It is very easy for people to jump on the Jesus bandwagon when they believe that it will improve their living conditions or make their lives easier. Who wouldn’t want better living conditions and an easier life? We all would. But this is not what Jesus is about and this is not why He came into this world.

Jesus came into this world not to give us better living conditions or to make our lives easier, but rather to set us free from sin and all of its consequences. This is the gift that Christ is offering.

If this is the gift that you, in fact, desired, and if this is the gift that you have, in fact, by faith received, then certainly you will not be disappointed in this life or the life to come. Each day will offer you an array of various opportunities to enjoy this gift, and one day the benefit of this gift will be fully realized as we find ourselves standing before Christ in glory.

Unfortunately, there are some people who have publicly identified themselves with Christ who may find themselves extremely disappointed in this life and will be absolutely devastated in the life to come. Why? They will find themselves extremely disappointed because though they jumped on the Jesus bandwagon they did not take the gift that He was offering.

We will see an example of this very thing this weekend in the passage that we will be examining.

This weekend we will be examining an incident that is typically referred to as the “triumphal entry.” It is described as the triumphal entry because of the enormous celebration that was precipitated by Christ’s entrance into the city of Jerusalem during the Passover feast. Unfortunately, this enormous celebration was tragically flawed.

How was it flawed? This enormous celebration was flawed because people were superficially embracing Christ for the wrong reason.

Let me read for you John’s account of this incident in John 12:12-19. “On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, (13) took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.’ (14) And Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, (15) ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold your King is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.’ (16) These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him. (17) And so the multitude who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb, and raised him from the dead, were bearing Him witness. (18) For this cause also the multitude went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. (19) The Pharisees therefore said to one another, ‘You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.’”
In examining John’s account of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem, I will make three different points that we need to understand. The first point that we need to understand is that Christ choreographed His very public entrance into Jerusalem (John 12:12-13). Though many people might see the very public entry of Christ as random or capricious, I see it as very calculated. Jesus wanted to go into Jerusalem with a lot of fanfare. He wanted a lot of people there to greet Him and welcome Him into the city.

This choreographing of His very public entrance into Jerusalem began when He and His disciples stopped in Bethany for a dinner party, which John describes for us John 12:1-11. Hopefully you remember that party. It was a great party characterized by good food, good friends and great conversation, but it ultimately began to unravel when Mary anointed Christ’s feet with perfume. Her action was challenged by Judas and apparently a few other disciples as being wasteful. This provided Christ the opportunity to explain the significance of what she had done in light of the things that He would very shortly suffer. But this is not all that happened that night.

Christ’s presence at this party in Bethany had become known, and a great many Jews had come out to Bethany from Jerusalem to see Christ and also Lazarus. We saw this in John 12:9. Obviously, “the cat was out of the bag,” and because of this, more and more people throughout Jerusalem were becoming aware of the fact that Jesus was not only in Bethany but that that He was intending to visit Jerusalem the very next day.

This was not an accident. Let me ask you a question. Was it necessary that Christ and His disciples stop in Bethany? Not really. The trip from Ephraim, where He had been staying with His disciples, to Bethany would have been ten miles, and the trip from Ephraim to Jerusalem would have been only twelve miles. This was simply a two-mile difference. Jesus and His disciples could easily have left Ephraim and gone directly to Jerusalem but they didn’t. Why? I don’t believe it was simply because they wanted to enjoy a great dinner party with their friends. I believe that Jesus’ stopover in Bethany in John 12:1-11 was very strategic. It provided the necessary time for the news of Christ’s impending visit to Jerusalem to be disseminated. We are now ready to consider what John said about this very public and choreographed entry of Christ into Jerusalem.

Let us continue to read. “On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, (13) took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.’”

At this point in the story the apostle introduces a group of people that he calls “the great multitude.” “The great multitude” that John refers to here in John 12:12 is different than the “great multitude” in John 12:9. The “great multitude” in John 12:9 were Jews, most likely residents of Jerusalem, who came to Bethany the day before to see Jesus and Lazarus when they were still in Simon the leper’s house. “The great multitude” in John 12:12 appears not to be residents of Jerusalem but rather Jewish pilgrims who had come to the city of Jerusalem for the Passover feast.
These pilgrims most likely had been camping out all over Jerusalem and on the outskirts of Jerusalem and now they have come together in mass. So how many pilgrims were there?

Josephus, a Jewish historian, estimated that the number of Jewish pilgrims at one particular feast was 2,700,000. Most scholars believe this figure was greatly exaggerated. Most biblical scholars estimate that the number of Jewish pilgrims attending the Passover feast in John 12 was between 150 to 250 thousand.

So, how many of these 150 to 250 thousand pilgrims went out to meet Jesus? I would think that it would be reasonable to guess that about 50 to 100 thousand Jews went out to meet Jesus. This had to be an amazing sight. Here were these thousands, these tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims winding their way toward Bethany the day after the dinner party. But they were not just winding their way toward Bethany; they were winding their way toward Bethany holding branches from palm trees.

Let us once again continue to read John 12:12-13. “On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, (13) took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him.”

So, what is the significance of these palm branches that these tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims were taking with them when they went to meet Jesus?

Palm branches in the time of Christ had become a national symbol. When Simon the Maccabee drove the Syrian forces out of Jerusalem he was feted with music and the waving of palm branches. It was kind of like the people were saying, “Long live Israel!”

This is what, I believe, was in the mind of these pilgrims when they brought the palm branches out to meet Christ. It was as if they were saying, “Long live Israel.” In other words, they brought the palm branches with them because they saw Him as the person who would deliver them from Rome.

Let us read John 12:12-13 one more time. “On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, (13) took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.’” This great multitude of Jewish pilgrims believed that Jesus could deliver them from Rome because they saw Him as a very special person. Let us look for a moment at what these Jewish pilgrims were crying out. The first thing that they cried out was “hosanna.”

The word “hosanna” literally meant “give salvation now,” but had come to be used simply as an expression of praise. It would be like us saying, “Hallelujah” or “Praise the Lord.” But this expression of praise was not all that was said. This particular expression of praise here in John 12:13 served to introduce a much weightier expression.
Look at the next thing that these pilgrims continued to cry out after they had intercepted Jesus. “Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” What is the significance of this phrase? The phrase “blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” comes from Psalms 118:26 and is best understood as a Messianic title.

The Jesus pilgrims were pronouncing a blessing on the one who came in the name of the Lord, or in other words, they were pronouncing a blessing on the Messiah who had been sent by God. This thought is reinforced for us when we read the very next phrase that these Jewish pilgrims cried out.

Let us once again continue to read John 12:13. “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.”

Though the phrase “even the King of Israel” did not come from Psalms 118:26, it does confirm that “He who comes in the name of the Lord” was a messianic title.

This was truly an amazing scene that is being pictured here for us in this passage. I would even say that this is a shocking scene that is pictured for us here in this passage. Why? Just days before, many Jews were wondering if Jesus would even be willing to come into Jerusalem during the Passover in light of the growing threat against Him, and now we see Jesus willingly being ushered into Jerusalem by tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims declaring Him to be their Messiah and expecting Him to overthrow Rome. Now that is shocking, but it certainly was not random or capricious. It was, in fact, very carefully orchestrated by Christ to strategically stop in Bethany before entering into Jerusalem.

Was Christ’s entrance triumphal? The Jewish people, who were a part of this enormous celebration, probably would describe it that way, but I certainly don’t that Christ would have necessarily looked at His entrance in this way. From His standpoint, His entry probably was more tragic than triumphal. Why? Though this great multitude of people had begun to see Christ’s true identify, they still very much had no understanding of why He had come.

They thought that Jesus, as the Christ, came to overthrow their Roman oppressor, but this certainly was not Christ’s intent. This leads us to the second thing we need to understand about Christ’s entrance. Not only was Christ’s entrance, His enormous reception, orchestrated by Christ but Christ’s entry as Israel’s king into Jerusalem on a young donkey was prophetically anticipated (John 12:14-15).

Let me read for you John 12:14-15. “And Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, (15) ‘Fear not, Daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.’”

Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey had been prophesied in Zechariah 9:9. In other words, it was no accident that Jesus chose to ride a young donkey into Jerusalem. It had been prophesied.

So, let us break this prophecy down. First of all, who is the daughter of Zion? The daughter of Zion is a common way to refer to the people of Jerusalem.
And what do we see the people of Jerusalem being told in this prophecy? They are being told not to fear when they see their king coming to them seated on a donkey’s colt. Why?

A donkey symbolized peace in contrast with a horse that symbolized war. The prophet was telling the people of Jerusalem that when they saw their king coming on a donkey, He was on a peace mission.

This does not mean in the context of Zechariah 9 that Jesus will not in the future wage war with those who make war with the people of Jerusalem. But Zechariah 9:9 clearly speaks of Christ’s peaceful intent when He entered Jerusalem in John 12.

This leads us to the third point that we need to understand about Christ’s entry into Jerusalem.

Though Christ’s intentions in entering Jerusalem were peaceful, His entrance was problematic (John 12:16-19). This will become clear to us as we conclude John’s comments about the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

Let me read for you John 12:16-19. “These things [the things about what were prophesied in Zechariah 9:9] His Disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him. [Had done what? Had secured the donkey’s colt for Jesus according to the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. Then what does the apostle tell us?] (17) And so the multitude who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb, and raised him from the dead, were bearing Him witness. (18) For this cause also the multitude went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. (19) The Pharisees therefore said to one another, ‘You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.’” So, how was Christ’s amazing entrance into Jerusalem problematic in light of these verses we have just read?

Christ’s entry into Jerusalem certainly would not have been problematic for the disciples. We know this because the disciples had fully cooperated in securing the young donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem even though they had no clue of the significance of their action until Christ was glorified based on John 12:16. Christ’s entry into Jerusalem certainly would not have been problematic for the eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Lazarus who had gone out to meet Jesus on His way from Bethany to Jerusalem based on John 12:17. And certainly Christ’s entry into Jerusalem would not have been problematic for the pilgrims who had gone out to meet Jesus on His way from Bethany to Jerusalem based on John 12:18.

If Christ’s entry was not problematic for the disciples, or the eyewitnesses, or the pilgrims, then for whom was Christ’s entry problematic? Christ’s entry into Jerusalem was problematic for the Pharisees.

Let us look at what the Pharisees were saying to each other in John 12:19. “The Pharisees therefore said to one another, ‘You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.’” The Pharisees, who were the chief opponents of Christ in the Sanhedrin, were terrified by what they saw when Christ entered Jerusalem in the way He entered it.
The sheer number of Jews who enthusiastically supported Jesus as their Messiah as He entered into Jerusalem pushed the Pharisees to a point of desperation.

Because Jesus had pushed the Pharisees to the point of desperation, the Pharisees and therefore the Sanhedrin who supported the Pharisees were now ready to do what they may not have been willing to do earlier and that was to seize Jesus during the Passover feast. Jesus, in effect, by His entry into Jerusalem in the way He entered Jerusalem, was forcing their hand. He wanted a confrontation with them during the Passover feast and He was now going to get it.

The champion of the Jewish multitude, who was ushered into Jerusalem by tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims, was about to fulfill the purpose of His coming. What a glorious day it would be when the purpose for His coming would be fulfilled. It would be a day of incredible triumph, but not the kind of triumph that the Jewish masses who had accompanied Jesus in Jerusalem had expected.

They had expected Him, when He entered Jerusalem, to set them free from Rome. But He had come to set them free from sin. They obviously were about to experience an incredible disappointment. They had come to Christ thinking He was offering one thing when He was actually offering something totally different. They thought He was offering something that would make their lives physically and materially better; they were wrong. This was not the reason why He had come, and this was not the reason why He had willingly entered Jerusalem with them.

Were they true disciples of Christ? No, not really! It is very easy for people to jump on the Jesus bandwagon when they believe that it will improve their living conditions or make their lives easier. But this is not what Jesus is about and this is not why He came into this world.

Jesus came into this world, not to give us better living conditions or to make our lives easier, but to set us free sin and all of its consequences. This is the gift that Christ is offering.

Is this the gift that you desired? If this is the gift that you have by faith received, then you will not be disappointed in this life or the life to come.

How could you be? Every day we have the opportunity, in this life, to walk in holiness and truth in the power of Christ. And in the life to come, we will be standing before Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, perfectly holy.

May God give us the grace to understand that Christ did not come in order to improve our living conditions or make our lives easier per se, but rather to set us free from sin.