



The Gospel of John - Chapter Twelve

II. John 1:19-12:50 - The Signs of the Messiah (continues/concludes)

II.d John 11:1-12:19 - The final Passover: the ultimate sign and the aftermath (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twelve

While making his way to Jerusalem for his final Passover, Jesus again stays in Bethany with Lazarus and his sisters. While sharing a meal, Mary anoints Jesus with a very expensive perfume, which annoys the disciples who believe the equivalent amount of money should have been spent of the poor. Jesus rebukes them for this saying she was anointing him for his death.

Because Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, he had become a symbol of Jesus' power and authority, helping to draw people to Jesus. Because of this the authorities started to plot to kill Lazarus too.

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the last time, fulfilling OT prophecy by riding in on a donkey's colt. Great crowds greet Jesus with adulation, hailing him as the King of Israel. This further aggravates the religious leaders.

During his time in the temple courts some Gentile believers indicate they wish to speak with Jesus. Although it is not revealed whether Jesus did speak with them, he does indicate that his death will draw such as these to him.

Jesus reveals both trepidation and determination over his impending death, resulting in God speaking from heaven. Although the crowd heard the sound they did not comprehend what was happening. Jesus spoke to them of his death but their confusion deepens as they thought that the Messiah would live forever and yet the one who claims to be he is speaking of his own death!

By quoting two well known passages from Isaiah, Jesus reveals how and why it is that so many are unable to respond to Jesus' teaching, understand who he is and thereby be reconciled back to God. The chapter concludes with a summary of Jesus' teaching again revealing his authority from and relationship with God.

II.d.iii John 12:1-8 - Mary Anoints Jesus

The anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany, also recorded in Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9, casts a long shadow forward over Jesus' imminent arrest, trial, condemnation, crucifixion and burial (vv.7-8). The story in Luke 7:36-50 involves a different woman, a different place, a different reaction from Jesus, and a different time in Jesus' ministry.

¹ Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

John 12:1

Six days before the Passover most likely refers to Saturday, since the Passover began Thursday evening at sundown and the Jews used the inclusive method of counting. It would be evening because the Sabbath ends as night falls on a Saturday and there are clear indications of work taking place that would not have been the case during the Sabbath observance.

The timing in John provides a discrepancy with the records in Matthew and Mark, which indicate that this event took place in the home of Simon the Leper on the Wednesday of Passion Week, i.e. just two days before Passover. The timing is not significant, nor is the location, but see the comments on v.2. It is the actions of Mary, the response from the disciples and Jesus' statements about the event that are of importance.

Jesus came to Bethany. After the raising of Lazarus, Jesus had travelled to Ephraim (11:54), but now he has returned to the relative privacy of the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

John 12:2

There could indicate either the home of Lazarus or Bethany, which fits better with the other accounts that place this meal in the house of Simon the Leper.

Dinner, Greek *deipnon*, refers to the main meal of the day, which was usually held toward evening: <<*He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid'*>> (Luke 14:12).

On a previous occasion, when Mary had sat at Jesus' feet while Martha served, there was a period of contention that led to a complaint: <<*But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me'*>> (Luke 10:40).

Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. It was the cultural norm for the women to serve and the men to dine. However, the specific mention of Lazarus

links to the earlier comment: <<*So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill'*>> (John 11:2), but more importantly is used by John who will later report that Lazarus was also a target for the chief priests' wrath.

³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

John 12:3

A pound or approximately half a litre is a very large amount of fragrant oil or perfume. Pure and expensive nard was imported from northern India and used by the Romans for anointing the head. The Synoptics indicate that the perfume was kept in an alabaster jar: <<*a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table*>> (Matthew 26:7), and: <<*While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head*>> (Mark 14:3).

It is recorded here that Mary anointed Jesus' feet, while Matthew 26:7 and Mark 14:3 mention that an unnamed woman anointed Jesus' head. Considering the large quantity of ointment, sufficient that the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume, Mary apparently anointed both Jesus' head and his feet. Attending to the feet was the work of servants: <<*She rose and bowed down, with her face to the ground, and said, 'Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord'*>> (1 Samuel 25:41), so Mary's actions show true humility and devotion to her Lord and teacher.

Her wiping of Jesus' feet with her hair is also remarkable, since Jewish women rarely unbound their hair in public. Mary's action indicates an expression of intense personal devotion to Christ, but no hint of immoral thoughts or conduct should be read into her actions.

John's focus on her anointing Jesus' feet points to Mary's great humility. As she comes to realise a bit more of the one who has been a friend to her and her brother and sister, her faith deepens and she recognises her unworthiness. The humility of her act prepares the reader to be all the more scandalised when Jesus himself washes his disciples' feet in the next chapter.

⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?'

John 12:4-5

Just as John had referred to Mary as the one who anointed Jesus' feet (11:2), so too he identifies Judas Iscariot as the one who was about to betray Jesus ahead of the account which he records later on.

Why was this perfume not sold. Selling possessions and giving the money to the poor became accepted practice in the early church: <<***There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need***>> (Acts 4:34-35).

Three hundred denarii represents the equivalent of about a year's wages since one denarius was the accepted pay for a labourer for one day. The annual salary for a standard job in the UK at a current minimum wage (2014) would be at least £12,000.

The money given to the poor. In the other accounts of this story Judas was only voicing what others were thinking. Pious Jews gave generously to the poor and his comments would not have been out of place at the time. John's following comments are clearly made in hindsight of who Judas turned out to be.

⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

John 12:6

He said this not because he cared about the poor. Judas' motivation was anything but pure. Before he betrayed Jesus, he had already become a thief. That John highlights that Judas did not care for the poor indicates that all true Christians should!

He kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it. Judas had been placed in a position of trust as the group's treasurer. He would not only become the one who betrayed Jesus but he was also betraying the trust of those whose lives he had shared so closely for three years. John is the only one who refers to Judas in the role of treasurer: <<***Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor***>> (John 13:29).

⁷ Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.'

John 12:7

So that she might keep it may mean 'keep the rest of the perfume', but Mark 14:3 says the flask was broken, and Judas complains that it was already wasted. Other interpretations are 'so that she may keep the memory of this' or 'Leave her alone, for she has saved the perfume, so that she could keep it for the day of my burial'.

She bought it. To be able to make such a purchase indicates that Lazarus, Martha and Mary were relatively wealthy. It was not just the poor and sick that followed Jesus. Peter and Andrew were middle class businessmen who owned their own fishing boat, as did the father of John and James. The diversity of his followers is indicated by a list of just some of the women who followed Jesus: <<***Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as***>>

some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources>> (Luke 8:1-3).

John often contrasts the actions of true disciples with those of would be disciples and opponents. These verses provide an even greater contrast between a true disciple in Mary and one of the chosen Twelve who had had privileged access to the teaching of Jesus, witnessing so much of his work and yet clearly one who never truly believed.

⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

John 12:8

The poor. Jesus' response alludes to: <<*Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land'*>> (Deuteronomy 15:11), and therefore he is not discouraging helping the poor and needy.

You do not always have me foreshadows Jesus' impending death on the Cross and subsequent resurrection and ascension, as well as the shortness of time remaining for the disciples to have a part in his earthly ministry.

II.d.iv John 12:9-11 - The Plot to Kill Lazarus

John concludes with a description of a large crowd seeking out Jesus there at the meal, attracted also by Lazarus' presence (v.9). Many Jews were putting their faith in Jesus because of Lazarus, so he was included in the authorities' most-wanted list (vv.10-11). Obviously, Jesus' popularity is rising once again. Lazarus was a living sign of Jesus' identity as life and life-giver, the victor over death.

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

John 12:9

They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus. Jesus had performed the miracles that drew people to him and helped some of them to believe he was sent by God. However, Lazarus was the living proof of the miracle, for he had been dead for four days and was now alive. Seeing him resume normal life was the most miraculous sight that drew the great crowd of the Jews.

¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

John 12:10-11

When the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death, it betrayed an astounding refusal to allow their beliefs to be changed by undeniable facts. They

would rather destroy the evidence than change their minds. This is not rational behaviour, but sin produces irrational action. They were particularly angry and upset because they were losing their influence of the people who were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

The Jews. John uses this expression in a positive way to speak of those who are coming to faith in Christ (11:45), indicating a hope that many of his Jewish readers will do the same.

II.d.v John 12:12-19 - Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Jesus' triumphal entry, with people waving palm branches to greet him, is celebrated in Christian tradition as 'Palm Sunday'. His riding into Jerusalem mounted on a young donkey fulfils the OT prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, while their chanting was that traditionally spoken out to pilgrims coming into the city and was taken from Psalm 118:25-26 that is accepted as messianic.

The waving of palm branches, which symbolically conveyed the notion of victory over one's enemy, probably indicates that the people mistakenly thought that Jesus would then and there bring national deliverance from Israel's political enemies, the Romans. Yet Jesus' popular acclaim would not last; within a mere five days, the shouts of praise would turn to angry calls for his crucifixion.

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

John 12:12

The next day refers to the day after the meal in Bethany and is accepted as the Sunday of Passion Week, called 'Palm Sunday' in Christian tradition. The festival is the Passover, one of three annual festivals that all Jewish men had to attend in Jerusalem. Thus the population swelled as people flocked into the city from around the region and the *diaspora* world.

¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord –
the King of Israel!'

John 12:13

By waving the branches of palm trees, a Jewish national symbol, the people hail Jesus as the Davidic king and echo the language of Psalm 118:25-26, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, hoping that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Indeed, in an apocalyptic text from the Maccabean era (164-63BC), palms are mentioned in association with the coming of the messianic salvation on the Mount of Olives (Testament of Naphtali 5).

The branches of palm trees were also a feature in the celebrations of the festival of Booths or Tabernacles: <<*On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic*

trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days>> (Leviticus 23:40).

The cry of Hosanna! is a Hebrew word *hoshi'ah-na* that had become a greeting or shout of praise but that actually meant Save! or Help! Not surprisingly, forms of this word were used to address the king with a need, such as: <<*When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and did obeisance, and said, 'Help, O king!'*>> (2 Samuel 14:4), and: <<*Now as the king of Israel was walking on the city wall, a woman cried out to him, 'Help, my lord king!'*>> (2 Kings 6:26).

Most of the crowd probably understood the title the King of Israel in a political and military sense, still hoping that Jesus would use his amazing powers to resist Roman rule and lead the nation to independence. However, like Caiaphas (11:49-52), they spoke better than they knew, as his disciples later understood (v.16). The crowd were perhaps alluding to the prophecy: <<*The Lord has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more*>> (Zephaniah 3:15). For Zephaniah, as for this crowd, such a scene was the anticipated outcome of the final battle with the Gentiles, which would liberate Israel once and for all. However, John has shown that the realities described by Zephaniah are already taking place in the midst of Israel through the ministry of Jesus, although in a very different manner.

This is only the fifth occasion that John refers to Israel explicitly in his Gospel. The other four come in the first three chapters where John's concern is with the initial witness to Israel: John the Baptist's witness to Israel (1:31) finds its initial response in the confession of Nathanael, a true Israelite (1:47), when Nathanael confesses Jesus to be the Son of God, the King of Israel (1:49); Nathanael then stands in marked contrast to Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel (3:10), who is unable to understand earthly things, let alone heavenly things. This motif now finds its fullness in this crowd's acclamation of Jesus as the King of Israel. Jesus is indeed the King of Israel and this motif now comes to the fore as the story nears its end.

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

¹⁵ 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!'

John 12:14-15

Jesus is depicted as the humble shepherd-king of Zechariah 9:9, who comes to the Holy City to take his rightful place. An early messianic prophecy speaks of a ruler from Judah who, sitting on a donkey's colt, will command the obedience of nations, fulfilling Jacob's prophecy for the one who would come in the line of his son Judah: <<*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the*

peoples is his. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes>> (Genesis 49:10-11).

The Synoptics give more detailed accounts of how Jesus knew the circumstances of where a donkey's colt could be found and sent two of his disciples to fetch it for him. Refer to Matthew 21:1-7, Mark 11:1-7 and Luke 19:29-35.

Do not be afraid may be taken from: <<*Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'*>> (Isaiah 40:9), where the reference is to the one who brings good tidings to Zion: <<*Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen*>> (Isaiah 44:2).

Daughter of Zion was a reference to Israel as the people of God. This analogy can now be extended to include all who believe in Jesus for their salvation.

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

John 12:16

His disciples did not understand these things at first. This is an important verse on the misunderstanding motif in John, indicating that many of the things Jesus said and did were understood only after the Cross and resurrection, when Jesus was glorified.

They remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. The NT indicates that the Twelve shared the hopes of the Jewish nation for a messianic king to rescue them from oppression, a hope they held onto even to the moment when Jesus ascended into heaven: <<*So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?'*>> (Acts 1:6). However, following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, their minds were opened and they were able to reflect back on what they had seen and heard, coming to a true realisation of what had happened, and what it all meant.

¹⁷ So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. ¹⁸ It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹ The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!'

John 12:17-19

So the crowd continued to testify. The use of the word crowd here can be confusing because the first use refers to those who had witnessed the raising of

Lazarus, had believed in Jesus and now testify that Jesus is indeed the one sent by God. It is their testimony that leads a further crowd of people to go out to meet him in order to see for themselves and offer their own praise.

The world has gone after him is an obvious overstatement, highlighting the Pharisees' exasperation at the popularity of Jesus and their failure to thwart him, although there were *diaspora* Jews in the crowd going out to see him and that would fit with their concept of the world here. In just a few years the disciples of Jesus would start to have an impact on the known world: <<***When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, 'These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also'***>> (Acts 17:6).

II.e John 12:20-50 - The approaching Gentiles and the Messiah's rejection by the Jews

The present section concludes the first major part of John's Gospel, which narrates Jesus' mission to the Jews. The arrival of some Greeks signals to Jesus that this mission is about to come to an end. But before Jesus can reach out to the Gentiles, he first must die. His hour is now at hand.

II.e.i John 12:20-26 - Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus

As well as the vast numbers of Jews coming to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, a number of God-fearing Gentiles, called Greeks here, were also in the city and they wanted to meet with Jesus. Jesus announces that his hour is finally here and that he must die in order for eternal life to come to so many more. He also teaches on the need to live lives to God and not to self.

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.

John 12:20

Greeks refers to Gentiles, not necessarily to people from Greece: <<***Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus***>> (Acts 11:20 NIV). They are 'God-fearers', non-Jews or perhaps Jewish proselytes who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the Jewish festival.

²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

John 12:21-22

They came to Philip. No reason is given why they approached Philip or why Philip sought Andrew rather than going straight to Jesus. It is suggested that it was unusual for Jesus to speak directly to Gentiles, although there are a few occasions recorded in the Gospels, and Philip sought council from Andrew who was perhaps closer to Jesus than was Philip: <<***When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,***>>

'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?'>> (Mark 13:3-4).

Bethsaida was just northeast of where the Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee from the north. Research since the 1980s has focused on et-Tell as the site for Bethsaida. This site does have residential remains from around NT times, including an apparent fisherman's house with ancient fishing equipment, located on top of an earlier Iron Age, i.e. OT-era settlement. Excavation geologists suggest that the Sea of Galilee originally extended closer to this site than it does today.

We wish to see Jesus. This is a perfectly reasonable request and one that has been asked by millions of people ever since. Jesus provides the answer in v.24 by alluding to his death that will produce fruit. That fruit will see Jesus because they have the faith to believe in him.

²³ Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

John 12:23

Jesus answered them refers to Andrew and Philip, not the Greeks. Although what he says does apply to them (v.24).

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. This hour is the moment in history where Jesus will lay down his life for the sins of mankind so they can be reconciled back to God. It includes his resurrection that signifies the breaking of the stranglehold that death had over life since the fall of mankind: <<**And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die'**>> (Genesis 2:16-17).

²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

John 12:24

If it dies, it bears much fruit. Jesus does not speak directly to the Greeks, but he speaks of their place in his community in the future. For he reveals, by the analogy of a grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying, that it is time for his death to take place, through which a great crop will be produced as he draws all men to himself (v.32). This verse answers the Greeks indirectly, for through his death Jesus will become accessible for them as the exalted Lord. Jesus teaches that for new life to come something has to die, as Paul also understands: <<**But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies**>> (1 Corinthians 15:35-36), and: <<**So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!**>> (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The contrast between remaining just a single grain, Greek *monos*, yet bearing much fruit indicates that the fruit Jesus speaks of are people, the fruit of evangelism. But a second meaning of fruit is also present: through Jesus' death fruit will be produced in the lives of his followers, namely, the very quality of life,

divine life, revealed in the death. The next verses spell out this connection between fruit and discipleship.

²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

John 12:25-26

Here again Jesus speaks in absolute terms to emphasise a point: those who love their life means ‘those who delight in their lives in this world more than in God’, and those who hate their life in this world means, by contrast, ‘those who think so little of their own life, and so much of God, that they are willing to sacrifice it all for God’. Following Christ entails self-sacrifice, shown supremely at the Cross. The Greek word for life, *psyche*, does not just refer to physical life, it is more comprehensive than that; taking in one’s whole being, one’s self. The self was not created to be an autonomous centre of being, but rather to be in union with God and receive life from him. This teaching from Jesus also appears in the Synoptic Gospel accounts in Matthew 10:39, Mark 8:35, Luke 14:26 and 17:23.

What is needed is a detachment from this self, and this is what is meant in hate. When Jesus says the disciple must hate father and mother in Luke 14:26 he does not mean despise, reject and abominate in an absolute sense. He is speaking about choices and attachments. He means that the devotion and obedience to himself must be so thorough that nothing else is distracting. Jesus is calling his disciples to reject rebellion against God and live in the light of life.

Lose it means not to have eternal life in comparison to those who serve God through Jesus in this life, who will be rewarded with the gift of eternal life.

Whoever serves me must follow me. This statement almost seems to be in reverse, i.e. whoever follows me must serve me. However, the ordering is quite deliberate by Jesus for it is only those who are truly following Jesus through the way they live their lives that are the ones who are serving him. By implication with what Jesus has been saying, true disciples must follow him into death, whether death to self: <<*Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life*>> (Romans 6:4), or those called to martyrdom: <<*As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come*>> (2 Timothy 4:6), and: <<*I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me*>> (2 Peter 1:13-14).

Where I am, there will my servant be also. Jesus remains with a believer throughout their earthly life by the indwelling of his Spirit but the promise is also that, after death, the believer will be with the Lord forever: <<*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also*>> (John 14:3), <<*Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory,*

which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world>> (John 17:24), <<Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord>> (2 Corinthians 5:8), <<For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you>> (Philippians 1:21-24), and: <<Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever>> (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Whoever serves me, the Father will honour indicates that the offer of salvation and eternal life in the presence of God is open to anyone who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

II.e.ii John 12:27-36a - Jesus Speaks about His Death

Jesus, in a moment of human weakness, reveals his natural apprehension of going to the Cross and asks his Father to save him but immediately rescinds the request by showing his determination to complete the work the Father has given him. Immediately, God speaks from heaven, acknowledging that he will be glorified by his Son.

Although the crowd hear the voice they fail to comprehend. Some think it is just thunder while others that it was an angel. Jesus explains that it was for them that God had spoken, revealing that he will be with them for only a short time longer. The crowd again show their lack of comprehension by stating they understand the Messiah will be with them forever so how could Jesus, if he is the one, now say he is going to die?

²⁷ ‘Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – “Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

John 12:27

Now my soul is troubled uses the Greek *tarassō*, which means ‘to be stirred up or unsettled’; the word or a related compound is found in the Septuagint in Davidic psalms, such as: <<**My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O Lord – how long?>> (Psalm 6:3), and: <<Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God>> (Psalm 42:11). In Psalm 6 David then prays for salvation; Jesus does not have that option if he is to fulfil the will of his Father. The majority of OT references in John’s account of the Passion, beginning here, are taken from psalms referring to a righteous sufferer.**

Father, save me from this hour. Having just called for discipleship that requires dying to self and following him, Jesus goes on to show that he understands just how hard such obedience is. Jesus shows that temptation as a human is not itself a sin, for he was tempted to avoid suffering if he could but, unlike human representation in the Garden of Eden, Jesus does not bow to the pressure of temptation; he makes a choice not to rebel against God. Jesus knows what he must go through, knows that the Father could have saved him from it if Jesus had truly

wanted him to, and yet shows true discipleship by pressing on until the end: **No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.** For John, this moment is equivalent to what Jesus would pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, which John does not record: <<*And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want'*>> (Mark 14:35-36).

²⁸ Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'

John 12:28

Then a voice came from heaven. This is one of three instances during Jesus' earthly ministry where a heavenly voice attests to his identity, the other two are his baptism and the transfiguration; refer to Matthew 3:17 and 17:5.

Father, glorify your name; I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. God brought glory to his name through creation, by saving one human family in the flood, by rescuing his people from slavery and on so many other occasions. His greatest glory had come in the sending of his Son to offer reconciliation and it would come again when he offered the life of his Son on the Cross.

²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.'

John 12:29

The crowd said that it was thunder. Events of eternal consequence are occurring in the unseen spiritual realm, but when unbelievers see or hear a manifestation of them, even the very voice of God speaking from heaven, they misinterpret them as natural events, showing their spiritual blindness.

An angel has spoken to him. The Jews that followed the teaching of the Pharisees believed that angels did speak to people from time to time, for example: <<*The angel of the Lord said to him, 'Why have you struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me'*>> (Numbers 22:32), and: <<*When the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and wept*>> (Judges 2:4).

³⁰ Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

³¹ Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.

John 12:31

This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. In v.29 some had related the voice to the divine realm and thus at least put it in the right perspective, even if they did not understand it. The others hear only noise. The voice testifies to the Father and the Son, but to no avail. They have not understood this voice, but Jesus says this voice is for their benefit. In saying this he is giving them the opportunity to realise they are missing something; perhaps they might be led to inquire what

the words meant. It is an invitation to become open and receptive to him. Jesus affirms that a message has been transmitted and that if they did not get it then something is wrong with their receivers. Indeed, he goes on to spell out that they are not missing just any message. He indicates that they are in the midst of the most significant events in human history: Now is the judgement of this world.

The ruler of this world in its present fallen, sinful state is Satan: <<*I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me*>> (John 14:30), and: <<*We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one*>> (1 John 5:19). Now, at the Cross, the Devil will be cast out, that is, decisively defeated: <<*He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning'*>> (Luke 10:18), <<*And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it*>> (Colossians 2:13-15), and: <<*Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death*>> (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus' triumph over Satan in his death and resurrection is the basis for his final triumph in the consummation: <<*And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever*>> (Revelation 20:10).

World here and in the rest of the Gospel refers to that which is in rebellion against God, especially in the religion of God's own people. There may be much talk of God and much activity for him that essentially is motivated by a love of self and has nothing to do with God. The Cross exposed this terrifying reality and condemned it.

Will be driven out. John is not trying to say that Satan has been cast out of heaven, away from the earth or out of the created universe. He knows that he still has a strong influence even after the Cross. What John is saying here is that he has been cast out of the true believer's heart and cannot be conquered by him providing they keep the love of Christ in their heart. His power is broken in the lives of those who have union with Christ.

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

John 12:32

This most explicit lifted up saying in John complements the earlier references in 3:14 and 8:28, and echoes Isaiah 52:13 <<*See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high*>>. Here is the banner Isaiah spoke of when he wrote: <<*On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious. On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to*

recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth>> (Isaiah 11:10-12).

All people, in context, means ‘all kinds of people’, or ‘people from all nations’; that is, both Jews and Gentiles. It is not a reference to universalism that states that all people will be saved. Here is the fulfilment of the messianic prophecies that the tribes of the earth will gather on Mount Zion to worship God, for example, Isaiah 2:1-5, Micah 4:1-5 and Zechariah 14:16-19.

The drawing, as in 6:44, is effective. But the gathering place is not the temple, for Jesus has replaced the temple. The one sacrifice on the Cross will fulfil the function of the sacrifices of the temple, and in Jesus’ own person, to myself, is the presence of God, whom they went to the temple to worship. The new community is grounded in the work of the Cross.

³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

John 12:33

The kind of death he was to die indicates that Jesus knew he was to be crucified, which includes the process of the Cross being lifted up into position after the person has been nailed to it. The Jews had tried to stone Jesus on several occasions but were always prevented from doing so. Such knowledge goes beyond prophecy and is a further indication of Jesus’ deity. He also revealed how Peter would be martyred: <<(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, ‘Follow me’>> (John 21:19).

³⁴ The crowd answered him, ‘We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?’

John 12:34

We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? This is the last of several messianic misunderstandings featured in this Gospel. It is also the last time that the crowd speaks directly with Jesus. They had failed to understand the voice of God (v.29), and now they show they fail to understand the voice of his Son.

The people have some inkling here that Jesus is predicting his death. What is probably meant by the law is the entire Hebrew Scriptures, in which there are several passages that speak of the perpetual existence of the Davidic Messiah: <<He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever>> (2 Samuel 7:13), <<Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations! May he be enthroned for ever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!>> (Psalm 61:6-7), <<His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with

justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this>> (Isaiah 9:7), and: <<In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed>> (Daniel 7:13-14 NIV). Later Jewish expectations are recorded in the Apocrypha, for example in 1 Enoch 49.1 and 62.14, and Psalms of Solomon 17.4.

The crowd ask the right question: Who is this Son of Man? For the key to all their questions is Jesus' identity. Jesus appears to avoid their question, instead issuing an admonition for them to pay attention to what they have already seen and heard. But in fact he answers them in a profound way, for he implies that he is the light (v.35).

It is interesting to note that John records it is the crowd that are linking the terms Messiah and Son of Man in this verse. There is still no clear comprehension but at least there is the dawning of realisation of who Jesus might actually be.

³⁵ Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.

^{36a} While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

John 12:35-36a

Jesus' answer is indirect; in view of the fact that the light will be with people only for a little while longer, his crucifixion is near. He urges the people to believe in the light while there is still time.

On Jesus' comment walk while you have the light, refer to the comments made on John 9:4-5.

If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. If a person believes they are living a fulfilled life apart from Christ then they are living in self-deception: <<*If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true*>> (1 John 1:6), and: <<*But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness*>> (1 John 2:11).

Jesus' followers share in his own life through their faith in him, and because Jesus himself is the light, they are children of light as they share in his light: <<*For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true*>> (Ephesians 5:8-9). Just as believers need not fear death because they have life itself in their relation with the one who is himself the resurrection and the life

(11:25-26), so also they need not fear the darkness because they have light through their relationship with him who is the light.

II.e.iii John 12:36b-43 - The Unbelief of the People

John summarises the unbelief of Jesus' fellow Jews in words that express how tragic and inexcusable is this rejection by his own people. Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. While this rejection was tragic and inexcusable, it was not completely surprising to those who understood the Scriptures. These opponents, who have taken such pride in Moses, have in fact repeated the pattern of those Israelites Moses condemned.

^{36b} After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

John 12:36b

When Jesus hid himself from them, he indicated God's imminent judgment and the completion of his revelatory work to the people of Israel (1:18).

³⁷ Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

‘Lord, who has believed our message,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’

³⁹ And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said,

⁴⁰ ‘He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and understand with their heart and turn —
and I would heal them.’

John 12:37-40

Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him indicates the culpability of people who had seen these miracles but still did not believe. The purpose of the miracles was to lead them to faith, and the miracles provided abundant proof of Jesus' deity and messiah-ship, but people in their hardness of heart still rejected this evidence.

This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah. John cites Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10 to indicate that the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah was predicted by Scripture and thus serves to confirm, rather than thwart, God's sovereign plan. Isaiah 53:1 refers to the servant of the Lord who was rejected by the people but exalted by God; Isaiah 6:10 attributes people's hardening ultimately to God himself, similar to Pharaoh's: <<*For the scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my*

name may be proclaimed in all the earth.' So then he has mercy on whomsoever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomsoever he chooses>> (Romans 9:17-18).

This text comes from the fourth of the Servant Songs of Isaiah, already alluded to in v.32. The Servant Song begins by saying that the Servant will be lifted up and exalted but that many will be appalled at him because he is disfigured (Isaiah 52:13-14). It is said: *<<so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him>>* (Isaiah 52:15a), because they were not prepared for what they saw. It is at this point that Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (Isaiah 53:1). In other words, the prophet is saying the message he has been given is very difficult to believe.

The present verses are the first in a series of fulfilment quotations in the second half of John's Gospel. Seen here is John's emphasis on divine sovereignty and human responsibility. On the one hand, the people should have believed and are held guilty for disbelieving, they did not believe in him. On the other hand, God blinded their eyes so that they did not have the spiritual ability to believe, and John can even say they could not believe.

The arm of the Lord is a metonymy for the strength of God, seen especially in great acts of deliverance such as the exodus, for example: *<<Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement">>* (Exodus 6:6), *<<Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?>>* (Deuteronomy 4:34). But now this strength has been revealed in one who is despised, stricken and crushed (Isaiah Chapter 53).

And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said. John's quote does not follow exactly either the Hebrew or the Greek forms of this passage, and his changes help highlight the significance he sees in this text. First, in both the Hebrew and the Greek of Isaiah, people are affected in their hearts, ears and eyes, in that order. Thus, John leaves out the ears and reverses the order so the eyes are first. In this way he focuses on the signs of Jesus, and moves from the outer to the inner, as he has done before (8:44). The interior disposition plays a major role, as v.43 will emphasise. Second, along with this clarification on the human side he also clarifies the divine side.

⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him.

John 12:41

Isaiah said this is a strong argument for the entire book of Isaiah being written by one person, the prophet Isaiah, for there are those who propose multiple authors. This most likely refers to the two specific passages that John quotes, Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10, but the wider context of both passages is probably also in view.

John seems to be claiming that when Isaiah saw the exalted King and the suffering servant, he saw Jesus' glory.

⁴² Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

John 12:42-43

The opposition of the Jewish leaders to Jesus was not at all monolithic; an increasing number of the leaders themselves had come to faith, for many, even of the authorities, believed in him. However, their fear of the Pharisees was still strong, and hence they did not confess Jesus publicly.

For they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God. John penetrates the human heart, showing again that the desire for human commendation kept them from following Jesus in a public way.

For fear that they would be put out of the synagogue. To be put out of the synagogue would mean total exclusion from all religious and many social activities, thus making the person a social outcast. Jesus knew that this would happen to those who decide to follow him: <<*Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man*>> (Luke 6:22). This was the fear experienced by the parents of the man born blind who would not testify fully when brought before the Pharisees as recorded in John 9:18-23.

II.e.iv John 12:44-50 - Summary of Jesus' Teaching

Now that the public ministry is complete and John has reflected on the rejection Jesus has met, a final statement from Jesus is given. It is not located either in place or time. The statement weaves together many major motifs from the first twelve chapters, the main theme being the salvation and judgment that have come through Jesus and that are all grounded in the Father.

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried aloud: 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

John 12:44-45

Then Jesus cried aloud would indicate that Jesus was in a busy public place and had to shout in order to be heard by the crowd. This may indicate that he was once again in the Temple Complex but this is by no means certain.

Believes not in me means 'believes not only, not ultimately, in me'. Since Jesus is one with God the Father then the believer is accepting of God, in him who sent me. Because faith in Jesus is faith in God the cowardice of the would-be believers in vv.42-43 is heinous. This unity between Jesus and the one who sent him grounds this section, as it has the whole Gospel.

Whoever sees me sees him who sent me. Those who have seen Jesus have seen the Father, just as Jesus will confirm to Philip: <<*Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”?’>> (John 14:9).*

⁴⁶ I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.

John 12:46

I have come as light into the world. John had announced Jesus as the light in his prologue: <<*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it>> (John 1:3b-5).*

To remain in the darkness would be to live without the true knowledge of God. This is not the case for everyone who believes in Jesus: <<*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light>> (1 Peter 2:9).*

⁴⁷ I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

John 12:47

I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them. The first type of person Jesus has in view here is the one who will listen, but they will not take the teaching into their life and live according to it. The would-be believers in vv.42-43 are one example of such people.

I came not to judge the world, but to save the world refers to Jesus’ First Coming, for he will come to judge the world when he returns: <<*For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head>> (Obadiah 15), and: <<He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgement has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water’>> (Revelation 14:7).*

⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, ⁴⁹ for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak.

John 12:48-49

The one who rejects me and does not receive my word. The second type of person that Jesus has in mind is the one who rejects Jesus outright. To refuse to receive Jesus’ word is to reject Jesus himself, just as to refuse to receive the Father’s Word, Jesus, is to reject the Father himself.

Has a judge. The Jews he is speaking to will be judged by the very person they revere: <<***Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope***>> (John 5:45).

On the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge. When final judgement comes the outcome for individuals will depend on whether they have accepted and tried to live by the words Jesus has spoken, those that are now recorded for all to read in the Bible.

I have not spoken on my own again indicates that supreme authority in the Trinity belongs to the Father, and delegated authority to the Son, for the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak, even though they are equal in deity.

⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.'

John 12:50

I know that his commandment is eternal life. The command has to do with a relationship with God himself and a sharing in his life. It is not just a description of a pattern of life and a demand to conform to it. It is a life that expresses the pattern of God's own character. Since Jesus' teachings come from God and offer eternal life, a rejection of these teachings is itself condemnation, for it is a rejection of God and his offer of life. There will only be two outcomes when judgement comes: <<***And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life***>> (Matthew 25:46).

What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me. The final words of the public ministry emphasise that the foundation for Jesus' statements, and for his whole ministry, is his oneness with the Father. He has not spoken on his own accord. Here is the divine humility of the Son. In the first part of the Gospel, which closes here, Jesus lives in complete obedience to the Father; in the second part he will die in the same obedience.