

THE NEW COVENANT LENS

Text: John 12:12-16; Matt. 21:4-9; Mark 11:7-10; Luke 19:35-38

Introduction

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, on the day we call Palm Sunday, was very convenient to say the least. For instance:

- It was at the Feast of Tabernacles, just prior to the Passover Feast. The Feast of Tabernacles was a happy celebration as the Israelites celebrated God's continued provision for them and remembering His provision and protection during the 40 years in the wilderness. The Jews would make temporary shelters or booths out of palm leaves. It was one of the compulsory feasts as was the Passover which celebrated the exodus from Egypt and the Israelites' freedom from slavery to the Egyptians.
- As a result, there were thousands of Jews in Jerusalem at that time. In AD 64, Jewish historian Josephus estimated there were 2.7 million Jews in the city. There was also an abundance of palm leaves.
- Palm leaves took on a new meaning after the Maccabean revolt and became significant signs of military victory and triumph.
- During the Feast of Tabernacles, the songs of the Hallel were sung. These are the psalms 113-118. One of the psalms that would have been on the lips of the Jewish worshipper included the words: "Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord." (Psalm 118:25-26, ESV). The Hebrew word that translates "save us" is the word *hoshi'ah na'* and when transliterated into Greek, becomes *hosanna*.¹

These people were expecting Christ to establish David's kingdom. The people who are calling Jesus king likely think that He has come to save them from foreign oppressors by fighting on their behalf (like Judas Maccabeus). The fact that Jesus rode in on a donkey didn't seem to minimize the expectations of the crowd. He does not enter Jerusalem on a war horse.

John wrote his Gospel approximately AD 80 or 90, some 40 years after the fact. Things had changed dramatically for John. He understood things then that he didn't understand at the time of the entry into Jerusalem. For example, he writes in John 12:14-16 (ESV),

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!" ¹⁶ 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.

Text

Although Christ certainly knew that he was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah, it is also certain that the crowd and the disciples did not know that – then. It is verse 16 that I wish for us to consider this Palm Sunday: "His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). [The ESV Study Bible](#) (p. 1092). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.” (John 12:16, ESV).

Before Jesus went to the Cross he said to his disciples: *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16:12–13, ESV).* This we learn teaches us that there were many things that Jesus did and said that were not understood until after the cross, after the resurrection and ascension, and after the Spirit was sent. In fulfillment of the promise of John 16, these apostles wrote what we know today as our New Testament. Adam Clarke is right to write, *“After the ascension of Christ, the disciples saw the meaning of many prophecies which referred to Christ, and applied them to him, which they had not fully comprehended before. Indeed it is only in the light of the new covenant, that the old is to be fully understood.”*

I counted, about 21 occurrences in the Gospel of John where people did not understand Jesus. The point of this message this morning is to remind us the following:

☞ The promises and the prophecies regarding Christ and the eternal Kingdom cannot be understood apart from the revelation of the New Testament.

Paul confirms this in his second letter to Corinth: *“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” (2 Corinthians 1:20, ESV).* And again, in Romans 15:8 (ESV), *“For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.”* Augustine once observed that the *“New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.”*

- Apart from the New Testament we would not know that it would be Christ that bruises the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). *“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” (Romans 16:20, ESV);*
- Apart from the New Testament we would not know that it was Christ who would come from the offspring of Abraham and bless all families of the earth. (Genesis 12:1-3; and Galatians 3:16);
- Apart from the New Testament we would not know that Christ Himself would fulfill all the Levitical sacrifices. (e.g. Hebrews 10:10)
- Apart from the New Testament we would not know that Christ fulfilled the Old Testament tabernacle/Temple. (John 1:14; 2:2)
- We could go on to show that Christ fulfilled the priesthood, the Sabbath, the Law, the Passover, the embodiment of Israel, the promised king of David, the Land and so on.

Here what we must learn: *“God’s promises find their fulfillment in Christ, indicating that the Old Testament Scriptures should be read as pointing to Christ.”²* You will remember that Luke records the risen Christ speaking to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. This is what he writes, *“And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses*

² Crossway Bibles. (2008). [The ESV Study Bible](#) (p. 2224). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25–27, ESV)

So What?

The question that you may be asking might be, “So what”? Why is this important for us to know this morning? Well let me suggest that there is an important interpretative principle here for Christians who wish to correctly understand their Bible. As important as that is, let us see how Paul applies this truth. Turn to 2 Corinthians 1:17–22 (ESV),

¹⁷ Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? ¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. ²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Because of Paul’s change of plans the Corinthians thought that Paul hadn’t kept his promise. Paul affirms that like Christ his “yes is yes” and his “no is no”. He then states that the God who was faithful to his old Testament promises will also faithful to you and me in Christ. John MacArthur writes, “Christ’s saving work of grace stabilizes believers and places them on a firm foundation in Him.”³ The same God who conceived and consummated the promises to Israel has also sealed us, who believe. The sealing of the Holy Spirit “has a threefold significance in the New Testament: (1) to indicate ownership, (2) to indicate genuineness; and (3) to preserve and keep safe.”⁴

Someday the Church will stand before Christ and like Joshua say, “*Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made . . . had failed; all came to pass.*” (Joshua 21:45, ESV)

³ MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed., p. 1765). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

⁴ Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (p. 2338). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.