



JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM – JOHN 12:12-19	78
SEEING JESUS – JOHN 12:20-36	79
THE MYSTERY OF UNBELIEF AND FAITH – JOHN 12:37-50	79
PERSONAL APPLICATION – JOHN 13:1-38	81

“Yet in the face of rejection, Jesus is still Lord and we are told that many, even among the leaders, believed in Him.”

CONTEXT

Chapter twelve plays a vital literary role in the Gospel of John. The action builds on the preceding event, the resurrection of Lazarus, and actually pulls together all of Jesus’ previous ministry. On the other hand, the chain of events told in the rest of the gospel begins to unfold in chapter twelve. Jesus moves to Jerusalem for the last time. Furthermore, Jesus interprets Mary’s anointing of His feet in terms of His own burial (12:7) and, for the first time, proclaims that His hour (to die) has come (12:23 & 32).

Four major events are contained in chapter twelve. First, Jesus is anointed (12:1-11), then, He enters Jerusalem (12:12-19), followed by some Greeks seeking Him (12:20-36) and ending with words on the perplexing problem of unbelief (12:37-50).

JESUS ANOINTED – JOHN 12:1-11

The simple words of John 12:1-2 stand against the vivid backdrop of the previous events. Lazarus, who has been given a new lease on life (11:44), and his sister Martha, who confessed a living faith (11:27), share a “dinner given in Jesus’ honor.” What honor must have been given to our Lord that evening for His life-giving power and love!

Suddenly Mary enters the room and in a dramatic action anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume and wipes His feet with her hair. In a sense, the surprising action completes the story of the resurrection of Lazarus. In chapter eleven, Mary’s statement to Jesus and her weeping troubled Him (11:32-33). Although we learned that Jesus’ words and deed strengthened Martha’s faith and gave life to Lazarus, we were not told how the event affected Mary. She now responds with an extravagant act of honor and love.

Two details of John’s introductory comments may be meaningful. According to some scholars, six days before the Passover, lambs were brought from pastures to special pens to be inspected for Passover usage. Does John’s

unique time datum remind some (Jewish) readers that Jesus, as the true Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world, comes to Jerusalem to die at the same time as the ordinary Passover lambs? The other surprising detail, is the notation that Martha served the meal (12:2). Rabbinic literature confirms how unusual it is for a woman, even a wife or daughter, to serve men. Even today, whenever I have been a guest in the home of a Palestinian, the women cook the meal but the men serve it. Perhaps, John reports Martha's action to show how Jesus' gift of life and faith creates surprising responses.

Returning to the story, Mary's action expresses tremendous gratitude. Her gift is costly. Do you know anyone who has given Jesus a year's salary? Her action also expressed humility. Note that she anointed Jesus' feet instead of, as might be expected, His head (Psalm 23:5b and 133:2). Does she present herself as Jesus' slave since foot washing was a slave's task? Does she anoint the feet rather than the head because she, like John the Baptist (1:27), considered herself unworthy of more important work? Furthermore, she publicly disgraces herself by wiping Jesus' feet with her hair (1 Corinthians 11:6). Her action exemplifies worship and praise of Christ without regard for financial cost or personal pride.

Mary's faithful action faces Judas' critical reaction. Let's not make Judas a villain too quickly. His question is reasonable. Sometimes, reasonable people may question the wisdom of parents giving extravagant gifts to children. Reasonable church leaders may act with responsible integrity when they stop a building project and give the money for a relief project. Judas stands as a villain not because his care for the poor is unimportant but because he is a hypocrite. Judas seeks to take personal advantage of Jesus' concern for the poor. There is certainly an important lesson here. Individuals and organizations often raise great funds claiming to serve the poor but sometimes the funds are poorly or selfishly spent, Jesus responds to Judas by defending Mary's sincerity and exposing Judas' hypocrisy. He tells Judas to leave her alone. He explains that she did not give the money to the poor because the perfume was for His own burial. Judas thinks of personal advantage, but Mary's gift stands as part of Jesus' gift of His life for the world's salvation. The lesson is obvious. People may express Christian concern but, if it is

hypocritical, it pushes Christ away and perpetuates human suffering. To use Jesus' words to explain poverty, and to tolerate it as a fact of life stands as a misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching of divine love now and forever.

The first section of chapter twelve closes showing even more vividly the inhumanity of living without Christ. People who reject Jesus want to kill Lazarus! Like Judas, people who elect to live without Jesus will ignore the rights of others and will stop at nothing to protect their own interests. Living with Christ creates the joy of giving things of this world, in worship of the Lord of Life. Living without Him means criticizing the generosity of others, hypocritically stealing from the poor, and planning to kill the blessed.

“The Gospel of John will not emphasize the agony of Jesus in Jerusalem as much as the Synoptic accounts. Instead, John will stress the glory of Jesus.”

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM – JOHN 12:12-19

John's Gospel account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is surprisingly different from the way the Synoptics tell the story. You may want to read Matthew 21:1-13, Mark 11:1-10 and Luke 19:28-41 before studying the details of John. In general, John more clearly records the people's misunderstanding of Jesus' glory. John begins by vividly portraying Jesus as one who has been anointed. John tells us that Jesus enters Jerusalem the day after the anointing. Since two of the Synoptic Gospels record the anointing of Jesus after His triumphal entry (Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9), John's narrative more vividly symbolizes an important theological truth. Jesus enters as the Anointed one, i.e. the Christ or King. He comes as King to claim His throne. The Gospel of John will not emphasize the agony of Jesus in Jerusalem as much as the Synoptic accounts. Instead, John will stress the glory of Jesus. Jesus enters not so much to suffer as to be glorified. Like the coach of a victorious team, He will be “lifted up.” Of course, that “lifting up” involves the agony of Roman torture on a cross, but, more important, it displays the wonder of divine love.

John also shows the royal welcome by saying that the people have palm branches (12:13). Only John shares

that information which gives the name Palm Sunday to the Sunday before Easter. It probably also shows the nationalistic messianic hopes of the people. Another major difference from the Synoptic accounts is the fact that John does not record Jesus' directions to the disciples to get his donkey (Matthew 21:2-3, Mark 11:2-3 and Luke 19:30-31). In the Johannine narrative, Jesus receives praise before we learn that He is on a donkey. The contrast stands vivid. The people welcome a king! Jesus sits on a domestic beast of burden probably to critique their claim. Jesus claims a different kind of kingship than people offer or want (6:15). The masses come because they have heard of Jesus' power (12:18). His enemies worry because His popularity threatens theirs. John tells us that even the disciples did not understand the event until the true humility and glory of Jesus was revealed. Only after Jesus' death and resurrection do the disciples understand how the Scripture and Jesus' action proclaimed a loving Savior rather than a powerful miracle working king.

The message of the event deserves our prayerful consideration. Why do we welcome Jesus into our hearts and lives? Do we merely want His power? Do we praise Him because we expect Him immediately to solve all our problems? If so, like the crowd, we will be confused and disappointed. Like the disciples, we need to take another look at Scripture and Easter. Jesus comes with surprising humility and deceptive weakness because His glory lies in His willingness to die and to rise again to show that God's gift of life is more important than the glory of this world.

SEEING JESUS – JOHN 12:20-36

The next event in the chapter begins with some Greeks asking to see Jesus (12:20-22). John tells how their request is passed from Philip to Andrew and finally to Jesus. Surprisingly, we don't know if the Greeks ever see Jesus. I think that we are not told because John wants to show God's perspective on our interest in things of this world. Instead of satisfying our historical curiosity, John plunges into what is really important. He records the words of Jesus about Himself.

The response of Jesus teaches four truths. First, Jesus' ministry is over and the time to die has come (12:23). Second, Jesus illustrates the "productive" power of death by comparing it to planting a seed. The "burial" of a

seed produces a harvest. Third, Jesus calls disciples to evaluate their priorities (12:25). Finally, Jesus promises life to all who follow Him (12:26). The truth is profound. Jesus will now show the glory of God in death and His truth involves our lives. We are part of the harvest and are called to follow His example. Like the crowd waving palm branches, we may welcome Jesus for what He can do for us but hesitate to be like Him in sharing the glory of self-giving service to God. Jesus' words seem to speak to that hesitancy in the next verse (12:27b). Self-giving service is painful and causes trouble even for our Lord. But He refuses to pray for escape from His divine work. His prayer (12:28a) reveals His divine harmony with the Father and models our service. Let all be done to the glory of God.

A voice from heaven signifies that the Father communicates with the Son. Their unique relationship is demonstrated by the fact that the crowd thinks of thunder or angelic speech. The voice from heaven, God the Father, affirms Jesus' past and future work (12:28b). How had Jesus already glorified God's name? Probably the voice refers to the teaching and signs of His public ministry. How would Jesus glorify God's name in the future? The next chapters will show God's glory as Jesus gives His life facing human sin and death.

The final words of this section already show the unfolding future glory of God in Jesus. The ruler of this world is being driven out (12:31). Mission work - drawing people to salvation - comes from the cross (12:32). Human questions show the need for God's revelation (12:34) and Jesus calls them to find the Light of God in Him (12:35-36). But, as He said (12:31), the time of judgment has arrived and Jesus hides from the unbelievers. The final section of the chapter (12:37-50) will present in stark contrast the ugly darkness of unbelief and the bright light of God's saving truth.

THE MYSTERY OF UNBELIEF AND FAITH – JOHN 12:37-50

John explains the unbelief of the crowd by referring to the word of Isaiah the prophet. The words are not easy to understand since they seem to teach that God wants some people not to believe. Yet we know other passages of Scripture clearly teach that God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4). Study the careful way in which the Synoptic Gospels use the Isaiah passage and you will begin to

“So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (NIV).

understand the intention of the verses (Matthew 13:13-15, Mark 4:1-12 and Luke 8:10). As is so often true in human language, reading between the lines to find the intention may be more important than examining the words as a precise expression.

Perhaps we can understand the statements from Isaiah better when we realize that the Bible teaches two truths that seem to conflict. The first truth deals with the love of God. God loves all. When the Scripture emphasizes the love of God, it stresses that human sin is due to Satan’s power or human stubbornness and resistance to God. The second truth deals with God’s power. God has all power. When the Scripture emphasizes God’s power it speaks in a way which shows that God permits evil (Job 1:12 and 2:6) in order to bring about good. Human logic cannot reconcile the different truths but both stand as true. We see the tension vividly in St. Paul who clearly preached the power and love of God. For example, in Romans chapters nine through eleven, God teaches through Paul that the mystery of the rejection of Jesus rests on God’s plan to bring Gentiles to saving faith.

I am not certain that I understand the theological tension or can explain it correctly but let me share an analogy which will reveal my thoughts. A parent may say, “You made that mess, now you clean it up.” “You made your bed, now you sleep in it.” Such words teach children that actions may create problems which parental love will not remove. They teach children that you have to live with the consequences of personal actions. I think that is part of the truth Isaiah teaches.

Let me suggest another, more complex, analogy based on the principle of “tough love.” For example, if a person I

love is an alcoholic, it is not my fault (just as my problems are not God’s fault). On the other hand, my love cannot actively “save” that person. The person must personally realize the problem and want help. In fact, my love may “drive” the person into deeper problems. Sincere warnings and pleadings may “create” rejection and antagonism. To really help may require “tough love.” I may have to “permit” the person to “hit the bottom of the barrel” so that the loved one blames self and seeks help. I may even, in love, push toward that fateful moment. Perhaps the analogy helps us understand the difficult words from Isaiah used in John. The warnings of God may lead to deeper rejection and the quickest way for God to rescue us is for sin to take its ugly course.

In summary of John 12:37-43, the difficult passages should not be interpreted to mean that God does not love the whole world. Other sections of Scripture clearly show God’s universal love. The verses are meant to show God’s power. The words attack the idea that the prince of this world might be more powerful than Jesus when people reject Him. Yet in the face of rejection, Jesus is still Lord and we are told that many, even among the leaders, believed in Him. God rules all, not Satan. In the final section (John 12:44-50) Jesus’ words explain His relationship to the Father and how rejection of His word leads to self-condemnation. Jesus points again to His inseparability with the Father and to His mission. He has come into the world so that whoever believes in Him has Light (eternal life) and not darkness (eternal death). Jesus ends His public ministry with these words of confirmation, “So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (NIV).

PERSONAL APPLICATION – JOHN 13:1-38

*Pray for the spirit of humility and commitment to service as
you read about Jesus washing the disciples' feet.*

John 13:1-17

1. In the first verse of this chapter, what are we told Jesus knew and how did He react to that knowledge?

2. What is your attitude when you face suffering? How do you treat others at such times?

3. According to 13:2-5, Jesus acts in the face of Judas' decision to betray Him. What is a "normal" reaction to betrayal by a friend?

4. Describe what Jesus did to the disciples.

5. Although the Gospel of Luke does not record Jesus' action of washing feet, how does Luke 22:24-27 help put the deed in a broader context?

6. What three statements does Peter make to Jesus and how does Jesus reply?

7. What do you think motivated Peter's remarks? How does such motivation affect you when offered help in Christian love?

8. Answer Jesus' question in 13:12 and explain your reply.

9. How can we imitate Christ? (Ephesians 5:1-2). How have you followed Jesus' example and been blessed in doing so?

John 13:18-30

10. Explain Jesus' teaching in 19-20. How do you apply the word to your life?

11. What startling announcement did Jesus make to His disciples in verse 21?

12. If you know that someone plans to hurt you, should you share that information with a dear friend? Why or why not?

13. In 13:26-27, what does Jesus do and why do you think He did it?

John 13:31-38

14. According to 13:34-35, what should Christians do?

How should they do it?

Why should they do it?

15. Can you think of an example of how verse 35 has worked in your life? If so, explain briefly.

16. In your own words state the two questions Peter asked Jesus and also give Jesus' answers.

Why do you think Peter asked the questions?

Evaluate Peter's attitude toward his own ability to follow Jesus.

Why does Jesus speak the words of verse 38?

17. List ways in which pride gives false confidence in one's own ability to follow Jesus.

Can you give an example of how false confidence today leads to denial of Jesus?
