

As Always - Great Expectations John 12:12-19

If I were to ask you what you might be looking forward to each of you already has something in mind and you have certain expectations about it. It might be something as small as dinner at a favorite restaurant or spending time with friends to something big like retirement or a dream vacation. **When my nephew hears about Sarah Palin coming to Grand Rapids, he really looks forward to standing in line to meet her. It comes with expectations.**

Those of you who are retired may have looked forward to that day and now that you are settled in has it met your expectations?

You may remember taking a class in school and hoping to get a particular teacher because that teacher was supposed to be the best or easiest only to find that your experience was less than favorable.

You may be looking forward to a vacation at a particular place you have never been before. What do you hope it will be like?

It may be a restaurant that has been highly recommended, only to find out that it was average. **We have a favorite Mexican place in Grand Blanc. Someone recommended another place that was supposed to be really good. We came away disappointed.**

Dare I even go into politics with the expectations of the mid-term elections this fall or the past presidential elections?

The fact of the matter is that each of us can identify something that we have eagerly looked forward and were extremely excited about only to be let down, perhaps let down in a big way.

There is an expectant mood in and around

Jerusalem among those who had gathered for the Passover celebration. There was always excitement around the Passover. This particular year there was good reason for such anticipation.

In this Passion Week and Palm Sunday in particular I would like to discuss four groups of people who were part of this conclave of celebrators and their response about Jesus. We see those same responses today among people.

Three groups are clearly spoken about. The fourth is present and unnamed but also have their opinion. Let's consider how each responded to Jesus.
The crowds who were mistaken
The Roman soldiers who were mocking
The disciples who were misunderstanding
The Pharisees who were mad

I. THE CROWDS WHO WERE MISTAKEN – v. 12-13, 17-18

Have you ever been wrong about your opinion of someone? Whether it was from personal observation or what you heard about them from other sources, you formed an opinion about a person. Whether they are accurate or not. That's what the crowd had done as they gathered for the Passover. We read **“the next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem.”**

A great crowd had come for the Feast. This was one of three occasions that devout Jews, men especially, were required to come to Jerusalem to celebrate. The city had swelled to a mass of humanity upwards of a million people. Towns and villages around Palestine would be like ghost towns. Few people would have remained behind. This was one of those events that people looked forward to annually, not just as an opportunity to celebrate the Passover, not just as a way of remembering the deliverance of their ancestors from Egyptian tyranny and slavery when God delivered them; it

was a time to wonder if the Messiah would enter the world's stage and take up His rightful place on the throne, subdue all their enemies and reign in peace. They were looking for a great military leader who would restore their kingdom to its former glory.

There are two groups that form this crowd. The first is this group we see in **verses 12-13**. It says in **verse 13** that they went out to meet Him. They had heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. From where Jesus had been staying, someone had raced ahead to let people know that He was coming to town. When they heard the news a mass of humanity began to exit town to greet Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem. As word spread, I imagine them rushing quickly down the streets to go greet Him on His way into the city.

Why did they go out to meet Him? I think it's because they had their hopes pinned on Him as the Messiah. Those who had been privileged to hear Him teach or who had been witness to one of His many miracles were in this crowd that day as they went out to meet Jesus. We might even surmise that many who were recipients of His healing power were there as well. It's possible that the once blind Bartemaus was among them or the man born blind who miraculously received his sight. The woman healed by touching the hem of His garment could have been there or the young man who was raised from the dead while the funeral procession carried his body for burial. The couple whose wedding Jesus had blessed by turning water into wine might have been part of the crowd. Or how about Zacchaeus or Nicodemus or the paralytic who was carried by four men on a stretcher and lowered through a hole in the roof – I imagine them to be present. Many of them were coming from Jerusalem because they heard He was coming. Based on the fever pitch of the crowd, their going out to meet Him was more than just out of curiosity, more than just wanting a glimpse of Him or to see if He really matched their opinions about Him. They had an expectation about Him.

Now you need to know something here that is important. Look back at **11:55-57**.

Whatever opinion the Pharisees had about Jesus, didn't matter to the crowd. They had their own opinion about Him. They defied the request by the Pharisees to inform them about where Jesus was and instead on the next day went out to meet Him.

On different occasions the people had wanted to make Him King. They wanted to set up His earthly throne right away. **Were they in some way incited by Satan to tempt Jesus to take the crown and bypass the cross?** No matter how many times or how many ways Jesus told them that He was not the kind of Messiah they were looking for, no matter that He said it was not yet His time, no matter that He told them that His kingdom was not of this world, they didn't care. To them, the miracles that He performed were evidence that He had the power to overthrow the Roman Empire and free them from oppression just like Israel was delivered from Egypt. It didn't matter that in all His teachings he never once brought up the subject of government overthrow, He never once talked about staging political unrest. Yet they wanted to force Him to take a crown and become king. To them the Passover was about political deliverance.

On this particular day, the day He rode into Jerusalem, Jesus fulfilled prophecy. It was more than just the prophecy of **Zechariah 9:9** about the Messiah riding in on a donkey. There is an even greater and more significant prophecy fulfilled that day.

Daniel 9:20-26

In this passage we have a prophecy about the end times. It is the prophecy of Daniel's 70 weeks. God revealed to Daniel that from the time of King Artaxerxes' decree ordering the rebuilding of the Temple, which occurred in 445 B.C., until the coming of the Messiah would be 69 weeks. That

decree is given in **Nehemiah 2:6**. In the context of the passage we understand a week to be the designation of a year. He speaks about a series of 69 7's. 7 times 69 equals 483 years according to the Jewish calendar. Their calendar consists of 360 days not 365 days. Many scholars put this time frame from the order to rebuild the Temple until the coming of the Messiah (not His birth, but the time He would reveal Himself to the Jews) was somewhere between 30 and 33 A.D. The best evidence given is by Historian Sr. Robert Anderson who puts this even in John 12 at 9 Nisan, A.D. 30. The month Nisan would be equivalent to late March and early April.

If your math is correct you are wondering about that other week, aren't you? Daniel 9:26 speaks about the Anointed One or the Messiah being cut off. That is the crucifixion. It will appear that the end has come and that He did not accomplish what He came to do. Now understand this, if Israel had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, the Pharisees still would have killed Him, and His sacrifice would have atoned for sin keeping in mind that it is not with the blood of bulls and goats but with the shed blood of the Messiah. For salvation to be given Jesus still would have had to die and shed His blood. If that had been the case and they accepted Him as Messiah, the final week spoken of by Daniel would have taken place right then following the crucifixion immediately ushering in the great tribulation of 7 years followed by the second coming of Christ to set up His kingdom. But since they rejected the Messiah that final week has been delayed until the culmination of the church age, the age that we are currently in and someday (and I believe soon), the final week will unfold just as Daniel prophesied.

The people gathered for the Passover celebration believed Jesus to be the Messiah, but not the Messiah spoken of in Scripture. They believed the Messiah would deliver from political oppression not from spiritual oppression. So while they accepted

Him as the Messiah, they rejected Him as the Messiah who would redeem them.

But that said, you can understand why they came out from Jerusalem with such enthusiasm. And they did what was natural to them, following a custom that dated back into the silent years when Simon the Maccabee recaptured Jerusalem from the Syrians. Collectively they went out to meet Jesus praising Him and celebrating His arrival by waving palm branches. Palm branches were a symbol of victory, part of their great pomp and circumstance. They thought Jesus was going to be another great military leader and conquer the land.

And they shouted and sang a Psalm. The segment recorded for us comes from **Psalm 118**. This is just one in a series of Psalms (113-118) called the Hallel and sung by the Temple choir in the mornings during the major celebrations. On this particular occasion the crowd began to chant as a song of praise for the Messiah from **Psalm 118:25-26**. **“O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”**

“Hosanna” is a term of praise and is the literal translation of “Help, I pray” or “Save now, I pray.” They were asking the Lord to deliver them and believed He would. By quoting from Psalm 118, they were hoping that Jesus would be the One they had long waited for. They truly wanted to make Him their king. In previous encounters when they wanted to make Him King, He had denied their request, not that He wasn't king, but that it wasn't His time. Now He does not disapprove of their claims or denounce their praise. He was entitled to it, but here's the sad thing, Jesus knew that in just a few short days, the crowd would turn on Him and instead of wanting Him to be their king, would ask for Him to be killed. Today they were joyful, tomorrow they would be jeering.

There is a second group in the crowd. In **verses 12-13** they came out to meet Him from Jerusalem when

they heard He was coming. The second group we find in **verses 17-18** and had come with Him. From the previous verses of this chapter and the other gospel accounts we learn that Jesus had come to the town of Bethany not very far from Jerusalem. It was there that Jesus ate and stayed with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. This is the same Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead. They were good friends and He elected to stay with them leading up to the Passover. Leaving their home on the way to Jerusalem the week before the Passover they came to Bethphage, which was near the Mt. of Olives. That is where Jesus got the donkey to ride.

Word about Lazarus being raised from the dead continued to spread and many who heard about it came to see him with their own eyes. This group followed Jesus as He traveled the short distance to Jerusalem.

Here's my point about the first group, the crowds, it's indicative of our day and age as well. Many people have a mistaken understanding about Jesus. They see Him as just a great teacher or very moral person, or maybe as someone truly gifted who could do great miracles, but that is it. But they still have a lot of respect for Him and they may even look to Him for some philosophical wisdom on how to live a moral life. They may even pray to Him in hopes of receiving some miracle, but that's as far as they look, the only way they see Him. They don't see their need of a Savior because they don't see a need to be saved. They are decent enough people; they may go to church regularly, give occasionally and pray religiously, but sin? No, that's the other guy. Like the crowds, they have mistaken Him and when something bad happens and He's not there for them, they quickly turn away from Him.

When we have a mistaken perception of Jesus, when our view is incorrect about Him, it will be easy to turn away from Him. **Do you have a correct understanding of Jesus or are you mistaken about**

Him? He is a king, but He came first to seek and save the lost. The crowds were mistaken.

There is a second group that is present in this scene although our passage does not mention them.

II. THE ROMAN SOLDIERS WHO WERE MOCKING – v. 14-15

We know the Roman soldiers were present because there was a garrison of soldiers quartered there. They are the ones who lead Jesus to His crucifixion and carry out the death sentence. We see later on in the book of Acts that Roman soldiers came down to the Temple area when Paul was about to be mobbed by the Jews. They are there to give added security, especially during the celebration of festivals. In such a heightened sense of nationalism at times of celebrations it would not be difficult to get that mass of people stirred up in a frenzy and begin a revolt. The Roman soldiers would have been on high alert in greater numbers to quell any potential uprising before it got momentum.

Why do I say that the soldiers would have been mocking? Let me suggest a couple of reasons. Here is a man riding into town followed by a great throng of people hailing Him as king. Yet he carried no weapons. He had no army. He rode a donkey which was not the symbol of mighty military hero or king. A donkey was considered a gentle animal, a meek animal, an animal that exemplified humility and peace.

These soldiers were used to seeing a grand display of military might. They were used to seeing a great General or King riding into the capital on a horse. There was always a display of great pomp. Often times they would bring in some of the conquered soldiers and lead them into the arena where the captured enemy would face wild beasts in battle only to end in their death. Jesus did none of that.

This expression of celebration about a king coming in to town on a donkey was to them just a joke. While they were wary of any potential uprising they did not see this man as any kind of threat to their empire.

Another reason I believe they mocked comes later on at the crucifixion. We read in chapter 19 that they made a mock crown out of thorns and put it on His head and gave Him a purple robe to depict royalty. If that weren't enough they sarcastically bowed down and worshipped Him. Matthew says they gave Him a reed to depict a scepter carried by kings to show authority. Their treatment of Him continued as they slapped Him, and spit on Him and took the reed and beat Him on the head. They did this to mock Him. In a final act of mockery they took His garments and gambled for them.

There are many today who openly mock Jesus. It was not something that only occurred when Jesus was alive. Let me give you some recent examples of people in our own culture who mock Jesus.

One author writes the following: "These days, mocking Jesus apparently has become great fodder for comedians and the entertainment industry. News has been widespread about a new film in the works called *Jesus of Nazareth*, based on a book by Dutch director Paul Verhoeven, in which the story has Jesus as the child of a Roman soldier who raped Mary."

So, we're to believe that Mary was not a virgin and that Jesus was not conceived of the Holy Spirit? The film also discounts the biblical teachings of Jesus performing miracles and His resurrection.

We cannot dismiss such blatant mockery as just Hollywood entertainment not to be taken seriously.

If you are familiar with pop singer Lady Gaga, she has a song out in which she describes being in love with Judas the betrayer of Jesus. **Just knowing that,**

is it worth listening to any of her other songs?

A couple years ago gay groups in San Francisco held a "Hunky Jesus" contest in which contestants were complete with crosses, crowns of thorns and beards. Of course if we were to say anything, we would quickly be branded as not loving them as Jesus would love them.

Can we remain indifferent to the mockery of our Savior? Mockery of Jesus is prevalent today.

The soldiers were there, and I am almost sure, mocking Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem.

III. THE DISCIPLES WHO WERE MISUNDERSTANDING – v. 16

You would think that of all the people who had any association with Jesus, the disciples would have had a clue about who He was. Yet we read in this verse that they did not understand any of what was going on. They didn't understand that this was the fulfillment of prophecy. Maybe they slept through that part of their Old Testament studies growing up. But the truth is as we see it in this verse, they didn't get it. It was like a veil had been pulled over their eyes and they were walking around in a fog.

But this isn't the first time they didn't understand something about the life, ministry or teaching of Jesus. Even after His resurrection just before His ascension into heaven, when Jesus told them to wait for the gift the Father had promised, the promise He spoke about, they asked this question. **"So when they met together, they asked Him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'" (Acts 1:6)**

You may recall the time Jesus fed the 4,000. Following that miracle the Pharisees came and questioned Him and asked for a sign from heaven (as if the bread wasn't enough). He responded by saying that no other sign would be given and then

got into a boat with His disciples and left. He then told the disciples that they should watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees. They thought He was referring to the fact that they didn't have any bread to feed the 4,000, but Jesus meant to watch out for their corrupt teaching. After further explanation Jesus asked **“Do you still not understand?”**

There were other occasions as well where they misunderstood Jesus.

They misunderstood His parables.

They misunderstood about His death.

They misunderstood about His resurrection.

Here they misunderstood about the prophecies He was fulfilling that day. It wasn't until the Holy Spirit came after Jesus was glorified that they were able to see these events clearly through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit that they understood.

John 7:37-39

John 14:26

John 16:13

Hind sight is always 20/20 as they say and guided by Holy Spirit the disciples could look through the lens of Scripture more clearly. But until then, like the rest of Israel, they were looking for political deliverance from foreign oppression.

Aren't you glad that we have the Holy Spirit as a Christian who can teach us and help us understand what Jesus said, why He came and our need for salvation? Is it any wonder then why the unsaved don't get it? I suppose we shouldn't be so hard on them. We share the gospel with them and give us blank stares. It's because they are spiritually dead and not until the Holy Spirit quickens them can they see to understand. **Is it any wonder that's why Paul says to the Corinthians that the cross is foolishness to them who are perishing?**

The disciples misunderstood.

There is one more group we ought to talk about. They are found in **verse 19**.

IV. THE PHARISEES WHO WERE MAD – v. 19

The response of the people further infuriated the Pharisees. That was an understatement. It isn't intended for us to believe from their perspective that everyone was now a follower of Jesus. Clearly they weren't following Jesus and the Roman soldiers weren't and neither was Herod or Pilate. Their reference to the whole world is not everyone in particular, but people in general. We'll see that eventually they were able to persuade many to side with them in their indictment of Jesus to condemn Him to death.

Their plans were being thwarted. According to **Matthew 26:3-5** the Pharisees wanted to wait until after the Passover feast to arrest Jesus and put Him to death, but here Jesus was forcing their hand to follow His timetable. He knew it was the will of the Father for Him to die at Passover in order to be the Passover lamb, so He was pushing the issue. And we read in **John 12:10** that they planned on killing Lazarus along with Jesus because he appeared to be as much a part of the plot as Jesus was.

But this thought of His death was not a new concept. They had hated Jesus for some time. They hated Him for calling them out, for calling them the hypocrites they knew they were but up to that time had concealed from the people. They hated Him for challenging the religious establishment, the system that had been in place for centuries. While they claimed to be looking for the Messiah, they openly rejected any notion that Jesus was the Anointed One. He exposed the rotting corpse of their soul and they hated Him for it.

R.C. Sproul writes **“They hated Jesus not because He called them names, but because He threatened their security, prestige and income. He was going to ruin everything they had worked so hard for. The Pharisees had brokered a rather uneasy peace between the powers of Rome, and their own people.”**

The Pharisees hated Jesus not only because He made them look bad before the people, but He also made them look bad to Rome and they didn't want to lose the political edge they had gained over years of pandering. That's why Caiaphas would make the remark that it would be better for one man to die than for everyone to die. No wonder the Pharisees were mad. Their plans seemed to be unraveling.

So many opinions are evident on this, the triumphal day of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. The crowds saw Jesus as one who would bring political reform not personal redemption. They were mistaken.

The Roman soldiers saw Him as someone to make fun of, the one who would be the brunt of late night jokes and political satire. They were mocking.

The disciples weren't sure what they saw. It wasn't until the coming Holy Spirit that they were able to clear up misunderstandings.

The Pharisees saw someone they were in competition with for the hearts and minds of the people. They were incensed at His rebuke of them and perhaps only Nicodemus from their group saw that through Him he could be born again. They were mad.

On this day, this Palm Sunday what is your opinion of Jesus? Who is He to you? What expectation of Him do you have? Is He just someone with good ideals and morals or is He the King who has come to conquer your heart through His subsequent death on the cross? He was not who any of them expected Him to be. The crowd would turn on Him. The soldiers would carry out His murder. The disciples would abandon Him. The Pharisees would be delighted in His death. Satan would cheer – but then comes the third day and His resurrection.