

Lesson Seventeen

(John 11:45-12:19)

You would think that seeing a dead man raised to life would be enough to cause any intelligent person to want to worship Jesus as the Son of God. Right? Wrong. Soon after Lazarus' grave cloths are removed and the excitement dies down, some of the mourners slip away to tell the authorities about it. There is an awful truth, then, in the proverb which states that the same sun which melts the wax also hardens the clay.

The Plot Against Jesus

(John 11:45-57)

⁴⁵Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him. ⁴⁶But some of them returned to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷So the Pharisees and the chief priests met with the Council and said, "What shall we do? Look at all the miracles this man is performing!" ⁴⁸If we let him go on in this way, everyone will believe in him, and

the Roman authorities will take action and destroy our Temple and our nation!"

⁴⁹One of them, named Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, said, "What fools you are! ⁵⁰Don't you realize that it is better for you to have one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed?" ⁵¹Actually, he did not say this of his own accord; rather, as he was High Priest that year, he was prophesying that Jesus was going to die for the Jewish people, ⁵²and not only for them, but also to bring together into one body all the scattered people of God.

⁵³From that day on the Jewish authorities made plans to kill Jesus. ⁵⁴So Jesus did not travel openly in Judea, but left and went to a place near the desert, to a town named Ephraim, where he stayed with the disciples.

⁵⁵The time for the Passover Festival was near, and many people went up from the country to Jerusalem to perform the ritual of purification before the festival. ⁵⁶They were looking for Jesus, and as they gathered in the Temple, they asked one another, "What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?" ⁵⁷The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, he must report it, so that they could arrest him.

It was the Lord's stated intention to raise Lazarus from the dead so that both he and his Father would "receive glory" (11:4) and so that the people would have solid evidence upon which to believe that the Father had sent him (11:42). And that is the result of this miracle, for many of these mourners "believed in him" (11:45).

It is well for us to keep in mind exactly why John records this event. For it is not just a heart-warming story to show us how much Jesus loves people. Neither is it just a thrilling, suspenseful account of Jesus' extraordinary power. Nor is it told merely to instill hope of eternal life in us. Jesus' primary reason for performing the miracle, as well as John's reason for recording it, is to cause each person who sees (or, in our case today, reads) it to believe in and trust Jesus enough to obey him and be saved.

That is why John says, near the end of this Gospel, "In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life" (20:30-31).

The Jewish authorities may have been prejudiced, but they are

not dummies. They are upset when the news is brought to their council chambers that Jesus actually raised Lazarus from the grave. They understand perfectly what the result of such miracles would be — “everyone will believe in him” (11:47). And they tack on, for good measure, the speculation that Jesus might cause such an uproar that the Romans would squash the Jewish nation under their dictatorial heel.

When he could not keep quiet any longer, Caiaphas chides them for their fearful words (11:49). This man Caiaphas served as high priest of the Jews from 18 to 36 A.D. He seems to have been little more than a puppet in the hands of his father-in-law, Annas, who had previously held the office from 7 to 14 A.D.

Then Caiaphas takes control of the situation and leaves no doubt that he intends to have Jesus killed. All their anxiety about how the Romans might react to Jesus’ miracles is, in his view, wasted effort. Because, if he had his diabolical way, Jesus is not going to be around that long.

There is great irony in the way that Caiaphas states his plan: “Don’t you realize that it is better for you to have one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed?” For while he is simply predicting that the death of Jesus would save the Jewish nation from any persecution from the Romans, he is also prophesying — although he doesn’t realize it — that Jesus is going to make spiritual salvation available to the Jews and to all other people (Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 1:16). Jesus also warned that their rejection of him would actually result in the kind of persecution the council feared (Luke 19:41-44; 21:10-28; Matt. 23:27-39). And in 70 A.D. the entire city of Jerusalem, including the magnificent Temple, was destroyed by the Romans!

From that very moment, Jesus becomes a fugitive from the Jewish authorities (11:53). The script has been written, the stage set. But Jesus does not allow the council to direct this drama. For Jesus is not about to allow himself to be captured until he is finished teaching his disciples and doing the other things which his Father sent him to do. So he withdraws to a tiny village named Ephraim (thought to be the modern village of Et-Taiyibeh), located about 14 miles north of Jerusalem.

Then, as the time for the Passover Festival approaches, the entire city of Jerusalem is filled with rumors and questions about whether the man named Jesus will dare attend (11:55-56). Not taking any chances, the chief priests and the Pharisees have their trap set for Jesus (11:57).

Jesus is Anointed at Bethany

(John 12:1-8)

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, the man he had raised from death. ²They prepared a dinner for him there, which Martha helped serve; Lazarus was one of those who were sitting at the table with Jesus. ³Then Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house. ⁴One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot — the one who was going to betray him — said, ⁵"Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?" ⁶He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would help himself from it.

⁷But Jesus said, "Leave her alone! Let her keep what she has for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have poor people with you, but you will not always have me."

John does not mention it, but between the time that Jesus leaves Ephraim (11:54ff.) and the time he arrives in Bethany (12:1), a period of about one month passes. And that month is spent in touring the areas of Samaria, Galilee, and Perea.

After that brief tour, Jesus returns to Bethany just six days before time for the Passover Festival to begin. His arrival was probably on Friday afternoon, March 31st, in 30 A.D. (Some Bible students believe that this is the same supper mentioned in Matt. 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9, which was held at the home of a former leper, Simon.)

His host (Simon the leper?) prepares an evening meal for him, a meal at which Martha helps serve the food and her brother, the resurrected Lazarus, is seated at the table with Jesus (12:2). There, among his friends and disciples, Jesus could relax and enjoy the fine food and warm fellowship.

Then, probably after the meal was finished, Mary steps into the room and anoints Jesus with a blask of expensive perfume. This particular perfume, made of "pure nard," was imported to Israel all the way from the Himalaya Mountains of India, where it was made from the stem of a certain plant.

Mary's generous and thoughtful act shows what it means to really worship Jesus. First, she is not ashamed to humble herself in his presence, even to using her hair to wipe the excess perfume off his feet (12:3). Second, she is eager to sacrifice in order to give the very best to Jesus (12:3). She may have been saving that

expensive perfume as a dowry for her marriage or even for use at her own funeral. But she would not pass up an opportunity to bless the Lord with it. Third, she encountered unjust criticism for her great expression of worship (12:4-6). Anyone who would sell his Savior for only 30 pieces of silver could certainly complain about "wasting" the equivalent of 300 pieces of silver! Like Judas, there are people today who resent spending money "just" to honor Jesus. Fourth, she discovered that those who freely give to Jesus also freely receive (12:3). As she poured the perfume over the head (Mark 14:3) and feet of Jesus, that powerful fragrance covered her, too. And wherever she went that night, she would bear that distinct likeness to the Son of God.

The Plot Against Lazarus

(John 12:9-11)

⁹A large number of people heard that Jesus was in Bethany, so they went there, not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from death. ¹⁰So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus too, ¹¹because on his account many Jews were rejecting them and believing in Jesus.

The chief priests were probably all of the Sadducee sect and were, therefore, people who refused to believe that the dead could be resurrected. And, as these verses plainly and sadly show, they are not about to allow the facts to influence their theology. They can't explain how Lazarus could be alive; but they can't afford to ignore him, either. So they decide to kill both Jesus and Lazarus.

The Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem

(John 12:12-19)

¹²The next day the large crowd that had come to the Passover Festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the King of Israel!"

¹⁴Jesus found a donkey and rode on it, just as the scripture says, ¹⁵"Do not be afraid, city of Zion! Here comes your king, riding on a young donkey."

¹⁶His disciples did not understand this at the time; but when Jesus had been raised to glory, they remembered that the scripture said this about him and that they had done this for him.

¹⁷The people who had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from death had reported what had

happened. ¹⁸That was why the crowd met him — because they heard that he had performed this miracle. ¹⁹The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, we are not succeeding at all! Look, the whole world is following him!"

This triumphal entry into Jerusalem takes place on a Sunday and is mentioned by all of the gospel writers (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40). The Pharisees prefer not to kill Jesus during the Passover Festival, lest they cause a riot (Matt. 26:1-5); but the warm reception which the people give to Jesus gives them additional concern.

Verse 15 is a free translation of Zechariah 9:9. In those days a king riding a horse was a symbol of the raw power that he intended to use in conquering his enemies. But when a king entered a city riding upon a donkey it was a symbol that he had peaceful aims. In this way Jesus tries to get across to the shouting crowds that he is not going to fulfill their expectations of leading them in a rebellion against the Romans.

Verse 19 strikes an ominous note, as the Pharisees realize that their efforts have failed so far. But they will try again. And very soon.

Thought Stimulators on John 11:45-12:19

1. Why did many of the mourners believe in Jesus?
2. Why did some of the mourners not believe in Jesus?
3. What argument do the Pharisees and chief priests present to the Council to encourage them to take action against Jesus?
4. Who was Caiaphas?
5. Why did Jesus go to Ephraim?
6. Why did John record the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection?
7. When did Jesus return to Bethany?
8. Why was Mary's anointing of Jesus so meaningful?
9. Why did Judas object to Mary's actions?
10. Does Jesus mean, in verse 8, that we should not be concerned about the poor? Explain.
11. Why did the chief priests want to kill Lazarus?
12. What significance was there in Jesus riding upon a donkey?
13. Why did this great crowd come out to meet Jesus?
14. What was the reaction of the Pharisees to the welcome which the people gave to Jesus?