

JOHN

(2)

The raising of Lazarus (11:1-54)

Martha said to Jesus, “**Lord, he has been dead for four days.**” Jewish tradition held that one’s relationship with God continued with the soul after death. When someone dies, *shiva* (Hebrew, “seven”) begins a seven-day mourning period during which the soul is believed to “hover” near the body for the first three days, and then gradually depart over the next four days. Jewish belief is that the soul is aware of everything spoken in the presence of its body, and that the soul mourns over its own body during the entire week of *shiva*.

When Jesus arrives at the home of Martha and Mary, instead of going immediately to the tomb, “**Jesus wept**” (35). “Wept” is found only here in the New Testament. By praying aloud, Jesus wants to make clear to the bystanders that what he is about to do is the Father’s work through him. For Jesus does not want to be seen as only a worker of miracles.



To Jerusalem again (11:55-12:19)

Only John’s gospel gives us the name “Palm Sunday.” After Jesus leaves Bethany and enters Jerusalem, the crowds welcome him with “**branches of palm trees**” (12:13).

The Last Supper (13:1-20)

When Jesus “**came to what was his own, . . . his own did not receive him**” (1:11). In John “love” is always a matter of choice (3:19; 12:43).

At the Last Supper it is “his own” who now claim Jesus’ attention and His love. Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet was more than a host performing a necessary service for his guests; in first-century Jewish culture, it was a complete reversal of status.

The departure of Judas (13:21-35)

Jesus’ offer of the morsel to Judas was an act of hospitality that could hardly be refused. In John’s gospel Jesus maintains the initiative.

“**A new command I give you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, that you love one another**” (13:34). What makes the commandment “new” is that by loving one another they are the organ or “conduit” of His love; and so “**by this they all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another**” (13:35).

“**If you loved me, you would rejoice that I’m going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I**” (14:28). While the assumption is that the disciples love the Lord, three times Jesus insists that obedience to his commands or his word is proof that a person loves him (14:15, 21, 23).

Indwelling and the love command (15:1-17)

The “vine keeper” is the traditional biblical imagery of Israel as God’s Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7). As the “vine,” Jesus personifies what every vine should be—the source of life to its branches.

“**No greater love has anyone than this, that he lay down his life for his friends**” (15:13). Laying down one’s life for another was a virtue widely commended in the Greek/Roman world. Jesus’ death

for the disciples transforms them into friends: **“You are my friends, if you are doing the things that I command you”** (15:14).

The world and the Advocate (15:18-16:16)

Jesus warns his disciples that the world will hate them just as it hated him; and that the world’s hatred will be active persecution, that is, banishment from the synagogue and later martyrdom. Yet the disciples must not be discouraged, for Jesus warned them of what was coming well in advance.

The disciples’ response (16:17-33)

For the first time since Judas’ question as to the identity of the betrayer, the disciples voice their confusion as to what Jesus has just said. Jesus tells them plainly that he is going away, and that he will be absent not only from the world but also from the disciples. What differentiates the disciples from the world is their emotional response to Jesus’ absence. The world will rejoice at Jesus’ absence, even as the disciples are grieved. Because Jesus has exposed the world’s sin, the world will rejoice when he is gone.

Jesus prays for the disciples and to the Father; essential unity of disciples (17:1-26)

When Jesus prays for the disciples, “and I am glorified in them,” he is as much as saying they are his pride and joy; just as Jesus is the Father’s pride and joy. They are his “glory” and are living proof that he has indeed, completed the “work” the Father gave him to do. This makes possible his return to the Father to resume the glory that was his “before the world was.”

What exactly was the “work” Jesus was given to do and has now completed? It is the work of revealing the Father’s name—the Father himself—in the world; the Father **“who so loved the world that he gave his only Son”** (John 3:16).

The disciples’ unity is essential for their mission in the world. Such unity will bring people to faith in Jesus and the Father. This unity must be visible in the world; for God’s plan will come to full realization not through Jesus’ limited time on earth, but through the band of the disciples he has gathered around him. Jesus does not say the whole world will believe in him (and everyone become disciples), or even that he intends this. Jesus’ intent is only that the world might believe that he was sent from the Father; and from such faith, the conversion of heart and mind.

In this way Jesus’ prayer holds out hope for the world but expresses nothing approaching certainty. It is not a *prophecy* of what must happen, but simply a generalized expression of divine intent (3:17). **“And I made known to them your name, and I will make known, so that the love with which you love me might be in them and I in them”** (17:26).

Arrest in Gethsemane and hearing before the Sanhedrin (18:1-27)

John’s gospel alone mentions the presence of Roman soldiers in the arrest. In Mark, Matthew and Luke, Judas identifies Jesus with a kiss. In John, Jesus takes the initiative and identifies himself. Fully in control of the situation, Jesus asks, **“Whom do you seek”** (18:4)? Unlike the other gospels, only John records that the soldiers “fell to the ground” as if vanquished by a greater army. Later, as the nighttime trial begins, the Pharisees disappear from the scene.

At trial, and in contrast to the other gospels, Jesus says nothing so provocative as “I am,” or “I and the Father are one.” As a result there is no rending of the chief priest’s garments or the cry of blasphemy. But one of the chief priest’s officers does slap Jesus on the face. Here the issue is not whether Jesus has said something insulting or blasphemous, but whether it is true. If it is true, it is not blasphemy, and if it is false, it should be considered as such and testimony brought to the contrary. In fact Jesus has said nothing even remotely insulting to the chief priest, and the chief priest does not act as if he had. Thus the slap is an egregious overreaction. What Jesus said to the

chief priest is the truth, what Jesus has repeatedly spoken “**in the synagogue and in the temple,**” throughout his public ministry in Jerusalem and Galilee (18:20).

Jesus, Pontius Pilate, and the Jews (18:28-19:15)

Jesus is transferred from the chief priest’s courtyard to Pilate’s praetorium (residence). Pilate goes out to meet the delegation so that the Jews would not defile themselves (18:28). To enter the residence – even the temporary residence – of a Gentile would compromise ritual purity, particularly since it was now “early morning” of the day before they were to “**eat the Passover**” (11:35). Thus the Passover meal had not yet taken place, confirming that Jesus’ last meal with his disciples was not the Passover meal *proper*, but a type of preparatory meal: “**Now before the feast of the Passover . . .**” (13:1).

Though Pilate ultimately accedes to the chief priest’s demand that Jesus be executed, he is not convinced that Jesus is a threat to the Roman Emperor. In fact, Pilate is fascinated with the phrase, “the King of the Jews,” as he repeatedly uses it to mock them: “**Shall I release to you the King of the Jews**” (18:39)? Ironically, the Jews who refused to enter Pilate’s praetorium for fear of defiling themselves, are the same who later welcome the Gentile’s rule over them: “**We have no king but Caesar**” (19:15).

“**What is truth**” (19:38)? Pilate’s question is dismissive. Pilate does not want an answer but only an end to the conversation. And the mockery that Jesus endures is aimed as much at the Jews themselves as at Jesus. Again, for Pilate the title “King of the Jews” seems an absurdity and thus he permits the soldiers to mock Jesus. When the soldiers are finished with their sport, Pilate says, “**Behold, the man**” (19:5). The pitiful sight of Jesus is calculated to evoke ridicule; however the Jews can hardly be unaware that the ridicule is aimed as much at them as at Jesus.

“**We have a law, and according to the law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God**” (19:7). The Jews reveal their real reason for wanting Jesus dead—not that he made himself “King of the Jews” and so pose a threat to the Romans, but that he “made himself the Son of God.” When Pilate asks Jesus, “Where are you from?” and Jesus answers, “My kingdom is not of this world,” it is as if for the first time Pilate senses someone greater standing before him.

Crucifixion takes place almost immediately. Unlike the other gospels, in John there is no Simon of Cyrene to help Jesus carry his cross. Death by crucifixion was a long, slow process. It was Roman custom to let the bodies hang on crosses indefinitely as a warning to others, and as a public reminder of imperial authority. Since Passover was about to begin, the legs of the two crucified with Jesus are broken to hasten their death (19:31; Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Jesus is buried quickly in a new garden tomb near the place where he was crucified. Thus John’s Gospel is the sole source of the long-standing tradition that the site of the crucifixion and the tomb were almost side-by-side. Indeed Jesus’ arrest and execution ends as it began, in a garden.

John’s gospel shows that Joseph of Arimathea had a companion—Nicodemus—who “**also came . . . bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about one hundred pounds**” (19:39). This is the only account in which men carry out this preparation. Otherwise it was women who anointed the dead. A hundred pounds is a huge quantity of spices, but not unusual for John’s Gospel, given the hundred gallons or more of water turned into wine at Cana, or the twelve baskets of fragments left over, or the one hundred fifty-three large fish caught in the sea of Galilee.

The empty tomb and the first appearance: Jesus and Mary Magdalene (20:1-18)

In keeping with Jewish law, only in John’s gospel is the empty tomb verified by two male witnesses (8:17). In the words of Mary Magdalene, the corpse is not just “the body of Jesus” but “the Lord,” confirming her degree of discipleship is stronger than death.

Mary supposes the body might have been stolen. But who would carefully unwrap the body, separate the head cloth and roll it up by itself, and then make off with a naked and mutilated body? The positions of the linen cloth and head napkin mean the body has not been stolen. For when John saw the linen cloths lying there, he believed. The word “lying” does not merely refer to cloths that remained on the floor of the tomb, but rather that they were in the same position the body had occupied them.

“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God” (20:17). This is the first and only time in which God is explicitly identified as “Father” of anyone except of Jesus the Son.

The second appearance: the disciples and Thomas (20:19-31)

The disciples’ experience of having seen the Lord is incomplete without Thomas’ participation in it, and in the end Thomas’ decisive confession, “my Lord and my God!” is theirs as well.

By showing the disciples his hands and his side, Jesus verifies the reality of his death, and introduces a second active verification: Jesus *breathed* on them, **“Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22).** As Jesus declares blessed are “those who did not see and believe,” John wants his readers to know that Jesus’ blessing applies to them—the readers of the gospel—for they also have not witnessed these things.

“After these things, Jesus reveals himself again to the disciples, at the lake of Tiberius;” Simon Peter’s commission (21:1-25)

The vocabulary of “revealing” is typical of John: at Cana he **“revealed his glory” (2:11)**; his disciples urged him to **“reveal yourself to the world” (7:4)**; and at the end of his public ministry Jesus prayed to the Father, **“I revealed your name to the men you gave me out of the world” (17:6).** John’s intent from the start was that Jesus be **“revealed to Israel” (1:31).**

To a considerable degree, John’s final chapter tells Simon Peter’s story. Peter’s is the first name mentioned; he takes the initiative to go fishing; and he is the first to react to the announcement, **“It is the Lord” (21:7)!** On the shoreline, all the disciples except Simon Peter (and later, John) disappear from the story. It is as if Jesus and Peter are alone.

Jesus asks Peter, **“Do you love me more than these?”** That is, do you love me more than these other disciples? Peter’s response wisely avoids any comparison between his love for Jesus and anyone else’s, and replies **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”** Jesus responds, **“Tend my lambs.”** Again, Jesus asks, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”** To Peter’s response that he does, Jesus says, **“Shepherd my sheep.”** Again Jesus asks, **“Simon, son of John, do you love?”** “Grieved,” Peter responds, **“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”** Jesus responds, **“Tend my sheep.”** Either Peter is “grieved” because it seems Jesus does not believe him, or because Peter remembers his earlier thrice denial of ever knowing Jesus. Three questions and three positive answers are intended by John as a record of Peter’s reinstatement.

Jesus is commissioning Peter to be Shepherd of the Flock in his absence. Furthermore whereas Jesus laid down his life for his sheep (no one took it from him), Peter’s death will not be “on his own,” but at the will and command of others, as is the death of any martyr. Though Peter once said, **“I will lay down my life for you!” (13:37),** the reality will be quite different.

Finally, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is explicitly identified as John: **“This disciple testifies about these things and who wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.”** Indeed the Gospel of John is “true,” so **“that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you might have life in his name” (20:31).**