

III. The Week leading to the Cross (12:1-50)

A. The Anointing at Bethany (12:1-11)

For three years the manifold perfections of the blessed Lord Jesus had been manifested both in public and in private. We observe that there was a deepening appreciation on the part of His own (even as find true in our own heart); but a steady hardening of unbelief and increasing hostility in His enemies. His own death was but a week away. Soon He was to be "made sin" and endure, in infinite depths of anguish, the judgment of God which was due it. He was about to yield Himself up to death for the glory of God (John 12:27, 28), for only in the Cross could be laid that foundation for the accomplishment of God's eternal counsels.

V. 1-3 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

This scene seems to closely parallel that given in Matt. 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9. The "seeming" discrepancies are minimal, and there are far too many similarities to quickly brush off the events as separate. Remember we are dealing with summary accounts. Also, Matthew and Mark are not always written in chronological order. They at times order their accounts according to topic.

One problem to some is the mention of the chief priest and scribes plotting 2 days before the Passover in both Matthew and Mark's account. It then follows with the account of the anointing. However, it may simply be that the conspiracy of Israel's leaders to seize the Lord Jesus is followed by a *retrospective* glance at the "anointing" because what happened at Bethany *provided them with an instrument* which thus enabled them to carry out their vile desires. The plot of the priests was successful through the instrumentality of Judas. Judas protested against Mary's extravagance, and the Lord rebuked him, and it was immediately afterward that the traitor went and made his awful pact with the priests.

This seems to me a more simple explanation than trying to fit in 2 or 3 different times of anointing.

The link between John 11 and 12 is very precious. There we have, in figure, one of God's elect passing from death unto life; here we are shown that into which the new birth introduces us: Lazarus sitting to eat in communion with the Lord Jesus. A leper healed (Matt. 26:6, Mark 14:3), a dead man raised, and the Son of God who had healed the one, and had raised the other, together at the table.

Jesus was the true Passover Lamb that was to be sacrificed for His people. It was for this reason He came to Bethany, which was within easy walking distance of Jerusalem, where He was to be slain. It is a delight to see the power and rule of our God over the whole situation. The very ones who thirsted so greedily for His blood purposed that it would not be on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people" (Matthew 26:5 and Mark 14:2). But God's counsels could not be thwarted, and at the very hour the lambs were being slain, the true Passover was sacrificed. "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel – that will stand" (Prov. 19:21).

V. 4-6 Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

What a contrast was this from the affectionate devotion of Mary! It is this incident that sets in motion Judas' decision to betray his master. Judas had no love for Christ, hence it was impossible that he should appreciate what had been done for Him. Though he had been in the closest contact with the Redeemer for three years, yet the love of money still ruled his heart. Cold-heartedness toward Christ and stinginess toward His cause always go together. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little" (Luke 7:47).

V. 7 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.

Other women "brought spices, that they might come and anoint him" (Mark 16:1), after He was dead. Mary *anointed* Him "for his burial" (Matthew 26:12) six days before He died! It appears her faith had laid hold of the fact that He was going to die—the apostles did not believe this (see Luke 24:21 etc.). She had learned much at His feet!

V. 8 – 11 For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

What a fearful state their hearts were in. They would rather commit murder than acknowledge they were wrong.

B. The Triumphal Entry (12:12-19)

V. 12-13 The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!"

The very fact that this is recorded by all the four Evangelists indicates this is an important moment. Josephus describes a Passover around 66-70 A.D., just before the Jewish War when 2,700,000 people took part, not counting the defiled and foreigners present. I only bring this out to give us understanding of the kind of numbers we are looking at.

When Simon the Maccabee drove out the Syrian forces from Jerusalem about two centuries earlier, he was honored with the waving of palm branches. Perhaps this may have signaled nationalized hope that a messianic liberator was arriving on the scene. Hosanna literally means, "give salvation now!" "*Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray now send prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*" (Ps. 118:25-26). The one who would come in the name of the Lord is the messiah-king of Israel. However, the following verse (v. 27) talks about sacrifice. New Testament eyes enable us to see that Messiah Jesus would deliver and save His people, but He would do it through the sacrifice of Himself.

In Revelation 7:9, where we behold the "innumerable multitude before the throne and before the Lamb," they have "palms in their hand."

V. 14-16 Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt." His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

Jesus entered Jerusalem in the way He did in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

What scriptures? The answer to this question takes us back, first of all, to the prophecy which dying Jacob made, a prophecy spoke about what was to befall his descendants in "the last days"—an Old Testament expression referring to the times of the Messiah: begun at His first advent, completed at His second. The aged patriarch declared, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and to him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine" (Gen. 49:9-11). A.W. Pink writes: "The word "scepter" here signifies tribal rod. Judah was to preserve the separate independency of his tribe until the Messiah came. The fulfillment of this is seen in the Gospels. Though the ten tribes had long before been carried into captivity, from which they never returned, Judah (the "Jews"), were still in Palestine when the Son of God became incarnate and tabernacled among men. Continuing his prophecy, Jacob announced, "And to him [Shiloh—the Peacemaker—cf. 'thy peace' in Luke 19:42], shall the gathering of the people be." This received its first fulfillment at Christ's official entry into Jerusalem. But mark the next words, "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine." The "vine" was Israel (Isa. 5, etc); the "choice vine" was Christ Himself (John 15:1). Here, then, was the fact itself prophetically announced."

Verse 15 itself comes from Zechariah 9:9. Like many New Testament quotations from the Old, the entire Old Testament context must be borne in mind if the full force of the

words is to be recognized. (In addition, often references are derived from two or more passages).

In Zech. 9:10-11, we note three points:

- 1) The coming of the gentle king is associated with the cessation of war – “peace.” We have the OC physical language, but it is portraying NC reality.
- 2) The coming of the gentle king is associated with the proclamation of peace to the nations – extending his reign to the ends of the earth (i.e. the latter half of Zech. 9:10 is a quote from Ps. 72:8, which promises a worldwide reign for Zion’s king, a son of David).
- 3) The coming of the gentle king is associated with the blood of God’s covenant that spells release for prisoners (clearly a Passover theme!).

V. 17-19 Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"

Once again we see great irony; this time in the use of the term “world.” That indeed is to be the case, and we see the Greeks seeking Jesus in the very next verse.

C. The Announcement of His Hour (12:20-36)

V. 20 Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast.

The arrival of the Greeks seeking Jesus serves as a signal that the “hour” was at hand.

V. 21 Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

At the very time the leaders of Israel sought to *kill* Him, the Greeks desired to see Him. Jesus was about to be the Savior of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Of old it had been said, "and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations" (Hag. 2:7). It seems it was more than an idle curiosity which prompted these Greeks, for if it was only a physical sight of Him which they desired, that could have been accomplished as He passed in and out of the temple or along the street of Jerusalem, without them interviewing Philip. It was a *personal* and *intimate* acquaintance with Him that their souls craved. The form in which they stated their request was prophetically significant. It was not, "We desire to witness one of his mighty works," but "We wish to see Jesus."

V. 22 Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

When Christ had sent forth the Twelve on their first preaching tour, He expressly commanded them, "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans." Furthermore, the disciples had heard Him say to the Canaanite woman, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Most probably it was because these definite statements were in Philip's mind that he now sought out Andrew and asked his advice.

V. 23-24 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.

I love Jesus' response. There must be a New Covenant established to bring in the Greeks! Apart from His sacrificial death, Jesus could do nothing for these Greeks. An earthly Messiah would do nothing for them at all.

This is the first time, the Lord declared that His "hour" had come. At Cana He had said to His mother, "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4), and about the middle of His public ministry we read, "No one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come" (John 7:30). But here He announced that His hour had arrived; the hour when He, as Son of Man, would be "glorified." This could be a double reference. The context could refer to the time when the Son of man would be glorified by receiving the worship of the Gentiles. But most certainly, linking this verse with the one that immediately follows, it is equally clear that He referred to His approaching death. To His followers, the cross appears as the lowest depths of humiliation, but the Savior regarded it (also) as His glorification. John 13:30, 31 brings this out: "Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. So [or **therefore**], when he had gone out, Jesus said, Now the Son of man is **glorified, and God is glorified in Him.**" The two things are intimately related: salvation could not come to the Gentiles except through His death.

If the Lord Jesus is to be to others the "resurrection" and the "life", we now learn what this involved for Him. He would be glorified by being the firstborn among many brethren. But how? Through death: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone: but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (John 12:24). Life could not come to us but through His death. Every seed sown in the ground to produce a harvest is a testimony to the cross-work of Jesus Christ.

These "Greeks" pointed in the direction of those other "sheep" which the Good Shepherd must also bring. It is also significant to note that just as Gentiles (the magi from the East) had sought Him soon after His birth, so now these "Greeks" came to Him shortly before His death.

V. 25- 27 He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.

He who thinks more of this life that now is, than the life which is to come, shall lose his soul. Jesus' disciples must give up their Jewish ideas of temporal rewards. They need to see that the kingdom is spiritual. Jesus' sheep are content to lose much in this life, in order to gain the glory of the life to come. They seek the glory and honor of God.

This is the prelude to Gethsemane. It reveals to us something of Christ's inward sufferings. His anguish was extreme; His heart was "troubled" – in horror and grief. Why was this? The insults and sufferings which He was to receive at the hands of men? The wounding of His heel by the Serpent? No, I believe it was the prospect of being "made a curse for us," of suffering the righteous wrath of a sin-hating God. "What shall I say?" He asks, not "What shall I choose?" There was no wavering in purpose, or indecision of will. Though His holy nature shrank from being "made sin," it only marked His perfections to ask that such a cup might pass from Him. Nevertheless, He bowed, unhesitatingly, to the Father's will, saying, "But for this purpose I came to this hour." The bitter cup was accepted.

V. 28 Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again."

The heavenly Father, who had been glorifying His name throughout the ministry of His dear Son, will glorify it again in the death and exaltation of Jesus – giving Him the name that is above every name!

V. 29-30 Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.

Three times the Father spoke audibly to the Son: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of His Messianic career, and in each case it was in view of His death. At the Jordan Christ went down, symbolically, into the place of death in the waters of baptism; on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah had talked with Him "of his [lit.] 'exodus'" (Luke 9:31); and here, Christ had just announced that His "hour" was at hand.

The hardness of the unbelieving heart is always ready to explain away the clearest evidence of truth.

V. 31-32 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

Many thought, when Jesus was crucified, they were passing judgment on Jesus. However, the cross was passing judgment on them – in their rejection of God in the rejection of His Son. Also, the judgment of His 'seed' occurred on the cross. The cross also brought about the defeat of Satan.

Jesus' being lifted up could refer to both the cross and His exaltation, which are definitely connected. Jesus' death was the pathway to His glorification; in fact, an integral part of it.

It is the One who has been "lifted up" (above this earth) that now draws all - elect Gentiles as well as Jews - unto Himself. That is why the translators have put "peoples" – not "people" referring to every person (i.e. people groups), referring to all without distinction, not all without exception. The preceding context has eliminated the latter option, as Jesus says this is a time of distinguishing those who love their loves from those who hate their lives. Thus, the "all" plainly refers to all of God's elect. The scope of the word "all" here is the same as in John 6:45 - "And they shall be all taught of God." It is the same "all" that the Father has given to Christ (John 6:37). The promise, 'I will draw all to Myself' describes that our Lord after His crucifixion would draw men of all nations and tribes and tongues to Himself - to believe in Him and be His disciples. Once crucified, He would become a great center of attraction, and draw to Himself; releasing from the Devil's usurped power; vast multitudes of all peoples, to be His servants and followers. Up to this time all the world had blindly hastened after Satan and followed him. After Christ's crucifixion great numbers would turn away from the power of Satan and become Christians. The New Covenant era is the time of belief.

V. 33-36 This He said, signifying by what death He would die. The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

Those in darkness cannot comprehend the Scriptures. They could not see the need for a dying Messiah. I sure do!

D. Scripture Fulfilled (12:37-50)

V. 37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him,

"They" seems to refer to the nation at large. Some after the resurrection were confused. How could Jesus be the Messiah when most of the Jews rejected Him? The Christian answer to this is that this unbelief is actually necessary as a fulfillment of Scripture.

V. 38-40 That the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

The widespread unbelief and blindness in the present day ought not to surprise us. It is just one of the evidences of the total corruption of fallen man. It seems that sometimes we only feebly grasp and believe the heart's wretched deceitfulness. Let us read our Bibles

more attentively, and search their contents more carefully. Even when Christ performed incredible miracles and preached the good news, there were large numbers of His hearers who remained completely unmoved.

We believe it had been better to render it thus: "They believed not, consequently the saying of Isaiah was fulfilled." God does not have to put forth any power to cause any sinner not to believe: if He leaves him to himself, he never will believe.

V. 41 These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

Even as Abraham saw Jesus' day and rejoiced, Isaiah, too, saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and spoke of Him. Oh, find delight reading the "gospel according to Isaiah!" We also here have the identity of the glorious Lord Isaiah beholds in Isaiah chapter 6!

V. 42-50 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."

This final narrative presents us with a brief but comprehensive view of all the Lord had taught and done during the course of His public ministry, and of the effects which His discourses and miracles had produced on the great body of His countrymen.

The closing section of John 12 forms an epilogue to that chapter of our Lord's life which had just been brought to a close in John 12:36. Four vital truths which had occupied a prominent place in Christ's oral ministry are here singled out: His appeal to the Father which sent Him (John 12:44, 45, 49); Himself the Light of the world (John 12:46); the danger of unbelief (John 12:47-49); and the end of faith (John 12:50). The result is clear that the guilt of unbelief rested inexcusably upon Israel. They'd rather commit murder than admit themselves wrong.