

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: The Passover, the biggest and most important feast day in Judaism, approaches and Jesus arrives at His destination in Bethany. A meal has been prepared in Jesus' honor and as Martha serves, Mary shows her extreme gratitude for Jesus by pouring a very expensive perfume on His feet and wiping them with her hair, an act of great reverence and humility as the home is filled with the fragrance of the anointing oil. Judas, the one who would betray Him, objects, stating that this was a wasted expense; to really honor Jesus, she should have sold the ointment and then given the money to the poor. He may have been right for stewardship's sake, but a greater purpose was at hand that he and others did not understand until after Jesus' crucifixion. Clearly, Judas had his eyes on the money and not on Christ; it was about his agenda and not about Christ, which begs the question, *where does our agenda lie?* Jesus, filled with compassion, comes to Mary's rescue and says; *leave her alone; she has done a beautiful, anointing act for me in preparation for my burial. You always have the opportunity to help the poor, but you will only have me a little while longer.* The people flocked to see Jesus and to see the person Jesus raised from the dead; even the foremost leaders and priests were there and because of this, many people began to believe in Jesus.

The following day, Jesus had His grand moment—the “Triumphal Entry.” As Jerusalem was overcrowded with Passover pilgrims, people took off their coats, waving palm branches and welcoming Him as He rode in on a colt. They sang and shouted out, *praise God! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hail King; Hosanna in the Highest!* This was in fulfillment of prophecy and the road to the redemption of the elect—all to display God's glory. As the word spread, the Pharisees were upset and perplexed.

Contexts and Background: Remember, John is not written in a chronological order. His audience is Jewish and they do not think in terms of events in a linear fashion like many western cultures do. There is a potential problem in this text when compared to the other Gospel accounts. Is there a contradiction with Mark concerning the colt or in the order of the events? Or, what about Jesus' anointing? When, and by whom was it done? Consider that Matthew's audience was Jewish, so he sticks with the fulfillment of prophecy in his account. For the colt, Mark only mentions the donkey because his audience is Greek, and they would not know of or care about the colt or its significance. The accounts of Matthew and Mark are different from John's in where the accounts of Lazarus and the anointing are. The difference was chronology; Jews were not chronological thinkers; Greeks were. Hence, the book of Luke, written to Greeks, is written in a chronological order, while Matthew and John focus on events. It's like watching a movie in a “flashback” or a “flash-forward,” where the characters are shown in a different time and different setting and then it shifts to another or current time. In addition, the narrative in Luke was probably about a different woman at a different time, so there two accounts and two anointings—one by a repenting sinner at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and one of devotion and gratitude at the end. (Matt. 21:1-17; Mark 11:2; 14:1-11; Luke 7:36-50).

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Passover.* This is a type and shadow to come of Jesus' redemptive work. It celebrates God's deliverance of His people from slavery, and now the True Redeemer is come, delivering us from our sins and giving us hope in His triumphant procession (2 Kings 13:14; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23)!
- *Bethany/Bethabara.* This was a small village of inns near Jerusalem where people on the pilgrimage to the Passover in Jerusalem would have stayed. It was in Herod's region, where John the Baptist was later captured and taken to *Machaerus*, Herod's fort and prison. John was later executed by the deception of Herod's brother's wife Herodias because he told them they were living in sin. *Bethabara*, found in the KJV and other versions, comes from a spelling error found in some later manuscripts. Bethany is correct; the confusion was that the early church leaders could not find that city because by the second century, it no longer existed (Matt. 14:1-12).
- *Jesus' honor.* It was customary to invite a traveling Rabbi into a home, even when the people of the home objected to His ministry. This was a show of respect for the position of teacher, whether they liked the teaching or not. Hospitality trumps personal feelings! Teachers like Jesus were given meals

and housing in exchange for lessons. Here, it may have been more than hospitality; it was a show of gratitude.

- *Reclining/sat*. The custom for Jewish people then was to sit for normal household meals, then for special occasions, to recline on carpets and pillows at a low table with their feet placed away from the table. They leaned on their left elbow, eating with their right hand. This is still practiced in most Middle Eastern countries.
- *Pure nard*. The name of the plant this perfumed oil was made from; it was imported from the East (perhaps China or India). A flask of alabaster was about twelve ounces; it was normally sold in units of one ounce, larger ones for the very wealthy. This anointing was extraordinary because of the very expensive oil, sealed by wax in an alabaster jar. It possibly was a family heirloom and showed Mary's gratitude and humility (John 1:27; 13:5).
- *Poured/anoint*. An act of devotion! Anointing someone with oil served several purposes; normally, it was dispensed on one's head. This was the daily routine of hygiene and a duty of the host. The Jews did not shower or bathe as we do, but put olive oil on themselves, then scraped off the sweat and dirt. This kept them clean, and their skin smooth and sunburn free in the hot climate. It also served to anoint for service and consecration, as with Saul and David. Here, it was to honor important guests. It could last for decades in this way if kept cool. It was worth a field worker's wages for a year (Matt. 6:16-18).
- *Judas Iscariot*. Perhaps no name in all of the ages signifies betrayal and disloyalty more than his! This man, who was with Jesus from the beginning and close in his relationship with Him, was perhaps even closer than the rest, yet would be the one to be the traitor! He was an *Apostle* (*Apostolos*); the word means *emissary*, or *sent ones*, as in Jesus' commissioned representatives (Matt. 10:14, 40; 15:24; Mark 6:7-13; 30; 9:37; Luke 9:1-6; 48; John 4:34; 5:24, 30, 36-38; 6:38; 1 Cor. 1:1; Heb. 3:1). He was the one who would betray Jesus, and later hang himself (Matt. 26:14-16, 47-50; 27:3-10). Yet, he was considered the "best" disciple—the best looking and the most promising. Looks and position do not tell us what is inside a person (John 13:29)!
- *Objected/Indignant*. It was the custom for the disciples of a teacher to discuss the financial matters, not the teacher. Judas used this authority to make his point. Judas was being hyper-critical, but the others said Matthew agreed with him! This may be right by reason of stewardship, but he was a manipulator and had another, more devious agenda. What the others saw as a waste, Jesus saw as honoring Him. What is precious in our sight usually is not so to God; what is precious to Him is our humility and devotion to Him (Matt. 26:8)!
- *Year's wages/300 denarii*. The act of devotion from Mary was very costly, a foreshadowing of the costs of faith. This is nearly three times the amount Judas would receive for his betrayal.
- *My burial*. Scented oils were used to prepare bodies for burial. This is another allusion to His *passion* to come. Jesus turns the anointing that was meant to honor Him—not to prepare His body for burial—into something obviously neither Mary nor His Disciples intended (Mark 16:1; John 19:39).
- *Poor among you/the poor you will always have*. This is a reference from Deuteronomy 15:11. It does not mean to ignore the poor or that poverty was acceptable; rather that we are challenged to be generous to the poor because we are faithful to God. Now God is amongst them! This is not downplaying service to the poor, but lifting up Christ as Lord! For us, it means we cannot do the service of God unless we are honoring God!
- *Have me*. A reference to the work of Jesus—that we receive life from Him, paid for by His death. John's intent in the Greek was *irony*, a common literary device then. Jesus also showed great compassion to Mary and protected her feelings while scolding His Disciples.
- *Palm branches*. Branches were waved to honor a dignitary and were used in the Feast of Tabernacles so they were already there. Normally, one had to go to Jericho to buy them; this became popular during the Maccabean period all the way up 'till Jesus' day (1 Macc. 13:51). This also was an

expression of the hope that He was the “militant” messiah they had sought to kick out the Romans. Josephus recorded other “would be” messiahs who, at that time, were competing for public recognition; perhaps this was also a statement of jealousy (Psalm 118:25-27).

- *Hosanna* means “O-save!” as in *save us now and continue to save and sustain us!* It is an expression of praise called the *Hallel* from Psalm 118:25-27 that was also sung at Passover and used as a celebration of victory. It was also a “saying” shouted at Passover in Jesus’ time. Ironically, (perhaps, deliberately), they did not see verses 22-23! Knowing the Bible does not always mean knowing the Lord! This has been called the “Triumphal Entry” in Church tradition; it was victory over darkness and the oppression of sin, but not in military terms, as the Romans did in their victory processions, or as many worshipers expected of Jesus. This is what we celebrate on “Palm Sunday” a week before Easter (Psalms 113-118; Zech. 9:9; Rev. 7:9).
- *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!* A quote from Psalm 118:26. It is to remind us about the character Jesus emulates of always seeking to be *gentle* and *humble* (Isa. 53:2-3, 7; Matt. 11:29).
- *King of Israel.* Jesus is the Great King! The Shepherd King! Jesus entered Jerusalem greeted as a king. This greeting of praise and worship eroded to disgust within a few days. Some of the same people who praised and called Him king then were calling for His death on Friday. The people were so blinded with their expectations of a Messiah they did not see what God foretold, or what they needed (Zech. 9:9).
- *Young donkey/colt.* A *colt* was a young donkey not yet separated from its mother, and usually would not be ridden. A donkey was a symbol for a royal emissary or a king bringing peace and good news; in contrast, a horse was a sign of action and war. Jesus used this image to point to His Kingdom of Peace. Donkeys were never used in war; they are too skittish. They were rarely used in farming, because they are lazy and stubborn. They were usually only for civil commerce (Gen. 49:10-11; 1 Kings 1:32-35; Isa. 40:9; 44:2).
- *Found.* To *found* means someone allowed Jesus, who was a distinguished visitor, to ride his donkey. In Matthew, Jesus sends two of His Disciples to get the colt. This is not a contradiction, rather an aspect of the same narrative. This gesture showed great honor to that person, the one to ride it, and the one to lend it.
- *Daughter of Zion.* *Zion* is synonymous to Jerusalem and Israel. *Daughter of Zion* refers to the people of Israel, as in Jews who are the people of God and points to God’s future rule on earth (Psalm 9:13-14; Isaiah 62:11-12;; Micah 4:1-2).
- *Written about him.* This passage fulfills the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 where a donkey and colt are mentioned.
- *Spread the word.* When something is important and others need to know, people will tell others about it.
- *Getting us nowhere.* The frustration of the religious leaders leads to their conniving and the hunting down of our Lord and Savior!

Devotional Thoughts and Applications: This passage ends with the narrative that has become the invocation to spread the word. The key for successful evangelism is the same as in advertising a product in the secular world; you have to “show and tell” others. We do this by words and by our actions of character and fruitful and faithful living. Be the difference so others can see our Living Lord by the mirror of yourself who reflects Him! To reflect Him, we have to act, think, and be as He has called us.

Jesus did not come to be over-powerful; He was birthed in history and in humility, and lived in humbleness, yet was fully human and fully God. He could easily have come as a powerful force blowing every one down, way overwriting wills, and tumbling cities. Yet, He walked in the gentleness and strength of a Shepherd so we can see Him more clearly. What He does as a Shepherd King is mostly what we can do too, as He calls us to do: walk and lead in the power of Him, be gentle, humble, hospitable, fruitful, faithful, devoted, and grateful, all aspects of character in this passage. We will also receive the

empowerment of God, acting in humbleness and character for a much more powerful lesson. His is the soft voice that calls us out of our pride and will, and shows us grace and the parade for the Gospel so we can be the mirror into Christ's greatness and eternity, moving us away from our sins and more into the life of faith in Him.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What gives you hope? Did you like parades when you were a kid? Why? How is Jesus a parade to you?
2. Have you ever had a great moment of victory like a sports triumph or winning a contest? How did you feel? How long did that feeling last?
3. How do humility and devotion go together? What about humility and gratitude? How have you displayed these traits separately and/or together?
4. How and why do many people today refuse the Gospel? How do many Christians do the same with the Word?
5. How does your own opposition hinder you such as fears, neglect, or lack of active faith?
6. Why is it that we cannot do the service of God unless we are honoring God? What does it mean that knowing the Bible does not always mean knowing the Lord!
7. Jesus was on parade here; how can you be His parade, as in His display for His honor?
8. Finish this sentence: *To really honor Jesus, I should _____?* What do you need to do to better understand and display humility? Hospitality? Gratitude? Devotion? Generosity? Honoring?
9. The expectations of a Messiah from these people prevented them from seeing what God foretold, or what they needed. How can this happen to Christians today?
10. What do you consider to be an "act of devotion?" How have you preformed such acts? What could you do this week to do one?
11. How can you display these Christian traits found here more? Hospitality? Gratitude? Devotion? Generosity? Honoring? Humility? What would this mean for your faith?
12. Have you ever carefully prayed and thought through where your agenda lies? It is easy to disparage Judas who had his eyes on the money and not on Christ, but what of us? What do you need to do to make sure your agenda for life and church is lined up with Christ's—His call and will and not your schemes and wishes? This is paramount for a healthy church!