

"The Triumphal Entry"
John 11:54-12:50
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Welcome! Our reading starts at the tail end of Chapter 11. We are about midway through this Gospel, but we have already arrived at the last week of Jesus' life on Earth. The balance of this Gospel will focus on this last week, His death, and His resurrection. The time is just before the Passover - the first of the Feasts of the LORD. It is no coincidence that this final week of Jesus' life would be during a time that is dedicated to remembering how God saved His people from death that if, by faith and obedience, they sacrificed an unblemished lamb and sprinkled the blood over door posts to the front of their homes. The sinless, unblemished Lamb of God would soon have His own blood poured out on a cross in order to save people from their spiritual deaths.

The people are arriving in Jerusalem – it's the nicest time of year in March or April – typically 60-70 degrees during the day. So, what are the people doing leading up to this important holy day? They're all a buzz about whether or not Jesus is going to come to Jerusalem. They've just seen Him raise Lazarus from the dead, so their curiosity - not their allegiance - is at an all-time high. The Pharisees, which loosely translated means wolves in sheep's clothing, however, are looking for tips from the people, so they can arrest Him. This is not your typical Passover, and it never will be the same again.

In this Gospel, Jesus opened His public ministry at a wedding - He's going to close it at the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Clearly, Jesus placed a high value on the family and the home. A loving and Godly home where Jesus is welcomed is a powerful fortress - it should come as no surprise that the Devil has targeted so heavily the family and the home. Divorce, single parents, split homes - they're all evidence of the success the Devil has had in disrupting something that is so sacred to our Lord. I'm not saying Godly homes are void of marital or familial failures - the statistics, sadly, prove otherwise. However, our best weapon against the Devil is the welcomed and focused presence of the Lord Jesus Christ - the Word of God.

While the people are wondering about Jesus and the Pharisees are scheming to arrest Jesus, what is Jesus doing? He's having dinner with 3 of His closest friends – Mary, Martha, and Lazarus – along with His disciples. The number 3 is an important number in Scripture – it is a symbol of Divine Perfection. Some of the more notable examples are:

- The Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Three times in a year God commanded that the men of Israel were to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem (*Ex. 23:14,17 Deu. 16:16*)
- Jonah spent three days and three nights in the fish
- Jesus was in the tomb for 3 days

- For where two or three are gathered in My name, there Am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)

We see in the description of what Lazarus, Martha, and Mary are doing is a perfect picture of how every church should be modeled.

- **Service** – Martha is serving the meal
- **Fellowship** – Lazarus is reclining at the table with Jesus
- **Worship** – Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet pouring out very expensive spikenard on Jesus' feet

So, we have this scene with Mary pouring out the perfume on Jesus' feet. There are some things we need to take away from the scene. Mary is not the same woman who also wiped her hair on Jesus' feet. The other woman was a harlot and Mary probably would not appreciate being called this. True worship is costly. Unabashed and sincere worship of God - dropping to our knees, raising our hands, singing at the top of our lungs will likely cause problems with people who don't understand either Who we're worshipping or why. King David danced before the people with all his might and stripped down to his underwear - total uninhibited worship of the Lord. His wife mocked him and paid a heavy price for doing so. Have you ever allowed yourself to completely let go and worship God? It may be intimidating at first, but when you truly grasp the love He has for you and the extent He went to prove it and save you, you should begin to experience not only a desire to intensify your worship but also feel free to do it anytime and anywhere. The cost to you is nothing compared to the price He paid.

Your true nature will be revealed if you spend enough time in God's presence. Typically found in the Himalayas of India, the spikenard Mary poured out was worth 300 denarii - the equivalent of a year's wages. If you were to take the minimum wage today, which is \$8/hour, that would work out to more than \$16,000 for this bottle that would be poured out on Jesus' feet! This was likely her dowry, but she didn't feel like she was worthy having something so valuable - but Jesus was worthy. Again, real worship is costly, and Mary's nature and devotion to Jesus is revealed. Tragically, so is Judas'. He has spent roughly 3 straight years with Jesus, yet he shows that the Lord's teaching hasn't impacted him enough to overcome his love for money.

He throws out a phony complaint that the poor could be fed with the money that could be made by selling the perfume. John, writing in hindsight, points out Judas, the keeper of the money, had been skimming for himself.

Jesus sees right through Judas' statement and sees his real motivation. This is something we need to remind ourselves. God is not mocked - He is omniscient which means He knows all things at all times. We can't fool God. We can't hide our secrets from Him. I think that's a big reason why Christians don't get closer to God - they are afraid of being exposed for who they really are. Do you see the disconnect in this

thought process? In essence, we're trying to avoid revealing something to the **only** One who can heal us from it **AND** already knows about it! Let go. Confess. He loved you enough to die for you. He was resurrected, so we could live and fellowship with Him. Why would you want to try to keep it from Him? It makes no sense.

I said earlier that the people's curiosity, not their allegiance, was at an all-time high. This observation is born out of us learning that their interest in the resurrected Lazarus is just as high. It's more like a side show interest, though. However, the Pharisees' interest in Lazarus is more serious. In Lazarus, there is a powerful witness to the power of Jesus, so what's the best way to destroy the case for Jesus being the Messiah? Kill the evidence.

Approximately 200 years before these events, there was a man named Judas Maccabee who led a band of men who miraculously overcame a heinous Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes and his army and drove them from Jerusalem. Spontaneously, the people waved palm branches in their celebration of this as a symbol of their deliverance. Now, 200 years later, the people are once again experiencing oppression - this time by the Roman Empire. So, while the people are singing Hosanna - which means "save us, we pray, save us now" - they're really saying "Be Judas Maccabee - deliver us from the Romans." When they learn that's not what Jesus' agenda is, these same people will go from shouting "Hosanna" to "Crucify Him"! Shamefully, I must confess that there have been times my *praise* for Jesus has turned to *dismay*s for Him because He wasn't following my agenda. Then I look at the cross.....

The method of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is significant as it is yet another fulfillment of prophecy. Zechariah 9:9, "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Prophecy fulfillment is one of the strongest testimonies to the truth and accuracy of the Bible. Naysayers will look at examples like these and say Jesus engineered these actions to prove He was the Messiah. The truth is that that's exactly right! But it was only done out of obedience.

There are many prophecies that Jesus fulfilled that He had no control over including when He was born, where He was born, and who His parents were. Not only do I not have a problem with these types of fulfilled prophecies - where Jesus can manage the action, but also, I am grateful that He is so faithful to be so obedient. That brings me comfort that He is true to His Word. Think about where we are at in this story. He is getting all this praise - you know there had to be a part of Him that would have liked to just become the King right then because of the love of He had for *those* people. But He didn't - for the love He had for *this* people - each of us, He knew He had to go to the cross to be *our* King.

We then have a scene which I think is important for us Gentiles to take note. There are certain Greeks who come to worship at the feast. Jesus is probably in the temple,

and the Greeks are restricted from entering the part of the temple Jesus is in. They approach Philip (the only disciple with a Greek name) asking Him to bring them to Jesus. Philip goes to Andrew, and Andrew takes Him to Jesus. The NIV version quotes Jesus statement that the hour has come for Him to be glorified and then He proceeds with the telling of the story of a kernel of wheat must die in order to produce fruit. It's not clear in the NIV who Jesus is addressing these statements to. The KJV and the NKJV begin verse 23 with the words, "And Jesus answered *them*, ..." I believe the "them" included both the disciples and the Greeks.

Jesus would typically reference Old Testament prophecies when speaking at critical moments during His ministry. Well, we are now heading into the shadow of the cross – it doesn't get more critical than this. Yet, this time He refers to a fact of science to make a point - something that the Greeks would likely be better able to relate to. In the shadow of the horrors of the cross, our Lord took time to speak to the Gentiles regarding the significance of what was about to happen on a level they would understand. Today, He speaks to each of us in ways that we can relate to - by music, by His Word, by His creation, or maybe even by long-winded POW lecturers! The point Jesus is making to these people is that in order to achieve the fruit He desires - saved souls like us - He first must die. His death, His blood must be spilled on that cross so that we may be delivered from spiritual death into spiritual life. The presence of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives is the evidence of the fruit that has come forth from His death.

Jesus gets their **mental** attention with the scientific statement – now He wants their **heart** attention. John 12:25-26, "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." What's He doing here? He is defining what it means to be a true subject in **His** Kingdom – the Kingdom of God. He's about to pay the greatest price one can pay – as our King. So here He's telling them in order for them to truly be a part of His Kingdom, they're going to have to pay a price as well.

Jesus wants us to live life as we were originally designed to live it – in the constant loving presence of and relationship with God. But He recognizes that's not possible in our sinful state, so He draws a line in the sand and basically says, "I can't be your King if you want to keep living life like you are – living it for yourself and the lusts of the things of this world." He's telling them things have to change, and that change begins with following Him. What does that look like? Mark 8:34, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." In order for us to live in the Kingdom of God, we must deny the temptations of this world, take up our cross, and follow Him. He tells us we are His servants if we do this.

He also promises that His Father will honor those who do this. Remember, God cannot lie, so His promises are sure. Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is alive and

active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. God's Word is a constant reminder to us that there is a difference between living in the Kingdom of God and living in a fallen world. It clearly tells us attempting to live in both these worlds does not work. When you read Scripture, do you sense the intention of God's desire to separate you unto Him? You should because that's what it means when it says it "penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit." God is a jealous God – He wants **all** of you for Himself.

In verses 27-30, we get a glimpse into the humanity of Jesus as well as a clear demonstration of the intimacy of His relationship with the Father. He's sensing the impending darkness of the cross, and He's admitting this has Him troubled. However, we also hear His courage and focus on His true mission – to glorify His Father's name. In terms of this story, what does that mean? How does Jesus being crucified glorify His Father? Let's face it, how does a Father who is willing to let His only begotten Son be wrongfully accused, be beaten, be scourged, and be crucified deserve any glory at all?

Because of what the *purpose of this plan* is to accomplish. This plan will provide the **ONLY** mechanism to which people may be redeemed – to be permanently forgiven for their sins and to have the assurance of an immediate establishment of a personal relationship with their Creator and to live with Him – even into eternity. That is what is going on here. God, who made us and then watched us turn our backs on Him, still loved us so much that He developed a plan that ONLY He could carry out. That centerpiece of that plan was to watch His Son be tortured and killed by the very people whom He came to save. That is a Father who deserves to be glorified.

The Father confirms to His Son that His name has been glorified, and it will be again. When? Easter morning. This is the third time we hear of the Father speaking to Jesus. We first heard Him at Jesus' baptism – the beginning of His ministry. The Second time is at the Mount of Transfiguration – the middle of His ministry. Now we hear Him at the end of His ministry.

We then get into some verses where there is some confusion. John 12:31, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." Does anyone in this room feel like the prince of this world, Satan, has been driven out of their lives? Neither do I. So, what's the deal? If you remember back with King David, Samuel anointed David to be the new King of Israel. However, Saul was the King at the time. Even though David was rightfully the King, it took 20 years for Him to finally take His position while Saul made life miserable for him during that time. That's where we are now – Jesus is the King, and He is the rightful owner of this world – He established that on the cross and His resurrection. He just hasn't taken possession to that which He has redeemed.

Therefore, Satan is causing as much trouble as he can until the real King comes and takes possession. I believe that is going to happen very, very soon. Jesus goes on to say in John 12:32-34 that He's going to be lifted up, and the people don't understand how He can be killed and also be, as Moses said in Exodus 3:18, "The LORD [who] shall reign forever." They weren't getting the idea that Jesus was in effect going to come twice – first as the humble Lamb of God and then Secondly, as the victorious and conquering Redeemer. What a blessing the Word of God is that it gives us these great promises of hope and deliverance!

Jesus is now drawing His public ministry to a close. Carol was kind enough to show me the lecture she wrote in the past for this reading – it's very good and, quite frankly, I can't improve on it, so I'm just going to steal this piece of it! His ministry is now going to convert to a private one – to His disciples. As the chapter closes, Jesus tells us:

- He is equal with God the Father (vs. 44-45)
- He came to rescue people from spiritual darkness (vs. 46)
- His primary objective was to save – not to judge (vs. 47)
- His words will judge the disobedient on the last day (vs. 48)
- His words are the words of the Father (vs. 49-50)
- Obedience to God's command brings eternal life (vs. 50)

This is a great compact summary of the gospel for our use

When I was a child, there was always a sense of comfort when one of my parents took my hand. Maybe it was to cross the street to make sure I got from one point to the other safely. Maybe it was I was in the middle of a crowd of strangers, and having my hand held gave me a sense of protection. Or maybe holding my hand was simply a gesture of love from a parent – they just *wanted* to hold my hand. Regardless of the circumstance, I knew it made me feel better. Many of you know that my wife and my family have been going through a storm for the last 2 1/2 years. I am certain **ALL** of you have either gone through, are going through, or will go through storms and difficult times. I will confess that many times during our storm we have asked, "Why"? or cried out, "We don't understand!" We have desperately asked for help. In effect, we are crying out for God to hold our hand – we need His guidance; we need His protection; we need His love.

In my preparation for this lecture, it was revealed to me that the hand I'm trying to grasp hold of is ***nail-pierced***. I never really put that together until getting ready for this lecture. This is what makes Jesus such an amazing Savior – He is willing to get personal – if we are. There is so much of life that I truly don't understand – especially these days. I can't make sense of the relentless suffering that my wife has had to endure. I suppose many of you can relate in your own lives – you simply don't understand why all this suffering is going on. I'm going to say something that will likely

upset many of you, but I've come to the clear conclusion that it is true – at least it is for my life. God **wanted** us to suffer – He **wants** us to feel this pain.

Isaiah tells us in the great Messianic Chapter 53 of his book that is “pleased the Lord to bruise Him – Him being Jesus. If God is not above having His Son suffer, what makes us think we’re above it? Now let me be clear, I don’t believe for a moment that God takes any joy whatsoever in our suffering. We learned in last week’s reading that Jesus wept over the suffering of His friends. Therefore, as certain as I am God **wants** us to experience this dark season, I’m just as certain He takes no joy in it. The reasons I can come to this conclusion is the foundations of my faith which are:

- **Isaiah 53:10a:** Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him (NKJV)
- God’s foundational character trait is love (**1 John 4:8b**)
- God is good (**Psalm 34:8a**)
- I was created and chosen by Him for His good pleasure (**Ephesians 1:4-5**)

For me, life simply doesn’t make a bit of sense if these statements aren’t true. I also can come to this conclusion because I’m absolutely certain I would not be pursuing Him as much as I am had it not been for what we’re going through. I would not be reaching out for His hand if I were not suffering. He has never left my side, although I will tell you it has felt like it many times. I’m now beginning to more fully understand Romans 8:18 which says, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

In other words, whatever God has in store for us sometime in the future, it is so wonderful and so glorious, He is willing to put or allow us to go through this suffering because what we will take from it will lead us to this future destination of glory. Now – I **still** don’t understand what is going on or why. I **still** can barely stand watching my wife suffer daily. I **still** don’t understand why economically we are taking such a hit. I have to come to the conclusion, though, that understanding the what, who, when, where, and why of our lives **is not the point**.

The **point** is to reach out to His hand – the nail-pierced hand – the hand that **does** understand what it means to suffer. As I hold that hand – His hand, I find His guidance, His protection, and His love. As dark and evil as what is going on around us – all of us, the cross of Christ demonstrates that Light wins out over darkness. It proves God’s love for us. My focus on “what **I don’t** understand” is changing to the “**One who does** understand”. Are you going through a storm? Do you need to know your safe, your protected, and your loved? Reach out to His nail-pierced hand. I can assure you He’s extending it to you. Take hold of it – He won’t let you go. Let’s pray.