

JOHN 12

Make Way for the King

We now enter the final week of Jesus at roughly the halfway point of the book. This is a reminder that the Gospels are not biographies but “Gospels” that tell the story of Jesus with emphasis on his death and resurrection. Following the death of Lazarus (the 6th sign), the popularity of Jesus skyrockets making him a threat to the religious elites. This sets him up for a Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem where the tension between Jesus and the scribes come to a head.

Preparing for Burial

Before entering Jerusalem, Jesus entered the home of Lazarus and his sisters. Right from the beginning, John directs our attention to Jesus as the Lamb of God by telling us this took place “Six days before Passover” (vs. 1). In this one sentence we have the anticipation of Jesus’s death and the celebration of Lazarus’s life.

To celebrate Lazarus’s resuscitation, his sisters throw a party. While Jesus and his disciples are eating and celebrating, Mary begins to anoint Jesus’s feet with expensive oil. The significance of this humble act should not be overlooked, and John won’t let us. It is an expression of humility, worship, and thanksgiving. But more than that, it is an expression of anticipation. Jesus himself explains it symbolizes his own death and burial (see vs. 7). In keeping with Jewish tradition, a deceased body would be anointed, but Mary does this prior to Jesus’s death in anticipation of that tragic event.

John is preparing the reader for the cross. Even more, he is interpreting its significance. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25), but it requires his own death. That is to say, he is the Good Shepherd, and he lays his life down for the sheep (John 10:11). For the dead to live, the Living One must first die. Mary is the first to grasp this concept.

Preparing for Battle

Jesus now enters Jerusalem for the last week of his life. Large crowds gather seemingly understanding the significance of the event. In the Synoptics, Jesus enters Jerusalem as a king (see vs. 13). For John, Jesus enters as the Resurrection and the Life (see vs. 17-18).

“Hosanna!” means “come and save us” and the crowd is singing Messianic Psalms. They clearly connect the arrival of Jesus with the arrival of their long-awaited Messianic King. Along with the songs, the imagery of riding on a donkey is symbolic of the Son of David. Such exuberate celebration (in contrast to the more private and humbled one in vs. 1-8) turns the religious leaders completely against Jesus. The battle, thus, commences and Jesus has declared war. The King has arrived, and he can raise the dead!

Perhaps most significant in this chapter is Jesus’s encounter with unnamed Greeks. This event, more than the symbolic anointing and entry into Jerusalem, moves Jesus. Upon meeting the Greek men, Jesus announces “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.” This is a clear reference of the cross. Throughout John’s Gospel, the “hour” was yet future. Now, it has arrived.

This interpretation is affirmed by the parable Jesus tells, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (vs. 24-25). That is, for wheat to produce fruit, its seed must first die. So too, for the gospel to bear fruit, its Savior must die. The hour has truly come.

The connection with the Greeks is not accidental. They are Gentiles and represent the nations. When Jesus is “lifted up from the earth” (a [hyperlink to John 3:14](#)), he “will draw all people to” himself (vs. 32).

Thus, this chapter, perhaps more than any before it, portrays Jesus as Lamb. Yet it concludes reminding us that Jesus is Light. “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” (vs. 46).

The Light has come into the world to lay his life down. That is good news.