
Last week we left off with Jesus having dinner at Mary, Martha and Lazarus' home in Bethany which is about 2 miles outside of Jerusalem. We were told that this was 6-days before the Passover. Let's continue from that point.

John 12:9-11

The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

Having begun to plot the death of Jesus, the religious leaders decide that it will be necessary to kill another innocent man who is guilty of what? Having been raised from the dead? That's it! It's unbelievable that these are the holy men of the land, the leaders, the shepherds and the ones that everyone looks to for guidance. What I think we need to glean from this is how powerful the "ME" truly can be if we let him live. If you feed him, if you care for him, if you let him rule your life, I want you to understand that you are capable of anything—whether you are a Christian or not—and I mean anything. The "ME" is an enemy of God. He hates God, and will, under the right circumstances, do everything and anything to oppose both God and those who follow God.

This is really scary. That old saying, "but for the grace of God there goes me" is more true than you might ever really want to admit. This is the very reason we have to stay so dependent upon God for everything—and I mean everything. We must never look to worldly wisdom, religious wisdom, or our own common sense to guide our lives, for that is the food of the "ME"—in fact it is a delicacy. And

once you feed the “ME” he is very hard to quiet down and ignore. You know what I am talking about. In fact, this week he has been eating at many of you from the inside out and you still don’t really understand what has happened; you just know it feels awful and you hate the conflict that it has brought into your life. It is best and so necessary to starve the “ME” and never give him space in your life; the risk of hurting people you love is simply too great. Instead, feed on the Word of God, believe the truth, and most importantly apply the truth, and let the Spirit of the Lord dominate your thoughts, emotions, and actions. This will be a death blow to the “ME.”

John 12:12-19

On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel." Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT."

These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.

So the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify about Him. For this reason also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this

sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him."

The news spreads quickly; Jesus is coming to town and everyone is excited. But we must remember why He is coming to town; He is coming to die. For Jesus this trip to Jerusalem is not about celebration and it's not even about propagation of His message, but it is about preparation. In fact, I think there was a carefully planned strategy behind this event and I say that because this was the only public demonstration that Jesus allowed. So you have to ask yourself, why did He allow it and even direct this event with the whole donkey thing? I believe that Jesus was forcing the hand of the religious leaders. He wanted them to feel as if their backs were so up against the wall that if they did not act immediately they would absolutely lose control of not just the crowd but their whole way of life. In effect Jesus was forcing them to move forward with their plan to kill Him. Remember, Jesus already told us: "no one can take my life from me. I lay down my life voluntarily. For I have the right to lay it down *when I want to* and also the power to take it again. For my Father has given me this command" (*John 10:18*). The when is now—meaning in the next few days. You see, Jesus' timing was always perfect and His bloody death would occur exactly when the priests in the Temple were offering up the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the nation, exactly 5-days from now. That is the whole typology of the Passover feast; it has always been a picture of the Messiah giving up His life for the sins of the nation. This is why I believe that this entire processional into Jerusalem is purposeful and was not just to fulfill the prophecy in *Zechariah*, but also to incite the reaction that it would engender.

By reaction, I suppose there were 4 major reactions by 4 different groups: the crowd, the disciples, the religious leaders and the Romans.

The Crowd: The crowd heard that Jesus was headed to town and they all came out to greet Him with Palm branches in hand. Jesus was more than famous and they wanted to see for themselves the one who raised Lazarus from the dead.

You might be wondering why the Palm branches. Well for a long time they were symbols of rejoicing. For example, on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles the Jews were commanded to take palm branches and rejoice before God for 7-days (*Leviticus 23:40*). Palm branches were also used to celebrate triumph and victory over their enemies. We read of this during the history that occurs between the Old Testament and the New Testament when the Jews had victory over the Syrians. During an event known as the Maccabean revolt the Jews organized, fought mightily, and regained control of Jerusalem and much of their former territory. When they freed Jerusalem they had a great celebration with plenty of palm branch waving. And then in *Revelation 7:9* we see the saints who came out of the great tribulation are rejoicing while waving palm branches in their hands.

So the crowds came to rejoice and celebrate the arrival of the one who they hoped would save them and lead their country to freedom from foreign occupation. The crowd was shouting messianic prophecies toward Jesus quoting *Psalms 118:25-26*: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel.” They were acknowledging that Jesus came on the authority and direction of God and that He was the promised one—the true King of Israel. They added to this the plea of “Hosanna.” In Hebrew, literally “please save” or “save now.” In so doing they were probably remembering the prophecy in *Zephaniah 3* which talks of the day the King Himself would come and live among them and they thought this was the day, it was finally happening.

Zephaniah 3:15-17

For the Lord will remove his hand of judgment and will disperse the armies of your enemy. And the Lord himself, the King of Israel, will live among you! At last your troubles will be over, and you will never again fear disaster. On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be, "Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid! For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

Wow, if the tension and the animosity with the religious leaders was not already at an all time high, the crowd is now proclaiming Jesus to be their Messiah, the King, and they want their King to bring the promised salvation (or in their minds the restoration of the nation and release from Roman occupation). So there was such frenzy that they were laying their palm branches and even their clothes down on the ground before Him. It was as if they were rolling out the red carpet so to speak so that the King could ride in with appropriate pomp and splendor.

The Disciples: All of this frenzy and the disciples had no clue what was happening all around them. Why did He tell them to go get the donkey and its colt? Why is He riding into town attracting such attention when He knows that the religious leaders want to arrest and kill Him? Why is He allowing such a crowd to worship Him in this way; He has never allowed or provoked that kind of response before? Besides, what they are saying is dangerous and will only make our situation worse. I am sure their minds were swirling and thought maybe Jesus had changed His mind about all that death stuff and actually decided to step up to fulfill everyone's expectations (including their own). They just did not understand.

It is fascinating to me that the disciples were so close to Jesus, spent all their time with Him, listened to Him explain everything; and, yet, prior to the Holy Spirit being imparted to them shortly after Jesus' ascension into heaven, they were for the most part clueless. They knew what the scriptures said, but they could not put 2 and 2 together and understand how practically every move Jesus made was a fulfillment of prophecy; it was still all such a mystery to them. But please understand it was not because they were stupid; rather, they literally did not have the spiritual capacity to understand the layered truths in the Word of God. They were men of flesh and had yet been born of the Spirit of God.

This is essential to understand. There is a revelation of the Word of God in the heart of a man or woman that can only be accomplished through the Spirit of God. A person can pick up the Bible and read it and understand its words, but still be clueless as to what it is really saying; and, as such, it will have limited, if any, impact on their lives. A person must be filled with the Spirit of God in order to truly understand what the Spirit is saying through the Word of God.

In *John 14:26* Jesus tells His disciples that it is the Holy Spirit who will teach them all things and even bring back to remembrance all that Jesus said. So the impartation of the Spirit would be critical to their coming into their own in terms of spiritual maturity and depth of understanding of spiritual truths. In fact, it was the Spirit of God that ultimately connected in their minds this event with the prophecy in *Zechariah 9:9* about the King riding in on a colt.

I am making this point because I want you to understand that if you have not been born of the Spirit you simply do not have the capacity to understand the beauty, the depth, the marvel, and the glory of the things of the Spirit. You may desire to know it and long to taste of it, but I am telling you that you must be born again of the Spirit of God in order to partake.

In addition, if you have been born of the Spirit, you have the capacity for spiritual understanding; however, you must be willing to let the Spirit possess you in the most real sense of that word in order to understand the things of the Spirit. Unless you let Him be the Lord over your life and you give no room for self rule, self-reliance, self-effort, self-protection, self-love, self-exaltation, self-obsession, self-determination, self-worship, and even self-destruction, you will only be able to enjoy aspects of the Spirit and understand pieces of the truth but still be left wanting and wondering why God does not work for you the way He seems to work for others. Now, I have told you this before but it serves repeating. You can experience as much of the Holy Spirit as you want; you just have to let go of the control over your own life. And if you don't surrender to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to let Him have control of those areas to which you hold to so tightly, you risk becoming just like the religious leaders. You will dig into your limited understanding of the truth, wrap it up in religious rules and regulations and literally choke the life out of others, all the while missing the fact that God is in your midst and wants to give you His life. This brings us to this motley crew.

Religious Leaders: Unlike the crowd who was anticipating the glory of God in their midst, the religious leaders were ticked off and totally beside themselves. They could not believe what they were observing and what the people were saying about Jesus. You can almost picture it. These priests in all their formal regalia looking down on the crowd from the walls around Jerusalem and they were so overwhelmed that all they could do is turn on each other and start making accusations, "what are you doing about this?" "Well what are you doing about it?" "Your worthless and you should have done something about this the last time He was in town." "Yea, well I sure did not see you get your hands dirty; besides your just afraid." "What are you going to do now?" "What do you mean me, what are

you going to do?” “The world has gone after Him; it is hopeless” In their minds, this has gone too far and they don’t know if they are going to be able to recover. They have to do something; they have no choice.

The Romans: Now let’s consider the Romans. They are not specifically mentioned in this text but you can be assured that they kept a close watch on all that happened in Jerusalem. I am sure they wanted to know if all these rumoring from the religious leaders were true. Was there going to be an uprising? Was there really a threat? Was this man dangerous? I am sure they had their scouts go to the wall to see what was happening and they probably started laughing and thought this was quite humorous. This is the king? This man is not a threat! For god’s sake, he is not only unarmed but He is riding in on a donkey, and at that a colt. In addition, His followers are not only unarmed, they are definitely not warriors. To the Romans this must have seemed like a joke. What was the big deal with this man? This has nothing to do with Rome and is just petty religious jealousy.

You have to understand that in their military mindset this was absolutely no threat at all. This guy was not coming in here to fight or conquer, if so He would have been on a horse dressed in battle gear and ready to rumble; this man is coming in peace. In those days, kings, rulers and the wealthy traveled by donkey when there was peace in the land and they did not have to worry about conflict for the donkey actually provided a smoother ride than a horse. So as far as the Romans could tell there was no need to fear, the crazy religious Jews were just doing what they do—overreact.

The irony of this whole situation is that the Romans understood the symbolism of Jesus actions, but not the Jews. The Jews were so preoccupied with a desire for freedom from their oppressors that they missed the fact that the Messiah—the King—came first to make peace. However, the peace Jesus would bring was not a

political peace but it was reconciliation between God and man so that there would no longer be the conflict caused by sin which separated the two. Rather, by His death man would have the opportunity to once again experience perfect peace with the entirety of the Godhead. That is why He came. The Jews were fixated on their here and now; Jesus was fixated on eternity. The Religious Leaders were focused on the agenda of the “ME;” Jesus was focused on the agenda of His Father.

John 12:20-26

Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

"He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal." If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

These Greeks were apparently Jewish converts and probably came to Philip because he was the only one, other than Andrew, with a Greek name and thought that he might be a little more accommodating to their request than one of the other Apostles. It is not too clear in this text if Jesus' response was for the benefit of these Greeks or if it was a direct response to Andrew and Philip. But either way

Jesus speaks about the benefit of dying. He knew what His death would accomplish exactly as it was prophesied in Isaiah.

Isaiah 53:11

When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.

Jesus knew that His physical death would result in a physical resurrection which would then lead to His return to His rightful position on His throne seated at the right hand of the Father—His place of glory. Jesus knew that by His death He would make peace between God and man so that He would have many heirs who would join Him in eternity. He knew all of that, but He made reference to what He was about to go through to let His followers know that if they were going to truly be His disciples they would have to walk down the same road. The way He states this, however, is truly unique and we have to stare at each part of this statement in order to get the proper interpretation and application for our lives.

He says: “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also.” Let’s break this down into its 2 parts: the “now” and the “later;” but first let’s talk about the back half of the sentence—our “later.” “Where I am, there my servant will be also.” The key to this verse is knowing that the verb “will be” is in the future indicative tense, which means it is a statement of fact which will occur in the future—no if’s, and’s, or butt’s; we will be with Jesus in the presence of the Father.

This is a powerful concept which is intended to bring us great comfort. One way or the other, whether we do it right or wrong while we are trudging through our lives here on earth, we will ultimately join Him in heaven and find our eternity in His presence. This means the pressure is off. We don't need to get all caught up striving so hard to do it right worrying about our eternity. We can rest knowing that we will be where He is and we will enjoy the presence of the entire Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Let's backtrack to the first part of the sentence for it deals with our "now." "If anyone serves Me, he *must* follow Me." I have italicized the word "*must*" because it sits at the crux of this verse. The verb "must" is an imperative (a command) and is in the present active tense. In other words, in order to serve the Lord, we must continually walk along the path where He is leading us. We must follow Him that is His command and it is to be our moment by moment reality.

This concept is pretty simple: if He is walking one direction and we are going another, we won't be following Him. However, do you understand the implication of this statement? It's absolutely outrageous and stabs a knife in the heart of most religious notions of serving God and being obedient to God. This statement is so profound in that it gives us no room to do things our way no matter how good our intentions might be or how sincere we are at trying to please God and serve Him. Simply said, we do not get to define for our life what "the service of God" looks like; He does.

Many of us equate this notion of serving God with doing things for God; things that seem very "Christian." It could be serving at church, leading Bible studies, teaching, leading worship, working at church camp, witnessing to others, being a missionary, cleaning up, or whatever. But what we must understand is that it does not matter what something looks like or how "Christian" it is; the only thing that

matters is whether or not what we are following Jesus down the path that He has established for us. Earlier Jesus said: “All of us must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent me” (*John 9:4*). So we must first be following Him—be on His path—and then we must do only what He has assigned us to do.

Therefore, no matter how badly we wish it were otherwise, if we are not on His path we are walking down our own path doing what we want to do. And the sad thing is that we actually expect Him to be ok with it and even appreciate our efforts at “serving” Him and doing “His work.” Think about the flurry of religious activity within realm of Christianity. People are absolutely convinced that God is, or should be, pleased with their efforts. After all, why wouldn’t He—they have worked so hard and have done so much “for” Him. Of course He must be pleased. Our religious “ME” cannot even begin to consider the possibility that God may not approve of our hard work and personal sacrifice.

I hate to say it but all that bluster of activity does not mean as much to God as you might think; in fact, it means nothing to Him. The reason is that if the work that you “do” for God does not derive from what He wants done, and if it is not a result of His doing the work through you (your being the vessel through which it is administered), then it derives from you and is done by you, which by definition is corrupted with the “ME” and can never be pleasing to God—never! It’s you living your will and not His will for your life. It does not matter how badly you want Him to be pleased or how intently you “worked” on His behalf; it’s still just you!

Have you ever had someone volunteer to help you clean your house and they just don’t know what they are doing and in fact they make more of a mess and practically double your work because you have to go behind them and clean every place they touched the “right way.” And, yet, if you say something to them about how they are cleaning they get all incensed as if you are the most ungrateful

person; don't you how hard they have been working for you. Well, our service for God is often like that.

I know that this does not fit into most people's understanding of God, church, Christianity, and so on but it is the truth. You are either on His path doing His work, following His lead, or you are on your own and those paths do not cross! There is no intersection between the flesh and the Spirit between your Old Man and the New Creation—none! You *must* follow Him in order to serve Him.

As we move on, you will see that *verse 26* was just a clever recapitulation of *verse 25* said a different way. *Verse 25* is also a two part sentence that says, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal." As far as the first part of this sentence, the word we have translated "life" in the Greek is also the word used to denote the heart, the mind, and the soul ("*psuche*"). Jesus is saying that if you pursue this life, including your relationship with God, according to your heart, your mind, and your soul, because you place such great value, merit and worth in your wisdom and your ways, you will lose or literally "destroy" your life. Your life will come to ruin and you will be the only one to blame. The verb "shall lose" is in the present active indicative tense which means that with certainty you will suffer this loss and all that you do will be continually adding to this loss.

This is the unfortunate experience of all of humanity. Despite what God tells us we all *naturally* place such great authority in our ways, our thoughts, our wisdom, and what we can discern with our own minds. As I said before, it is the delicacy of the "ME." We fixate on the tangible and tend to think that this world is our reality, that this is our home, and that this is where we find our life. But this is a lie and is a trap of the enemy that seems to capture all of us even though we have walked this

path of our own wisdom so many times and we know that it *never* satisfies and *always* keeps us wanting.

So why do we continue to place so much value and worth on our ways and what we think we know? I believe it is because hating our life is contrary to everything within our flesh. Surviving this life is hardwired into all of us. And not just mere survival, we seemed to be hardwired to try and survive better than those next to us and all those who came before us. So letting go, letting God call the shots, and being absolutely vulnerable to His leadership, direction, and plan for our lives is just not ok with the “ME.” It’s way too risky. His wisdom is not our wisdom and so we don’t like it; but we must learn to love it. For hating your life—your “*Psuche*”—is the pathway of faith and the way a true servant of God lives.

I understand this is hard and I struggle with it all the time. Honestly, there are times that I struggle even telling you to come to God and lose your life when I know that God is dead serious in demanding it all; especially when I know that He will instantly begin the work of prying your fingers away from the death grip you have on your life. Yet, at the same time, I know by experience that as scary and difficult as it can be, there is no other place I would want to be (and no other place you really want to be). *Psalms 25:10* says: “all the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth;” therefore, it is only when we walk down His path and follow Him will we experience the peace of God and the freedom within our being which He promises to us.

Have you ever noticed that the harder you try and hold on to this life the more difficult it becomes. For a time it might seem like you are getting the better part of life as you pursue your own will, but it always catches up to you. The pressure, the demands, and the expectations from this world never diminish, and when you no longer fit the bill and are no longer useful, you will be discarded. It happens all the

time (jobs, relationships, etc). No one wins living this way; everyone loses. That is why Jesus says that you must despise this life—literally hate it—and only walk down the path that He has established for you.

So what does it mean to hate this life? Does it mean that we are to be walking around grumpy and ticked off all the time treating those in the world as objects of scorn and derision? Not at all! It just means that we are to hold very lightly to the things of this world and more importantly place absolutely no value in the wisdom that the world has to offer—which if you think about it is the primary source of your own wisdom. In the alternative, give absolute and sole authority to God’s wisdom which can be yours if you are willing to seek Him and seek Him and seek Him (*Proverbs 2; Proverbs 3:5-7*). *James 1:5-8* tells us that God wants to give us His wisdom if we are willing to ask. But if we ask we must believe that He will answer us. This means that we are to take no action on our own authority but wait until He provides the answer or leads the way.

This is how you learn to trust not in your own wisdom and learn to not live by your circumstances, but by faith. This is the pathway of humility; the path of complete dependence upon God. This is the way Jesus lived during His time on earth; He set the example for us to follow. He was dependent upon the Father for all things. He has said over and over that all that He does and everything He says has been appointed by the Father and that He is the vessel through which the Father lives and acts. The most amazing thing is that this way of living is what He desires for us. Jesus said: “I live by the power of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, those who partake of me will live because of me” (*John 6:57*). This is radical. His life and experience with the Father is to be our life and experience with Him. He wants us to so depend on Him for all things that in practical effect we despise our “*psuche*”—the heart, soul, and mind of all that is not of Him.

The Father knows that this is difficult and so He give us a promise as an incentive to follow His ways. Jesus tells us that in the future the Father will honor us. **Romans 8:17** says He will treat us as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ and we will share in the glory of the Son. That means that His glory is our glory and all that is His is ours. That will be an honor that we cannot even begin to imagine and it will not be just our 15-minutes of fame, but this honor, this glory, will last for eternity.

Even in providing us this promise, the Father is asking us to follow Jesus' example and live as He lived. The Father gave Jesus a promise and an incentive to walk down the path that the Father had established for Him: if you are willingly to lay down your life I will provide you this great big huge family that will be together forever. With this promise, Jesus was able to go forward and do what the Father wanted Him to do and give up His life for you and for me. Now, in the same way, Jesus wants us to live for the future and for our reward, so that both in life and in eternity, we can be like Jesus.

Let us hate our own life; let us live for Him. Let us serve Him by walking only on the path that He has established for us believing the truth that all His paths are good and filled with lovingkindness. I know that it may not feel that way, which is why we must not trust in our own wisdom but in His. But His paths are always good for that is what He has said. And we can be absolutely convinced that He is telling the truth for He loves us so much that He was willing to walk the path that He walked—the path of death.

Let's Pray