



Disciplers Bible Studies

JOHN
LESSON 13

Christ's Last Days of Public Ministry John 12:1-50

Introduction

The first 12 chapters of John's Gospel describe the public ministry and miraculous signs of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They focus on Jesus revealing the glory of His Father and Himself through supernatural events and divine discourses to a partially believing, largely unbelieving public. Starting next week, the last nine chapters will cover His private ministry, farewell discourses and passion. This week's lesson, Chapter 12, is the final chapter of Christ's public ministry describing His triumphal entry and explaining the "hour" of His coming glorification.

In Chapter 11, we learned of Jesus' all-powerful miracle of raising His friend, Lazarus, from the grave. This supernatural demonstration of having power over physical death was more than the chief priests and Pharisees could take. From that day on, they officially planned to kill Jesus. He no longer walked openly among the Jews but went away to Ephraim to await the Passover week and the climax of His earthly mission.

Outline of John 12:1-50

- I. Back to Bethany (12:1-11)
- II. Jesus' Triumphal Entry (12:12-19)
- III. Request of the Greeks (12:20-22)
- IV. Jesus' Answer (12:23-26)
- V. Commitment to the Cross (12:27-36)
- VI. Israel's Unbelief (12:37-43)
- VII. Jesus' Final Claim (12:44-50)

I. Back to Bethany (12:1-11)

A. Setting – Celebration Supper

Prior to His last Passover week, Jesus returned from Ephraim to the house of Simon, the leper, in Bethany (Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3). Near Jerusalem, this town was where He had called Lazarus from the tomb just a few months earlier. Lazarus, Mary and Martha were at Simon's house perhaps helping Simon host a celebration in honor of Lazarus' resurrection. They had prepared supper for

Jesus. Lazarus was reclining at the table with Him.

B. Mary's Anointing

Similar to an earlier date at Lazarus' and his sisters' home in Bethany, Mary worshiped Jesus while Martha served tables (Luke 10:38-42.) Here in Simon's home, Mary's heart overflowed with love and gratitude for her Lord and she anointed Jesus' feet with a very expensive ointment from India and wiped them with her hair. She humbly disregarded the Jewish tradition against ladies unbinding their hair in public. The house was filled with the fragrance of this costly, imported oil that came from the roots of the nard plant. Some, if not many, of the guests must have thought her gesture was extravagantly wasteful, even downright shocking. Many commentators believe that it was a symbolic act of consecrating her Lord to death and burial.

C. Judas' Objection

Judas objected to what he considered an excessive, uncalled for misuse of a pound of valuable ointment. He asked why this fragrant oil was not sold and used to help the poor. Three hundred denarii were a full year's wages for a working man in that culture. Jesus knew that Judas' motives were wrapped up in his own greed. As treasurer for the twelve disciples, Judas kept the money box and appropriated the contents for his own use. He was selfishly materialistic and not the least concerned about the poor.

D. Jesus' Response

Jesus' response probably meant that Mary's gracious act should be considered as anticipatory of the day of His burial. There would be no objection to her anointing His dead body on that day, so why not let her show her love and affection while He was still alive. Mark 14:6-9 contains a similar passage with the general sense of "Let Mary keep the credit of having performed the last rites for my burial here and now." Possibly, Mary sensed that Jesus was to die for the sins of the world and it evoked this act of absolute adoration to His Person. Jesus was always concerned for the poor. In His statement, "*The poor*

you have with you always,” He was comparing the unique opportunity that His impending death presented with the continuous need to help the poor, long after He was gone.

E. Plot to Kill Lazarus

When the Jerusalem Jews and others heard that Jesus was in Bethany, they came to see Him. The news had spread quickly about Jesus’ supernatural power over death and they wanted to see the resurrected Lazarus in person. There undoubtedly was intense curiosity and much controversy about the miracle, but many went away believing in Jesus. The chief priests, however, concluded that the increasing number of people witnessing Jesus and Lazarus would remember this incredible event as long as the two of them were around. More and more people would acknowledge Jesus as the resurrection and the life. Therefore, Lazarus also should be put to death.

II. Jesus’ Triumphal Entry (12:12-19)

A. The Gathering Multitude

The scene shifts from the quiet dinner with friends in Bethany to a great multitude on the streets of Jerusalem. They had come to the city early to purify themselves for the Passover. When they heard that (1) Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and (2) that He was on His way toward the city, they took palm branches and went out to welcome their Messiah. The multitude must have included Jerusalem residents and many Jews from Galilee where Jesus had had His greatest following.

B. Hosanna! The King of Israel

It was common practice in Israel to wave palm branches at national processions, celebrations and dedications (Leviticus 23:40.) On this occasion, the multitude was most likely using this national symbol to signal the popular belief that Messiah had appeared to bring national liberation from the Romans. They cried out, *“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!”* Hosanna comes from a Hebrew word meaning “give salvation now” or “save, we beseech Thee.” The palm branches gave rise to what we now call Palm Sunday.

C. The Father’s Timing

Interestingly, this was the only public demonstration that occurred during Jesus’ earthly ministry. It is another indication of the Father’s precise planning for the climax of Jesus’ redemptive mission.

The hostile Jewish leaders had not planned to kill Jesus at this particular time, but the excitement and great enthusiasm of the masses enraged and motivated them more than ever to carry out their plot.

D. Significance of the Donkey

Over 500 years before Christ was born, Zechariah 9:9 prophesied that the Messiah’s humble entry into Jerusalem would be on a donkey. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-38) all give more detail about how Jesus secured this docile animal. John merely wrote that He found a young donkey and sat on it. Jesus did not repudiate the title, King of Israel, but He did disclaim the multitude’s notion of a military/political victory over Rome. The symbolism of His riding a donkey versus a warhorse signifies that His reign would be governed by a peaceful policy. An entrance on a warhorse would have indicated a military policy. As King at His first coming, He would reign with the power of love and peace, not with military might. In contrast, however, at His second advent, He would come on a white horse to make war (Revelation 19:11-16.)

E. Composition of the Multitude

Two crowds are presented next - the group that was the eyewitness to Lazarus’ resurrection and the group comprised of Jerusalem residents and pilgrims that had come early to Jerusalem to purify themselves. The Lazarus group bore strong testimony of what they had seen and heard. The resident-pilgrimage crowd showed their appreciative response with palm branches and an escort into the city. The Pharisees were deeply aggravated as they watched this enthusiastic procession with Jesus gaining so much acclamation. They were frustrated by Jesus’ popularity, but were unable to take any action at this moment. Though they commented about the whole world going after Him, relatively few people had truly believed in Jesus.

III. The Request of the Greeks (12:20-22)

A. Who Are They?

John does not indicate where these Greeks were from. The New Testament often refers to Gentiles from the Greek-speaking world as Greeks. They may have originated in any part of the Greek-speaking world from nearby to farther away. They were a God-fearing group of Gentiles that had attached themselves to the Jewish way of life and synagogue worship without being fully converted to Judaism. Or, they may even have been Jewish proselytes (i.e.,

full-fledged converts to Judaism.) On occasion, Gentiles traveled to Jerusalem to worship at the Jewish festivals. The Jews received them in the synagogue where they could worship in the outer court of the Temple called the Court of the Gentiles.

B. What Do they Want?

The group of Greeks approached Philip and asked if they could have an interview with Jesus. They may have been curious because everyone was talking about Jesus. It is more likely that, since one or two days had elapsed between John 12:19 and 20, Jesus had been teaching at the Temple. Once again, as in John 2:13-17, He cast out the money changers and animal sellers. The outer court of the Temple had initially been divinely ordained to be a house of prayer for all nations. These Greeks could have been there and recognized Jesus' action as having been taken in the interest of Gentiles like themselves. Philip and Andrew told Jesus that the Greeks wanted to see Him.

Interpretive Note

It is worthy to note the differences between John's Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels on the Temple cleansings. John did not write about Jesus' second Temple cleansing just before His triumphal entry. On the other hand, Matthew 21:12-13 and Mark 11:15-17 both record one cleansing occurring just before His triumphal entry. Either there were two separate events or they were misplaced in the Gospel records. The differences between the cleansing incident in John 2:13-17 and the Synoptic Gospels, and the placement of these events in the chronology of Jesus' ministry, argue for two cleansings rather than one.

IV. Jesus' Answer (12:23-26)

A. The Hour Has Come

Jesus answered the disciples and the people standing, by saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified." This request of the Greeks was clearly the occasion for His announcement that the time for His death, resurrection and ascension was at hand. He told His listeners that the time was fast approaching when not only Jews and Gentiles, but many others, would come to enjoy the new life He would impart after His death. John did not indicate whether or not the Greeks were able to see and hear Jesus on this occasion. The Apostle simply may have been pointing out that the request of the Greeks stirred Jesus' heart and initiated His teaching about the widespread blessing that would result from His death.

B. The Son of Man

The title "*Son of Man*" was Jesus' favorite name for Himself. The title is used 94 times in the New Testament, most of the time by Christ Himself. It signifies several important characteristics of His divine-human nature according to the context in which it is used. Thus, it connotes His incarnation, His deity, His likeness to humanity, His sacrifice, His suffering, His humiliation and His glorification.

C. A Grain of Wheat

The Lord used the analogy of a grain of wheat to explain a great principle. A grain or kernel of wheat, put in the ground, died in order to bring forth life. Only then would it produce a stem, leaves, a head and more kernels for harvest. Similarly, Jesus would have to die and be put in the ground. After His death, He would live again. Not only would Jesus live again, but He would die that believers might live also. His life would have to be sacrificed before new life could be imparted to others. Like the grain of wheat, Jesus must die in order to produce life for those who would believe.

D. Two Kinds of Life

Jesus explained meaningful truths about two kinds of life. Applied to today's culture His truth means this. First is the life that loves and enjoys the things of the world. These are the people who relish and strive for the materialistic, hedonistic and/or sexually-oriented things of life. They focus on possessions, power, prestige, alcohol, drugs, immoral icons and other anti-God things our culture offers (James 4:4). The second kind of life does not live for the self-oriented things of the world, but secures itself in Christ, and serves and follows Him for life eternal. Jesus promised that everyone who lives this second kind of life will be honored by His Father (James 4:4.)

Application:

If you love this world and live for yourself selfishly, you lose your life in the sense of wasting it, now and forever. The short-sighted pleasures of this world come to a tragic end. Conversely, if you hate the anti-God things of this world and pursue the welfare of others, your unselfishness blesses you temporarily and you gain your salvation eternally. Do you participate in any way in the spiritual decay that is dominating our culture, or do you honestly accept Christ-centered discipleship as a divine premise to live by?

V. Commitment to the Cross (12:27-36)

A. His Troubled Soul

John then wrote of Jesus' deep moment of despair as He contemplated His hour. His soul was deeply troubled by the immediate prospect of going to the cross and carrying the unspeakable burden of human sin. His passion would include intense physical pain, temporary separation from His Father and bearing the Father's wrath for the sins of the world. Jesus' emotional desire to avoid the cross was countered immediately with His stronger desire and commitment to obey His Father completely. He said, *"For this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name."* He was ready to go into and exhaust this hour because it was the divinely appointed way for His glorification.

B. The Affirming Voice From Heaven

The people heard a voice from heaven acknowledging and authenticating Jesus as God's Son. It was a veiled revelation from God which some thought was thunder and others an angel. They heard the sound but could not distinguish the sense. Jesus, however, understood the articulate voice of God glorifying Himself through His Son's death, resurrection and ascension. He told the people that the heavenly voice had sounded for their benefit more than for His.

C. The Meaning of His Death

Jesus explained that His death on the cross would bring judgment on the world and on Satan. The world's values, standards and religions would be shown to be fraudulent and folly. Evil and iniquity would be atoned. Individuals who accepted His sacrificial death on the cross would not bring condemning judgment on themselves. His death on the cross also signaled defeat for Satan's power over sin and death. Believers would be delivered from Satan's domain of spiritual darkness and slavery to sin. However, by God's permission, the devil would be permitted to function in opposition to God until He is captured at Armageddon and later thrown into the pit. His eternal destruction is sure and certain, even though it is still in the future (Revelation 20:10.) Jesus closed His explanation of His redemptive death by again referring to the cross. When lifted up from the earth, He would be exalted and glorified. He would draw Gentiles as well as Jews to Himself like a great spiritual magnet.

E. Jesus' Final Public Statement

The crowd was still puzzled and confused by Jesus' words. He tried to help them understand with a final

public statement about light and darkness, *"Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you."* They needed to believe in Him as the Light before He died on the cross. After the cross, when the Light was no longer present with them, it would be more difficult to believe. Jesus then departed and was hidden from them.

D. Meaning of the Cross to Us

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend the suffering connected with the cross of Christ. His passion encompassed not only vicious scourging and cruel crucifixion, but the unbearable weight of the sins of mankind. He was made sin, not in an academic sense, but actually for you and me. God's justice required a holy, unblemished Lamb – His own Son – to atone for the sins of the world.

VI. Israel's Unbelief (12:37-43)

A. The Fulfillment of Prophecy

John then summarized Jesus' self-revelation to the world and the lack of Israel's response to it. Jesus had performed many signs and spoken many discourses, and yet most of the Jews were not believing Him. The reason for their unbelief is that prophecy had to be fulfilled. By God's Spirit, Isaiah had prophesied that Israel would not believe and, therefore, could not believe. They would not accept God's Son and the day came when they could not accept Him. God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. He had judicially taken this action because they refused to believe His precious Son.

B. Fear of the Rulers

Even though most of the Jews rejected Jesus, many of the rulers believed in Him. However, because of the Pharisees, these rulers would not confess Him. They were fearful of excommunication from the synagogue and they loved the approval of men more than the approval of God.

VII. Jesus' Final Claim (12:44-50)

As a climax to Christ's public ministry, John emphasized once again the critical significance of Jesus' words concerning belief and unbelief. Believing in Jesus meant believing in Him who sent Jesus. Rejecting Jesus meant rejecting the Father and turning one's back on the true Light. Unbelief was the same as passing judgment on oneself instead of accepting a Lord and Savior who could take away doubt and uncertainty about living and dying.