



The Book of John

Chapter 12

February 4, 2018

John 12:1-2 – *Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.*

Less than a week before Jesus is to be crucified at Passover, Jesus went to a dinner given in his honor at Bethany. Bethany was located about 1.5 miles east of Jerusalem on the south-eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Today, the city is identified with the current West bank city of al-Eizariya (meaning "Place of Lazarus").

You'll notice that it's mentioned here that Martha served. She was a woman of action. That was her "thing", whenever there was work to do, she was there to get it done. If we were to give Martha a motto it would probably be something like, "Gitter done!"

John 12:3-6 – *³ Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.*

Next up, we have Martha's sister, Mary. Whenever Jesus was around she could usually be found listening at Jesus feet while, of course, Martha was off busy somewhere getting something done. This was Mary's "thing." If we were to give Mary a motto it would be something like, "Sit down, relax and let's chat for a bit?"

Some might say that Mary was being lazy and not focusing on the task at hand which was the feast. Others would say she was focusing on what was important which was spending time listening to Jesus. Either way, at this point Mary makes an extremely lavish sacrifice. She used a pound (a Roman pound being 11.5 ounces) of ointment made from pure nard to wash Jesus feet.

At this time, the primary footwear in Israel was the sandal and walking around a dusty area like that would tend to get the feet extremely dirty. Consequently, the host would typically offer water for their guests to wash their feet or the host might have a servant do it. But, not Mary. She washed Jesus' feet herself. On top of that, she didn't just use water. She used an essential oil, a perfume, that cost 300 denarii.

Offhand, this amount may not sound like a lot but just how much is 300 denarii worth? A denarius (or "penny") was what an agricultural worker was typically paid for one day's labor. If we relate this to today's minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour times 10 hours then multiply that by the 300 denarius that works out to almost \$22,000! At just over \$1,900 an ounce that would place this as #6 on the list of top 10 most expensive perfumes today. That's some expensive foot scrub!

But not only did she use an extremely expensive perfume to wash the filth from Jesus' feet but she used her own hair to wipe off the grime. What an extremely humble and worshipful gesture to make! Have you or anyone you know ever made such an extravagant offering to God?

However, Judas did make a somewhat valid point about the offering despite his selfish and impure motives. You could actually feed and clothe a *lot* of people with that amount of money! Of course, Jesus made an excellent counter point.

John 12:7-8 – ⁷ *Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”*

It’s a fact that no matter how much you might sacrifice and give to the poor, you will always have them with you. But, Jesus would be leaving shortly and so much sooner than they ever suspected!

There was once a time when churches were built as magnificent structures dedicated to honoring God. People wore their finest clothes to show their honor and worship for God. But current trends have changed that idea. Churches are now often constructed in an inexpensive, industrial fashion or existing buildings are repurposed for use as church buildings. People argue the money could be better spent in other areas. And, congregations have opted for wearing more comfortable, practical clothing. So, the question is: Which of these does God prefer us to do?

John 12:9-11 – ⁹ *When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*

News of Lazarus’ resurrection had obviously started to spread. People were coming not only to see the miracle worker, Jesus, but also the one Jesus had brought back from the dead. I, myself, would have loved to hear what Lazarus had to say about the “other side.”

Meanwhile, the chief priests were starting to get desperate. It was bad enough that Jesus was performing miracles that they were having trouble explaining but to have him raise a man 4 *days* after he died would be impossible to explain away. Not only that but most of the religious leaders were Sadducees which didn’t believe in life after death. Having a man returned from the dead would be an embarrassing contradiction to their whole theological system.

John 12:12-16 – ¹² *The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ 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!” ¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, ¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”*

Palm branches had been a symbol of Jewish nationalism since the time of the Maccabees, a group of Jewish rebel warriors that had previously taken control of Judea. The use of these branches showed this was a patriotic rally and the crowds looked to Jesus as a political and national savior. However, Jesus wasn’t there to fulfil that purpose. His purpose was to be their spiritual savior.

The prophetic scripture that talks about this event is Zechariah 9:9 where it says “*your king... righteous and having salvation*” would come “*humble and mounted on a donkey.*” In the ancient Middle Eastern world, leaders rode horses if they rode to war but donkeys if they came in peace.

The cry “Hosanna!” meant “save now.”

John 12:16 – 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.*

Often when we’re in the midst of a momentous occasion (whether good or bad), we fail to recognize the magnitude of the moment for what it is. It’s only when we look back later upon the event that we can see it clearly for what it actually was. Do you ever pause to look back on your life and see God’s guiding hand over

events that have occurred in your life? We can use those moments to thank Him and to gather encouragement for trials you might currently be facing.

John 12:17-19 – ¹⁷*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. ¹⁸The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”*

The Pharisees are finally starting to realize that they’ve lost their grip over the situation. It makes me wonder as to what exactly was going through their heads. Did they ever realize at some point that they were actually fighting against the God to whom they had supposedly dedicated their lives to serving?

John 12:20-23 – ²⁰*Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*

It was time. It appears to be that the sign that the crucifixion was near was when the Gentiles started to seek Jesus.

John 12:24-26 – ²⁴*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. ²⁵Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

Jesus reveals the true reason for his presence here on Earth. His death on the cross will literally save the eternal lives of millions who will choose to accept his sacrifice for their sins. But just as important is his next statement. When you choose to follow Christ, you are surrendering your life to God. That means we should no longer be living only for ourselves. As we go through our day, we should be changing our thinking from “what’s in it for me” to something more like “how can I serve Him today?”

Read again the last line of the scripture above, “If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” This means that God’s eye is on us and He is watching our actions and waiting for us to do the right thing. Before we accepted Christ, we were orphans and on our own. But afterwards, we were adopted and became one of God’s children. We should make our Father proud in all of our actions because He *is* watching us.

John 12:27-30 – ²⁷*“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”*

Jesus bares his soul at this moment. Understandably, he has great dread for what he knows is coming but he doesn’t shirk from it for this was the entire reason he was here in the flesh.

John 12:30-33 – ³⁰*Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

What exactly was the purpose of Jesus’ proclamation? It was to establish the fact that Jesus knew what was coming, his crucifixion, and that it was ordained by God and not the result of some random act of Man.

In any case, there will always be those that will doubt no matter how strong the evidence. And doubly so in this case as there have been many who have claimed they were the long awaited Messiah. Jesus tells them exactly what will be occurring so that when it does happen they won’t be taken by surprise and lose their faith.

We should also note that the verb used for *lifted up* in the original Greek text is the word *hypsotēnai* which has a deliberate double meaning. It means both a literal elevation (as in being raised up on a cross) and exaltation (being raised in rank or honor).¹

John 12:34-36 – ³⁴ So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

The crowd is proclaiming their ignorance of who Jesus really is and everything the Messiah would actually be. They were aware of the Old Testament passages which speak of the triumph of the Messiah but apparently they were not aware of those verses that speak of his suffering (such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53). It is understandable from a human perspective how when studying the Old Testament one would not understand and/or prefer to marginalize those scriptures that speak of one who will deliver his people as “a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.” Or that say “they have pierced my hands and feet – I can count all my bones – they stare and gloat over me.”

John 12:37-40 – ³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” ³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, ⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

Astonishingly enough, many still refused to believe in Jesus. However, it should really come as no surprise since it was prophesied so long ago by Isaiah. He said that God would harden their hearts so they could not believe. This may seem harsh and unfair to those being denied salvation. However, we don’t know the mind of God and how He works. For all we know, salvation was later offered and accepted by these same disbelievers later on. Either way, it was necessary for their disbelief at this time so that Christ would be persecuted and crucified for our sins.

John 12:41-43 – ⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. ⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Even though many refused to believe there were some who did. I would ask you though, who is worse: those who refused to believe or those who did believe but hid it away so that they wouldn’t suffer persecution? Have there been times in your life when you knew you should speak up about your faith but remained silent out of fear of persecution or rejection?

John 12:44-50 – ⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/studyguide_jhn/jhn_12.cfm

As we look at the closing words of John 12, we can take several lessons away from what Jesus says in this one short paragraph.

1. Be transparent: When others look at you and your life, they should see God.
2. Be a light to others: We are told in Matthew 5:14 and 16 that *“you are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”* You are God’s interface to the lost. Don’t muck it up!
3. Speak the word: Speak **only** the words God gives you to speak. You can’t improve on God’s words.
4. Only do that part which God gives you to do: Any more and it becomes about us and our attempts to try and take control.
5. Don’t judge: That’s reserved for someone else on the last day.