



**IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**SERIES: WHO IS JESUS**  
**TITLE: THE MISUNDERSTOOD ONE**  
**SCRIPTURE: JOHN 12:12-19**  
**DATE: MARCH 29, 2026**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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We are in week four of our “Who Is Jesus?” series. Thus far, in our effort to describe Jesus, we have noted that He is the Promised One, the Miraculous One, and the Incomparable One. Today, we will learn that He is the Misunderstood One.

Truly, it is heartbreaking to misunderstand Jesus. It is sad because knowing Jesus is the most soul-satisfying truth a person can know. In fact, one could argue that knowing Jesus is the very reason we were created.

In our text today, we are looking at a story commonly called the “Triumphal Entry,” where Jesus draws near to Jerusalem. Oddly enough, we call it the “Triumphal Entry,” but Jesus only draws near to the city; He does not immediately enter it. The episode gives an account of Jesus approaching Jerusalem while people celebrate His arrival. And while there is much celebration, there is also much confusion beneath the surface.

Discussion starter – Have you ever felt misunderstood? How so? And how did it make you feel?

## Text

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### John 12:12-19

<sup>12</sup> *The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> 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!” <sup>14</sup> And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,*

<sup>15</sup> *“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!”*

<sup>16</sup> *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. <sup>17</sup> The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. <sup>18</sup> The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. <sup>19</sup> So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”*

## Explanation

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### Context

The context that the Gospel of John provides is interesting. Jesus had accumulated both a frenzy of positive popularity and significant opposition. The crowds were excited about His arrival into Jerusalem, yet the religious leaders—like the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees—were opposed.

Why the opposition? On several occasions in the Gospel of John, Jesus made explicit statements about His divinity. In John 5:17, Jesus described Himself as one who always worked, just as His Father always worked. This statement explained why it was permissible for Jesus to work on the Sabbath. The result: some Jews began to “seek all the more to kill Him” (Jn. 5:18).

In John 8:58, in an argumentative discussion with some Jews, Jesus claimed that He existed before Abraham. When some Jews asked the obvious question, “You are not yet fifty years old. Have you seen Abraham?” Jesus replied, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” In His answer, Jesus referred to Himself by the name God gave to Moses: “The Great I Am.” The result: “they picked up stones to throw at Him” (Jn. 8:59).

Again, in John 10:30, Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.” The result: “They sought to arrest Him...” (Jn. 10:39).

As you can see, tension was building between Jesus and some Jews over His claim to be divine. This tension reached a climax when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:38-44). All of Jesus’ previous miracles and signs pointed to His divinity, but now His raising of a dead person convinced even more people to believe in Him (Jn. 11:45; 12:9-11).

Since more people were believing in Jesus, the chief priests and Pharisees decided they needed to convene and plan. Caiaphas, the high priest that year, determined it was best for Jesus to die for the sake of the nation (Jn. 11:49). As they finished meeting, they made plans to put Jesus to death and gave orders that anyone who knew Jesus’ whereabouts should inform them (Jn. 11:53, 57).

One relevant point is that Passover was approaching. For the festival, many Jews were gathering in Jerusalem. These Jews were speculating whether Jesus would come to celebrate the feast. People were actively looking for His arrival (Jn. 11:55-56). Thus, there was significant anticipation leading up to the day described in our text. The people were excited because many viewed Him as the Messiah, while the chief priests viewed Him as a blasphemer who deserved death.

## **Jesus Draws Near to Jerusalem**

Five days before Passover, Jesus drew near to Jerusalem. The Jews were obviously excited; they had come to celebrate the Passover feast and Jesus’ arrival added to the celebration. Since the people were hoping and looking for Jesus, it did not take long for the news to spread that He was coming.

As Jesus approached the city, people took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him. The Old Testament does not prescribe the use of palm branches for Passover. Interestingly, palm branches were used during the Feast of Booths, which occurred roughly six months after Passover. During that

festival, Jews waved palm branches as a symbol of rejoicing before the Lord (Lev. 23:40).

Historical records also show Jews using palm branches to celebrate national victories, such as during the Maccabean revolt of the 160s B.C. This background is likely behind our text today. By welcoming Jesus with palm branches, the people were likely celebrating Him as a liberating king.

This event took place on a Sunday, which is why we commonly refer to the Sunday before Easter as Palm Sunday.

The people cried out, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” Their unified voice highlighted just how popular Jesus had become and the belief they embraced. The word “hosanna,” which we still sing in worship today, means “the Lord saves.” The people clearly viewed Jesus as representing God in a powerful way. They desired Him to be their king, identifying Him as “King of Israel.”

This episode is filled with irony. The Jews called Jesus king and they hoped He could overthrow the Romans. Yet Jesus did not come to Jerusalem to fight the Romans. He came to suffer and die at the hands of the Jews under the leadership of the chief priests and Pharisees. He indeed was their king, but the people misunderstood how He would serve as king and how He would establish His kingdom.

### **Jesus Riding on a Donkey**

Jesus rode on a donkey. John does not record the backstory, but He had previously instructed two disciples to gather a donkey the day before (Mk. 11:1-6; Lk. 19:18-34). Jesus’ riding was not because He was tired from walking or because a donkey just happened to be nearby. He intentionally planned to ride a donkey.

Jesus did this to fulfill the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9-10:

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.

<sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
and he shall speak peace to the nations;  
his rule shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River<sup>[c]</sup> to the ends of the earth.

In Zechariah, riding a donkey contrasts with a war horse. It symbolized coming to Jerusalem not to wage war against the Romans, but to come in peace. By arriving on a donkey, Jesus identified Himself as a king who brings salvation—not through war, but through humble submission to His death.

## Misunderstanding

The disciples also struggled to grasp the significance of Jesus' act. John tells us that the disciples did not understand Zechariah's quotation until after Jesus was glorified—that is, until He rose from the dead.

It is interesting to consider Jesus' reaction to the crowd. The people cheered overwhelmingly. Although they misunderstood Him, Jesus did not silence them. Luke records that the Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke the crowds for shouting, "Blessed is the king..." Yet Jesus responded that if the people were silent, the rocks would cry out (Lk. 19:40). Jesus clearly welcomed their shouts of praise.

However, although Jesus did not silence them, He knew they misunderstood Him. According to Luke, even as Jesus approached Jerusalem, He wept over the city. Luke writes.

<sup>42</sup> Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side <sup>44</sup> and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation. (Lk. 19:42-44).

Jesus fully understood why He was coming to Jerusalem. He knew that He was coming to die so that many could find salvation and true peace. At the same time, Jesus wept, knowing that the people did not understand. It was precisely because they did not understand that they would ultimately reject Him.

The Jews who welcomed Jesus as He came to Jerusalem would soon turn against Him under the influence of the chief priests, scribes, and elders. Yet in this moment, they were unaware of the greater plan unfolding. The celebration of His arrival as king was sincere, but their expectations of a political liberator did not align with the spiritual salvation Jesus came to bring.

### **Discussion Questions**

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- What stands out to you about Jesus in this story?
- Is Jesus still misunderstood today? How so?
- How can one go about making sure they know Jesus accurately and thus to avoid confusion or misunderstandings?
- How can we see God's sovereignty and human responsibility in this story?
- How would you describe the misunderstandings of the crowds and how they differed from the misunderstandings of the Pharisees?
- What does the humility of Jesus riding on a donkey teach us about leadership and power?
- How might we sometimes treat Jesus like the crowd did—praising Him when it fits our expectations but resisting Him when it does not?
- John says the disciples did not understand these things until after Jesus was glorified. Why do you think the resurrection helped them finally understand these events?

### **Conclusions or Application**

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#### **JESUS THE MISUNDERSTOOD ONE**

It can spark our curiosity to ponder what it must have felt like for Jesus to be so often misunderstood. Jesus spent so much time with His disciples revealing Himself to them. He told them plainly many times that He would go to Jerusalem, be rejected, die, and rise again. He had a substantial public ministry that should have enabled the people to grasp His identity. Yet He was still misunderstood.

It is striking to think that despite being misunderstood by everyone—even those closest to Him—Jesus continued faithfully to reveal Himself and obey

His Father's plan. Perhaps Jesus knew that only after He had died and risen again would people truly be able to make sense of who He was.

Misunderstandings about Jesus abound today. Recently, Pastor Kyler mentioned in his Wednesday night Pastor's Class that nearly every religion has some appreciation for Jesus—whether Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age spirituality, Islam, Mormonism, or Jehovah's Witnesses. Yet all of these religions misunderstand Jesus at His core. They either deny His full divinity, His resurrection, or the Trinitarian nature of God. Make no mistake—these are central aspects of who Jesus is.

Fortunately, Jesus is not defined by the opinions people hold about Him. Jesus is who He is. And who He is—well—that is who He has always been and who He will always be.

Our task, then, is to know who Jesus truly is. We are not to shape Jesus to fit our own understanding; rather, we must shape our thinking around who He has revealed Himself to be. Such a task requires humility to receive Jesus' revelation of Himself. When we understand Him for who He truly is and believe in Him, only then do we find true and lasting peace.