

A Fitting Response – John 12:9-16

John 12:9-16. This is one of the famous Palm Sunday passages in the Bible, but I'm not going to preach it from that perspective. I'm going to preach it from the perspective of those who lived it. Those who were there.

Because they had no idea what was coming five days later. No idea this was the last hurrah. And certainly no idea how fitting their response was.

But we do. And we should do the same. We should respond to Jesus just like them. Because if their response was fitting *then*, before the cross, it's even more fitting now.

Intro

[9] *When the large crowd of the Jews* [referring to those who came to Jerusalem early for the Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread just before it] *learned that Jesus was there* [in Bethany (1); close by], *they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.* (ESV)

[10] *So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, [11] because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.* Their worst fears realized. First recorded back in 11:48 – “*If we let him go on like this* [they said], *everyone will believe in him.* And it was happening. Having come for the spectacle, to see the man who lived again, they left for the Lord. Having come as *unbelievers*, they left as believers. It was happening.

And still does. How many people come for the spectacle, just to see what's going on, and leave as believers? Come as spectators and leave as participants? Forever changed? A child of God and part of his family? A lot. It happened then and it happens now.

And it often doesn't sit well with those who *don't* believe. Friends, family, co-workers; even religious leaders. In this case the chief priests. It didn't sit well with them. In fact, it bothered them so much that they conspired to kill *Lazarus* in addition to Jesus. Resorting to even *more* extreme measures to preserve the status quo. Even *more* evil.

All of which serves as a warning to . . .

Beware of the ill-effects of unbelief (v9-11)

The ill-effects from those who *reject* Jesus. The ill-effects of those who *refuse* to believe in him. Refuse to repent. In fact, beware the ill-effects of unbelief in yourself.

Because first of all . . .

• It leads to hate

The first of four reasons. *Unbelief* in Jesus leads to *hate* for Jesus. And not just him, but hate for those who love him. Those who believe in him.

Is that not the core issue with the chief priests? They *hated* what Jesus was doing. They hated their loss of influence. They hated his power and authority. What else would drive them to such measures? What else would cause them to put a bounty on his head? And Lazarus too.

But it's not just them. Unbelief leads to hate in everybody. Look around. Scratch the surface.

Some of you are estranged from your *family* because they hate the fact that you believe; and begrudge the time you spend here. Others are *restricted* by their family; refusing to allow them to attend. Or come to youth group.

Some of you have incurred the wrath of *professors*; because they hate your biblical worldview. And a few of you hate this right now; because *you* don't believe.

It's an ill-effect. That *affects* all of us. And if we're wise, we'll beware. Not to clam up or withdraw, but to be ready. And persevere. And rise *above* the hate.

Second . . .

• It leads to poor decisions

Beware of poor decisions from unbelief. Poor decisions yourself, and poor decisions by others. Like poor decisions in relationships: who to befriend, who to date, who to marry. Poor decisions at Christmas parties. Poor decisions at home. Poor decisions in life. Apart from the mind of Christ, apart from belief in Jesus, poor decisions abound.

Sometimes when I see people living dirty, sinful, downtrodden lives, I think, “If they only believed. If they *only* believed, their life would change drastically. Just by making better decisions.”

But most don't. And suffer the ill-effects. And adversely affect those around them as well. And if *you* don't believe, you will too. Making one poor decision after another. Beware.

Third . . .

• It leads to persecution

Unbelief leads to persecution. Beware of that as well. Sometimes it's verbal persecution, sometimes social, like being snubbed at work or canceled online; and sometimes worse. Like having your life threatened; think Lazarus. Or being kidnapped by Islamic terrorists; like some of the Christian school students in Nigeria recently. In fact, 1 out of every 7 Christians worldwide are being persecuted for their faith.

Why? Why do people do such things? Because they hate them. They hate Christians. Their unbelief leads to hate, and their hate leads to persecution.

It's happening in Nigeria. It's happening at the hands of the Taliban again in Afghanistan. And from the ayatollahs of Iran. And the secular leaders of China. And the dictators of North Korea. And a growing number of anarchists right here in our own country; driven by any *number* of radical passions.

But they all have one thing in common. They hate us. They hate people who believe. And they're prone to persecute us because that's what unbelief leads to. Beware and be ready.

It leads to hate, poor decisions, persecution, and sometimes God forbid . . .

• It leads to death

The ultimate ill-effect. Like the death of Charlie Kirk. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Michael Nnadi, a Nigerian seminary student executed in 2020. And 3000 more in 2024. 3000! And in the last century, 40 *million* worldwide. More than the *first* 19 centuries of Christianity combined.

Sometimes the ill-effects of unbelief leads to death. Just like it did for Jesus. And it's a fitting response to beware. Beware and be ready.

Second, the second fitting response, from the *heart* of the passage, is . . .

Acknowledge greatness when you see it (v12-15)

Referring to Jesus of course. Recognize and call attention to his *glory*. His power. His love. His grace. Acknowledge *that* greatness.

We do it all the time with athletes. Musicians. Authors. Performers. How much more ought we to do so with Jesus? The Son of God incarnate. Immanuel. Greatness embodied. After all, it's what the crowd did. Look at v12.

[12] The next day [Sunday] the large crowd that had come to the feast [same crowd as v9; the large crowd] 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!"

They acknowledged his *greatness* when they saw it. When they realized it. Recognized it. And did so in four main ways.

First, they welcomed him as their Savior. And we should too. Even more so.

• **Welcome Jesus as your Savior**

That's the idea of palm branches in v13 – *they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him*. Laying them down like a red carpet and waving them as he passed by. A traditional way of welcoming new royalty to town.

It started all the way back in Leviticus 23 with the worship of ancient Israel during the Feast of Tabernacles. They cut palm branches and leafy branches it says (23:40), and waved them during worship to symbolize their *longing* for a Savior. And after 15 centuries, here he was.

So palm branches were a symbol of their welcome, and "*Hosanna!*" was a cry of salvation. V13 again. *[13] They took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna!"* A Hebrew word meaning "save us." Which, in time, morphed into "the one who saves." Or just "Savior." So they were explicitly welcoming Jesus as their Savior! Little did they know.

But we do. We see even more of his greatness. And we should do the same. Welcoming him into our *lives* as Savior. Our hearts. The one who saves us from our sin. Saves us from bondage. Saves us from hell. That's the first fitting response to his greatness.

Second, we should . . .

• **Praise him for what he's done**

Like the crowd no doubt praised him for raising Lazarus. And praised him for coming to Jerusalem. And doing so *in the name of the Lord*. V13b – *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*. That is, with all the power and authority of God above.

It's an expression of praise straight out of **Ps 118:25-26** – *Save us, we pray, O LORD!* [Or

in Hebrew – *Hosanna, O LORD!*] *O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!* Praise him. *Praise* the one with all God's power. And they did. They acknowledged his greatness when they saw it.

Which is not only a fitting *response*, but it's a passage, in God's sovereignty, that would have been on the tip of their tongue. Because God-fearing Jews *sang* those words as they made their way to Jerusalem for the various feasts. Including this one. They praised him for what he did. And they didn't know the half of it.

Acknowledge his greatness by praising him for coming to take on flesh and die for our sins. Praise him for coming with all the power and authority to rise from the dead and forgive us. Praise him for ascending back to heaven to intercede for us. And promising to come again to raise us. And conquer the powers of darkness to protect us.

"Born to give us second birth," and "born that man no more may die," "Let heaven and nature sing!" And us too.

Third . . .

• **Worship him as King**

Acknowledge his greatness by worshipping his kingship. The very label the crowd gave him: *King of Israel. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!*" (13) Or "the very" *King of Israel*. Which means he's not just *backed* with power and authority, he *has* power and authority. Because he's the rightful King of his people. The rightful *ruler*.

The question is, who are his people? Who is *Israel*? If he's *the King of Israel*, who is that? Is it ethnic Jews, like it was then for the most part? Those of Abraham's *physical* lineage who lived in and around Jerusalem?

No. Israel is the church. Believers. *We* are the *Israel of God* as Paul says it in Galatians 6:16. Because *it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham*, Galatians 3:7; faith in Jesus. And *only* those of faith. *For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel*, Romans 9:6. Only the children of promise do. Only those who are saved and promised eternal life.

Or as Paul says it in **Galatians 3:29** – *If you are Christ's*, [if you belong to Jesus, by grace through faith] *then you are Abraham's offspring*. New Testament Israel. Which makes Christ our King. The rightful ruler of our lives. Reigning right now in the hearts of those who are his, and soon to come over the whole world.

And the only fitting response is to worship him. As in, proclaim his *worth* and your allegiance. Acknowledge his *greatness*, and your faith. "O worship the King, all glorious above, and gratefully sing his power and his love." (Robert Grant, hymn, 1833)

And fourth . . .

• **Follow him as Lord**

Acknowledge the greatness of Jesus by following Jesus. Not just casually, but devotedly. Follow him as your gracious master and perfect leader. The one who controls all history and fulfilled all prophecy. Like the one found here.

V14-15. The crowd shouted – *And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, [15] “Fear not, daughter of Zion [people of Jerusalem]; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”* Exalted but humble. Powerful but gentle. Fear not.

It’s a prophecy from **Zechariah 9:9** written 500 years earlier. *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.*

It’s a prophecy that Jesus was fulfilling in real time; entering Jerusalem on a donkey. And *completely* fulfilled a few days later; offering salvation to those who believe. All of which makes him Lord. Lord of history and Lord of life. And that’s not the half of it.

He also fulfilled the prophecies of his humble birth and sacrificial death. His Spirit of wisdom and amazing power. His Mosaic likeness and Davidic lineage. His virgin birth and shining light. His eternal throne and righteous kingdom. Fulfilled. Every last one of them.

Not to mention the names of deity ascribed to him: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. All true, every single day, in every single heart that’s his. Making him Lord of all, and worthy to be followed. Another fitting response to his glorious greatness.

And then last, the final response, comes from v16 – *His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified [as in resurrected with a new glorified body and ascended back to heaven], then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.*

Sometimes hindsight really is 20-20. But only if you remember and put it all together. Like the *disciples* did; those closest to him. Especially the 12. Some of whom went on to record it all. They remembered what was written about him in the Old Testament, and connected it to Jesus to write the New. A fitting response for sure.

That’s not to suggest that *you* have to write a book. But that you *too* remember the things written about Jesus. Old *and* New. You too connect the dots. The dots between prophecy and fulfillment. Foresight and completion. Jesus and you. His life and yours.

Remember everything and connect the dots (v16)

That’s the response. That’s most fitting. Especially in the presence of greatness. Deity.

You say, “Come on, Pastor. There’s no way. I don’t even *know* everything to remember. Let alone remember what I *do* know.” I get it. And feel the same way.

But we know *some* things. And we have the Bible to learn others. And good teachers to learn *from*.

And should you lack *understanding* along the way, like the disciples, you have the Holy Spirit; *within* you. And the fellowship of saints around you. You have prayer; and fellowship with God. You have Bible studies; and Small Groups. Youth group and Freedom Group. Not to mention resources unfathomable to the first disciples. Available at

your fingertips.

Unlike any other time or place in history, we have it all. Except for an excuse. We have no excuse to forget what we know. No excuse to miss the dots.

Summary

So whatever you do, make every effort to remember everything and *connect* them. The dots from Scripture to Jesus, and Jesus to you.

It’s the least we can do in the presence of greatness. And the most fitting response for sure.

Prayer – Lord, we acknowledge your greatness. We see it and praise you. And to the extent we don’t, refresh our memory. Remind us of your kingship and lordship. Spur us on to follow. And God, should you allow us to suffer the ill-effects of unbelief, give us the strength to persevere. Not just barely, but triumphantly. We pray, in the mighty and matchless name of Jesus – King of glory, Prince of Peace, and Lord of all.

You Are Loved