

JOHN 12-13

The 12th chapter begins the final stage of Jesus' life. The religious leadership has given orders for his arrest and Jesus makes his way via Bethany to Jerusalem. The final showdown begins.

12: 1-11 - JESUS AND LAZARUS

Luke's gospel also records the washing/anointing of Jesus' feet, but in John's gospel the woman is identified as Mary the sister of Lazarus. Also, in Luke, her action is interpreted as an act of grateful love whereas in John it is also interpreted as an anointing for Jesus' death. Now that Jesus has announced he will die, the last stage of the gospel drama has begun.

The religious leaders want to get rid of Lazarus as well as Jesus since the risen Lazarus becomes a living sign of Jesus' identity as the son/messiah of God and, therefore, a focus of peoples' faith.

12: 12-19 - THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

The riding on the donkey, the prophecies, and the waving of palm branches are all signs of the people's identification of Jesus with the messianic, Davidic king.

The crowd from Bethany who has accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem testify to Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, and this in turn convinces the crowd that meet them in Jerusalem. The Pharisees, on their part, are at a loss to stop it.

12: 20-36 - SAYINGS OF JESUS BEFORE HIS PASSION

Some Greek-speaking Jews and possibly gentile converts (pilgrims who have travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover feast) want to see Jesus, and Jesus responds by declaring, finally, that his hour has come, the hour of his glorification. His death will bear much spiritual fruit, and those who want to share in this fruit must be willing to follow him.

Jesus' soul is troubled at the prospect of facing his hour, but he is resolute despite this. Moreover, his glorification is also the Father's glorification and it is ultimately the Father's glorification that Jesus is serving with his death and resurrection.

Another image Jesus employs is that of being raised up in order to draw all of humanity to himself. This also indicates for the first time the kind of death he will die (crucifixion). And so, Jesus' glorification is the whole death/resurrection/ascension event.

12: 36-50 - A SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

Some believe in Jesus, some do not, and some, even of the leadership, believe but are afraid of declaring it openly for fear of being excommunicated from the synagogues and community. Even though it is people themselves who make choices in relation to Jesus, it is also God who moves and stirs peoples' hearts. Again, many believe in spite of resistance from the authorities. At the same time, they are afraid of the consequences and do not express their faith openly.

Jesus says that he will not judge those who hear his words but are unable to keep them. Rather his judgement rests on those who reject Jesus and his word. The judgement will be that Jesus will be vindicated at the last judgement and those who rejected him will be on the wrong side of eternal life.

Jesus speaks what the Father has told him to speak. The Father has priority even if Jesus and the Father are one.

13: - THE LAST SUPPER

In John's gospel the last supper is not a Passover meal (Friday) but rather a meal on the day before Passover (Thursday). Some scholars suggest that the reason for this in John's memory is that Jesus will be crucified as the Passover lamb on the Friday. As John the Baptist declared of him, he is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. One problem with this theory is that the Passover lamb was not about atonement for sins, but it was about remembrance (Do this in remembrance of me). On the other hand, there were also occasions where lambs could serve as atonement sacrifices.

The key to the supper in John's gospel is servant love. If Jesus serves his own disciples in this kind of way, they ought to humbly serve one another. Love does not have a superior attitude. It comes down to the level of another person and meets them as an equal. It also seeks the other's good above one's own good. It's about receiving through giving and experiencing fullness of life through service.

Two characters among the disciples are highlighted. 1) Judas is described as someone who has allowed evil to enter his heart, turning against Jesus. The devil is a lively player in this drama. 2) Peter is someone who is well meaning and well intentioned yet lacking understanding and self-awareness. Thus, he goes to extremes in his responses to Jesus, failing miserably. Jesus predicts Peter's denial but also his eventual faithfulness.

The mark of a disciple of Christ is love. The commandment to love one another is new and yet it is old. It is new because Jesus is speaking it. It is old in that this is what the law had always intended at its heart.