

“The Triumphal Entry”

John 11:55-12:50

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I have the privilege and the pleasure of welcoming you to our first large group gathering of 2025.

I’m sure that this past Christmas you received lovely cards and heard divine Christmas carol lyrics wishing you a Merry Christmas and “peace on earth.” These words and lyrics are not only beautiful, but they’re scriptural (Luke 2:14) and in sharp contrast as to how Jesus, Himself, describes His purpose on earth. He exclaimed that He did not come to bring peace, but to bring division (Luke 12:51-53).

We have already seen the polarization of love and hate and the intense emotions that swirled around His ministry. From our previous lessons, we know there is no one else like Jesus who divides sheep from goats, wheat from tares, and believers from unbelievers. (Matt 25:32-33; Matthew 13:24–30; Matt.13:36-43)

The first eleven chapters of the Gospel of John describe the three-year ministry of Jesus Christ from the Apostle John’s perspective. The second half of the book covers chapter 12 to its end, which occurs over a timespan of just one week. Time is short! The clock is ticking and Jesus had much to do before the Passover.

In this week’s lesson, we will examine Jesus’ last few days before the festival and the urgency He felt to do His Father’s will. We will look deeper into the following events:

- A Dinner at Bethany
- The Triumphal Entry
- Jesus Delivers His Last Public Message

Through the context of these events, we will identify the Passover participants—those in Jesus’ inner circle, the religious leaders, and those who only knew of Him—and their reactions and attitudes toward Him as the Passion Week began.

In chapter 11, we studied how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead - the final culminating, public miracle of Jesus. This news spread quickly and Lazarus had become the most well-known resident in the small village of Bethany, which is a couple of miles east of Jerusalem.

We saw the pieces of God’s plan falling into place. It is no accident that this miracle occurred so near Jerusalem. I believe that this part of God’s plan was saved for the proximity of Jerusalem so the news of this miracle would travel from Bethany to those in Jerusalem where it would be the subject of many conversations during a time when Jerusalem was filled to overflowing with men, women, and children.

In John 11:55, we see that many people traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the Passover festival. Information gleaned from Josephus, the great historian of the first century, disclosed temple records that indicated at least 250,000 sheep were slaughtered in the temple during this particular Passover. One lamb was sacrificed for an average-size household of ten people. When you do the math, it makes sense that there would have been 2.5 million people flooding into Jerusalem. Imagine a crowd of over two million people jammed into a city only a few miles square, standing room only, sheep everywhere.

Everyone was looking for Jesus. He was the most popular person in the nation. There had never been anyone like Him as either a teacher or a miracle worker. People arrived early to attend all of the ceremonies, purchase their animals, change their coins, complete the purification rituals and make the necessary preparations to celebrate the Passover that would occur at the end of the week.

Can you imagine the conversations that must have gone on as the residents and sojourners rubbed shoulders with one another during the endless rituals? Verse 56 of chapter 11 tells us that the people were looking for Jesus and asking one another if they thought He would show up to the festival at all.

We learn from the last few verses of chapter 11 that Jesus avoided the religious leaders. He had no need for further discourse with them. He had said all that He needed to say. Each of the religious leaders had made up his mind about Him. The die had been cast.

The chapter ends with these words: "The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest Him" (John 11:57). In short, Jesus was a "wanted man."

Chapter 12 marks a significant transition in Jesus' life. It delineates the shift from His public ministry to private mentoring. It's interesting to note that the pace of the narrative slows as the intensity of emotions accelerates.

As the appointed "hour" of Jesus' glory approached, He spent His final week in the company of His closest friends and preparing His disciples for what lay ahead, all the while walking the path to the cross that His Father had prepared beforehand.

Dinner at Bethany

As chapter 12 opens, we find Jesus in Bethany spending precious time with His circle of friends at a dinner six days before the Passover. According to the parallel account of this in the Synoptic Gospels, Simon who was a Pharisee hosted a supper in honor of Jesus (Matt. 26:6-13 Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50.) If the four accounts describe the same event as many theologians believe to be true, this Simon had been known as Simon the Leper, but no longer as Jesus had healed his leprosy.

Simon's invitation to dinner must have meant a lot to Jesus. After all, the Pharisees were already plotting to place Him on death row and we know they were ready to charge Lazarus as an accomplice to Jesus whom they identified as a blasphemer! Too many people were believing in Jesus as the Messiah and honoring Him above the religious leaders. These prideful and power-hungry leaders' felt that both Jesus and Lazarus were becoming a threat to their power.

We know that the Lazarus family was well-represented at this event as Lazarus' sister Martha was serving and fulfilling her role as I like to call her - "the Hostess with the Mostess." Lazarus was reclining at the table with Jesus as were the other apostles when his sister Mary approached Jesus with about a pint of pure spikenard, which was an extraordinarily expensive perfume. She anointed Jesus' head (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3). Then Mary emptied the alabaster jar of perfume on his feet in a lavish gesture of worship. She drenched His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. "The house was filled with fragrance" (John 12:3).

This was a risky way for Mary to show her devotion to Jesus. Her behavior violated several cultural norms. First, society expected her to be serving not anointing. Second, touching the feet of another person was considered degrading. Mary's wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair - the crowning glory of a woman - left her with no public dignity. Third, a woman was never to take her hair down in public. The lack of a head covering in Jewish culture suggested the lack of sexual modesty. Fourth, her extravagant use of the perfume probably left her without a dowry, which meant her chances of having a favorable marriage were decreased.

In John 12:4, Judas Iscariot, apostle and soon to be Jesus' betrayer, watched in disbelief as such an expensive treasure was wasted on anointing one's feet - even if the feet belonged to Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. In verse 5, Judas voiced his objection with a pious phrase as he said, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."

Scriptures reveal that Judas did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief (John 12:6). We know that as keeper of the money bag, Judas would help himself to its contents. This trusted treasurer had been embezzling the group's reserve for some time.

One must wonder how Judas could have gone so wrong. As far as we know, Judas was learning and doing all the things that the disciples were chosen and appointed to do. He just did them with a corrupt heart.

Ladies, did you appreciate the endearing moment when Jesus came to the defense of Mary and her extreme devotion when He told Judas to leave her alone? Then Jesus made His shell-shocking statement in verse 7 as He said: "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

I believe the following quote from Dr. Lloyd J. Morgan summarizes this portion of Scripture succinctly: "Judas, blinded in self-interest, criticized her action, and so revealed himself as utterly opposed to the very spirit of the Lord himself."

Mary's brother Lazarus also played a major role in God's plan. His being restored to life was evidence of Jesus' power as a miracle worker. We learn from verse 9 that Jesus was not the only person with a target on His back. As Lazarus' popularity as the "man who was raised from the dead" was spreading, more people were believing in Jesus' power and the religious officials felt more threatened and fearful of this movement. And so, they plotted to kill Lazarus "for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in Him" (John 12:10).

The Triumphal Entry

It was Sunday by our calendar, the sixth day of April and four days before the Feast of the Passover. We have come to know the day as Palm Sunday. It was the very day that had been prophesied approximately 500 years earlier (Daniel 9:24-27). The day had come and would soon be history.

The congested and unimaginable scene is summarized by Jon Courson in the following quote: "And in the midst of the crowd of people and bleating sheep enters the Lamb of God – coming to die for the sins of the world."

In studying the parallel accounts of the Triumphal Entry in the Synoptic gospels, I was touched to read that as Jesus approached Jerusalem, He wept over this "city of peace." I know that this had to be an overwhelmingly emotional moment for Him. Not only was He facing the extreme torture that was ahead of Him, but He also knew the fate that lay before Jerusalem. The holy city would be destroyed because God's people did not recognize the time of God's coming to them. (Luke 19:37-44)

In verse 12, John's narrative takes us to a scene in Jerusalem where a large and enthusiastic crowd gathered for what seemed like a patriotic parade. The crowd included Passover visitors from outside Judea, the local people who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus, the religious leaders who were greatly concerned about what Jesus might do at the feast, and the Roman soldiers who were probably there for crowd control. Those present were expectant and wondering if Jesus would show up.

The spectators became active participants when they heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. They excitedly obtained palm branches and welcomed the expected king as they waved the branches in His honor and shouted His praises.

Although Jesus had entered the gates of Jerusalem many times, this time he entered as king. However, unlike a conquering warrior king, He entered the city on a symbol of peace. He rode on a humble donkey rather than on a great white steed.

According to Warren W. Wiersbe, "This was the only public demonstration that our Lord allowed while He was ministering on earth." Jesus' purpose was to obey the will of His Father, as well as to fulfill the prophecy recorded in 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."

The crowd also greeted Jesus with words from the Messianic Psalm 118:25-26 which says: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" The meaning of Hosanna is "save now," and on this day the crowd received Jesus as their triumphant Messiah. On this day, Jesus not only fulfilled prophecy. He was proclaiming the character of His kingdom. It was a spiritual kingdom not a military kingdom. He came in peace, not war.

We know this same crowd that ushered Jesus in with palm fronds and cheers would soon desert Him because He obeyed His Heavenly Father rather than meeting their expectations of a conquering hero!

As we revisit verse 23, we read that Jesus' time had finally come. In this passage, there were Greeks who wished to speak to Jesus. We don't know if Jesus addressed them. What we do know is that *Jesus declared that the hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified* (John 12:23).

Jesus Delivers His Last Public Message

Now that everything was in place, Jesus gave His final public teaching before His crucifixion. He shared an analogy of why He must die by simply saying, "I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." And with that explanation, Jesus shared the necessity of His sacrificial death.

I think it is important for us to examine the last part of chapter 12 as Jesus faced His fear. He refused to give in to His humanity. It would not stop Him from doing the will of His Father. In verse 27, He disclosed that His soul was troubled. Jesus longed to avoid the agonies of the cross that were before Him, but He accepted His Father's plan and understood that His very purpose was to see it through in order that His sacrifice would change everything for anyone who had faith in Him as the Christ. God's plan ensured that both Jew and Gentile would be considered children of God through their faith (Galatians 3:26-29).

Jesus asked for His Father to glorify His name! Now just imagine this, a voice came from heaven. It was the voice of God who said, "I have glorified it, and will

glorify it again." The people who heard it said it thundered; others said an angel had spoken to Jesus. Jesus clarified that the voice was for their benefit, not for His.

Don't miss the significance of Jesus' words as He stated, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Jesus said this to show the kind of death He was going to die" (John 12:31-33).

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus and kill him.

Application

John 11:55-12:50 is so rich in important events and lessons contained in the passages that we studied this week. Today, let's allow God to speak to each of us as we review the power of God's Word in Chapter 12 and how He wants us to...

- 1) Worship and serve Him.
- 2) Firm up our relationship with the Lord as we increase our faith and intentionally spend time to know Him more personally.

A very important part of every believer's life is worshipping the Lord. Lesson 12 provides us with very strong examples of worship. Lazarus and his siblings were uniquely gifted and they freely gave of their talents in their worship to God. Martha was a consummate hostess, Mary gave extravagantly, and Lazarus gratefully shared his testimony with others about Jesus, the Son of God who raised him from the dead.

Judas' heart condition stands in sharp contrast to that of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus and their worship of their Heavenly Father. Judas used his talent to serve himself. Judas spent three whole years under the tutelage of Jesus; and yet, he remained a self-serving, greedy thief. As it turns out, going through the motions of ministry and surrendering your heart and life to Christ are two very different things. Judas failed to do the will of the Father in heaven. Let's face it--his heart wasn't in it.

This lesson encourages and challenges us to take inventory of our God-given talents and abilities and use them in worship of our Savior and King! Our worship can take on many forms: spending time in prayer and supplication, giving thanks, singing praises to our Lord, giving our tithes and offerings, praying for and encouraging others, and loving them with the compassion that Jesus has shown us as we share our faith with all who will listen. Even tying another's shoe can be worshipping and serving. As my almost 97-year-old mother requires more assistance these days, I am learning more humility and ways to show her my love.

We must take time to reflect on our service to our Lord and assess if our service is what He is directing us to accomplish in this new year.

As the treasurer of People of the Word, I took this lesson very seriously. Because Judas was devoted to money, I was reminded of Matthew 6:24 – “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.” I want to serve Him with a pure heart and do the best job I can in His service.

Perhaps it is time for each of us to reflect on our worship and service to the Lord. Let’s be sure that our hearts are pure and we are desiring to know God’s will and to serve him uniquely and sincerely.

The second lesson comes with a sobering warning from Matthew 7:21 which says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). We must solidify our relationship with God, be firm in our faith, and develop a laser-like focus in accomplishing His will for each of us.

It is tragic to know that even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, the onlookers still would not believe in Him. Even those Pharisees who believed that Jesus was the Messiah would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue, “For they loved human praise more than praise from God” (John 12:43).

The triumphal entry informs us that even when we praise the Lord, we may not really know Him. The welcome wagon committee picked up palm branches and even quoted Scripture believing that Jesus had come as their Savior and king. Even though Jesus clearly fulfilled prophecy, He didn’t fit the warrior king mold they perceived He should. These enthusiastic “believers” will soon drop their palm branches and turn their backs on the one they had been waiting for all of their lives.

Do you think that Mary might have been the only one who really understood what would happen to Jesus? Like Mary, we need to spend time with Jesus - listening, learning, and gaining insight as we seek to draw nearer to Him each day.

Mary’s story will not be forgotten. Jesus gave her quite a tribute when He announced she would be remembered wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world. He stated, “What this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her” (Mark 14:9). It is apparent that God knows each of us and He is aware of our devotion or lack of devotion to Him.

Mary prompts us to not wait for “someday.” We should show our love to our Lord and to others now. I believe God is urging us to write the letter, make the apology, purchase the gift, and hug a mother-in-law so as not to miss the moment that we might regret later. We know our time on earth is short.

In verses 25-26, Jesus promises that “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.”

It makes sense that if we want to share in Jesus’ glory, we must be willing to die to self and follow Him. If you haven’t surrendered your life to Him, make this your moment. He has already chosen you. Choose Him back.

The next time Israel sees the King, it will be different. He will come in glory. It will be a scene of victory and each of us will need to be ready.

Allow me to close with one last quote in regard to this new year. This quote is from our very own Laura Rutherford who recently said, “I am so excited to see how God will bless People of the Word in the future!” I join her in that sentiment as I wish you a blessed 2025!