

“A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN” SERIES

#22: “The Triumphal Entry”

SCRIPTURE: John 12:1-19

Jesus is on His way to his last Passover, which was just six days away. He was visiting again in Bethany, the hometown of Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But they are not at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. This dinner is at the home of Simon, identified as “the leper.” Several kinds of skin diseases were identified as “leprosy” in that day. Whether Simon’s disease was past or present, we don’t know. Jesus probably had healed him in past months. Martha was serving the meal, and Jesus and Lazarus were “reclining at table” along with Jesus’ disciples and others when...

...MARY BEGAN ANOINTING THE FEET OF JESUS.

She *“took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus”* (v. 3).

If you want to get the full story of what Mary did, with all its splendor and significance, you need to read both Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts of this event, along with John’s. You may notice that in Matthew’s and Mark’s gospels Mary anoints Jesus on the head, while John says that she anointed His feet. She probably did both, and John simply chose to mention her anointing Jesus’ feet.

The ointment was *“made from pure nard.”* What in the world is “nard”? One Bible dictionary has it: “A costly fragrant oil of light-reddish color, derived from the spikenard plant (*Nardostachys jatamansi*). Because it was expensive, nard was often mixed with inferior oils, and it was sometimes counterfeited. Notably, both Mark and John state that “genuine nard” was used on Jesus.”

Apparently, Mary wanted to express her love, gratitude, and appreciation for all that Jesus had done, especially the raising of her brother Lazarus from the dead. Her sister was good at cooking and serving, but those were not her gifts, so she began to anoint Him with

an expensive fragrant oil – about a liter – imported from India that was worth about a year’s wages.

What’s more, Mary ignored the custom for women of the day, let her hair down, and wiped the excess of oil from Jesus’ feet! Letting her hair down in public was bad, but then wiping a man’s feet with it was unthinkable!

No doubt, the aroma filled the house. Butler comments: “Whereas the two other gospel writers tell us that all the disciples were indignant and complained of what they called waste, John informs us that Judas was the instigator of the murmuring. Judas had persuaded the others to criticize Mary as being extravagantly wasteful. He even suggested that the money should have been given to the poor. But Judas was not at all interested in the poor! He was interested in Judas. He was the treasurer for the general fund of the Master and His twelve disciples” (p. 169).

Jesus told Judas and the others, *“Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me”* (v. 7).

Then, John tells us that...

...THE CHIEF PRIESTS MADE PLANS TO KILL LAZARUS.

When word spread that Jesus was at Simon’s house, and that Lazarus was there, too, people from all over the area began to gather, and the chief priests saw an opportunity to get rid of Lazarus. Seeing Lazarus alive was causing many of the Jews to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah, so they thought that if they got rid of Lazarus, it would spell the end for Jesus.

As far as we know, Lazarus lived to be an old man. None of the gospel writers say anything about him after this.

Next, John tells us about...

...THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM.

On the next day, which was Sunday, after enjoying dinner at Simon’s house, Jesus decided to go into Jerusalem. You can just

imagine how the disciples felt about this. I'm sure they objected and tried to talk Him into going back to Perea, even though John doesn't say such.

John wrote: ***The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"***

Can't you just imagine the response of the chief priests and Pharisees? Some of them probably went to Caiaphas, the high priest, demanding, "We've got to do something about this Nazarene! He's got the whole world thinking he's the Messiah!"

Then, on His way into Jerusalem, Jesus hitched a ride on the colt of a jenny! Why a donkey? Why not a horse, a prancing steed? Well, the donkey was a symbol of peace, while a horse was a symbol of war. It's remarkable that the book of Revelation describes Jesus coming on a white horse when He comes to judge the nations. Here, he rides a donkey, the colt of a jenny.

The disciples, wondering what was happening, didn't realize that this was the fulfillment of prophecy written hundreds of years prior to this time (Zechariah 9). Butler describes the scene:

"However, a meek and spiritual Messiah was the farthest idea from their minds. As Jesus rode up the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives a multitude of people from within the city had come out to meet this palm-waving, shouting procession. Thus, with a multitude following him and one in front of him, Jesus proceeds toward Jerusalem surrounded by exuberant festive thousands, hailing Him as their Messiah-Deliverer. The ovations of, "Hosanna! Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the kingdom of our father David which is about to come to us! Hosanna in the highest!" increased in volume until the hills of Judea echo them back. The people by the hundreds strip their cloaks from their backs and throw them in the dusty road for the colt upon which Jesus rides

to walk. Many also ran and cut branches from nearby trees and spread them in the roadway ahead of Jesus” (p. 178).

John sums up the response of the Pharisees in verse 19: ***So, the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”***

Jesus’ overwhelming popularity among the people has derailed their plans. So, “all they could do for the moment was to wring their hands in helpless frustration. But they would soon find a solution. They would side with the hated Sadducees in their bold and unscrupulous schemes” (Butler p. 180).

IN CLOSING...

What’s the significance of this donkey-ride into Jerusalem? It marked the end of His three-year teaching ministry. It underscored His claim to be the King of Israel. It was the “last straw” for the boiling hatred of the chief priests and Pharisees, that would lead to the inevitable crucifixion, just as God had planned it.