

LESSON #18 CHAPTER 12: 1-19***The Triumphal Entry***

Divine Attribute: Ruler

Theological concept: Victory on the Cross

Geographical location: Bethany, Jerusalem

Chapter Structure

12: 1-11 Jesus was anointed at Bethany in advance of his death in Jerusalem

12: 12-19 Jesus entered Jerusalem as the Messiah King Predicted

Spiritual Principles:

P1 God judges us by our hearts

Today's lesson ...

In the last lesson, we learned about the Lord's greatest miracle - the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which aroused the most response from His friends and enemies.

Today, we come nearer to the first historical 'Good Friday' - only six days to go. In retrospect of Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, John recorded two significant events. First is the anointing of Jesus by Mary, which Jesus said was done in advance for his burial in Jerusalem; second is the welcoming parade Jerusalem gave to her king. Both events led to more people believing in Jesus and greater animosity from the religious leaders.

A.12: 1-11 Jesus was anointed at Bethany in advance of his death in Jerusalem

Jesus knew that he would be given to the Jewish leaders for crucifixion in no time, yet he returned to Bethany, which was only two miles from the very citadel of His enemies. Clearly, the Lord had no intention of avoiding death because it was how he was to glorify the Father (13:1). During the passion week, the Lord stayed in the house of his good friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, a home that was filled with love and warm friendship for Jesus.

A feast was given in Jesus' honour. It may have been intended in part to celebrate Lazarus's recent recovery from the tomb, as Lazarus was also treated as one of the guests of honour alongside the Lord who raised him from the dead. Again, Martha served, and Mary worshipped the Lord.

Side-note: The account of Mary's anointing of her Lord is found also in Matthew 26 and Mark 14. But it must not be confused with the similar account in Luke 7, which took place in Galilee at the house of the Pharisee Simon.

3 Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

A pound of pure nard ointment would have cost a labourer a year's wages (v.5). Such an extravagant outpouring was an act of pure love and worship. Mary's generous and unusual way of anointing (letting down her hair and using it to wipe Jesus's feet was something Jewish women would not do in public) was unanticipated and uncomfortable in the eyes of even the disciples, causing a brief silence, which was soon broken by a voice of protest from the traitor,

"Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (v.5)

Was it unseemly for Mary to spend money in this manner? The answer is in Jesus' response in verses 7,8.

"Jesus said, 'Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.'"

Compare with *"she has done it to prepare me for burial"* (Mat 26:12) or *"she has anointed my body beforehand for burial"* (Mark 14:8) We can see clearly that Jesus approved what Mary was doing for him. He was saying, "Let her keep the credit of having performed the last rites for me here and now, against the day of my burial." (*F.F.Bruce Exposition Notes on the Gospel of John, p.257*)

No one would object if the same amount of ointment were used to anoint Jesus' dead body in due course because unusual expenses at a funeral were not regarded as unseemly in Jesus' time. If that is the case, why should anyone object if it is poured over Jesus while he is still alive and able to appreciate her love?

But there is a more important message in Jesus' approval, *"you do not always have me"* Jesus was telling them that "My death is about to happen."

Did Mary know that Jesus' death was near? Did she do it as a burial anointment in mind? Some commentaries interpreted Jesus' words in verse 7 as Mary knew Jesus' death was at hand. They further argued that this was why she did not appear at Jesus' tomb on Sunday. Even though such a conclusion is appealing, this way of interpretation is reading into the text instead of reading out of the text because the textual evidence is inconclusive.

We can only say that it's possible that Mary had a revelation that Christ's death was near or that the Holy Spirit guided her into performing this act, signifying a funeral rite, without she knowing Christ's impending death. (The Syriac Bible translates it as *"she hath done it, as it were, to bury me."*)

The other disciples probably agreed with Judas that Mary was not a good steward of money. So do we. People sometimes quote verse 5 *"Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"* without realising that they echo a criticism that the Lord rebutted, *"Leave her alone."* *"Why do you bother this woman?"* (Mk 14:6)

Two things we must know. First, Jesus is not teaching that we can be excused from our family or social duties, such as charity or parental support... if we offer the money to him instead.

Second, Jesus rebuked Judas not because he had misunderstood or criticised Mary but because of his hypocrisy and evil intent (v.6). At that time, the other disciples did not know Judas was a thief or a

traitor yet. John's interpretation of Judas' protest in verse 6 was viewed in light of his betrayal of Jesus. But Jesus knew. God's dealing with us is always just and most appropriate. God will rebuke us if we do something good out of evil intent. If we do something bad out of innocence, God will forgive us. Didn't Jesus say that God rejected the Pharisees who prayed impressively but were self-righteous and accepted the tax collector who mourned for his sinfulness? Didn't Jesus say that even some who prophesy or perform miracles cannot enter the Kingdom of God "[but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.](#)" (Mat 7:21) ***God judges us by our hearts, i.e. whether we do the will of God from the heart!***

P1 God judges us by our hearts

Mary might have been extravagant on this matter, but Jesus said, "[She has done a beautiful thing to me.](#)" (Mat 26:10). It was beautiful because it was a gesture of love out of hearty devotion and pure love to God.

Life application

Do we not tend to misunderstand and criticise when someone gives his or her best to the Lord? Let's be cautious not to let envy or pride obscure our vision, preventing us from appreciating the beauty and fragrance of good worship. When the Holy Spirit opens the ear of our soul to hear the Lord say, "Leave my servant alone! Don't make life difficult for him/her!" Let us back off and repent.

[⁹Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.](#)

The feast became a public occasion because a large crowd had come to see Jesus, who could restore life, and Lazarus, who had returned from the dead. We can imagine Lazarus being shielded by his sisters from offensive curiosity. Lazarus was now a star witness to the power of Jesus, a sign of Jesus being the Resurrection and the Life, and many people believed in Jesus as a result of seeing him and Jesus. And many of them followed Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover (vv.17,18).

The chief priests, led by Caiaphas, had already made plans to kill Jesus (11:50-53), and now they have decided to add Lazarus to their list. They were consumed by jealousy, blinded by fear and enslaved by their rebellion against God!

B. 12: 12-19 Jesus entered Jerusalem as the Messiah King Predicted

John shifted the scene from a feast in Bethany to a noisy public parade in Jerusalem. All four gospels recorded this event. This was the only "public demonstration" that our Lord allowed while ministering on earth. His purpose was to fulfil the Old Testament prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. The result was a growing animosity on the part of the religious leaders, eventually leading to the crucifixion of the Saviour, which he had foreseen.

["¹² The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.](#)

The news of the coming of the One who could resurrect the dead reached Jerusalem (v.18) and excited the pilgrims who had come in advance of the Passover to purify themselves (11:55). Before Jesus arrived, a large crowd gathered at the city gate to receive Jesus in great enthusiasm and keen expectation.

¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (vv. 12,13)

Side-note: Nothing is recorded about the Roman’s viewpoint, but it is certain that they kept a close watch that day. During the annual Passover Feast, it was not uncommon for some of the Jewish nationalists to try to arouse the people.

The palm branches they carried have given the anniversary of this event in the Christian calendar its name: Palm Sunday (though the day does not appear to have been a Sunday by John’s chronology)

Date palms grew commonly and are still growing in and around Jerusalem and Jericho. In Leviticus 23:40, the Jews were commanded to rejoice before the Lord for seven days with ‘branches of palm trees’ during the feast of the Tabernacle.

On this occasion, by the words with which they greeted the Lord, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” the palm branches carried the people’s expectation of imminent national liberation.

The word ‘Hosanna’ is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *hōsā-âh-nā*, which means ‘give salvation now’ or ‘give victory now’. These words elaborate on Psalm 118:25, a psalm of thanksgiving to God for granting Israel victory: “Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!”

The crowd certainly had their own ideas of what the arrival of Israel’s King meant. However, while Jesus accepted the title they gave him, he repudiated the military and political ideas which they associated with the title with his following action:

“¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,
¹⁵ Fear not, daughter of Zion;
 behold, your king is coming,
 sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

Jesus’ riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was an acted parable designed to correct the misguided expectations of the pilgrim crowds and to show the city its true way of peace. The Lord deliberately arranged to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-10

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
 Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
 Behold, your king is coming to you;
 righteous and having salvation is he,
 humble and mounted on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
 and the war horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall speak peace to the nations;
his rule shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

If we recall, as early as John 6:15, by the sea of Galilee, the Lord could have commanded a ready army had he chosen to enter Jerusalem by a war horse. But he followed the Father's way and offered Jerusalem the policy of quiet and patient submission. Of course, the pilgrims could not appreciate the meaning of his action; even the disciples' comprehension was a slow dawning(v.16).

"17 The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. 18 The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign."

Jesus arrived with another crowd—those with him when he raised Lazarus from the grave. Verses 17 and 18 tell us that when they met the crowd from Jerusalem, they couldn't help but tell them about what they saw with their own eyes! The entire area was filled with fervent personal evangelism! The Jerusalem crowd had earlier heard of the miracle of resurrection. Now, they heard it firsthand from the eyewitnesses, and many believed and received Jesus as their king!

Life application

Dear brothers and sisters, like Lazarus, we were also raised from spiritual death. Are you willing to let God use you to pass on the miraculous work He performed on you? Let us not shy away from personal evangelism.

It certainly looked as though Jesus was seeking to incite a revolution and establish himself as king of the Jews. So the Pharisees had reason for saying, "You see, you cannot do anything about it. See, the whole world has gone off after him!" Most of the Pharisees took the view that the Roman occupation, oppressive as it might be, was God's will and must be endured until He removed it. (Whereas the Zealots held that pagan occupation of Israel's land was an insult to Israel's God, and any recognition given to the occupying power constituted high treason against God (this is a new doctrine of Judaism at that time); The Sadducees, on the hand, viewed laying in co-operation with the occupying power is the path of wisdom.)

But their qualms were groundless, for Jesus had no intention of doing what they thought he would do. Right from the beginning, the Devil had offered him this route but was turned down. Our Lord had resolutely set out for Jerusalem because he knew the time for him to be taken up to heaven had come. (Luke 9:51)

Closing

This extraordinary event was known as the "triumphal entry" in light of what the peaceful policy would lead to - many captives of sin and death are set free through the crucifixion of Christ. Christ's death on the cross is a sweeping and irreversible victory over sin and death! Today, many souls are still being set free. It will continue to be so until our King returns from heaven on his throne with thousands of angels. The triumphal entry at Jerusalem that day was but a foreshadowing of the triumphal entry that took place

in the spiritual realm when Jesus ascended into heaven and was seated on the right hand of the Father. Yet, there is another triumphal entry impending, as promised in Revelations 19:11-16:

“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness, he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

You and I have missed the historical triumphal entry; let us not miss the next, which is also the ultimate triumphal entry. Let us focus on following Christ and be transformed into his image, so that our lives will be filled with the aroma of the perfume of Jesus' death!