The Triumphal Entry: What Can the Crowds Teach Us Today?

John 12:12-19

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the Gospel of John chapter 12; Today as we take time to think about the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem, we will be studying the account that the Apostle John gives us in his gospel. As you are opening up your Scriptures, I would like for you to think back to the largest concert or public even you have ever attended. As you are thinking about that event try to focus on the crowd. What are the different kinds of people you see in the audience at concerts or other popular public events? Now that we have identified some of those types of people, now let’s look at what John has to tell us about the arrival of Christ in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. (Read Scripture)

As we have just read, the arrival of Christ in Jerusalem brought about a wide range of emotions and reactions. For our study of this event today we are going to look closely at four different groups of people who were there that day, how they reacted to what they saw happening around them, and finally what each of these groups of people can teach us as we proclaim the saving faith we have in Christ. Let’s begin by going back to the beginning of our passage and seeing what kinds of people John explains for us.

The first group of people we are told about are the crowds that had come from all over the neighboring countries to celebrate the Passover feast. The Passover was celebrated annually and it was considered a mandatory pilgrimage for Jews to go to Jerusalem so that they could have the Passover meal and sacrifice the lamb so that their sins could be passed over from the previous year. John tells us that when the people heard that Jesus was coming, they got the Palm branches and went out to meet Him. These people were excited to see Jesus because they heard about all of the miraculous things He had done while He was in Galilee. We know this is the case because their chanting as they welcomed Him included them calling Him the King of Israel. They were, in essence, honoring Him with their lips as the Son of God, even though we are also well aware many of them would turn their backs on Him later in the week. So, as we look closely at this part of the crowd, what have we learned about these people? Are they following Christ because they really believed in who He was or were they going along with the excitement of the crowd? Based on the way John has written verses 12 and 13 we must conclude that these people were going along with the crowd and were riding on the Jesus bandwagon. Can anyone here tell us what we call fans who change the teams they root for based on their current success? We usually call them front runners. This part of the crowd was in with the hot topic of day, which was Jesus. A question for us to ponder here: Are we following Christ because He is a popular figure or do we follow Him because we truly believe He is who He tells us He is? This is a question we should ask ourselves every day.

Group 2 is found in verse 16, which are the disciples. John tells us that they did not understand everything they saw taking place during this welcoming, but later on they would remember why all of this had been done for Christ. We can conclude from this verse that the disciples were committed to following Christ, but even after all He had taught them, they still did not understand His mission in Jerusalem that fateful week. Today there are many people who admire Jesus and like the things He taught, but they still do not understand why He had to die on the cross for them. They have been blinded by pride and cannot see that they are in need of a Savior. Have we truly accepted the fact that Christ has died for our sins and because of His sacrifice we have been restored to a right relationship with God? If so, our lives should reflect that knowledge. How can we live out that knowledge, we will discuss that in just a few moments.

The Third group is found in verses 17 and 18, which were the people who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead. These people had come to Jerusalem with Him from Bethany. The reason these people were so excited and were proclaiming Christ was because they had witnessed a miracle unlike anything they had ever seen before. The performing of signs in the gospel of John is always done to show us an attribute of God that has been manifested in Christ. John tells us that when Christ raised Lazarus, He told all of the people there that He is the resurrection and the life and that no one who believes in Him will ever die. What we need to ask ourselves today is whether we really trust that Christ has overcome sin and death? If He has then we have eternal hope and a reason to celebrate today. I am here to tell you that not only should we believe His claim, but we have strong reasons to believe that claim.

The fourth and final group we will look at are the Pharisees, which we find in verse 19. We see that the Pharisees are angry and full of jealousy. They have realized that Christ has taken the spotlight off of them and is now becoming more of a powerful presence than they are. This jealousy will come out in such a horrible way that it will cause them to break their own law in order to put Christ on trial and murder Him. The attitude of the Pharisees has not died out because we still see it in the world today. There are many other religions that do admire Christ, but when it comes to His claims of exclusivity, they drop Him immediately. They have replaced Christ with something else, which they feel is what will save mankind. This happens because Satan has been able to blind the minds of so many people by making them believe the lie that God’s way of dealing with sin is to just ignore it and that they can overcome that sin with their own good deeds. This is why Christianity is the only faith that makes the claim that Gid has saved His creation, not that creation can save itself. Taking the power out of man’s hands makes this such a hard concept for many people to accept. Do we believe that Christ’s sacrifice is payment enough for our sins? If we don’t, this will impact the way in which we live out our faith. Now that we have identified the four groups, let’s look at what we can learn from each of them.

Application

As we consider the large crowds that welcomed Christ to Jerusalem because of His

reputation let us consider the words that Matthew Henry shares in his commentary. “Those that have a true value and veneration for Christ will neither be ashamed nor afraid to own him before men in any instance whereby they may do him honour.” What we see in this statement is that one way a true follower Christ can be evaluated is through the way they acknowledge Him before others. A real believer in Christ is not ashamed of Him and will always bring Him honor no matter what the situation may bring them. This is one of the most challenging aspects of today’s Scripture because the crowds who were shouting for his glory on Sunday turned around and shouting for His death only five days later. Either Christ is the Lord and Savior or He is not. If we believe that He is the Christ we are called to honor Him in all that we do and say in our relations with others. That is a high calling, but Jesus tells His disciples that the way they will be judged by others is the way in which they love one another. “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). Therefore, we show Christ we love Him by the way that we love each other. If we only follow Him because He is a wise teacher or because of what we have read about Him we are really missing the big picture. We experience the peace and joy of God when we live in love towards each other.

The disciples were a committed group of men who wanted to show their devotion to Christ by standing up for Him and not allowing anything bad to happen to Him. Their devotion to His safety is something that we can appreciate, but Christ makes it clear that even though they did not understand at first, they eventually would understand after everything had taken place. This culminates at the Last Supper when Peter says that he will die with Christ and that no matter what happened he would not deny Him (John 13:38). The disciples teach us that devotion to our Lord is a good thing and that is something that He desires from us. However, He also calls us to have faith in His Words and live in confidence showing that we do believe in the words He has spoken. The disciples were infants in the faith and had not yet understood everything. Through their maturity in the faith, they were able to help those who would later come to accept Christ and put their faith in Him. Have you every shared your testimony with someone who is not a believer? If so, what impact can a testimony have? I have done this one time and I have to say it was one of the most difficult things I have ever done. The person I shared it with was not yet convinced to follow Christ, but the sharing of that experience opened up many doors of communication with that person that I still have with them today.

The people who experienced the raising of Lazarus also have a role to play in our study today. What lessons regarding our faith can we learn from these people? Once again we go to Matthew Henry who reminds us “Those who wish well to Christ's kingdom should be forward to proclaim what they know that may redound to his honour.” Have you ever witnessed a miracle in your own life or in the life of another? When this happens do we keep it to ourselves or do we share with everyone we know? Of course, we share this because the growth of God’s kingdom comes when we boldly proclaim what we have heard and seen. As we said earlier Christ’s signs were performed so that we would have evidence that He is who He says He is and that we can trust His words. These witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus give us an example to follow. We should always give Gid glory for the things He has done and is continuing to do in each and every one of our lives. This brings to mind the old hymn “To God Be the Glory.” “To God be the glory great things He hath done, so loved He the world that He gave us His Son, who yielded His life an atonement for sin and opened the floodgate that all may go in.”

Finally, we come to the Pharisees. Can we learn anything from this group? We certainly can. Even though the religious leaders of that day looked at Christ as nothing more than a trouble maker because He challenged their authority, they do teach us a very important lesson as we walk with Christ. Henry: “Those who oppose Christ, and fight against his kingdom, will be made to perceive that they prevail nothing. God will accomplish his own purposes in spite of them, and the little efforts of their impotent malice.” The pharisees thought that when they had murdered Christ, they had brought an end to Him forever. What we see is that was only the beginning. Their efforts brought them nothing but a stronger faith than they had ever seen. Men who had abandoned and betrayed Jesus would become bold proclaimers of the resurrection only days later. What we learn is that there will always be opposition to the gospel and that we will continually need to be prepared for those attacks. The days of being a Christian in a rather safe country are beginning to shrink and we need to bind ourselves together stronger than ever before if we are to stand firm. As we continue to hold fast to our faith, we have the comforting words of Christ to guide us: “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own; but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13). We have the Holy Spirit to guide through these challenging times. He will guide us as we speak and, in our actions, so that in all is said and done Christ will be glorified. We can overcome the world because Christ has already overcome it and Satan.

As we prepare for the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord let us take the time to learn from those who have come before. We need to remember that Christ is not only a popular figure because of what He taught, nor is He just one of many ways to heaven. Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven who has proven His words through the resurrection from the dead. The triumphant entry that we acknowledge today has opened up the doors for the king of glory to come into our hearts. Each of us need to open up our hearts and allow Him to remind us of the love He showed in that when we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Prayer