

Notes on John 12

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Jesus Enters Jerusalem – John 12

Jesus Anointed by Mary — John 12:1-10; cf. Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9.

Verses 1,2

1. When and where did the supper in v1-8 occur? Who was there?

A dinner at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus

The time of Jesus death was drawing very near. The record here takes up six days before the Passover, which was when He was killed. So, we are here beginning to study the last week of his life. John focuses strongly on this last week, devoting nearly one half of his record to it.

Jesus returned to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead in chap. 11. See notes on Bethany in 11:1.

They prepared a meal for Jesus, Martha served, and Lazarus was at the table. People who serve God have always helped preachers by providing them with meals. This is a form of support for the preacher, providing his needs as he does his work. It is interesting that Martha served, for this seems to be typical of her. See notes on Luke 10:38-42.

Jesus was no longer seeking to avoid conflict with the Jewish leaders. The time had come for the final confrontation and His death. Knowing this, He openly entered Jerusalem for the final week of His life.

Verse 3

2. Describe what Mary did (v3). Thought question: What is an ointment and what is spikenard — KJV?

Mary anointed Jesus.

Mary honored Jesus by taking a pound of a very costly ointment called spikenard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it and wiped His feet with her hair. Spikenard was a costly perfume, probably imported, and had a fragrance that filled the house. This constituted a sign of great respect for Jesus, and perhaps resulted from Mary's gratitude for the resurrection of Lazarus.

Other accounts say the ointment was in a container made of alabaster. Alabaster is a type of lime deposit (like what is found in caves). King states that such boxes are still used today to preserve spikenard.

Mark 14:3 adds that this happened in the home of Simon the leper. Apparently, this Simon was related to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Perhaps Jesus had healed him of his leprosy.

A similar but different event occurred on a different occasion in Luke 7:37-39. The two are not the same, since they occurred at significantly different times, at different places, and with different details.

Matthew and Mark do record this same event, although John's account differs slightly from the others. It is recorded before the triumphal entry, and the time is given as six days before Passover. Also, Jesus was anointed on the feet instead of the head. However, the other details are so similar that it is almost certain the two events are the same.

Most likely the ointment was placed on both Jesus' head and His feet. McGarvey explains the difference in time sequence by pointing out that Matthew gives no specific sequence. He just says this happened when Jesus was in Bethany. Numerous events are told in different orders in the different accounts. This is not a contradiction. It just is the way people tend to tell stories. Perhaps Matthew told the story when he did because it reveals somewhat the character of Judas who, in the subsequent verses, agreed to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Verses 4-6

3. What did Judas say about this and what was his motive? What does this reveal about Judas' character, and how does it help us understand the betrayal? (Think: Did God compel Judas to betray Jesus, or did God just use one who was already evil?)

Judas complains about this use of a valuable substance.

Matthew and Mark say the disciples were indignant about this, because they thought it was wasteful to put this on Jesus. It would have been better to sell it and give the money to the poor. It was worth 300 shillings or denarii. Since a denarius was about a day's wage (Matthew 20:2), this ointment was worth almost a year's wages! This shows the great value of Mary's sacrifice to honor Jesus.

Actually, John says that the main one who was upset was Judas, but he did not say it because he cared about the poor. He said it because he kept the money of the disciples (13:29), and being a thief, he took some of it for himself!

Consider what this event reveals about the character of Judas, even before he agreed to betray Jesus (cf. 6:70). He was a greedy, covetous man, even to the point of stealing. Further, he stole money that should have been used to support Jesus and His apostles in their work of spreading the gospel. It would have been bad enough to steal from wealthy people who might not use the money profitably anyway, but he was stealing money that would have been used to help souls be saved. This shows he did not care for spiritual things, as he ought. And here he even resented money used to honor Jesus. Had it been set aside to help the poor, he would have stolen it. Such greed reveals much about Judas' character.

John ties this to that fact that Judas would later betray Jesus for money. That was an act of greed and covetousness, just as in the present account. Sometimes people think Judas was victimized by God or compelled by predestination to betray Jesus, resulting in his being lost. Others have tried to defend or justify Judas as a victim of circumstances, or perhaps even a hero!

This story, however, reveals that Judas had been evil by his own choice long before the betrayal. God did not compel him to do evil, when he betrayed Jesus. God just took Judas as he was and allowed him to do an evil deed that needed to be done. This is similar to the Jews who killed Jesus. God did not make them evil. They were already evil, as Jesus' lengthy debates with them proved. God took them as they were and allowed them to do an evil deed that needed to be done to accomplish God's plan for our salvation.

Finally, note that Jesus and His apostles had a common treasury even before He died and long before the church began. This does not, of itself, prove that such funds were used for the same purpose(s) as the church treasury should be used. The church had not yet begun. Nevertheless, during His lifetime Jesus did institute many practices that prepared the way for what is done in the church.

Verses 7,8

4. What did Jesus say to do about Mary? What reasons did He give? (Thought question: What does this teach us about poverty and about the importance of honoring Jesus?)

Jesus defends Mary's act.

Jesus, however, did not share the disciples' criticism of Mary. He said she had done a good work on Him. There would always be poor people for whom they could do good, but He would not be with them long. She was, He said, anointing Him for burial.

I doubt that Mary knew Jesus was about to be buried. But if the ointment had been used to bury a dead relative, likely no one would have complained about that. Such was commonly done to honor the memory of one who died. Mary had done a similar act of honor to Jesus while He was still alive. If it would have been appropriate to show such honor to Him after His death, why

would it be wrong to so honor Him during His life? So, He used it as an opportunity to remind them that He was about to die and be buried. They would have Him with them for even less time than any of them realized. It was appropriate that they express their devotion for Him while He was there.

Jesus here stated a profound general truth: the poor are always with us (Deuteronomy 15:11). This is not stated to mean we should ignore them. But poverty will never be eliminated from the earth. Jesus did not come to solve all the physical problems of mankind, and He did not establish His church to do so. He knew troubles and problems will continue as long as the earth stands. We ought to show compassion for such people, but it is also good and right to honor Deity. If we wait till all the poverty is removed before we worship or give gifts to honor God, we will never honor Him.

In other accounts, Jesus predicted that the woman, for her simple and humble expression of love, would be remembered throughout the world wherever the gospel is preached. And indeed that is exactly the case, for here we read the record that memorializes her act throughout the whole world.

Jesus appreciates humble deeds when done according to His will from a sincere heart.

Verses 9-11

5. Why did many people come, and what did the Jewish rulers decide to do about it?
(Thought question: What does this reveal about the character of these rulers?)

The Jewish leaders plot also against Lazarus.

Many people heard that Jesus had come (apparently still at Bethany), and they came to see Him. But many also wanted to see Lazarus. Lazarus had been raised from the dead, and people wanted to see for themselves the proof that he was alive. This caused many Jews to believe in Jesus, as was the purpose of miracles (cf. 11:45-48). Again, what so-called faith healers today have this kind of evidence that we can go and see?

The Jewish leaders, however, were determined that people should not believe in Jesus (see 11:47-53). So evil and determined were they that they even plotted to kill Lazarus to destroy the evidence for Jesus' claims. Many of the chief priests were Sadducees, who denied the existence of the resurrection. So, they may have also sought to destroy Lazarus, because was living evidence against their doctrine.

This is incredible depth of evil. As religious leaders, these men should have accepted the miracles as proof Jesus was from God. They should have believed in Him and defended Him. Instead, they actually opposed Jesus. Worse yet, they wanted to kill Him. They justified this on the claim that He was guilty of blasphemy and violation of the Sabbath. But here they even sought to kill a completely innocent man, simply because Jesus had raised him from the dead! What crime had Lazarus committed? None whatever, but they still wanted to kill him to prevent people from believing in Jesus.

Some men, who are viewed as good and godly men, can stoop to incredible depths of evil. Even overt murder was not too extreme for these men in their determination to maintain their honor in the eyes of the people.

Triumphal Entry — John 12:12-19; cf. Matt. 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40

Verses 12-16

6. Describe how the people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem (vv 12,13).
7. Where else is this event recorded in the New Testament?
8. Define “Hosanna,” and explain what the people meant by “King of Israel.”
9. How did Jesus ride into town, and what Old Testament passage did this fulfill? (Thought question: What was the significance of riding this way?)
10. When did the disciples understand the significance of these things?

The people welcome Jesus to Jerusalem.

Many people had come to Jerusalem early to attend the feast of the Passover. When they heard that Jesus was coming, many, who expected Him to be a king, determined to honor Him with a great processional when He entered.

Knowing this, Jesus made arrangements for an entry that would be humble. Other accounts show that He sent disciples to a nearby village to find a donkey and her colt. They were to set them loose and bring them to Jesus. This fulfilled prophecies in Isa. 62:11 and esp. Zech. 9:9. The Messiah was prophesied to come in a lowly way sitting on the foal of a donkey. The disciples obeyed, found the animals, placed garments on them, and Jesus sat upon them.

Although some commentators state that kings of Israel sometimes did ride on donkeys, yet this was a humble way to arrive, not typical of other great earthly rulers. Today rulers and important people feel they must ride in an expensive limousine in parades. So, in that day a king might ride in a chariot with powerful horses. But to enter the capitol city riding on a donkey's foal was extremely humble. Though the Christ was predicted to be a great ruler, He was also predicted to enter Jerusalem in this humble way. Jesus here fulfilled this prophecy.

Jesus was not the kind of ruler the people had in mind. He had repeatedly said things designed to lead them to understand that His role here was spiritual (see chap. 6). In Matthew 20:28 He had told them He came to be a servant and die for others. He was using this opportunity to show them again that exaltation by human standards was not His goal.

As He entered the city, multitudes of people lined the road. They placed their garments in the pathway and cut down branches and spread them in the road. These were all ways of welcoming and honoring Him, as people do for great leaders and heroes.

The people called out expressions of honor. They called Him “Son of David” and “King of Israel” — i.e., the descendant of David who was to bear the rule on the throne of David as predicted in the Old Testament. This shows their confidence He would be king, though they misunderstood the kind of king.

“Hosanna” means “Save, we pray.” It was a prayerful supplication, similar to Psalms 118:25,26. The idea seems to be a request for salvation, perhaps salvation from their enemies by the hand of the Messiah. It seems to have become an expression of honor. In any case, such demonstrations of honor would surely catch the attention of the Roman authorities, especially during the time of such a great feast. No doubt, this was part of the concern of the Jewish leaders.

It is incredible that people are so fickle. Just a few days later, these same people would be calling out, “Crucify Him!” People who do not understand God's plan can easily be swayed from truth to error.

At this point, not even the disciples understood why Jesus did things as He did. Later, however, they remembered and understood the fulfillment of prophecy.

Jesus Teaches When Greeks Seek Him – 12:20-50

Verses 17-19

11. What other reason did the multitudes have for honoring Jesus (vv 17,18)?
12. How were the Pharisees affected by the greeting Jesus received?

The witnesses of Lazarus' resurrection give testimony.

The effect of Lazarus' resurrection continued, as those who had seen it told other people about it. Note that "witness" in the Bible refers to personal, first-hand testimony. These witnesses were there when Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb.

People were also able to meet Lazarus for themselves, not just to hear from others about his resurrection. They could, if they desired, question him. But especially they could see for themselves that he was alive. They did not have to take anyone else's word for it.

At this point, the Pharisees were frustrated. They had determined to put a stop to Jesus' popularity by any means possible, good or evil (cf. 11:47-53). Yet, it appeared that the whole world was following Jesus, and their opposition was accomplishing nothing at all. They had let all the people know that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be cast out of the synagogue (vv 42,43). It was generally known that they wanted to arrest Him, or even to kill Him. Yet, here He entered into their very stronghold to the open acclaim of great multitudes of people!

To the eyes of men, Jesus was at the height of His popularity. Who could believe that just a few days later He would be executed as a common criminal? Apparent success and honor in the eyes of society and multitudes can be a very fleeting thing. We must not seek it for its own sake nor trust in it when it appears we have it. God's people are never in general favor with the majority of people for long.

Verses 20-22

13. What request did certain Greeks make and to whom did they address their request?

Some Greeks seek to speak to Jesus

Among those who came to worship at the feast were Greeks. This word does not refer to Hellenists: Jews by nationality and religion who spoke Greek and accepted Greek culture because of where they lived (cf. Acts 6:1). Rather, this word refers to Greeks by nationality — people who are not Jewish. However, the record says that they were among those who came to worship at the feast; and since this was a Jewish feast, perhaps these were proselytes. Or perhaps they were Gentiles who had just heard about Jesus and had come to be present for the feast (though they could not fully participate in it).

Many of them may have come a long distance to the feast. Nevertheless, they had heard about Jesus, so they asked Philip for an opportunity to see Him. Philip told Andrew, and the two of them turn told Jesus.

Nothing more is said about these Greeks, but we presume that the discussion that follows occurred in their presence, so they heard the teaching Jesus gave.

Verses 23-26

14. What illustration did Jesus use in v24, and what did He mean by it? (Thought question: What glory was the Son going to receive — v23?)
15. Explain v25 in your own words.
16. What must we do to serve Jesus and what reward will we receive for serving faithfully (v26)?

Jesus predicts His death, and urges others to follow Him.

Jesus then began a discourse about His death. He said the hour of His glory was come. The Passover and His death were imminent. He knew He would die at the feast. Interestingly, He

spoke of this as the time of His glory. In a sense, His death was glorious in that it provided salvation for all mankind. But more likely, He refers, not just to His death, but also to the resurrection and exaltation that would follow.

Jesus compared His death to a grain or seed of a plant that must fall in the ground and “die” in order to produce a new plant and more fruit. The seed does not, of course, die in the sense of completely losing life, as plants do when they die. The seed changes form and sprouts to form new life. As the Creator, Jesus knew this. He simply spoke of a change of body, yet the life continues on. And this is the proper terminology to use as a comparison to His own death (and in a sense to our death). At death, we change bodies, but the life continues on like a seed changing form to a plant.

The point is that, in order for one to enter a new form or body, life in another form or body must be given up. But the result will be great benefit to others. The seed is just one seed by itself till it “dies” and sprouts to form a new plant. Then that plant will in turn create many more seeds like the one that produced it. This greatly multiplies the good results that come to all.

Jesus here describes the principle of sacrifice: one must be willing to give up what one has in order to accomplish something of greater value. The application to Jesus is obvious: by giving His life on the cross, He gave great benefit to all mankind. Like the seed, He sacrificed Himself in order to produce a much greater benefit to others. This result would also lead to His “glory.”

Jesus explains further that, if one loves this life to the point that he is determined to keep and use it for himself, he will lose his life in eternity. If one is willing, like the seed, to sacrifice the life one has, the result will be a much greater and more wonderful life in eternity. The principle also applies to us, in that those who serve Jesus must follow Him. As in Matt. 16:24-27, the point is that Jesus’ disciples must be willing to sacrifice our lives for Him as He sacrificed His life for us. He gave His life to die for us, but our sacrifice to Him is a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1,2) in which we give our lives serving Him according to His word (2 Cor. 5:14,15).

If we so serve Jesus, we too can give blessings and benefits to others. Then as Jesus was glorified, so the Father will honor us by allowing us to be where Jesus is. Where He will be in eternity, we will be there too, rejoicing in His presence and in the bliss of eternal life.

Verses 27-30

17. What request did Jesus *not* make of the Father? Why not (v27)?

18. What did the Father say to Jesus from heaven, and what did the people think the sound was?

19. For whose benefit did the Father say this (v30)? (Think: How would this benefit them?)

Jesus calls on the Father to glorify His name, and the Father answers.

Jesus realized that He would be glorified (v23), yet His soul was troubled. In some respects, He desired to ask His Father to save Him from that hour (the suffering and mental anguish of the cross). Yet, He knew that He had come to this hour for the purpose of enduring it.

In many ways, this section is similar to Jesus’ prayer in the garden (Matt. 26:36-46). The thoughts He expressed in the garden, and the anguish He endured there, were not new to Him. These verses show that the same thoughts had been in His mind for some time as He dreaded the death He must endure. As a man, He wanted to ask to avoid it; yet He knew it needed to be done. In the garden He did ask that it be avoided if there were any possible way to do so, yet He still asked the Father’s will to be done.

In His grief at this time, Jesus simply asked for the Father to glorify His name. The Father responded with a voice from heaven saying that He had glorified His name and would do so again.

This ought to be our request, when we don’t know exactly what to pray for or what would be best to happen. Especially we should pray this when, like Jesus, we are facing a difficult trial that we wish we could avoid, but it may be important for us to endure the trial to accomplish God’s

will. We should simply pray that the events that take place will be whatever gives glory to God. We may not know what is best and may not wish to endure what is ahead. But if it will glorify God, we must be willing to submit and do His will.

The voice from heaven was variously interpreted or misinterpreted by the multitudes. Some thought it was just thunder from heaven, but others thought an angel had spoken to Jesus. Jesus explained that the voice was not for His benefit but for that of the people. He already knew that God had been glorified by events on earth and would be so again (especially in His death and resurrection). But the multitudes needed (and we need) to know that God would be glorified.

Sometimes it seems the forces of evil are winning the battle here on earth, and we do not think God is being victorious. We get discouraged at the apparent success of sin and wickedness, as it spreads over the earth seemingly without no power to oppose it. This is surely the way the disciples would feel in the days ahead when Jesus was suffering and dying on the cross. Yet they would need to remember, even as we need to remember, that God has defeated evil before and will again. Especially He would defeat it at Jesus' death and resurrection.

Note that the opinions of the people, though involving some misunderstanding, yet show that they knew something had happened. Some tried to explain it away as thunder, just like some people today try to explain away Bible miracles. Others said an angel had spoken to Jesus, which shows they recognized the sound as involving speech. They misunderstood the source of the speech, yet they realized it was supernatural.

Verses 31-33

20. Who is the prince of this world, and what would happen to him?

21. How did Jesus describe the manner of His death, and what would He do for people if He died? (Thought question: What does this tell us about churches that attract new members by means of recreation, entertainment, etc.?)

Jesus promises that His death would result in men being drawn to Him.

Jesus states that, in His death and resurrection, He would judge the world and would cast out the ruler of this world. Satan is called the ruler of the world here and in 14:30; 16:11. He is the one served by all people at some time in their lives and by most people most of the time. The world was about to join Satan is opposing Jesus by crucifying Him.

When Jesus died on the cross, it appeared that Satan and his followers had been victorious over Jesus; but in reality it was Satan himself who would be defeated. When Jesus arose again, Satan's defeat was accomplished. Satan's primary powers in the world are sin and death. Both were defeated at the cross. From that point on, he has continued to tempt people into sin and death has continued, but it is has been conclusively proved that Jesus' power is greater. Satan's final defeat is just a matter of time. See Heb. 2:9-15; John 16:11; 1 John 3:8; 4:4; 1 Cor. 15:54-57; 2 Tim. 1:10.

Jesus said that, if He were lifted up (by His death on the cross), He would draw all men to Himself. This indicated the manner of His death: He would be lifted above the earth as He was crucified on the cross. Doubtless, the people did not at the time understand this, but the meaning would become clear when His prediction came true.

Though Satan would cause Him to be put to death, yet this would not ultimately defeat Jesus. Instead, it would be the means by which He would draw men to Him. Satan doubtless thought that, by turning the multitudes against Jesus and bringing about His defeat, he would cause people to reject Jesus for all time. They would be repulsed by His manner of death and His inability to prevent it. However, by rising from the dead, Jesus gained the ultimate victory and achieved the means whereby people are attracted to Him, not driven from Him.

That death on the cross, which Satan intended to be a deathblow to Jesus and to His power for good, instead became the means of salvation to all men and the means that attracts men to Him! What a turnabout! Jesus "snatched victory from the jaws of defeat." That which was intended for His destruction became the very means He used to produce victory. Few events in

history are characterized by such irony, and no other event can match the importance of this victory.

By His death, Jesus would draw “all peoples” to Himself: Jews and Gentiles. His intent from the beginning was to be, not a national king, but the Savior of people of all nations. He came to give hope of eternal life, not just to Jews, but to Gentiles. To do this, He had to defeat Satan by crucifixion and resurrection.

Note that the drawing power that attracts men to Jesus is Jesus Himself, and especially the story of His death and resurrection as revealed in the gospel. Jesus draws men to Himself. Yet, He has commissioned us as His disciples to spread the message of what He has done by preaching the gospel. People are attracted to Jesus by hearing the message of His death and the importance of it.

This being true, it is foolish and sinful for men to try to use other means to attract people to the church, to Jesus, and to His teaching. It is totally contrary to Jesus’ intent to try to attract people by offering them carnal attractions, such as banquets, candy, ice cream, recreation, entertainment, sports, parties, and other forms of fun and games. Nor does the Bible tell His church, as such, to help the world’s poor and needy by offering food, clothing, shelter for the poor, and care for the widows and orphans, etc., in order to attract people to Jesus.

There is nothing wrong with *individuals* having wholesome entertainment, and we are commanded to help the needy around us in the world. But this is not the work of the church, and churches should not institute such programs thinking they will lead people to salvation. Individuals should do good works for sake of the good works themselves, because Jesus commanded them. Our individual influence for good may encourage people to listen to what we say about Jesus. But the apostles never taught local churches to initiate such activities to attract people to Christ. Jesus even refused to give food when food was what people sought (see notes on John 6). Rather, the power that the early church used to save souls was the preaching of the gospel (Romans 1:16). We should do the same.

Likewise, it misses the point to try to attract people to the church by emphasizing the beauty of the meetinghouse or the skills of the preacher or even the friendliness of the people. Nothing should be used to attract people except the message of the gospel, the teachings of the Bible. The modern Social Gospel, with its carnal attractions, is a violation of the spiritual nature of the gospel, and shows that people lack faith in the power of the message of Jesus (John 6:44,45; 1 Cor. 1:18-25; Rom. 10:14-17; etc.).

For further discussion about the work of the church and the use of carnal attractions, see our article on church organization and work at our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verses 34-36

22. What objection did the multitude raise to the fact Jesus had said He would be lifted up? (Thought question: Where did the law say this, and in what sense was it true? How does Jesus’ statement harmonize with this?)

23. What illustration did Jesus return to in vv 35,36, and where else had He used similar illustrations?

The people think the Christ should remain forever, but Jesus again affirms that He will be with them just a little while.

The people seemed to understand that Jesus was saying He would leave them. But this confused them, because they were convinced that the Christ should abide forever, according to the law. Yet Jesus was saying the Son of Man must be lifted up. So, they asked who this Son of Man was that He was referring to. When He had come to town, they had celebrated Him as the Messiah in the triumphal entry. They had supposed He would be their Messiah and reign on earth over an eternal kingdom. But how could He do that if He died? Was He talking about Himself or

someone else that must be lifted up? In any case, it is clear that they misunderstood what He said.

Where did the law say that the Christ would abide forever? They gave no specific reference, but perhaps they had in mind such verses as Psa. 110:4; Isa. 9:7; Ezek. 37:25; Dan. 7:14. And truly, Jesus will abide forever and His kingdom will stand forever. But the problem these people had is they did not understand the nature of the kingdom. They thought it would be an earthly kingdom with civil earthly rule like David had. How could the Christ do this, if He died? Note again that the people's misunderstanding of Christ is based on their determination that His kingdom must be an earthly kingdom like that of David (see notes on John 6:15).

However, when one understands that the kingdom is spiritual and pertains to man's relationship to God (John 18:36; Col. 1:13,14), then one understands that it was not contrary to God's plan nor to these prophecies for the Christ to die. On the contrary, it was necessary for Him to die in order to provide salvation and hope of eternal life in this spiritual kingdom. And this too had been prophesied in the Old Testament, but the people did not understand or accept these prophecies.

Why did Jesus not explain this to the people at this time? Probably because He had said this (or things related to it) in various forms so often that He knew they would not understand or believe (cf. 10:25; see chap. 6). Even His own disciples did not understand till after His death, resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

So, Jesus did not answer their question about the Son of Man directly. He simply repeated, in a different form, His affirmation that He would leave them. He returned to His illustration that He is the light who could give men understanding so they could see the way to travel (see notes on 1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; 1 John 2:10).

But He repeated that the light would soon leave them. While they had the light, they should believe in it and walk in it so they could avoid darkness (sin, evil, spiritual confusion and error). To walk in darkness is to have no idea where one is going (spiritual error and confusion). But by believing in the light, one can be a son of light: a person characterized by light and the blessings associated it, just like a child shares the characteristics of his father. See also John 8:12; 1 John 1:5-7; Luke 16:8; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5)

Jesus then withdrew from them a while. He was spending His nights outside the city. The time for final confrontation and His death drew near, but He had to die at the Passover as the Passover Lamb. So He taught all that He could, then left a while, accomplishing all He could, but making sure they did not kill Him till the appointed time.

Verses 37,38

24. What Scripture did John quote that was fulfilled by the people's attitude toward Jesus (vv 37,38)? What reason is given why they should have believed in Him?

The people's disbelief fulfills Isaiah's prophecy.

Despite all the signs Jesus had done, the people still did not believe on Him. This is interesting. They had just gotten through making a big production of His entry into Jerusalem, honoring Him and shouting great words of exaltation to Him (vv 12,13). Yet almost immediately afterward, we are told that they did not believe on Him. They did not really believe in what He said about Himself and did not believe He was who He said He was. They believed (or hoped) He might be the Messiah **they** wanted, doing things they way **they** wanted. But they did not believe He was the Messiah that He really was.

Note that again we are told the reason why they should have believed in Him: because of His miracles. That is the proof. They should have accepted He was from God despite their confusion over His teachings. They should have continued with Him until they did understand, and should have been willing to conform their ideas to His. Instead, they ignored the miracles, insisted on their own ideas, and rejected Him because He did not fit their ideas.

Yet, all this was prophesied. Despite their misunderstandings about the Messiah abiding forever, the Scriptures had really predicted the Messiah would be rejected. The specific quotation here is Isaiah 53:1 which, in question form, implies the people would not believe God's message despite the fact the arm (power and might) of the Lord had been revealed to them (in His works and miracles).

Verses 39,40

25. What other Scripture explains why the people did not believe, where else is this passage quoted in the New Testament, and what does this Scripture mean?

They did not believe, because they closed their eyes.

Another passage quoted from Isaiah 6:10 predicted that the people would not believe, because their eyes were blinded and their hearts hardened. See Matt. 13:13-15.

The different translations of the passage make it difficult to know who blinded and hardened the people. John's account says "He," Matthew says "they," and Isaiah just says "Make the heart of this people dull..." It appears unclear who does it. However, as with Pharaoh in Ex. chap 5-12, it can be viewed as both God and the people who produce the result. The people hardened and blinded themselves in that they are free moral agents and had the power to choose whether to listen to God or not. God did it in that His word is designed to attract those who have godly attitudes and open minds, but it is designed to repulse those who have ungodly attitudes and stubborn self-will.

Note that this is not teaching Calvinistic unconditional predestination. Matthew 13:13-15 clearly shows that the people were blinded because they closed their eyes. Whatever happened was conditional on their own free will and choice.

Johnson uses an excellent example. He explains that it is a matter of Divine law. It may be compared to a man who refuses to use his muscles; by natural law, he will become weak. So, if a person chooses to remain in the dark and refuses to come to the light, he will soon become blind. If this happens, who makes Him blind? It can be said that he did it, because he refused to allow light into his eyes. Or it can be said that God did it, because God made the law that led to the result. But even so, it happened only because the man chose to so act.

Likewise, God's Divine law decrees that a man who refuses to accept spiritual light will become spiritually blind (ignorant and without understanding). And a man who persists in disobeying God will become hardened in heart. So, when these people rejected the light and became blind, or when Pharaoh resisted God's law and became hardened, who did it? The sinners did it because they chose to reject God and His laws. But it can also be said that God did it, because He made the laws that made it inevitable that such conduct would produce the end result. Yet, the law was conditioned on the choice of the people. Hence, it was not unconditional predestination but conditional predestination.

God had predicted all along that the people would reject His will and not accept the Messiah. This is nothing new or surprising. The same is true of people in any age who do not have the open mind and godly attitude to seek truth and change, if they find they have not been living in harmony with truth. Serving God takes humility to admit error and spiritual mindedness to seek God's will above all else in life, surely above our own desires. Those who do not have that attitude will not obey, and often will not even appear to understand the truth.

This passage is saying again what Jesus had often said about the people's unwillingness to believe in Him. The problem was not that the evidence for His claims was inadequate, as they implied it was. The problem was that the people did not have the right attitude toward truth and God's will.

Verse 41

26. According to John, what did Isaiah see and who was he speaking about when he made this prediction?

27. According to the context in Isaiah, whose glory did Isaiah see? What does this tell you about who Jesus is?

Isaiah made these statements when He saw the Lord's glory.

Isaiah said these things (in Isa. 6:10) when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. John is clearly saying that "Him" in this passage refers to Jesus. Jesus is the one in Whom people did not believe (v37, and see v42 below). Hence, Jesus is the One whose glory Jesus saw in Isaiah 6 and the one He spoke of in Isaiah 6:10.

But Isaiah 6:10 is part of an overall context describing a vision in which Isaiah saw God on His throne (v1). Isaiah said, at the time, that He had seen Jehovah (6:5).

Hence, Isaiah said he saw Jehovah, but John cites that very event and said Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of Him. The necessary conclusion is that this is one of several passages in which Jesus is called Jehovah. And in this passage He was on His throne in glory. It is proper to use the term Jehovah for Jesus, as well as for God the Father.

Verses 42,43

28. How did some Pharisees react to Jesus and why (vv 42,43)?

29. What lessons can we learn from vv 42,43 about the importance of obedience and of confession?

30. What can we learn about the danger of seeking praises from men?

Some of the rulers did believe but refused to confess.

Many people had not believed in Jesus (vv 37-41). But some did believe, including many even of the rulers. They would not confess Jesus, however, because they feared to be put out of the synagogue as the Pharisees had said would happen (see 9:22). Their refusal to confess Jesus because of this threat proved that they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

We learn here that confession of Jesus was then, as it is today, a necessary requirement of discipleship. One must be willing to confess Jesus in order to become a disciple, and one must be willing to continue to confess Him to remain a disciple. Those who, like these rulers, will not confess Jesus, cannot be His disciples. See also Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 11:27; 12:42,43; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15.

We also learn that believing who Jesus is in ones heart is not enough to save a person or make him a disciple. Some today claim people are saved by "faith alone," and all one needs to do to be saved is to have a conviction and trust in Jesus — obedience is not necessary, and especially baptism is not necessary. If so, then these rulers were saved. Yet it is clear from the passages about confession that they were not saved, and most people will agree this is true (even of those who claim to believe in faith only).

It follows that people are not saved just by believing, but there are additional steps of obedience required. Confession is an outward work requiring physical action (speaking with the mouth — Rom. 10:9,10). Hence, outward acts of obedience are required to be saved.

If that is true, then why should anyone object to the fact that we conclude, based on many Scriptures, that baptism is also one of the acts required in order to receive forgiveness (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21)? By whatever reasoning one concludes that confession is essential to salvation and those who will not confess will not be saved, by the same kind of reasoning one can show that baptism is essential and those who will not be Scripturally baptized will not be saved.

For further discussion about obedience, baptism, and salvation by faith only vs. obedient faith, see our article on these subjects at our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

This passage also shows that, when Jesus tells us what to do but we refuse to do it because we want to please people, then we are guilty of loving the praise of men more than the praise of God. This is a common problem that keeps people from being disciples of Jesus. Many people are too concerned what people think of them and too little concerned what Jesus and God the Father think of them. This was a common problem with the Pharisees who sought the praises of men (Matt. 6:1-18; 23:1-12; John 5:41,44). Religious leaders today are tempted to the same problem, and all of us need to guard against it. Nothing should be allowed to be as important to us as pleasing God (John 7:18; 2 Cor. 10:12).

Verses 44-46

31. What is the relationship between faith in Jesus and faith in the Father (vv 44,45)? (Thought question: Why is this true?)

Faith in God requires faith in Jesus.

These verses record one of Jesus' last public discourses to the Jews, perhaps His very last before His arrest and crucifixion. It is not clear exactly when He spoke these words, but the account draws very close to the time of His death.

Jesus in a sense summarized His whole teaching appeal to the Jews in these verses. He claimed again that He was acting as an official representative of His Father who had sent Him. Hence, those who believed in Him were actually believing in the Father who sent Him, and those who saw Him were seeing the Father who sent Him. This is not a physical truth and does not prove He and His Father were the same person (see on 8:16-18; 10:30,38). He is simply expressing the fact that He was acting as His Father's representative.

It follows that, if they rejected His teaching they were also rejecting the teaching of His Father. One cannot really believe in the Father, if He refuses to believe in Jesus (and vice-versa). And the same principle applies to our attitude toward those official representatives through whom Jesus revealed His word in the gospel or New Testament. How we receive or reject them is how we are receiving or rejecting Jesus. See also Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20.

Jesus also repeated again that He was the light of the world so that people who believed in Him would not live in darkness (see notes on 12:35,36).

Verses 47-50

32. What will be the standard of judgment on the last day? What lessons should we learn?

33. What was the source of Jesus' teaching and why is this important (vv 49,50)?

Jesus came to save the world, not to judge it.

Jesus said again that He was not here to judge those who rejected His word. He was here to save the world, not judge it (see also 3:17; 8:15). Again, this did not mean He would never judge the world. On the contrary, some day He will return to judge the world (see v48). But that was not the purpose of His first coming.

The world is condemned, but not primarily because Jesus came and people did not believe. The world is condemned because of sin: disobedience to God's commands. But the only hope of salvation is through faith in Christ. So Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn it: it was already condemned. Yet, if people do not believe, they will stand condemned because they have refused the only remedy for their sins.

Nothing here teaches it is wrong for us to rebuke sin (see notes on 7:24; etc.). Jesus repeatedly rebuked sin while on earth. But final judgment and statement of eternal destinies will be left till He returns (Matt. 25:36ff; 2 Cor. 5:10); that is where we too must leave it.

Judgment will be based on Jesus' commands, which He spoke on His Father's authority.

Jesus will come again at the last day. At that time the world will be judged according to what Jesus has taught. Though Jesus did not judge people while here on earth in His first coming, this did not mean people could lightly reject or ignore His teaching. They would still be judged by His words at the last day. This affirms that there will be a judgment at the last day, as also taught in Matthew 25:31-46; John 12:48; Acts 10:42; 17:30,31; Romans 2:4- 11; 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:27; 10:26-31; Revelation 20:11-15.

Further, at that time we will be judged by what Jesus has taught. This is why it is so important for us to study Jesus' teaching. Does it make sense to face judgment and be sentenced to eternal destiny when we have not even examined the standard of judgment to see whether or not we measure up? A student cannot pass a test without studying the material the test will cover, and we cannot be acceptable in judgment unless we have studied the Bible (John 8:32; Acts 17:11; Joshua 1:8; Hosea 4:6; Hebrews 5:12; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Proverbs 2:1-20; Psalms 1:2; 119:47,48,97-99; 19:7-11; Matthew 5:6).

But note further that, simply because people refuse to obey Jesus, that does not prove they are not amenable or subject to His law. All men are subject to His law, because He is Lord of all, King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. And His teaching is the same as that of the Father, who likewise rules over all. It simply is not true, as some teach, that only citizens in Jesus' kingdom are subject to His laws. Not all have the blessings and privileges of citizenship; but all are subject to His laws and will be judged if they refuse to obey. He Himself so states here.

We must realize that, if we reject Jesus' teaching, we are rejecting the teaching of the Father since Jesus spoke what the Father told Him to speak. This is not denying that Jesus Himself possessed the authority of Deity. But on earth He was acting as a man subject to God the Father like we are. We cannot speak on our own authority apart from God, and neither did Jesus. Of course, His thoughts and desires never contradicted those of the Father anyway, so whatever He taught would agree with the Father's will (17:20,21).

The Father's commands lead to eternal life. We must accept and follow them if we seek eternal life. If we reject what Jesus said, we reject what the Father said, and that in turn is rejecting eternal life. We need, therefore, to believe and obey His teaching if we want the eternal life that only God can give us.

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