

Gospel of John Chapter 12 - John Karmelich

As I studied this chapter, I kept thinking of a quote by Walter Martin (a great teacher of God's Word a generation ago, who had a national radio show). He'd preach, "Give them Jesus, but if they won't listen to Jesus, give them Moses"! He meant that if people weren't willing to get the good news of Jesus, they needed to hear the bad news of judgment. I know I'm preaching to the choir, but realize Chapter 12 is a perfect example of that philosophy! This chapter is essentially about four events that each contain good news for the saved and the bad news for the "not"! Since we're called to use our life live as use our life as a witness for Jesus, how do these stories, that occur about a week prior to resurrection Sunday affect our lives? The answer is they each give us lessons on what to say about Jesus or about God's judgment when we talk to others.

Obviously, I don't believe in conking people on the head with a Bible. It just turns them off and puts a big dent in our Bibles! I'm also aware that not every conversation involves "eternal matters." I'd argue the first thing is that our lives should be different enough that people know we believe in the true God! When we go through tough times it gives us opportunities to preach about eternal stuff when the "chips are on the line," so to speak. My point is, regular Bible study not only draws us close to God, it equips us on how to be good witnesses for Him. So we too can, in our way, give the good news of Jesus, and/or the bad news of God's judgment, that all of us must face. For us believers, judgment is strictly about the eternal rewards based on how we used our lives to make a difference for Jesus. Let's be honest, for the non-believer, judgment is really bad news. In effect, that's what Walter Martin preached.

With that said, let me explain the stories told in this chapter. The first one is a big dinner where the two sisters (Mary and Martha) of the last chapter having dinner with their brother Lazarus. Yes he's the guy Jesus raised from the dead after four days. At the dinner Mary wiped Jesus' feet with her hair. It was to prepare Him for His burial, and as a sign of adoration. We also read of Judas (the bad disciple) as he is complaining about the cost of the perfume Mary used. I can't resist sharing a classic quote here on that: Judas knew the cost of stuff, but nothing about the value! Bottom line, story #1 has both someone who worshipped at Jesus' feet, and Lazarus back from the dead! We also read the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Lazarus because they couldn't have him being a living witness for Jesus. The pattern here is about people committing their lives to Jesus, as well as those whose hearts are growing so hard, even with a person back from the dead, (think of us who, in effect, are raised from the dead because we believe in Jesus) being a witness. Hatred of Christianity causes people to hate Jesus all the more to oppose Him! In this chapter, those who hated Jesus wanted to kill those who were living as witnesses for Him. No it has not changed today. That double-edged sword is emphasized all through this chapter.

Next comes the story of what we call Palm Sunday! It's when Jesus publicly rides into Jerusalem as the promised Messiah. I've always been fascinated by the fact Jesus told people in effect, "Don't say who I am, so crowds won't overwhelm Me with requests." Yet on "Palm Sunday," He arranges a parade to be worshiped as God, to give an official opportunity for the Israelite nation to collectively accept or reject Him as their long-promised Messiah. A lot of people cheered Him and sang a specific chant associated with the Messiah (from Psalm 118) which essentially means "Come now as we want our Messiah" Yes many people saw or heard about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, so many cheered Him. Still, the leaders talked the crowd into rejecting Him because of His claims of being God. The "bad guys" of this part of the story were the Jewish religious leaders who saw all of this and still rejected Him. Each side is growing closer or farther away from Him!

The next story involves some foreigners who came to Jerusalem for the Passover feast and requested to see Jesus. He used that moment to give a little speech, essentially saying one must "die to live." Yes it is a reference to the fact we must change our lifestyle to become Jesus' servants! To verify that's what God wants us to do, God the Father's voice was heard to verify Jesus was doing what He called Him to do. It led to a short Q&A where Jesus said, to "walk in the light" while the light shines (that is Jesus in the world). It can also refer to the fact we're to be witnesses for Him while we're alive as the "light" is (Jesus) in us. There's a famous text quote here translated, "Sir, we've come to see Jesus." I know that some churches have a small plaque on their podiums to remind the speaker who the audience came to see (Jesus) and not the podium speaker!

From there we get two quotes from Isaiah, one from Chapter 53 and one from Chapter 6. Both indicate that everything that was occurring was predicted in the Old Testament. I need to pause here to say that those two quotes are precious to me for another reason. For many years (mostly last century) many of the so called "scholars" argued that there were two writers of Isaiah. They argued someone wrote the first Chapters 39 chapters, and another wrote Chapters 40 to 66. Yet Jesus quotes from both "halves" of Isaiah in this chapter and specifically stated many don't believe the same Isaiah wrote both halves! This means Jesus is saying Isaiah wrote the whole book as there's only one Isaiah. After a few comments on Isaiah seeing Jesus (i.e., Isaiah preached about Jesus in his book). That led to His comment that all who believe in Jesus as God have seen "the light." The other interesting thing about the two Isaiah quotes is they're written in "past tense." That means many centuries before Jesus came on the scene, Isaiah did predict the Messiah would be rejected nationally by Israel! Isaiah Chapter 53 is often nicknamed "The 5th Gospel" as it describes the crucifixion from God's vantage point! I tell people who have doubts that the Gospel is the only way to heaven to study Isaiah 53, which was written six to seven centuries prior to Jesus being on the scene!

One of the arguments in Jewish (non-Christian) commentaries is that if Jesus was the Messiah wouldn't more Jewish people recognize that? That's why the last dozen verses (more or less) are Jesus making a case why He's the Messiah and the penalty for rejecting Him! The fact that Isaiah wrote in "past tense" that He would be rejected corporately. Obviously there are exceptions as the church grew dramatically in the first century after Jesus rose from the dead, despite fear one would be excommunicated from the Jewish society for believing in Him! Bottom line, the last part of the chapter is a speech by Jesus as He warns people of the consequences of rejecting Him. Whether it was something Jesus said at this point, or editorial comment by John the writer, either way it's the truth!

By the way, this is the end of Jesus' public ministry. The rest of the book is the events of the cross and a few chapters dealing with His relationship with His disciples. If this gospel was written to prove He is God, obviously it needs to emphasize the consequences of rejecting Him, as well as the benefits we get for accepting that truth. Jesus is the light that came in the world, and we are to reflect that light as witnesses for Him. That's why God created us in the first place. The rest of the book focuses on events surrounding the cross, as well as Jesus dealing with His disciples. Those chapters are not just to teach a bunch of historical facts, but to show us what Jesus expects of us as His disciples.

All of this leads to the most important thing for us believers: Jesus calls us to be a light for Him to the world around us. That doesn't mean we must stand on a busy corner with a giant "love Jesus or go to hell" sign around our neck. It means our lives should reflect who is the Lord of our lives! Hopefully, that'll inspire you to pray for how you can use your life as a witness for Him!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John