesus as the embodiment of the values of the Republican Party, or the Democratic Party. Certainly He must be the embodiment of American values. In reality, Jesus is above all of this. He has not come to provide a political salvation. Jesus and His word do provide us with values and moral standards. Political parties would do well to heed those standards and values in their policies and conduct.

The Old Testament and New Testament and Jesus Himself do speak of Jesus Christ as king. They speak of a time when Messiah Jesus will establish a literal kingdom upon the earth. One of the specific descriptions of the coming of that kingdom was recorded by the Apostle John in Revelation #19. But that

is still future. In His first coming Jesus was concerned about establishing a spiritual kingdom and providing a spiritual salvation.

IV.

We come then to vv. 14-16 and GOD: EXPECTING A HUMBLE SAVIOR. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. GOD: EXPECTING A HUMBLE SAVIOR) According to vv. 14 & 15, **“And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!’”**

The other Gospels give more details about how this colt was acquired. It is sufficient here to note that Jesus did not come into Jerusalem riding on a war horse. Such a transportation choice would have suggested that Jesus was making a political claim, that he was seeking to start an insurrection. At the Second Coming, described in Revelation #19, Jesus is portrayed as coming to earth on a war horse. A donkey was regarded as a more humble animal. It was a beast of burden.

The quotation in our verses comes from Zechariah #9 v. 9. (ZECHARIAH 9:9) The whole verse reads like this: **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”** The Apostle John abbreviated the verse in his quotation of it.

The crowd was calling upon Jesus to provide salvation. Jesus was the king who came to provide salvation. The fact that He was approaching Jerusalem on a donkey and not a white horse was an indication that He was providing a different kind of salvation than what these people expected or desired. The salvation that Jesus was providing was a salvation from sin and from the power of the devil. This was the salvation that the Jews really needed. This was the salvation that all of humanity needed.

Such a salvation could not be provided by a political savior. Rather it was required by the God-man who would die on the cross to provide atonement for sin, to provide a satisfaction for the righteous anger of a holy God against sin. It would provide an entrance into eternal life for those who would believe in this Jesus.

The crowd was quoting Psalm 118, the last of the Hallel Psalms. (PSALM 118:26) Verse 26 says this: **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.”** The next



verse (PSALM 118:27) adds, **“The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!”**

Jesus was and is God. At the recent Feast of Tabernacles He declared Himself to be the light of the world. He was shining His light upon these religious pilgrims at that very moment. But what was about to happen next? Jesus was about to be bound to the altar. His altar was to be a Roman cross. His sacrifice would be the only sacrifice that could provide a final atonement for the sin of the Jews, for the sin of the Gentiles, for the sin of me, and the sin of you. That was the salvation that these people truly needed. That is the salvation that we need. Thus God provided it by means of the God-man who came to Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He was our humble Savior.

The Apostle Paul recognized the significance of this in Philippians #2. (PHILIPPIANS 2:6-7) Beginning in v. 6, he wrote, **“...though he [Christ Jesus] was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (PHILIPPIANS 2:8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

The crowd was expecting a crown. God was planning a cross. The crown will appear at the Second Coming of Christ. But first comes the cross, and then comes the crown. So it is that Jesus told His followers to take up their cross. Our crown awaits the future. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 16 in our text: **“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.”** The disciples remembered these things after the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. The glorification that Jesus experienced apparently involved His death and resurrection and ascension into heaven. Such was God’s plan for this humble Savior.

V.

We come then to OUR EXPECTATIONS OF JESUS. (V. OUR EXPECTATIONS OF JESUS) In our wider culture for those who have some kind of loose connection to Jesus, there is often an expectation and hope that Jesus will provide deliverance and support for our agenda. It may be a political agenda where we are seeking deliverance from Nancy Pelosi, or Donald Trump. It may be a social agenda where we are seeking His approval for women’s rights or gay rights or abortion rights or immigration rights.

For many of us, what has brought us to Jesus is the hope for deliverance from some kind of crisis. It may have been a relationship crisis or a health crisis or a family crisis or a job crisis. As we enter the Christian life, we ask God to bless our hopes and plans. He may do that. But His expectation is to make us like Jesus. This same Jesus told His followers to take up their cross and follow Him. That implies that there will be a certain sacrifice and hardship and suffering involved in being His follower. For the cross must come before the crown. The implication is also that He wants to set our agenda.

Jesus Christ in John #10 promised that His followers would have an abundant and meaningful life. He did not say that it would be a carefree life. What Jesus really desires from us is that His expectations would become our own. He desires that His agenda be primary, not our own.

Moody Bible Institute professor John Koessler has these valuable insights about our expectations:  
**“Because we think that God’s mind and ours are the same, we set goals for God. We know what we want, and so we put it in the mouth of God. We let our desires govern our expectations.**

**“Sometimes the goals we set actually align with what God intends. When that happens, we can become so encouraged that we set more goals for God. But sooner or later--- and probably sooner rather than later--- what God does is so at odds with our expectation that we hardly know what to think.**

**“We pray for healing and the patient dies. The job that seemed so perfect goes to someone else. That person who would have been the perfect spouse does not return our affection.**

**“The result is more than a crisis of faith, at least as we usually define faith. Our difficulty is not that we have set the bar so high that we must now come to terms with God’s inability to come through. We know what God can do. We believe he can meet our high expectations. No, the problem is just the opposite. What really bothers us is that we have misread God’s purposes. We are deeply disturbed, and not merely because he has failed to do what we wanted or even expected him to do. We are haunted, instead, by the fact that God hasn’t done what we believe in our hearts he should have done.”**

Such, oftentimes, is the nature of our expectations and our disappointments. The remedy for this is to learn what His expectations are. That comes from a study of His word. For it is the Bible which reveals God’s plans and desires for us. We must also keep in mind that before the crown must come the cross.