

# JOHN 12-13

The 12<sup>th</sup> 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 (already in chapter 11:2 when Mary is introduced). 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, an energizer of peoples' faith in him and against them.

## 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. Also, the crowd from Bethany who have accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem testify to Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, and this in turn convinces the crowd already 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. There is a mutual giving, honouring and glorifying of one another between the Father and the Son. This is the pattern Jesus wants to establish between himself and his disciples too, and this then can inspire the disciples' sharing with and honouring of one another. Isn't this beautiful?

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 (raised upon a cross). And so, Jesus' glorification is not just his resurrection but begins with his crucifixion. More to come on how that is.

## 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 have chosen the wrong side of the eternal abundant life he came to give. Why? Because they had shut their hearts to the love of God channelled through him.

Jesus speaks what the Father has told him to speak. The Father has priority even if Jesus and the Father are one. And yet, Jesus' power is that he is the voice of God. God has entrusted God's Word in and through Jesus, completely. And so, Jesus and his Abba God are, indeed, 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, and in such self-giving, discovers its own greater good. It's about receiving through giving and experiencing fullness of life through service, even if such service may lead to death.

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 return and faithfulness. Both Judas and Peter represent two kinds of responses to Jesus we've encountered throughout this gospel narrative.

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 core. In a world of fierce opposition to love, love has a cost and it has to include forgiveness so that no door is closed to healing and renewal if and when hearts are ready. Judgement happens when we have shut the door to love and find ourselves outside the sphere of love. What kind of life is a life that has shut itself off from love?