

November 10
John 12

Today we read chapters 12 and 13 of the Gospel of John. We find ourselves on familiar ground, for we are reading again about the last week of Christ's life. All four gospels report extensively upon the events of this Passion Week, but John reports on fewer events. He gives us, as is his habit, some more details, especially conversations the other gospels lack.

John tells us that it was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus who broke open the container of pure nard. It is probably only because John is writing many years after Mark that he dares to give us Mary's name. The reason she is not named in Mark is without doubt the very same reason the resurrection of Lazarus goes completely unmentioned in all three of the other gospels despite its incredible significance. Mary and Lazarus' names are absent from the synoptics because it wasn't safe to mention them. Unlike the disciples of Christ who were scattered by the early persecution of the church and left Jerusalem to find safety and also to preach the gospel all over Judea and eventually the whole Roman world, it seems Mary and Martha and Lazarus remained in the little town of Bethany, only a few miles from Jerusalem, for the rest of their lives. There they would be easily within reach of the authorities who were persecuting and even killing followers of this new Christian way. So, in order to protect them Matthew and Luke don't even mention the feast at which Jesus was anointed by Mary, and Mark disguises her identity. To protect Lazarus, none of the synoptic writers even refer to his resurrection. By the time John writes, the danger is passed so he can tell the whole glorious story.

It's interesting to note that the full pint of nard that Mary broke and anointed Jesus with, while it is difficult to calculate it's worth it surely represented a great deal of her investment and in all probability was her entire life savings knowing that the woman was Mary, Lazarus sister that provides us a motive that's missing from Mark's account. Because after Christ raises her brother from the dead no gift would have been so extravagant. Unlike Judas who doesn't appreciate the value of her sacrifice for Jesus. John tells us that Judas objected to this gift, not because he cared about the poor, he says he could have sold it and feed the poor, but because he's a thief. Over the years I've heard people explain that Judas was a frustrated zealot, but maybe Judas was a zealot, but John's explanation is somewhat simpler, Judas was a thief and his implication is that he sold Christ out for that money. Now it's interesting he sells him out for a little bit of silver and here Mary gives her entire life savings to anoint Jesus. It was this raising of Lazarus that brought events to a boil and forced the hands of Christ's enemies. Verse 23 of Chapter 12 is the key to understanding all that is about to happen.

Jesus says there "The hour has come." Because of what happened at the graveyard in Bethany, so many people had begun to follow Christ and so many others had been confirmed in their allegiance to Him that the chief priests and scribes could wait no longer. The crisis had come to a head. You were either a person for Christ or you were against Him. You were His devoted disciple or you were His abject enemy.

Since John's audience most likely would have been Greek, it is understandable He only would record the visit of the Greeks. They came to see Jesus and probably approached Philip because he had a Greek name.

There are three things about this encounter with the Greeks that deserve to be noted today. The first is the prophecy that Jesus makes concerning His impending death. All throughout His ministry He has been saying, "My hour has not yet come." Now He says, "The hour has come" and He says He is going to die "like a kernel of wheat" which dies and then produces new seed. That is certainly a prediction of His death and after it was all over John could see it also as an allusion to His resurrection. He also spoke of His death by saying He would be "lifted up." These words, John said, clearly pointed to the cross. Jesus knew exactly how He would die.

A second thing about this event that would capture our attention is the fact that once again, as at the baptism at the mount of transfiguration, the voice of God was heard speaking from Heaven. When Jesus prayed "Father glorify thy name". God said, I have glorified it and I will glorify it. Now think about this, a few days before at Bethany Jesus raises a man from the dead. He's been in the ground four days and he did it in a most public way possible. He did it in front of hundreds of people and then again in front of a large crowd of people. Jesus talks to God and God talk's back. Now they heard it, they knew what had happened and it caused many of them to believe, and it scared his enemies to death but instead of believing his enemies they just hated him all the more.

The last thing we need to notice and is very significant, it's the fact that Jesus said his death would have significance, not just for the Jews but for all men. It is in the presence of these Greek people that Jesus says "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me." The theme of universalism -- that is, the fact that God's grace is for all men, not just for the Jew, it's there all through the scripture. You remember His word to Abraham, "All peoples on the earth will be blessed through you." God always intended to have some of every tribe, tongue and nation in his family. That fact was not clearly understood until the ministry of the Apostle Paul broke upon the first century world. Jesus understood it and His words in John chapter 12 make that very clear. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me." God's grace is for everyone. But instead of believing, they hated him all the more. It's for you, it's for me, and it's for every tongue, every tribe and every nation. Halleluiah! Once again this is Pastor Mike Goett, I've enjoyed our time together, and have a great day.