BIBLE SERIES: *"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"*

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JOHN 12 JESUS' LAST WEEK & ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM

We now enter the last week of Christ's life—covering an astounding *third* of the entire Gospels!

After Lazarus' resurrection, John writes, "Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples. And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think—that He will not come to the feast?' Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him" (Jn. 11:53-57).

The Preacher's Bible Commentary says, "'*Many of the Jews'* who have seen what Jesus has done now '*believed*.'" This forces the religious authorities to act. The Sanhedrin is called into session with the chief priests, the Sadducees, taking the lead. In the face of Jesus' decisive action these men seem confused, wondering '*what shall we do?*' But if something is not done quickly the whole populace will come to believe in Him, which will surely become a threat to Rome. Then they '*will come and take away both our place and nation,*' crush what little freedom is left and destroy them as a people. In the midst of this discussion Caiaphas, the high priest, makes a broad, sweeping statement. He was the high priest '*that year,*' the fateful year of God's mighty saving act! He is contemptuous of the naive, indecisive talk in the Council. Do these men not realize that it is expedient that one man should die so that the '*people,*' God's chosen ones, and the '*nation,*' the civil organization, will not perish? Here is a key saying, a prophetic utterance, from the mouth of an enemy. Caiaphas so speaks his own thoughts 'that he pronounced a sentence of God unconsciously.' By a mysterious irony he interpreted the true meaning of the death of Jesus, 'though in a way directly opposite to that which he apprehended.' Jesus' death, arranged by Caiaphas and his fellow council members, was not only for the salvation of Israel, but for all God's children scattered abroad. Not only those separated geographically, but those divided culturally and spiritually. All mankind, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, would be drawn to Jesus, 'lifted up,' partaking in a common life with Him and with one another. This '*gathering together*' is John's way of speaking of the church. God's dispersed are to be gathered into one family by Jesus…Now the decision is made, and the Council begins to make deliberate plans to kill Jesus. He no longer walks openly but withdraws to Ephraim, apparently a wild country northeast of Jerusalem, to remain '*with His disciples.*' One wonders about the conversations, the teachings among these men during these last quiet days.

"When the people begin arriving in Jerusalem to purify themselves before the Passover, they look for Jesus in the temple. Undoubtedly many recall times when they had heard Him teaching so boldly within the temple confines. Now, the people assumed that He probably would not be coming for the Passover because the word was out that if anyone knew where He was it was to be reported to the authorities who were eager to seize Him."

The account continues, "Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.' Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death

also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus" (John 12:1-11).

Notice how desperate these chief leaders were when they realized the danger of losing their wealth, power and prestige. They had to kill both Jesus and Lazarus, since they couldn't deny Lazarus had risen from the dead, and there were many witnesses in Jerusalem who had seen it.

The Preacher's Bible Commentary mentions, "Jesus comes to a dinner party in Bethany. This feast of thanks [due to Lazarus' resurrection], in which Lazarus, Martha, and Mary are involved, may well have taken place in the home of Simon the Leper if this is the same occasion recorded in Mt. 26:6-13 and Mr. 14:3-9. Martha is in her customary place of serving while Lazarus, never more fresh and alive, is at the table with Jesus. Even now one can almost hear the joy and soft laughter of their animated conversation as they eat and drink. It is Mary who kneels and anoints Jesus' feet, generously pouring out costly perfumed oil that was equivalent to the wages of a year's work, and then wiping His feet with her hair. It is a symbol of consecration for that divine work which Jesus was about to do. An early preparation for His death. Also a pledge of honor reserved for royalty. In a few days Jesus will enter Jerusalem as an anointed King.

"The fragrance of this generous gift, so gratefully poured out, fills the house with far more than its sweet smell. It brought the warm, pervasive glow of love. This act of love is so extravagant that Judas, who obviously feels it has been a waste, asks piously why this money could not have been given to the poor. He asks this not because he cares, but because he is a selfish thief. Apparently Judas was gifted in handling money, so he had been given the responsibility for the common pot, which became his undoing. How often we go astray in the area of our strength. The gifted preacher can succumb to his ego, the brilliant accountant becomes an embezzler, or the empathetic counselor give in to adultery.

While Mary is giving her best in preparing for His death, the greed of Judas will cause Jesus' death. In Jewish thought, preparation for death was an act of mercy, a greater 'good work' than justice, which was almsgiving for the poor. So Jesus commends Mary, not because He is indifferent to the poor, but because of her [great] work of kindness preparing for His own death."

John continues, "The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!' Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt.'

"His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, 'You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!' Now there were certain Greeks [Greek converts to Judaism] among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus. But Jesus said, 'The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.' Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' Jesus answered and said, 'This voice did not come because of Me, but for your

sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.' This He said, signifying by what death He would die" (John 12:12-23).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out, "A wild enthusiasm over Jesus broke out. Thousands of Galilean pilgrims had come to the Passover, and they had seen many of His mighty works. Previously He had rejected the role of a political Messiah but, they thought, perhaps now was the right moment. Jerusalem was the city of the great King and He was coming to it. Waving their palm branches, symbols of victory, the people were shouting 'Hosanna!' which in Hebrew means 'Please save' or 'Save now' (Ps. 118:25). It came to be a shout of praise. Quoting Ps. 118:26, they ascribed messianic titles to Him: 'The Coming One' and the King of Israel. Jesus' riding into the city on a young donkey was a sign of peace. He did not ride a war horse or carry a sword or wear a crown.

"The size of the crowd kept increasing. The news of the great miraculous sign--Lazarus raised from the dead--spread through the city, and other groups surged out to meet Him. It was a day of great popular acclaim, but sadly the people had little spiritual perception. The mass reception of Jesus made the plans of the Pharisees impossible. They 'were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill Him. But not during the Feast,' they said, 'or the people may riot' (Mr. 14:1-2). Pessimistically they acknowledged the whole world has gone after Him. Irony is again evident, for most of those people did not really believe in Jesus. He had been moving toward His decisive hour. The coming of the Greeks confirmed that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. For most people death is their humiliation. But for Jesus death was His means of entry into glory. His willingness to die for others' sins in obedience to the Father brought Him renown. 'I tell you the truth' introduces a solemn affirmation. The analogy of a kernel of wheat 'dying' in the ground and producing many seeds teaches that death is necessary for a harvest. The wheat analogy illustrates a general paradoxical principle: death is the way to life. In Jesus' case, His death led to glory and life not only for Himself but also for others.

"In the case of a disciple of Jesus, the principle is similar. A disciple must hate [or love less] his life in this world…On the other hand the man who loves his life will lose it. Anything in life can become an idol including goals, interests, and loves. A believer should undergo a spiritual death to the self. Being a servant of Jesus requires following Him. Many of Jesus' original servants *did* follow Him—in death. According to tradition, the early disciples died as martyrs. Jesus' word was thus a prophecy and also a promise. His true disciples (those who serve Him) follow Him in humiliation and later in honor or glory.

The Preacher's Bible Commentary adds, "The Man who was weary at a well and wept before a tomb does not go automatically or casually to [be crucified]. The flesh shrinks from this [excruciating] death. Here the anguish, the longing of Jesus to avoid this [death], is boldly recorded.

"But there is no turning back from the decision made in the counsels of eternity. Jesus has come in loving obedience to the Father's will and every move of His ministry has been a response to that plan. That faithfulness has brought Him to this hour. And there will never be a harvest, the Greeks will never know, unless Jesus completes His mission. For this purpose He has come! So the trembling, questioning cry, '*Father, save Me from this hour,*' is answered by the Son's decisive prayer of obedience, '*Father, glorify Your name.*'

"That name has been entrusted to Jesus and now in His last, costly act He will lift that name up above all other names. Then, as at His baptism and His Transfiguration, the Father's voice is heard. His name has been glorified throughout all of Jesus' ministry, from the Jordan to Bethany, and now in this hour He will glorify it again. This is a sign of the Father's approval. The voice from heaven confirmed faith in the spiritually perceptive but to the unspiritual it was only a noise. Jesus' death on the [stake] was a judgment on the world. Evil was atoned for. The world's goals, standards, and religions were shown to be folly. The prince of this world, Jesus said, will be driven out. His power over people by sin and death was defeated and they can now be delivered out of his domain of spiritual darkness and slavery to sin."