

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. During this time the soul is aware of everything spoken in the presence of its body, and that the soul mourns over its own body throughout the entire week of *shiva*.

When Jesus arrives at the home of Martha and Mary, instead of going immediately to the tomb, “**Jesus wept**” (11:35). The term “wept” is found only here in the New Testament. By praying aloud, Jesus makes clear to the bystanders that what he is about to do is the Father’s work through him; for he 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’s Gospel, “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. Thus 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 master became the servant.

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 always 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, the disciples are the instrument 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 do indeed love the Lord, three times Jesus insists that obedience to his commands or his word is proof that one loves him (14:15, 21, 23).

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

The “vine keeper” reflects 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 his disciples transforms them into friends: **“You are my friends, if you do 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 was warning them now of what was to come.

The disciples’ response (16:17-33)

For the first time after Jesus announces that one of them will betray him, the disciples voice their confusion. Jesus tells them plainly that he is going away, and that he will be absent not only from the world but also from them. But what distinguishes the disciples is their emotional response to Jesus’ predicted absence. The world will rejoice at Jesus’ absence, even as the disciples are grieved; for Jesus has exposed the world’s sin, which is the reason the world will rejoice when he is gone.

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

When Jesus prays for the disciples, he is saying that they are his “glory” and living proof that he has completed the “work” the Father gave him to do. This makes his return possible to the Father to resume the glory that was his “before the foundation of the world.”

What exactly was the “work” Jesus was given to do and has now completed? It is the work of revealing the Father himself to the world: the Father **“who so loved the world that he gave his only Son”** (3:16). And for this work the unity of the disciples is essential, and 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. And the plan is that the world might believe that he was sent from the Father, **“that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”** (3:16).

In this way Jesus’ prayer holds out hope for the world but expresses no 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 it 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 when Jesus is arrested. 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 should be 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, which 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 to accommodate the Jews (18:28). For the Jews to enter the residence – even the temporary residence – of a Gentile would compromise their ritual purity before they “**eat the Passover**” (11:35). Thus the Passover meal had not yet taken place, indicating that Jesus' last meal with his disciples was not the Passover meal *proper*, but a type of preparatory meal in anticipation of the feast: “**Now before the feast of the Passover . . .**” (13:1).

Though Pilate ultimately agrees 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 the Jews: “**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 a 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, and is aimed as much at the Jews 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 the real reason they want Jesus dead: because 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 the cross. Death by crucifixion was a long, slow process. It was also Roman custom to let the bodies hang on crosses indefinitely as a warning to others, and as a public reminder of imperial authority. But 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. And 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 always women who anointed the dead. A hundred pounds is a huge quantity of spices, but not unusual for John's Gospel, given John's tendency to emphasize such details: the hundred gallons or more of water turned into wine at Cana; the twelve baskets of fragments left over after the feeding of the five thousand; and 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 the words of Mary Magdalene, the corpse is not just “the body of Jesus” but “the Lord.” This confirms the degree of her discipleship with Jesus, which 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 are proof that 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 as the body that had lain underneath—that is, “lying in their folds.” In keeping with Jewish law, only in John’s gospel is the empty tomb verified by two male witnesses (8:17).

“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to 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 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!” becomes 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 have not seen and yet 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; the Lake of Tiberias; 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. The impression is that 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 so he 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, Jesus says, “**Feed my lambs.**” 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, “**Feed my sheep.**” Either Peter is “grieved” because it seems Jesus does not believe him, or because Peter remembers his earlier threefold denial of ever knowing Jesus. Three questions and three positive answers are intended by John as a formal record of Peter’s reconciliation with Jesus.

Jesus further commissions 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.

Finally, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is explicitly identified as John: “**This disciple testifies about these things and who has written 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).