

The King is Worthy (John 12)

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Date: 28 March 2021

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[0 : 0 0] at John chapter 12. So we are taking just a short break. As Easter approaches, we'll take our break from our regular Deep Into His Love Ephesians series. It's all online if you wanna catch up, give you a chance to take a breath.

And this Sunday is Palm Sunday. So we're gonna look at the Palm Sunday story and other stories here in John 12. So let me pray and we'll begin. Amen. Our Lord Jesus Christ, you are worthy.

Worthy of every song that we have sung today. Worthy of all the prayers that have gone up through you. And you are worthy most of all because you died and rose again. What a beautiful twin truth that we celebrate this coming Easter.

I pray that you would help us now. Pay attention to your word. As we hear the story afresh from John's eyes. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Fran was quite into activities and so I thought I'm gonna join in.

Okay, put up your hand if your birthday has already been this year. So just one, two. Okay, just put it right up. Okay, about a quarter. Is that right?

[1 : 1 2] In the congregation. Okay, so picture that. That's kind of the percentage of people that when asked late last year whether they would get a COVID vaccine said they weren't sure.

They weren't sure about getting it. I've got reservations. Okay, 24%. Okay, so roughly one in four. Right, so it's one thing to have a COVID vaccine available in our country.

It's another thing to convince people to get one. Not saying that you're not gonna get it. I trust your judgment. But look, governments all around the world, they have a dilemma now. They have to convince millions and millions of people to get vaccinated.

And so they've launched million dollar ad campaigns. Here's one. It's from the US and it's up to you. Americans love their freedom and so it's up to you.

Okay, it's up to you if you get a vaccine but it's up to you also to get back and save this country and so on. This one, the next one is from the UK. Okay, so that's Elton John.

[2 : 1 4] That's Michael Caine. He's in all the Batman movies as Alfred. And so they've brought in celebrity power. And Elton John even says, he gets a jab and says, I'm still standing.

And so a bit of tongue in cheek appeal. Trying to get you to kind of relate to these celebrities. Trying to get you to get the vaccine. This one's my favorite one though. This is from Singapore. And it's got all the feel.

So just like intergenerational family stories. I think there's five different videos from the perspective of like, you know, one person and another person, another kid. And it starts with you.

It's in different languages, rallying kind of the nation's multicultural makeup to come together and to love and protect your loved ones. So very story driven, particularly very successful at the moment, right, this kind of advertising.

I think of the Apostle John lived in the 21st century. Perhaps he wouldn't have been a fisherman. Perhaps he would have been a copywriter for an ad agency. I think he's so good at telling stories. Okay.

[3 : 16] Who's ever read the book of, the Gospel of John before? Yeah. John's Gospel. Yeah. Right. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, four Gospel writers. He's quite different, isn't he? Okay. He gives you details that no one else seems to know.

It comes from him being kind of part of Jesus's inner circle. But I just think he's just a, he's just very observant. And he gives us kind of color, right? It's not just facts and figures, right?

He gives us individual reactions. Here's an example. John chapter two, when the wine runs out at the wedding in Cana, right, he records the little details. You can almost see Mary's smile as she tells his servants, just do whatever Jesus tells you to do.

Right. Or when Nicodemus, okay, a religious leader, comes to see Jesus, John manages to tell us it's dark and it's in the deep night. John knows, right, that like every good marketing company, right, that you've got to tell the story, right?

Okay. Stories matter. And not just stories, but tell it through the people's eyes. People matter. And we love this today, right? It's not just ASB Bank selling you products. It's Ben and Amy's wonderful adventures and on the side they're using banking products, right?

[4 : 29] We love this kind of story-driven narrative. It's not just HelloFresh. It's how-to dad telling us how to use HelloFresh, okay? We love that character-driven type of storytelling.

And John is great at this. And so what I wanted us to do today, in chapter 12, we're going to hear John tell the story of Palm Sunday and the night before. But think of it through the different characters' eyes.

That's what we're going to do today. Right? It is 50 verses. It's fairly long. That's why I didn't ask Fran to read it out. Okay, that would be quite a long reading. But I want us, as we go through it, to explore five different reactions to Jesus' coming death, right?

Five different reactions to Jesus. That's what we'll do in the first half. And then to close, we're going to ask three questions that Jesus raises for us. I think that's what we see in John chapter 12. We see five different reactions from different people, different groups of people, and then we're challenged with three questions for us.

So let me read from the first couple of verses. This is John chapter 12, verse 1. This is God's Word. Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

[5 : 47] Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume.

She poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. So firstly here, in verses 1 to 3, John gives us Mary's costly devotion.

Here is Jesus, and here is the first reaction we see. Mary's costly devotion. Some of you might know her backstory. You can read chapter 11 in your own time if you'd like to find out more.

Only a few days earlier, she was crying tears of grief because her brother had died, Lazarus. And then there was shock and joy as Jesus comes and raises him from the grave again.

And now she is so overwhelmed with joy, she comes to the party, Lazarus' party, and gives lavish worship. This is on Saturday night, and at this kind of pre-Passover feast, feast, Mary takes a year's worth of wages, right?

- [7 : 02] Imagine that, a year's salary, and pours it over Jesus' feet. And not only that, this pint of pure nard, she doesn't just waste it on him, the honoured guest.
- She's even bold enough to wipe it with her hair. Very unusual behaviour, right? For a first century woman. And as the smell kind of wafts through the whole house, it invites us to wonder about the broader meaning of this moment.
- You see, Mary's devotion, okay, anointing someone, pouring perfume, this is the kind of action you see in the Bible with royalty, with kings. Think about how Samuel, once upon a time, anointed King Saul with oil in 1 Samuel chapter 10, for example.
- But yet later on in verse 7, Jesus makes a very interesting comment, and he says this, verse 7, right? This was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.
- Like a clever ad campaign, there's a double meaning behind Mary's devotion, right? It's not just anointing a king, but it's also burying one. Here is God's anointed King, Jesus Christ, being celebrated and honoured on Saturday night, but he's also about to be buried.
- [8 : 21] There are important things happening in this upcoming Easter week, yet Mary is the first to respond with costly devotion. At least one person, though, disagreed with this kind of extravagant worship, right?
- Have a read of verses 4 to 5. One of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to portray him, objected. Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?
- It was worth a year's wages. Here, John records for us a second response to Jesus' coming death. Selfish deceit, right?
- Selfish deceit from Judas. We know from the other Gospels, for example, Mark and others, that Judas, he wasn't the only disciple who was upset about this kind of activity, right?
- This kind of waste of money, but I think in John's Gospel, he chooses to single out Judas so that we can do a direct kind of compare and contrast, okay? We have Mary's devotion compared to what Judas does.
- [9 : 27] John, later on, right, in the very next verse, tells us. He tells us straight. He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He was a thief. Judas never really wanted to care and use the money for charity.
- He just wanted to line his pockets. We know how it will end. This selfish deceit from Judas, it will drive him, right, to betray the Messiah for 30 pieces of silver.
- That's the kind of price that you would pay for a slave in the Old Testament. Judas wants to just profit out of Jesus' death and he does and yet he dies a ruined man.
- It's a telling picture, isn't it? Striking. Where your treasure is, your heart is also. Judas is prime example. And so John invites us to compare and contrast with Mary.
- Mary thought Jesus was worth everything she owned. Judas saw him worth not much more than a slave. What about you? What about you?
- [10 : 31] What is Jesus worth to you? Friends, we've seen devotion, we've seen self-interest. Third, John brings up another character, right?
- John recounts actually outright hostility we see in verses 8 to 11. We see from the chief priest, sorry, verse 9, we read this. Meanwhile, a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was here, there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead.
- So, the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

You see, the religious rulers in Judea at the time, they'd already begun to try and deal with Jesus. He was becoming bigger and bigger problems for them. And yet now, after Lazarus' resurrection, their hostility grows, right?

They're even going to expand their murder plot to try and take out Lazarus. He's just proof that Jesus is who he says he is. And so here, when we see this hostility, John is reminding us there will always be hostility around those who follow Jesus.

[11 : 45] Okay? There will always be people who ignore the undeniable, right? who will refuse to believe in Jesus. That has always accompanied Jesus wherever he goes.

We need to be prepared to live in this culture where, bit by bit, more and more, people are not just kind of, I don't care about Jesus to, wow, you bigot, you hateful person when you tell them you follow Jesus.

How prepared are we for that? Because John is trying to prepare us for that, isn't he? hostility. Hostility comes when Jesus is proclaimed. And yet at this point in John's gospel, right, here in verse 11, they can't do much, these chief priests, because there's a group of them hostile to Jesus, but then they're outnumbered by the crowd.

And so as John moves from one kind of scene to another, right, there's a change in scene from verse 12, we see, not just an anointing from the night before, now we see a triumphal entry.

We see a triumphal entry. And here we see a fourth reaction to King Jesus. We see a fourth reaction to Jesus' coming death, and it's this, we see, I think, confused kind of passion from the crowds.

[12 : 59] We see passion, but I think it's confused. Let me tell you why. But let me read it first. Verse 12, the next day, the great crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel.

Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it as it is written, Do not be afraid, O daughter of Zion. See, your King is coming. Seated on a donkey's colt.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with this. Palm Sunday story. I wonder if, growing up, you kind of, you know, made donkeys and cut them out and put, like, stuck little palm branches on it.

I don't know what you guys did, but, yeah, it's a very familiar story to us, isn't it? Here's Jesus, right? King of kings. He's triumphantly riding into Jerusalem, okay, God's city, and he rides it on a donkey and the crowds around him roar with delight.

[14 : 04] and yet, the crowd's passion is misplaced and the clue, okay, is in what they're waving, palm branches. You see, palm branches were the Jewish equivalent of kind of waving your national colours, okay?

So, back when the Bible first began, okay, they waved palm branches after God rescued them from the Exodus. So, actually, if you read Exodus 15, you'll see them wave palm branches.

But now, okay, over time, it's become developed into this sign or symbol, okay, of national pride. It would be like us waving a New Zealand flag or wearing red socks or whatever we do, wearing, I'm sorry, like a black, you know, black silver fern, okay?

That's what the palm branches mean. So, what is the crowd thinking when Jesus walks in on a donkey? I think they're thinking this, Jesus, wow, you are going to make Israel great again, aren't you, right?

Jesus, you are going to come here and you are going to, you're going to sort out this terrible situation we're living in, okay? You are going to boot out the Romans. You're going to, you're going to establish a political kingdom that will not end, okay?

[15 : 16] That's why they're calling out, Hosanna, right? Hosanna means save us now. What was top of their mind was they wanted to be rescued from this oppression from a foreign enemy.

So, they're passionate, but I think they're confused, right? Because just like we had a double meaning, okay, on the Saturday night with Mary, there's actually a double meaning here when Jesus rides in.

Because while he is actually Israel's true king, while he does ride in like a king, he's riding in on a donkey. A donkey.

A young donkey. And John wants us, right? He's very deliberate. He wants us to see the greater meaning of this. And so he actually quotes for us from one of the Old Testament prophets, Zechariah 9.9.

And he reminds us of the images there of Zion's king coming to daughter Jerusalem on a donkey. Right? And Zechariah 9.9 says this, Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion.

[16 : 15] Shout, daughter Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly. Riding on a donkey. Lowly. And actually, in the next verse, in this original prophecy to Judah, okay, God actually promises to defeat their enemies through a coming king.

Yes. But in verse 10, what he's trying to do is proclaim peace to the nations, even as he is victorious. Not just coming in to destroy people, but to bring peace to the nations.

You see, Jesus is God's chosen king, yes. But if I'm in the crowd and I'm cheering, okay, I've got it confused when I think this king is going to come and hold a sword and just start cutting people up like that guy in 300, okay?

As these people are waving their palm branches, I think they've got it confused. They should have, as John says, watched and said, ah, he's riding a donkey. Ah, the peace that he's bringing in is going to come very differently.

Jesus will not build his kingdom by aggressively taking life, but by peacefully laying down his life on the cross. And so as an aside, I think this is, I think why, you might have read, I don't know, conspiracy authors, okay?

[17 : 32] They get it wrong. They kind of paint Jesus as a zealot, okay? Someone who is just like a terrorist almost. John makes it clear that Jesus has not come in to bring victory to through political change.

He comes in to bring victory through his death and resurrection, nothing else. Right? So the crowd's here, they sing victory songs, they lay victory branches, they're very patriotic, but they do not understand the true nature of who the Messiah will be.

John tells us that the crowd is confused. So what have we seen so far? We've seen, we've seen devotion, we've seen deceit, we've seen hostility, and we've seen confusion, right?

John, he's such a good storyteller. He weaves in all these different responses. I think he wants us to go, where are you at? Which one do you most relate with? But there's one more response.

We see this in verses 20 to 22. And let me read that for you and we can see this sincere curiosity. Verse 20 says this, Now, there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the feast.

[18 : 43] And they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request, Sir, they said, we would like to see Jesus. And Philip went to tell Andrew. Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

And then Jesus replied, The hour has come. For the Son of Man to be glorified. I think it's telling that, I read from verse 20, but actually, in verse 19, you hear the Pharisees, they're complaining.

They're like, oh, this is useless. The whole world is going after him. And then John's like, uh-huh, let me tell you about some Greeks who've just come after him. John's a clever story writer.

He is. John is saying, look, Jesus' mission is to save the world. And here's an example. Now, these Greeks, obviously, they're not Jewish, but they probably feared God in some way.

They're probably interested or had some connections with the Jewish community. Right? Maybe they knew Jesus from his time up north of Judea and ministering in Galilee. Maybe when they came in for the Passover, they were curious by the buzz of the crowds.

[19 : 50] Maybe it's kind of like the way that when there's a flash mob and you're just walking past, you kind of want to stop and see what's going on. Right? Who's drawing the crowd? And so these Greeks, they approach Philip with their request.

But what's striking is when Philip and Andrew, they bring their request to Jesus, we never hear what happens to the Greeks. Right? If you read the rest of the chapter, there's no mention of what happens to them.

Unfinished story. Because John wants us to focus on what Jesus says. Right? What did he say in verse 23? The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

One of the key themes that pops up in John's Gospel is time. Time. You'll see this if you choose to read the whole of John's Gospel. Back in chapter 2, right, he's about to do this, you know, he's at the wedding, he doesn't want to do much and then they're like, they're out of wine, they're out of wine and he's like, mother, my time's not yet come.

And then later on in chapters 7 and 8, he's kind of duking it with the Pharisees, the religious leaders, but they could not seize him because his time had not yet come. But why is it, the friends, that now the time has come?

[21 : 00] Because the world has come to him. Because this is the moment when Jesus chooses to announce he is going to be glorified. But that's a strange way to describe what happens over Easter, right?

To be glorified. Have you ever thought about this? Why is someone hanging on a cross, being executed, being humiliated, stripped, beaten, and then killed?

Why is that glorifying? How can that be a sign of victory like we sing? How can a bullet from a firing squad be a signal of triumph? Well, actually it can.

It can if we know the worthiness of the person who dies. And John uses all these different characters to remind us and show us, right, that Jesus' coming death is precisely what gives him glory.

Friends, the king is worthy because his death brings victory. I'll say that again. The king is worthy because his death brings victory. You see, here the Greeks have arrived and that signals a new era, a new time has dawned.

[22 : 11] The hour has come, right? Jesus is going to draw in the nations. We are proof of that. And how will he do this? Well, he tells us, verse 24 to 25.

And he tells it in a bit of a parable, doesn't he? I'll tell you the truth, verse 24. Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Just as you need to bury a seed in the ground so that it will grow into a fruitful tree, Jesus is saying this, he must die, right? To bring the fruit of God's salvation for the world.

Jesus says, the hour has come. He will bring glory and victory by burying himself for his people. And this is kind of Jesus' final public sermon in John's Gospel.

[23 : 15] After this, it's all very private talk with his disciples. So this is his public message, his last one. If he must die to save the world, verse 25, his followers must be willing to hate their own lives, right?

To hate their own lives. To lose it even so that you will keep it for eternity. We must follow the Lamb wherever he goes. And so, I don't know about you.

Maybe you're here and you're just curious about Jesus or you kind of know a little bit about him, right? You've grown up in church so you know stories and bits and pieces. Please keep on being curious.

It matters. Keep asking your questions. We welcome them here at this church. But one thing you need to know is this. To follow Jesus, right, doesn't just mean following him in a victory parade.

it means following him whatever the cost, even if it means death. The true Christian life is this. Someone dies to their own self, their old self, lays it aside so that it bears a fruit of new life in Christ.

[24 : 22] And thankfully, thankfully, Jesus promises if you turn away from your old path, right, you repent and you believe in him, you follow him as a suffering servant. The Father will honour you.

So, yeah, if you're a curious observer, if you're not a Christian and you're not sure, perhaps keep remembering this. And can I encourage you, plead with you, put your trust in him, believe him.

We don't have time to go through the rest of what Jesus says, but read his words. He says things like put your trust in his light, right, verse 35, so that you may be children of light.

The hour has come and it's coming, right, repent and believe. Some of us think that we live forever, but if you think that time's on your side and you can make a choice about Jesus later, please think again, right, because Jesus says the hour has come, the time has come, right, and one says the Son of Man has already been glorified.

But in another sense, there is a time still to come and hour is still coming for the whole world to be judged, for the ruler of this world, the King of Kings, to return.

[25 : 40] And when he returns, it will be too late to choose because you've already made your choice. Friends, you can bow and serve this glorified King now or you'll have to bow to him later in judgment and in punishment for eternity.

So believe in him. That's my first encouragement to you. Believe in him. See how much his life and death is worth to these people, okay, and give yourself today to serve him. Give yourself today to serve him, right?

Maybe some of you, you're responding to him in not just curiosity, not hostility, obviously, but maybe there's a bit of self-interest in you, okay, or maybe a bit of confusion. I want to ask two more questions then and I'm going to take these from the last few verses of John 12.

The first challenge, I think, sorry, the second challenge is from verses 42 to 43 and let me read this for you. Yet at the same time, many, even among the leaders, believed in Jesus, right, in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue.

For they loved praise from men more than praise from God. What makes us scared when we meet our co-workers and talk about our Easter plans and just kind of let it slide that we're going to church?

[27 : 03] What makes it hard to invite our friends and neighbours to come and hear the gospel preached here or to join with our other Christian friends?

Okay. What makes us stay in our holy huddles and not actually have a Christian friend, a non-Christian friend? Look, we can have our reasoned excuses, right? Oh, I'm not an expert or maybe that's the pastor's job or the group leader's job or I think our church building's too scary, it's too much Chinese or I know my friend, they will definitely say no, they won't come but John forces us to ask, do you love praise more than people?

Right? So, do you love praise from people more than praise from God? Right? It's right here in the text. The Bible reminds us it is often fear of others, right?

Fear of people more than God that drives us to be scared, right? That blocks our boldness when we want to live our lives with Jesus. And behind our fear I think we've forgotten how much Jesus is worth, right?

Maybe we need a reminder like Mary, right? That costly devotion, that lack of fear of what others will think. So, Jesus reminds us again, right?

[28 : 21] If we have that fear, look at verse 45. Sorry. They love, sorry, verse 43, they love praise from men more than praise from God.

Then Jesus cried out, when a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only but in the one who sent me. And verse 45, when he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.

That gives me so much encouragement, right? I'm a fearful, scared person. Often, I will hide and I will be too scared to even admit that I'm a pastor of a church.

I don't know about you, it's scary for me too. But when I'm fearful, verse 45 says, look to Jesus. Look to Jesus. He's come into this world to bring light, not darkness, right?

We don't have to be scared to say that we're Christians. To say that we are part of a family that brings light. So sure, right? We don't have to be silly.

[29 : 18] We don't have to say stupid things, right? But be bold. Be bold. Tell your workmate, hey, what are you doing this weekend? Hey, have you ever been to a church service before?

Do you have a faith? What religion did your parents bring you up in? Start those conversations. We're at school, you know? You know I love you, right?

Maybe you could say to someone, I've been there with you when you struggle. Can I share with you why Jesus is worth so much to me? Start those conversations, right? Don't be scared of what other people will think.

In Christ, we are already accepted by God. We don't need anyone else's approval, so why not? Who else is worth more? Who else is worth more? So believe in the light, right? And be bold with his light.

Okay, that's my second challenge to you. And then finally, Jesus challenges us, verse 47 to 48, with a challenge. Will you obey his words?

[30 : 16] Because read this, verse 47, as for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world but to save it.

But there is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words. That very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

In other words, Jesus has spoken. Some of you here at PCBC, you have heard the good news of Jesus many, many times. Maybe here on a Sunday, maybe from your group leaders, but you can't just hear them, you need to obey them too.

Right? Otherwise, your disobedience will find you out on the last day. And for some of you, you may claim to be a follower of Jesus, but God knows your heart better than I do. Maybe you have the name Christian, but the way you live is totally opposite to that.

John reminds us, no, no, we must obey him. We not just hear his words but do them as well. we must put our secret sins to death, right?

[31 : 29] Things that we would not share with others but we are doing. Sexual immorality or idolatry, jealousy, rivalries or gossip and division, all these things that other New Testament writers write about.

Do we tolerate them in our lives? Or do we switch gears? Do we switch gears and obey Jesus' words and do them as well? Because friends, the hour has come.

Jesus is king and this king is worthy of everything because he brought victory with his death. We believe this, yes. Maybe you're even bold about this but we need to obey this as well.

And if he's worth everything then we can. If he's worth everything we can believe in him, we can be bold for him and we can obey his word together. Let's pray.

Oh God, save us. Hosanna. Save us now. Save us now. Lord, you are worthy. King Jesus, your death brought victory.

[32 : 45] Father, through your son you have rescued us from the punishment our sins deserve. Thank you. Father, help us to believe this when we are faltering this Easter.

Help us to be bold about this, this gospel when we are scared and fear others more than you. Search our hearts and bring in a desire to honour you first and foremost.

Not just in what we say but what we do. Help us to to obey your word because your king is worthy and his death has brought victory. I pray these things in Christ's precious name.

Amen.