

The Unexpected King | John 12:12-19
The Rev. Dr. Matthew Lee | The Falls Church Anglican
Preaching Draft | March 29, 2026
(Discussion questions on page 9)

Intro:

- “***Never meet your heroes.***” It’s a common proverb many of us have heard that suggests that meeting people we admire oftentimes lead to disappointment.
- Why? Because either we have ***unrealistic*** expectations for our “heroes” OR have created in our minds a certain image of what that person will be like; whether they are athletes, actors, famous Christian speakers, authors, worship leaders, and dare I say, certain pastors.
- So, when they inevitably are different from what we’ve imagined, or don’t live up to our unrealistic expectations, we get let down, or sometimes even angry.
- This leads to things like a Reddit thread I saw called “Rude Celebrity Encounters” where people bash on celebrities who were not nice to them, not realizing that these celebrities are imperfect human beings just like them.
- *So, what’s this have to do with the passage for this morning?*
- Well, in some sense, this was sort of what was happening to the crowd that we just read about in **John Chapter 12**, especially, in light of the chapters to follow.
- Let me set the scene for you...

I. The Context/Passage:

- This passage occurred during the time of Passover when the Jewish people remembered how God had saved His people from Egypt. And you all remember the story of Moses.

- It was a really big event and a huge celebration. Imagine the Super Bowl and the scene right around the stadium. There were tons of people in the city of Jerusalem.
- Now, prior to this passage, for about 9 months, Jesus had been zigzagging through 35 different places teaching and performing miracles.
- And one of these miracles was Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This was alluded to in vs. 17. And the crowd in this chapter witnessed this miracle.
- So when they heard that Jesus was coming into the city of Jerusalem, they were pretty amped up. They had super high expectations but also a certain image of what Jesus would be like, and more importantly, what He came to do.
- They believed that Jesus WAS the Messiah that the entire Old Testament talked about.
- And they were excited and ready to meet their “hero.”
- But then something a bit strange and unexpected happens. The crowd, maybe expecting a bit more swagger or fanfare from the Messiah and coming King, were probably taken aback by how Jesus chooses to enter into the city.
- Instead of coming in on a chariot, or a powerful war horse, surrounded by an entourage, with trumpets blowing, Jesus comes quietly riding on a humble, unassuming donkey.
- Now, Jesus did this for various reasons, which we'll get to in a bit.
- But one main reason was to directly fulfill a prophecy that was made in Zechariah 9:9, which vs. 14 references, where it says:

“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.”

- But riding on a donkey ALSO pointed to the fact that Jesus had a direct line to King David. Again, another Messianic reference.
- This is why in parallel passages, the crowd also shouts, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”
- Now, without going into too much historical background, back in King David’s time, the donkey was actually a “royal” animal. Kings rode on donkeys.
- However, AFTER King David’s time, Kings switched from donkeys to fearsome and mighty horses whenever they rode around in a city.
- Especially after winning a major battle, Kings would ride into a city with great fanfare; with tons of soldiers, weapons, maybe even captured enemies riding in to declare how great the King was.
- Imagine the movie Gladiator, when Russell Crowe enters into Rome after a great victory.
- And this was probably what the crowd was expecting.
- After all, Jesus had JUST raised a person from the dead! That’s pretty incredible. And if you ARE the Messiah, the coming King, you should have a bit more swagger.
- But a small, unassuming donkey? With no soldiers, no weapons, no prisoners?
- This was completely different, completely radical, and completely unexpected.
- A few other things to note: In the other Gospel accounts, when Jesus came into Jerusalem on this donkey, we see people placing their “cloaks” on the road.

- What this symbolized was their willingness to submit and follow Jesus as their King.
- People also waved and laid down Palm Branches which symbolized their hope in Jesus as the King who would make everything right in the world. This is why we call it “Palm Sunday.”
- It was a symbol of hope that Jesus, this new King, would bring freedom and a change in their lives for the better.
- That’s why people shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel.”
- And that word, “Hosanna,” literally means, “God save us!”
- But what we see in the next few chapters, and in the next few days that Jesus wasn’t the “hero” they expected; but He WAS the “hero” they needed.
- So... that’s the scene. That’s the “triumphal entry” that we celebrate today.
- So, what’s the point? What’s God trying to teach us through this passage, especially in light of the chapters to come?
- Well, there a LOT of amazing truths that we can glean but let me just point out two for us this morning.

II. The Lessons:

- And the first truth is about human nature: Specifically, that ***OUR tendency as human beings is to make God into OUR own image instead of seeing God for who He really is. But when God refuses to conform to our image, we can easily falter in our faith.***

1. Human Nature:

- What do I mean by this and where do see this?

- Well, I mentioned it briefly, but what you see in this passage is the crowd, excited about what they saw Jesus do: raising Lazarus from the dead, healing sick people, delivering people from demons.
- They believed that Jesus WAS the Messiah who would come to make everything right.
- They believed Jesus was there to SAVE them. That's why they shouted, "Hosanna!"
- ***BUT...*** what THEY thought Jesus would do and how THEY wanted Jesus save was very different from how Jesus chose to save.
- *Specifically*, the crowd wanted Jesus to deliver them from a hard, and at times, oppressive life that was caused by the Roman government.
- They wanted and expected the Messiah to set them free from their economic hardships, religious persecution, and other difficulties in life.
- Because they were tired of being the persecuted minority and wanted to be on top for a change.
- And they thought Jesus would be the one who would make all that happen.
- To put it another way, the crowd wanted Jesus to be their Savior, ***but on their terms and in their way.***
- Yes, they laid down their cloaks on the road to declare their allegiance to Jesus as long as He did what THEY expected or WANTED.
- You see, they wanted Jesus on a fearsome warhorse NOT the Jesus on a donkey; and definitely NOT the Jesus on a cross.
- And so, when Jesus didn't meet their expectations and refused to conform to THEIR image, this same crowd that shouted, "Hosanna!" became the same crowd that shouted, "Crucify!"
- This is why Jesus says in **Matthew Chapter 11**:

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.” (Mt. 11:16-19)

○ **Connect:**

- For us this morning, as we think about this, what’s the implication?
- Well, I think if we’re honest with ourselves, we tend to do the same thing that the crowd did.
- I know I am guilty of this myself, but our tendency is to try and make Jesus conform to OUR image instead of seeing Him for who He really is.
- Like the crowd, we want Jesus on OUR terms, we want it “our way;” What I call, “Burger King” Theology.
- But when Jesus refuses to conform to our image and submit to our ways, or do things on our terms, we get deeply disappointed or even deeply angry and we falter in our faith.
- Like the crowd, we so easily can lay down our cloaks and wave the Palm Branches when things go well and, in our way, but the moment God throws a curve ball in life and doesn’t answer in our way, we like the crowd can turn on Jesus on a dime.
- Even for myself, how I easily I can go from trusting, praising, and even preaching about the goodness of God to doubting and even being angry at Him when He doesn’t seem to make sense and do things in the way that “I” want or expect; or on my timetable.
- How easily I can go from CELEBRATING Jesus to CRUCIFYING Him in my heart.

- And maybe I'm not alone in this, but maybe some of you struggle with a faltering faith at times.
- Maybe it's when we've been praying for months or even years for a loved one to be saved, but they never trust in Jesus; or we believe God for healing, but he doesn't heal, at least in the way we expect.
- Or when we pray, and give, and sacrifice, and obey, believing that God would bless my life only to lose a job; or not find a job; or have trouble in our family, or experience health issues.
- And maybe like me, you're not a super-Christian who can always trust and always have faith, but at times, you doubt and wonder if God really sees or even hears your prayers; You doubt His goodness when life doesn't seem to go your way; when God throws us a curve ball and doesn't conform to our expectations.
- But I think the reason for this is because of what I mentioned earlier: And that is, that it's when we want God to fit into OUR box and image instead of seeing Him for who He really is and letting God be God that we tend to falter in our faith.
- That's when we doubt and get confused or at times get bitter at God. It's when we want to follow God on OUR terms instead of on HIS terms.
- And so the application question for us is: *In what ways do we try to conform Jesus to our image instead of seeing Him as He really is? In what ways, do we follow Jesus on OUR terms instead of His?*

(Transition)

- That's the first lesson. The second lesson, thankfully, is a bit more positive.
- And it's positive because it's about God and HIS nature.

2. God's Nature:

- Specifically, ***that despite OUR faltering faith, even faith-less-ness, God remains faithful. And He will ALWAYS, ALWAYS come through for us, but not ALWAYS in the way we want or expect.***
- *And where do we see this?*
- Well, as I mentioned, the crowd wanted to be saved and delivered, but on their terms and in THEIR way.
- They wanted a Jesus who would ride into the city on a fearsome horse, with soldiers, and a display of power.
- They wanted things to change politically, economically, and socially.
- *But instead, what happened?*
- We see Jesus, without weapons, without an army, riding on a humble donkey.
- But more importantly, instead of overthrowing the government by violence or force, Jesus chose to be humiliated, mocked, spat upon, and then eventually hung on a cross.
- And He did this, first of all, to show that He was a very DIFFERENT kind of a King and Savior; a very DIFFERENT type of leader; a very DIFFERENT type of Messiah and Hero.
- He wanted to show that He was a “HUMBLE” King. That HE came not to BE served but to serve; To wash people’s feet so that we may do the same.
- Jesus wanted to show that the TRUE King and Messiah, unlike us, doesn’t vie for power, but instead chooses to give up his power and come in weakness so that others might be saved.
- The true Messiah comes to save NOT through violence or force or a display of human power, but through humility, weakness, and ultimately, the sacrifice on the cross.

- *But more importantly*, Jesus in this passage and in the chapters to come showed that what the crowd really needed wasn't deliverance and salvation from their external difficulties, but from their sinful hearts.
- That what the people really needed was freedom, not from political oppression, but from the slavery of sin and death.
- And this could ONLY happen by Jesus paying for their sins upon a cruel cross.
- He came to save, but just not in the way they expected.
- And though Jesus could have easily said, "forget you guys" after the crowd turned on Him, He instead remained faithful despite their faithlessness. Jesus continued to the cross and ultimately provided deliverance and salvation through His death and resurrection.
- Jesus may not have been the "hero" the crowd expected, but He WAS the "hero" they needed.

Connect:

- For us this morning, it's a reminder that no matter what, even when our faith seems to be shaky, even when we falter and fail – God remains faithful.
- And He will ALWAYS, ALWAYS deliver, and ALWAYS pull through, but just not ALWAYS in the way we expect or want.
- And the greatest picture of this, of course, was the cross.
- As **Romans 5:8** reminds us, "While we were yet sinners; while we were at our very worst; broken and messed up; rebellious, enemies of God, Christ died for us."
- THIS is the message of Palm Sunday and the message of Holy Week.