**Thru the Bible: Between Signs and Glory (John 12)**

**Introduction:** Although the “Book of Signs” is generally seen as encompassing chapters 2-12, John 12 is more like a transition or hinge chapter preparing for the “Book of Glory” in the second half of the gospel (chs. 13-20). Not only does it mention Jesus’ glory several times (12:16, 23, 28, 41, 43), but other important themes introduced in the Prologue are reiterated and developed, such as light versus darkness (12:35-36; 46), the rejection of his own people (12:10, 37-41), and the belief of non-Jews who seek to become “children of God” (12:20, 32, 46). There is also a summary of how people have responded to the various sign-acts Jesus has performed in the first half of the gospel, characteristically divided between belief and unbelief:

- **Belief:** Because of the final sign of the raising of Lazarus in the previous chapter, “many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him” (12:11), while others in the crowd who had heard of the sign, “went to meet him” (12:18). As a result, the Pharisees complain, “Look how the whole world has gone after him!” (12:19).

- **Unbelief:** Despite many in the crowd believing in him, Jesus has to withdraw and hide himself from the crowds because, “although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him” (12:36-37).

- **Hesitant Belief:** John mentions a third category, which included religious leaders, who believed in Jesus but did not publicly confess it, because they were afraid the Pharisees would have them “put out of the synagogue.” John’s evaluation of these “secret believers” is not very positive, “they loved human glory more than the glory of God” (12:42-43).

**Main Transitions:** In preparation for the final week of Jesus’ life and the events of the third Passover, John 12 encompasses several important stories connected to his identity and destiny:

1. **Mary’s anointing of Jesus (12:1-8):** This is one of the few stories which occurs (in some form) in each of the four gospels, although there are interesting differences and accents between them if compared “horizontally.” While Luke’s version comes much earlier (7:36-50), Matthew, Mark and John place the story strategically before the Passion Narrative, with Jesus himself interpreting it as a symbolic preparation and anointing for his death and burial (Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9). Only John singles out Judas Iscariot as the one to complain to Jesus about the “waste” of such valuable ointment and a lost opportunity to “help the poor” (12:4-8). His character assessment of Judas’ false motive also prepares for the betrayal scenes which occur in the following chapters. But what does Jesus mean by, “You will always have the poor among you” (12:8)?

   - “For you always have the poor among you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish” Mark 14:7
   - “There will never be any poor among you if only you obey the LORD your God…The poor will always be with you on the earth, therefore I command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy’” Deut. 15:4, 11
   - “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had…There was not a needy person among them” Acts 4:32-34

2. **The Triumphal Entry (12:12-16):** In the Synoptic Gospels, the ‘Triumphal Entry’ is the first event as Jesus enters Jerusalem for the Passover festival and also represents the opening tradition of their Passion Narratives (Mt. 21:1-9; Mk. 11:1-10; Lk. 19:28-40). John’s version is much shorter and accent certain details which relate to the gospel’s special themes. It is also the only gospel to specifically mention the people using palm branches, which became the source of the later ‘Palm Sunday’ tradition. Several important themes are illustrated by this event:

   - The acknowledgement of Jesus as the “King of Israel” who comes in the name of the Lord to ‘save now’ – the meaning of ‘Hosanna’ (12:13). This relates to the popular expectation of the renewal of David’s throne.

   - However, the very public acclaim and messianic fervor in the holy city during the Passover would make many others extremely nervous. And so the proclamation of Jesus as king, in contrast to the Roman Emperor as king (“Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar” 19:12), becomes the motivation for his arrest, illustrated by the epitaph placed on the cross, “king of the Jews” - written in the three main languages for all take warning (19:19-22).

   - The intentional juxtaposition of a celebrated king riding into the capital city on a donkey illustrates the fundamental nature of the kingdom of God as a contrast to earthly kingdoms and rulers. Whereas earlier in the gospel, Jesus walked away from those wanting to forcibly make him king (6:15), he now willingly presents himself as a king who will conquer by meekness, suffering and death rather than by military might and the sword.
3. Jesus’ hour has come (12:20-36): Up to this point, John has been careful to note that, despite recurring opposition and threats from the religious leaders, the climactic hour of Jesus’ destiny had not yet arrived (e.g. 8:20). But now the divine timetable of final events has been set into motion with the announcement, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (12:23). What it means for Jesus to ‘be glorified’ is then explained further in the following teaching of Jesus:

a. The analogy of the wheat (12:24-26): Using agricultural examples familiar to his audience, Jesus wants to draw an analogy between the effects of his death and the planting of a grain of wheat. As a kernel of wheat planted in the ground dies it creates seeds which sprout into new life and so create the conditions for a future great harvest. Later in the passage Jesus says, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” (12:32; cf. 3:14-15). Jesus then immediately presents his own vocation of suffering as a pattern of discipleship, where those who love and serve him must follow him and be willing to lose their life. This is John’s version of the passion predictions and call to discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., Mk. 8:31-38).

b. Jesus wrestling with his destiny (12:27-36): John does not include the story of Jesus praying and crying out to God in the Garden of Gethsemane, but here, even before the upper room meal, we have a similar tradition. In a moment of reckoning, Jesus is greatly troubled within and mentions the possibility of escaping the cross, only to immediately acknowledge that his death is bound up with the glory of the Father and rescuing his creation and kingdom from the powers of evil. This type of upside-down victory is at odds with the people’s expectations and understanding of the “Messiah” and “Son of Man”: “We have heard that the Messiah remains forever...Who is this Son of Man?” (12:34).

4. Now is the judgment of the world (12:31, 44-50): The eschatological theme of judgment and judging is an important one in the gospel, though it is crucial to understand the ‘now and not yet’ nature of judgment, distinguished by two interconnected contexts. If this is not taken into account, then one could become quite confused when putting two statements next to each other: “I came not to judge the world, but to save it” (12:47) // “For judgment I have come into the world” (9:39)

“God did not send his Son into the world in order to judge the world” (3:17) // “Now is the time for judgment on this world” (12:31)

“You judge by human standards, I pass judgment on no one” (8:15) // “I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just” (5:30)

a. Judgment as discernment: In Jn. 7:24 Jesus says, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with a right judgment.” This type of judgment involves correctly evaluating the truth of a situation, especially as it relates to recognizing the true nature and authority of Jesus in relation to the Father. In John, the ability to exercise a “right judgment” is connected to the interrelated themes of light versus darkness, seeing versus blindness.

b. Judgment as final (future) accountability: John’s gospel is in accord with the other NT writers who present Jesus as God’s delegated agent of final judgment, as Paul notes in Acts, “God...has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by the man he has appointed” (17:30-31). But in John’s perspective, the judgment of the world has already been initiated and set into motion by the incarnation, ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus. “Eternal life” starts at the moment of belief (5:24-25). How the world responds to him as God’s messenger and Savior can have both immediate and long term consequences (Jn. 12:47-48).

c. Judgment as character consequence: Because God has created the world and everything in it, there is an order, pattern and purpose in creation which reflects his design and permeates the physical creation and the social order of humankind. This is based in the biblical tradition of Wisdom and encapsulated in the “reap what you sow” principle. In this way present actions (or inactions) are connected to both present life and future accountability, “A time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live...a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (5:25, 28-29).
...Christ is the judge; and yet, from another point of view, it is we who pronounce judgment on ourselves.”

Kallistos Ware, The Orthodox Way, 135