

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

(Part 2)

by Philip Eichman

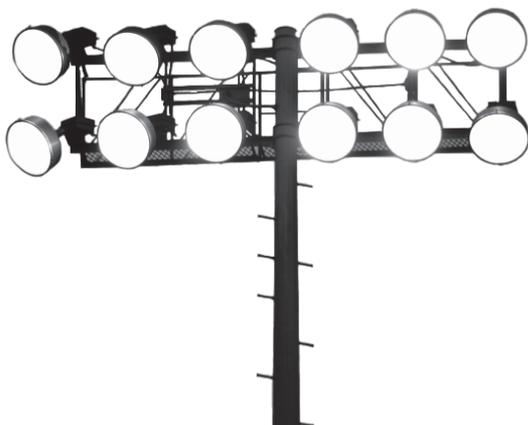


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Introduction

In Part 2, we will continue our study of the Gospel of John, emphasizing once again John's unique portrayal of Jesus. Much of the content of chapters 12–21 is taken up with the final week of Jesus' life. Some of this is similar to the other Gospels, but there is also a large amount of important material that is found only in John's Gospel that helps us to have a more complete understanding of the story of Jesus.

About the Author

Phillip Eichman has been a teacher most of his adult life. He holds master's and doctoral degrees in biology and was a biology professor for more than thirty years. He also completed master's degrees in Bible and ministry at Harding University, has taught Bible courses in Christian schools and colleges, served as a Bible class teacher, and part-time minister. He is now retired, and lives with his wife Nancy in South Carolina where he enjoys spending time studying and writing.



Key Verse:

***"Hosanna! "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
"Blessed is the King of Israel!" (John 12:13b)***

WARM UP



"The Gift of the Magi" is a short story written in 1906 by O. Henry about a young couple that wanted to find the perfect gift for each other, but were prevented from doing so because they lacked the funds. Unknown to each other, they decided to sell their most precious possessions in order to buy a gift. The wife decided to sell her hair to buy a chain for her husband's fine watch. Little did she know that her husband had sold his watch to buy a comb for her long, beautiful hair. As it turned out, the gifts were somewhat impractical; but each of them had searched and sacrificed for the perfect gift and that is what made their gifts so special.

In this lesson from John's Gospel, we will read about two gifts given to Jesus. The first of these was a gift of expensive perfumed oil given from the heart by Mary, a devoted friend and follower of Jesus.

Like the couple in the story, Mary had sacrificed much and given a gift that was truly special.

The other was a gift of praise and honor given by the crowd as they placed palm branches before Jesus and shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!” Sadly, the gift from the crowd was only temporary and fleeting. For a brief moment they praised Him as a king, but only a few days later another crowd demanded His death.

WORK OUT



Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet

John tells us that a few days before Passover, a meal was given in Bethany to honor Jesus.¹ Lazarus was one of the guests and Mary and Martha were also present. Martha was helping to prepare the food and serve the guests. Like her sister Mary, Martha loved Jesus and was serving Him in her own way.

The guests were reclining at the table. This may seem to us an odd way to eat a meal, but the practice had become popular among the Jews, especially for a banquet or other special meal. The table was lower, and those present would have reclined on their left elbow facing the table and used their right hand to eat.

Reclining in this way, the guests' feet would have been behind them. During the meal, Mary came to the feet of Jesus and anointed them with a costly, perfumed oil called nard or spikenard. This was made from the stems and roots of a plant that grew in India and was highly valued and very expensive. Typically, only a few drops would

¹ The same story is recorded with some other details in Matthew 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9.

have been used to anoint the head of a guest, but Mary in her extravagance used all of it to anoint Jesus.

Mary's love and devotion for Jesus is apparent in her actions. She gave to Jesus what was probably the most valuable and precious gift that she could give. The fact that she anointed Jesus' feet rather than His head also shows her humility. Normally, the feet of a guest were washed by a servant or slave, but Mary was willing to lower herself in this way to serve Jesus.

Mary also unbound her hair and used it to wipe the excess oil from Jesus' feet. Such actions would have been questionable by the moral standards of the time. The unbinding of the hair like this was not something that a respectable Jewish woman would have done, except in the presence of her husband. Mary, however, must have seen no shame in what she had done and was not concerned about what others thought of her actions. This was an expression of her love, and she was totally and completely absorbed in what she was doing.

At least one person present, Judas Iscariot, criticized Mary's gift. Jesus told him, "Leave her alone." Mark's Gospel added that Jesus also said, "She has done a beautiful thing to me" (Mark 14:6). No matter what the others may have thought, Jesus recognized the special gift that Mary had given to Him.

Jesus went on to point out that the gift was in preparation for His burial, and that He would soon be leaving them. "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me," Jesus told them. Little did those present realize that, in a matter of a few days, Jesus' words would come true.

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

The event recorded in John 12:12–19 is usually called the "triumphal entry." It is recorded in all four Gospels and is an important point in

the unfolding story of Jesus.² It took place at the beginning of the Passover week when visitors from all over the world were coming to Jerusalem for the feast. On the minds of many of them must have been the news of a teacher, or a prophet, who had performed various miracles. This would have been especially true of the rumors that He had brought a man back from the dead.

At some point, people in the crowd realized that Jesus, the man that they had heard about, was approaching the city. The other Gospels give more details, but John simply tells us that Jesus was riding upon a young donkey. The sight of a grown man riding on a small donkey may seem humorous to us, but for the Jewish people, it was filled with meaning. The prophet Zechariah had spoken of a king that would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9), and no doubt many in the crowd made the connection. The implication was clear; Jesus was riding into Jerusalem like a king or Messiah.

What followed was a spontaneous response as the people began to shout words of praise. Some of these words were from Psalm 118. This Psalm was sung during the time of the feasts and was associated with the coming Messiah. To these words of praise the people added, "Blessed is the King of Israel."

Some of those in the crowd waved palm branches as they greeted Jesus. Date palms grew in that region, and palm branches were used in some of the Jewish celebrations. In the Psalms, the palm tree was used as a symbol of righteousness (Psalm 92:12), and by the first century the palm tree had been adopted as the symbol of the Jewish nation. Like the shouts from the crowd, the palm branches were intended to welcome Jesus as a king, or even the Messiah.

The Jewish people had anticipated a Messiah who was a great

2 The parallel accounts are in Matthew 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–10; and Luke 19:28–38.

military leader that would drive out the Romans and rebuild the kingdom to the glory days of David and Solomon. Such a leader would have been expected to arrive on a powerful horse or in a chariot. It is surprising that they would have seen a king in this humble carpenter and teacher riding on a small donkey.

In verse 16 John tells us that the disciples did not understand what was going on. They had been with Jesus, seen His miracles, heard His teaching, but they were still not able to fully understand what was happening. It was only after Jesus was “glorified,” or resurrected from the dead, that they began to more fully understand what Jesus was all about.

The religious leaders on the other hand, did understand the situation and the implications of the crowd’s response to Jesus. For them, Jesus was no king. He was a threat to their authority and position, and as a result they furthered their plans to remove this troublemaker (John 11:53).

COOL DOWN



The day in which Jesus entered Jerusalem marks the beginning of the last week of Jesus’ earthly life. In the days that follow, Jesus will spend time with the disciples, teach His last lessons, be arrested, tried, nailed to a cross, and finally raised from the dead. John devoted almost half of his Gospel to this last week. This should give us some indication of the importance of the events that took place during this time and remind us that this was all part of God’s plan for redeeming sinful mankind.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe Mary's gift? What would be something of similar value today?
2. What was Martha's gift to Jesus? How was it different from Mary's gift?
3. What are some "gifts" that we can give to Jesus?
4. What insight into Judas Iscariot's character is given by his criticism of Mary? How does this relate to John's comment about Judas?
5. Why do you think that the people wanted to make Jesus a king? What was their motive?
6. In what ways is Jesus different from a typical king? How can we make him the king of our lives?