



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

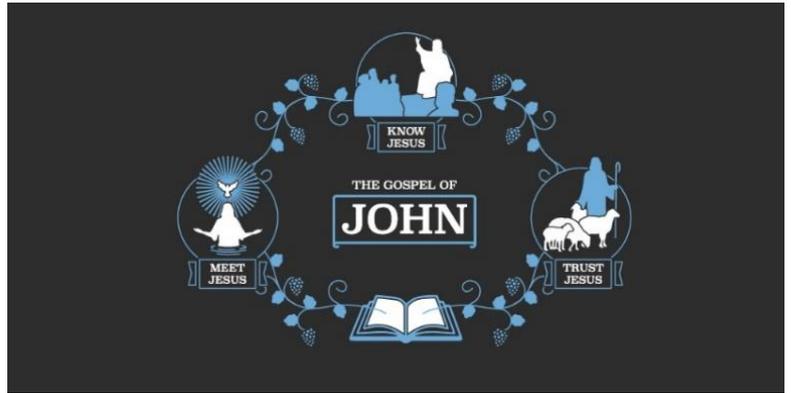
## When Jesus Comes to Town

### The Gospel of John

John 12:12-19

Tim Badal | March 6, 2022

Please turn to John 12. As a church, we've been in a series for some time now, looking at the life and ministry of Jesus. Our desire is to meet Him, learn from Him, then by taking these first two steps, we would begin to trust and believe in Him with greater focus and faithfulness.



John 12 is kind of the pivot point of the entire Gospel. The first 11 chapters are dedicated to the last three and a half years of Jesus' life and ministry here on earth. As chapter 12 opens with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, John begins to slow down his narrative. It's as if he's aware that the culmination of Christ's life—His death, burial, and resurrection—are coming soon.

Therefore, the next ten chapters don't span years, months or even weeks; they actually span just days. Then in the final chapter of John we learn about the 40 days that followed Jesus' resurrection from the dead. It's not that the other things John covered in the earlier chapters weren't important. but clearly John wanted us to focus with greater intensity on what he puts into the last chapters of his Gospel.

Once again, we find Jesus in Jerusalem. This wasn't the first time He was there; it's the fourth or fifth visit John tells us about. Nor is this the first festival John records that Jesus was part of. However, this is the *crème de la crème* festival, the Passover, the pinnacle of the Jewish calendar. This is the celebration of God's deliverance of His people from their captivity in Egypt. It commemorates the time God allowed His death angel to pass over the homes of the Jewish people because of sacrificial lambs. In the springtime of every year, the people of God dedicated this festival in memory of that deliverance. As a result, tons of people came to Jerusalem. Most scholars believe over a half million people attended the festival the year Jesus was there. The first century historian, Josephus, tells us that during the time of Passover, it was not uncommon for 250,000 lambs to be sacrificed.

Word had gotten out that Jesus from Nazareth was arriving. People wanted to see Him. They had heard how He healed the blind man. There was now word coming from Bethany that just days earlier, Jesus had raised Lazarus after he had been in the tomb for four days. The excitement in the crowd was palpable.

Now this feeling wasn't something that was true only in the first century; it's true for us today. There's something exciting about having a famous person come to your town. People want to gather to see this person and hear from them. Having that person in their zip code, in their village, means they might even be able to touch or interact with him.

Many of you know I'm from the town of Hinckley. It's a very small town; if you blink, you'll miss it when you drive through. But every 10-15 years, something famous happens in Hinckley. If you're not aware, Hinckley was where the first Harlem Globetrotter basketball game was played back in 1927. So every few years the Globetrotters come back to our little gym in our little town as the hottest ticket in town. We pack out our gym, because even though the Globetrotters have played in massive arenas, we get to see them in our little space. We get to watch these incredible ambassadors of good will and basketball fun. What you hope

for is to be the one called out to join them on the court. There's something great that happens when famous people come to your town.

Hinckley isn't the only town where this kind of thing happens. If you've been in the Fox Valley area for any amount of time, you might remember that in 2005 George W. Bush came to the Montgomery Caterpillar plant. Tens of thousands of people came to hear the President and other dignitaries speak, hoping to shake hands with a standing President.

Yet he wasn't the only President who has visited this area. If you're from Aurora and you're a little older than I am, you might have been there when Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon gave speeches on the steps of Aurora's city hall. They were announcing that one of the best places to live in the nation was Aurora, right here in the Fox Valley. That's what Honest Ike had to say.

When important people come to town, we in the Fox Valley like to throw parades which is exactly what we did in 1903 when President Teddy Roosevelt came to Aurora. Historians tell us that hundreds of thousands of people came to see him in Aurora.

But the all-time largest crowd in the Fox Valley to welcome someone famous was in 1961 when President John F. Kennedy came to Batavia. He was part of a parade that traveled down Route 31. Hundreds of thousands of people were rejuvenated by this young, vibrant new President who came to our area to speak about a new America.

Listen, friends, there is something awesome when a famous person comes to your town. What I want you to know is that the event recorded in our text today is greater than the visit of any President or famous basketball players. In John 12, Jesus came into Jerusalem and just like when someone famous comes to town today, each person has to decide if they are for them or against them? As we'll see today, sometimes that question isn't easy to answer. A person needs to think through the motives for their decision.

This morning I'm going to ask two questions. Now my focus won't be on Jesus and I don't think that was John's intention either. He only mentions Jesus twice in our text. Most often his attention is on the crowd. Every one of the Gospel writers includes this important event, however in the other three, the crowd is not the center of the writers' focus.

We should notice the contrast between the crowd that witnessed Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday and the isolated individual Mary we read about in the previous passage. Mary expressed an undying devotion to her Savior, regardless of what the community thought about what she did. We see this problem with the crowd in all the Gospel accounts. As the story unfolds, there were about 100 hours between what we'll read about today and the events surrounding Good Friday. About 100 hours later Jesus was arrested, tried, beaten, then He walked the long road to Calvary where He was hung on a cross until He died.

This leads us to ask what happened to the crowd from Palm Sunday? Where were they when Jesus needed somebody to give a testimony on His behalf? Where was Sunday's crowd when Jesus was arrested? Where were they when He walked alone to Calvary? Surely they might have at least been there to take care of His mother. Where were those who could have paid homage to Jesus for all He had done for them? Where were all the people whom He had healed, who had demons cast out of them? Being in the crowd isn't good enough.

Today we're going to look at the contrast between casual spirituality and committed spirituality. We need to seriously consider which group we're a part of.

## **When Jesus comes, will He find you spiritually casual?**

When Jesus comes to town, is He going to find in you and in me just casual spirituality? This is something we need to think through. Right away, our answer is, "Of course not. I'm here at church. You're preaching to the choir. I was here last week; I'll be here next week. I'm not casual." We need to think about a couple things regarding casual spirituality.

**First, casual spirituality is energetic.** There was great passion represented in the Palm Sunday crowd.

**Secondly, the crowd was also enlightened.** They knew Jesus was coming. They weren't there by happenstance. They had intentionally gathered to see Him.

We read in verse 12 that *"the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem."* They had heard the stories that led them to believe Jesus might well be the Messiah. That's why the crowd called out, *"Hosanna! Blessed is he who*

*comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel"* (verse 13). They were definitely enlightened; you can be as well but still be spiritually casual. You can be energetic and still be casual.

We also see in verse 17 that **they were experienced** because they were aware that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Some of them had probably even been there. This crowd knew Jesus could do miracles. They had witnessed that what He claimed about Himself was true because of the signs and wonders.

They were energetic, enlightened, experienced and **they were all about exalting Jesus**. They were there and none of them said, "I don't want to say anything nice about Jesus." They called Him blessed. They said, "Favor is upon Jesus, Who comes in the name of the Lord." They even said He should be the King of Israel. They were a pro-Jesus crowd.

They were energetic and enlightened. They had experienced the moving of God and they were exalting Jesus. The problem was that this spiritual casualness didn't have staying power. Within 100 hours—a matter of a few days—this same group became part of the mob that cried, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" They were even given the opportunity to have Him be released, but they called for Pontius Pilate to kill Barabbas instead.

What should we learn from this? For one thing, we don't want to be part of the crowd. As parents, we tell our children, "Don't fall for the pressure of the crowd." There's nothing good when a group of people gathers together and tries to talk you into something. Yet many people in churches today—and sadly, maybe even some in this church—are completely content with casually hanging around with the crowd.

I'm indebted to the Barna Group, who did a study on the spiritual casualness of the church in America. They said this: "Casual spirituality is defined by the desire to please God, family and other people, while extracting as much enjoyment and comfort from the world as possible." They call these people "casuals." They continue:

For casuals, success is balancing everything just right, so they're able to maximize their opportunities and joys in life without undermining their perceived relationship with God and others. It's a life in moderation. It allows them to feel religious without having to prioritize their faith. This type of spirituality is a low-risk, predictable proposition, providing a faith perspective that is not demanding.

Being spiritually casual can be all things they esteem: a nice human being, a family person, religious, an exemplary citizen, a reliable employee, never having to publicly defend or represent difficult moral or social positions, nor even lose much sleep over their private choices—as long as they mean well and generally do their best.

From their perspective, their brand of faith practice is genuine, realistic and practical. To them, casual spirituality is the best of all worlds. It encourages them to be a better person than they would have been if they were irreligious, yet it is not a faith into which they feel compelled to heavily invest themselves.

Does that describe you this morning? You might be thinking, "I'm not sure. Tell me more." Let me ask you three diagnostic questions to determine whether or not we—and I'm including myself in this—are spiritually casual.

### **Am I more comfortable in crowds?**

You're thinking, "Wait a minute. Are you asking about my personality? I'm extroverted. I love crowds." Or maybe you say, "I'm introverted and hate crowds. I don't even want to be here, but I am." That's not what I'm talking about.

John mentions the crowd three times in this short passage and he's not talking about their personalities. He's asking about their practice of spirituality, their practice of faith. So ask yourself this: "Do I practice my faith, my spirituality, only when others are doing it with me?"

Let's stop for a moment. When was the last time you worshiped, prayed, thought about and meditated on God and His Word? When was the last time you served? Or talked about your faith? Or opened God's Word? Was the last time you did these things the last time you were with us here in this room?

Don't look around; I'm asking you. If this is so, then I want you to know, brothers and sisters—and I say this with all love and sincerity—you're probably way more casual than you want to believe. Let's face it. To do faith in a crowd is easy. It's much easier to do it here. Why so?

1. It's exciting to be part of the crowd. There's an energy here. It's not something that translates into your bedroom, den, car or wherever you might spend some quiet time. The energy of a room full of people is much different than you being by yourself.
2. It's anonymous. No names are listed in John's description of the crowd. We don't know who was there and who wasn't there. It was easy to get in and get out of this Palm Sunday crowd.
3. It's low cost. There was little to no commitment. Once the parade was done, they could go home to their activities and do their own things. It was short-lived. This is in direct contrast to Mary in the preceding verses. We know her name. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it over Jesus' feet, then dried His feet with her hair. It cost her a full year's wages. Hers was a costly devotion. Do you see Mary's committed Christianity as compared with the casual Christianity of the crowd?

The people there were not having their lives threatened. They had nothing to worry about. So what if Jesus was arrested, what did that mean to them? They went on with their day. Nobody in the crowd was questioned about their allegiance to Jesus. They didn't have to speak of Him to anyone else after they left the parade.

Does this describe you? Do you find comfort in doing your spiritual activity within the confines of a crowd? Have you ever been asked about your faith, only to talk about the faith of others? "Well, I'm part of a great church. The worship team is awesome. We have kids in our kids' ministry filling the hallways. Our teachers are second to none. Our student ministry is growing. And did you hear we had an outreach where tons of kids showed up? God is doing great things. Our lead pastor? He's okay; he preaches the Word..."

Are you listening to what you're saying? I want to know about your faith, but you told me about everybody else's faith. I want to know what God is doing in your life, but you're telling me what He's doing in everyone else's life. Young people, don't talk about your mom and dad's faith; talk about your faithfulness. Husbands, don't talk about your wife's faith; talk about your faithfulness.

You see, it's easy to be in the crowd. There's insulation within a crowd. There are no requirements in the crowd. There are no restrictions. They have the ability to take Christ or leave Him whenever they think it's expedient. Does that describe you? Does it describe me?

### **Am I hopeful for a change in temporal circumstances?**

Let's be fair! These people showed up. They wanted to see Jesus. There was some level of allegiance to Jesus. He was saying things the Romans may not have liked. They showed up because Jesus was coming.

But what was their real purpose? Why were they saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel?" Jesus found the colt of a donkey and sat on it. John quotes the Old Testament, "*Behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.*"

Why did this group love Jesus so much? Was it because "Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost"? No. Was it because, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life"? No. The crowd wasn't there to receive the spiritual blessings that come from a Savior Who saves people from their sins. So why did they come?

Look at verse 13: "So they took branches of palm trees." That's really important. You're thinking, "I love Palm Sunday. The kids get to wave those branches. It's great." You might not love it after I'm done. What's with the palm branches? These palm branches declared the crowd's agenda.

I love what D.A. Carson writes, because he says this better than I can: "John is the only Gospel to mention the palm branches that we now associate with Palm Sunday. Two centuries before Christ, Judas and Simon Maccabeus had driven the Syrian forces out of Israel." Remember those guys? Remember Antiochus Epiphanes? Remember Hannukah, where the Jews celebrated the time when they had vanquished their foes? That's who we're talking about here, 200 years before Christ. Carson continues:

Their victory was celebrated with music and the waving of palm branches, which also had been prominent at the earlier rededication of the temple. Thus palm branches were a symbol of Jewish nationalism and of victory over their enemies. The crowd was hopeful that Jesus was the messianic liberator who would free them from Rome's domination.

So why was the crowd there? Because Jesus was running for President? Just like we see a famous man announcing his presidential campaign, who would not vote for Jesus? He has a great food stamp program—with just a couple loaves and fishes, He can give everybody food. Talk about Medicare for all? Jesus has the ultimate health care program. You come to Him blind or lame or whatever and He can cover it.

Jesus was always fighting against the establishment. He declared, “Whom the Son sets free is free indeed.” Put that on a hat. This was the guy. He was their candidate. He was the guy who could address the Roman problem once and for all. No longer are the people of God going to be oppressed. This Jesus is the new Moses! He must be the Messiah. He’s the one.

Here’s the problem—that’s not why Jesus came. He came to seek and save that which was lost, not to set up His earthly kingdom and to vanquish some earthly opponent. He came to bring new life to all who would believe in Him. This begs the question for us as well. Our types of churches need to be so careful about something these days—merging our faith in Jesus and politics. Oh, church, be careful. Does it mean we can’t be political? No, we can be political. But listen to me carefully: Jesus is not the answer to the White House; He’s the answer to our sinful hearts.

That was their problem and it’s part of our problem today.

Some of us are following Jesus because of what He will get for us. We view Him like a genie in the bottle or like Santa Claus. “I’d better be good. I’d better live as He says, because if I don’t, He might make my life miserable. I really don’t love Him, other than when emergencies come. But I need to make sure my life is just good enough so I don’t have to worry.”

These people saw Jesus as a means to an end; we have to be careful about that as well. Are you following Jesus because of what He will get you according to your agenda? Are you looking at Him and saying, not, “The Father’s will in heaven be done,” but, “My will, Jesus, be done”? Whether we want to hear this or not, some of us are living there. Jesus is this footnote on the page of everything that’s written about us. Are we being too casual?

### **Am I clueless to the plans of Christ?**

Finally we need to ask, “Am I clueless to the plans of Christ?” Casual spirituality would say yes. Notice in verse 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.”*

John wrote his Gospel about 50 years after these events took place. I love his honesty. He says, “We disciples were in that crowd and we didn’t understand what was happening.” The disciples were altogether too casual. They were too worried about who would be first in the Kingdom. They were thinking about how they shouldn’t minister to the Samaritans. They were worried about a lot of earthly matters. To be sure, they were more invested in Jesus than the rest of the crowd, but they still did not understand what He was about. They certainly didn’t understand why Jesus had to die on a cross. They were convinced that meant “game over.” Then what were they going to do? They decided to go home and move on.

Part of our casualness is revealed if we ask ourselves, “How in tune am I with the plans of Christ? Do I know what the Word of God says about Him and what He’s doing in the world? More importantly, do I know what the Word of God says about what Christ wants to do in me? Am I in tune with what it means to follow Him? Am I in tune with what it means to deny myself and take up my cross daily? Do I understand how that intersects with my checkbook, calendar and priorities? Do I understand how God’s Word has bearing on my entire life?”

Far too many of us are casual, thinking Jesus is simply a Sunday morning item in our lives. He never intersects with any of your decisions or dreams. He’s never involved in your thinking, other than, “I’ll go to church; I’ll sing some songs about Him. Pastor Tim will talk altogether too long about Him, then hopefully we can get some lunch. I’ve done my duty. I’m way better than my neighbor.”

If this is you, you’re smack-dab in the middle of the casual crowd. You don’t want to be there. There are three ways to diagnose if you are taking a casual approach to Christ. Are any of these true of you? I have wrestled with these myself and am sad to say there’s way more casualness in your pastor’s life than there should be. As a result, I stand convicted even before these words hit your ears.

## When Jesus comes, will He find you spiritually committed?

So what do we do? We need to be spiritually committed. Again, I will turn to Barna Research, who is helpful in understanding what it means to be spiritually committed.

The spiritually committed are defined by their faith. Their worldview is built around their core spiritual beliefs and resulting values. Their success is defined by their obedience to God, as demonstrated by consistently serving Christ, carrying out His commands and principles. It uses corporate times of celebration as a catalyst for deeper personal times of devotion and it's able to stand the test of time, no matter the opposition or struggle.

Which one better defines you this morning? Can I tell you that this definition is not found within any particular group in the crowd in Jerusalem? So we need to look to the greater narrative of Scripture to see what God does in the work of some of the people in that crowd—namely the disciples—who later are on fire for the Lord and who do great things for Him.

I don't want you to think you come in here, the pastor slaps you around a little bit, and you think, "Well, the ship has sailed; I can't fix this." Yes, you can. Today is the day, by the grace of God, that you can say, "I'm done being casual; I'm going to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ. When I fail, I'm going to run to Jesus and get His forgiveness so I can continue in fellowship with Him."

That's why I'm so glad today we'll be centering ourselves around the Communion Table in a few moments to seek that forgiveness and to do that business with our God. But how do we know when we're growing in spiritual commitment? Here are three diagnostic questions.

### Am I living in fear or by faith?

Zachariah 9:9 is quoted here and John says again, "We didn't see it at first, but I see it now." In verse 15 he says, "*It is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming.'*" Did you know that those words, "*Fear not*" —or some derivative of them—are the most-used command in all of Scripture? There are a couple hundred different times where the Bible says, "Fear not. Do not be anxious. Do not worry. Do not fret. Do not dread."

Notice that Zachariah addresses this to the "daughter of Zion." I don't have daughters, but I see how the men around me treat their daughters way differently than they treat their sons. There's grace, mercy and love when the Father says to us, "Fear not, O My daughter."

Why? Why don't we have to fear or dread? Why can we live by faith? It's because of the promise of the coming King. That statement isn't altogether true for us, because our King has come. He has finished the work He said He was going to do. All we're waiting for is the next parade, right? We're just in a holding pattern, waiting for Jesus to come to town. We want to be ready for that. Jesus asked, "*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?*" (Luke 18:8). Not fear, but faith.

If you want to know how you're doing with vacillating between fear and faith, remember that fear says, "I'm on my own," but faith says, "I have a mighty God Who is on my side." I don't want you to think that because we're committed individuals that there will be no issues. Faith in Christ doesn't mean an absence of trouble; it means the presence of a mighty God. Are you living in greater fear or greater faith? Spiritually committed people are going to grow in their faith, even as difficult as that may be in the days we live in.

### Am I declaring what Christ has done?

In verse 17, we read about a certain a group of people: "*The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead.*" This is a subset of the larger crowd and it says they "*continued to bear witness.*" Again, the crowd doesn't always do bad things; sometimes they do good things. But they need to bear witness of what God is able to do. The problem here is that the crowd bore witness when they were in the majority, but they were unwilling to bear witness when they were a minority.

Do you want to know if you're in the crowd? How vocal are you when everybody agrees with you, then how quiet are you when nobody agrees with you? That's when you'll know. A spiritually committed individual says, "I don't care who I'm talking to; Jesus is Lord. If that means I'm going to lose popularity, so be it. If that means I'm going to lose my job, so be it. If that means I'm going

to lose my friends, so be it. If that means I'm going to lose standing in the community, then so be it. Jesus is my King. Jesus is my Lord. It doesn't matter what it costs me."

In weeks to come, we'll see when Peter was in the minority he is way different than when he was in the majority. Being in the crowd enables us to boast about Jesus, but being a committed follower of Jesus means we can say, "In the good, the bad or the ugly of life, one thing remains true: Jesus is my King and I'll bear witness to Him."

### **Am I fighting or following Him?**

Verse 19 says, *"So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'" They were saying, "Man, we fight this guy and all it does is gives Him more clout with the people. It ain't working."*

Can I just tell you this? If you're a committed follower of Jesus Christ, then you're going to see less fighting and more following. I'm not saying you're a Pharisee and that you're hellbent on getting rid of Jesus. In my desire to commit to following Jesus, I'm amazed at how often Jesus says, "Go this way. I want you to do this," but I say, "No, I want to do that."

Listen, your casualness is getting the best of you if you're saying no to Jesus way more than you're saying yes to Him. Again, it's not my job to judge you in this. It's not the job of the person sitting next to you to judge you in this. Only I can judge this about myself; only you can judge this in yourself. Are you fighting and saying no to Jesus, like the Pharisees did, or are you following Him?

The triumphal entry was where people loved to be a part of the crowd, announcing that Jesus was all these great things. But in a matter of hours, they couldn't be found. Can that be said of you this morning? You love to be here. You love to experience what Jesus is doing here. You love the excitement that comes with being here. But when you're by yourself, or you're alone in a group of people who are antagonistic toward Jesus, are you rendered mute? Even worse, do you find yourself going with that crowd?

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