

REFLECTION GUIDE

JOHN 12:9-26 | THE SURPRISING GLORY OF THE CROSS

KEY TERMS

Hosanna - *Hosanna* (v. 13) is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “give salvation now,” but in Jesus’ day it had come to be used as a common expression of praise or acclamation.

Greeks - *Greeks* (v. 20) refers to Gentile’s who were attracted to Jewish monotheism and might visit Jerusalem for religious festivals. They were now, however, full proselytes to Judaism.

Son of Man - The title *Son of Man* (v. 23) is one of Jesus’ favorite ways to refer to himself. It draws on imagery from the Old Testament book of Daniel which foretells the coming of a divine figure who will come alongside God (identified as “The Ancient of Days” in Daniel) to usher in God’s kingdom.

SYNOPSIS

Having stayed in Bethany, Jesus now heads to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. The growing crowd hears that Jesus is coming, and many go out to meet him as he arrives carrying palm branches and crying, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (v. 13, quoted from Psalm 118:28). John notes that Jesus arrives on a young donkey, fulfilling Zechariah 9:9: *Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!* Kings or military rulers typically rode donkeys only when offering terms of peace, highlighting the contrast between the people—who expect Jesus to overthrow the Romans and become a political king—and Jesus, who comes to be enthroned as a different kind of king. The response to Jesus’ entry is mixed: 1) the disciples do not fully understand, 2) the Pharisees continue to want to kill Jesus (and now Lazarus), and 3) some Gentiles want to see and know more about him (vv. 16-22). After these events, Jesus tells his disciples, *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified* (v. 23), referring to his upcoming death, resurrection, and ascension. He then shares a parable: *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* (v. 24). This parable seems to have two meanings: 1) Jesus’ death will bear fruit, and 2) those who “die” to their own life and follow Jesus will have a fruitful life (vv. 24-26). John then records Jesus wrestling with his impending death but ultimately praying that the Father would glorify his name (vv. 27-28), and the Father responds, *I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again* (v. 28).

GOING DEEPER

Read Zechariah 9:9 and Revelation 19:11-16. In John’s Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as both the fulfillment of the promised King in Zechariah 9:9 and as the one who eventually fully reign as King over all. How does recognizing Jesus as the sovereign King shape the way you live daily? In what areas of your life do you need to acknowledge his Lordship more fully?

DID YOU KNOW?

Palm branches were common in Jerusalem. Originally used in the Feast of Tabernacles, they had become a symbol of victory and celebration at other festivals. John revisits this imagery in Revelation 7:9, where people from every nation worship the Lamb with palm branches.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read John 12:9-19. Make 3-5 quick observations. What significant events are mentioned? What emotions are present?
2. Why do you think the religious leaders respond as they do to Jesus' actions (see verses 10 and 19)? Does this seem reasonable from their perspective? Why or why not?
3. What is the significance of "these things" in verse 16 (what occurs in Jesus' arrival in to Jerusalem on a donkey to much celebration from the crowd)? When do his disciples actually comprehend their importance?
4. Read John 12:20-26. Throughout the gospels leading up until this point, Jesus has repeatedly said that his hour had not yet come, but now he says "the hour has come." Why does Jesus believe his hour has arrived? How is this significant for Jesus' mission?

LIVING THE WORD

5. In our day, what are some of the ways people are told to "find life" or "seek the good life" or "find the real you"? Can you think of specific examples of authors, speakers, movies, or songs where these messages are presented?
6. If you were talking to a friend at a coffee shop, how would you explain Jesus' paradoxical teaching about finding life in verses 23-26?
7. The gospel is good news. Is it difficult for you to see the good news in these verses? How does this teaching frame our understanding of Jesus' death, eternal life, and Jesus' call to follow him?
8. What might it look like for you to "lose your life" and "die" to this world so that you can "find your life" and "live" for eternity? Can you think of one practical way to live this out each day?