

## STUDY NOTES

### *The Passion of Christ – A Lenten Series based on John 12-13*

#### WELCOME

#### WORSHIP

As the pilgrims entered Jerusalem they would sing songs of praise with the word Hosanna [=save] (John 12 v13) prominent in them.

Either sing

- Hosanna, Hosanna (MP 242)
- Hosanna to the Son of David (MP790)
- or a more modern song that reflects the theme of celebration for God's saving power.

#### WORD

##### Introduction to the series.

John devotes nearly half his gospel to the last week of Jesus life. In the life of the Church this is prepared for during the season of Lent and a turning point is reached on Palm Sunday with Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. John's account of this is recognised by many commentators as signifying a shift from the former chapters (Chapters 2 to 11) where he has sought to slowly reveal the identity of Jesus as the Christ (the promised Messiah) the Son of God, the one through whom if we believe in him we might have **life**. (John 20 v31)

John 12 therefore marks a significant turning point starting with the preparation of Jesus for Passion Week by his anointing (12 v10) and all the events that occur during this final week.

In some churches the whole passion of Christ is read on Palm Sunday. This is usually ignored in favour of the more palatable recounting of the procession of Jesus on a donkey and its clear reference to Jesus as King. Yet John's gospel grows if anything darker and is full of incredible teaching that reflects on **how** Jesus is to be the Christ the Son of God.

The reading of the Passion Gospel takes us into the heart of Holy Week. It can be read on Palm Sunday after the procession as it reminds us that the kingly power of Christ is the power of self-giving love.

The key to all of this is Jesus reference to his death. John locates this in Holy Week itself but the other gospel writers, following Mark, refer to in the significant announcement to some of his disciples at Caesarea Philippi (the place where Kings are anointed) following Peters Confession that Jesus is the Christ (Mark 8 v29). Whilst John gives a different account, there is a similar sense of a **fuller revelation of Jesus true identity** reaching a climax in the raising of Lazarus from the dead and Jesus statement

*'I am the resurrection and the life'*

*John 11 v28.*

Similarly both John and the other Gospels have an element of **Jesus true identity only being slowly revealed** alongside a **growing hostility amongst those in positions of religious leadership**.

Given the amount of teaching that John uniquely offers for the period that relates to Holy Week it is helpful if group members read through the account that John offers from chapter 12 to 19.

**Having established the significance of the Passion of the Christ this series will then consider some of the responses to the true identity of Jesus as they are revealed by his impending death.**

We do so by reflecting on the responses of different characters (Judas, Peter and Mary) and asking ourselves in what ways are we like them? In what ways have we experienced similar responses when we seek to glorify the name of Jesus?

## The Passion of Christ has Universal Application

John introduces this major turning point of the prediction of his death through a question from some Greeks.

*'Sir, we would like to see Jesus'. v21*

These Greeks represent us, the Gentiles, those who are drawn towards the people of God yet are outside of them. They were not Jews yet sometimes described as '*God fearers*'. They represent the whole world and not just the Jewish world. John by using this setting is placing the prediction of Jesus death in the context of its world wide significance and ultimately **the universal possibility that all people might benefit from a crucified and yet resurrected Christ.**

As an aside it is interesting to note that John records the involvement of Jesus disciples in bringing these Greeks in as they pass their request for an interview with Jesus (that is what it amounted to) through a fellow Greek (Philip) and Andrew, both of whom had of course been involved in bringing the boy with the loaves and fishes to Jesus at the feeding of the 5,000. (John 6 v59)

Jesus response to their question seems rather obtuse. He starts to speak about a seed falling to the ground and dying but in so doing producing many seeds. (v23). You need to leap ahead to v32 to catch the universal significance of this illustration for these Greeks who wanted to see Jesus.

*But when I am lifted up from the earth  
I will draw all men to myself.*

*John 12 v32*

In other words if they and we want to really see Jesus then we need to allow him to complete his Father's mission. (Jesus addresses God as Father three times in two verses in this passage clearly in the context of being under his authority).

What will look like a tragedy, his ignominious death at the hands of those who had been plotting to kill him (John 11 v53), will in fact be a glorious triumph. The means of his death, **the how** he is to be the Christ the Son of God, is through the cross and ultimately the resurrection.

*When I am lifted up*

For now, for these Greeks and the crowd on that first Palm Sunday (the Greeks had joined in the Feast mentioned earlier 12 v12 & v20), this lifting up was in the future. A danger for us as we read this account is that we do so looking back through the resurrection at the cross. They had to look at the person they were drawn to and wanted to see be taken to the Cross and die. They only had his words to hold onto that one day

*I will be lifted up from the earth.*

This has to be the journey for Jesus as only through these means will **all men** (Jew and Greek) be drawn to him. As Tom Wright observes

*they wouldn't just see him they would come to him  
and be drawn into the powerful love of God,  
drawn into fellowship and new life.*

Tom Wright '*John for Everyone*' Part 2 p29

John always has this universal application of Jesus ministry in mind. Earlier you may recall in Jesus discussion with Nicodemus he states

*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert,  
so the Son of Man must be lifted up,  
that **everyone** who believes in him may have eternal life.*

*John 3 v14-15*

The reference is to Moses lifting up a snake in the desert refers to the people of God being 'saved' from the venomous snakes the Lord had sent among them when the people had grown impatient and spoke against God and Moses.

*Make a snake and put it on a pole  
**anyone** who is bitten can look at it and live...  
Numbers 21 v8*

He continues famously

*For God so loved the world  
that he gave his one and only Son  
that **whoever** believes in him shall not perish  
but have eternal life*

*John 3 v16*

### Application

The Passion of Christ is for everyone.

As a group perhaps break into 2's or 3's and pray as indicated for five minutes.

Pray that you may include yourself in being able to benefit from Jesus being lifted up on the cross and ultimately resurrected.

Pray for those who currently are 'God Fearers' but not part of the people of God may feel welcome to share in our Lenten and Holy Week activities.

## The Passion of Christ has **Eternal Consequences**

As usually with John there is another layer of meaning behind Jesus words than that which applies to the Greeks who asked him the question in the first place.

This is indicated by three factors

- *Firstly Jesus reference to time – the hour.*

*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified v23*

*...Father save me from **this hour***

*it was for this very reason I came to **this hour** v27*

This is the 'hour' to which everything else has lead. At the beginning of the Gospel John records Jesus saying to Mary when she involves him in the incident of the wine running out at a wedding in Cana

*Dear women, why do you involve me?*

***My time has not yet come...***

*John 2 v4*

This is repeated in the Gospel

*Therefore Jesus told them,*

(Disciples encouraging him to go to the Feast in Jerusalem  
to do his acts in public rather than in secret)

*The **right time** has not yet come*

*7v6,*

*You go to this Feast,*

*because for me **the right time** has not yet come*

*7v8*

John comments concerning the desire of those who opposed him because of his teaching in the temple courts

*At this they tried to seize him,*

*but no one laid a hand on him*

***because his time had not yet come***

*7v30*

Similarly there is that continuing sense of the Father's divine protection when the Pharisees reacted to his claim to know the Father.

*You do not know me or my Father.*

*If you knew me, you would know my Father also.*

*He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area  
near the place where the offerings were made.*

*Yet no one seized him*

***because his time had not yet come.***

*8v20*

These all indicate that up until this point there has been a sense of **Jesus ministry moving inevitably to a significant event**

The prediction of his death indicates that now his time has come

*It was just before the Passover Feast.*

*Jesus knew that **the time** had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father 13 v1*

Jesus speaks of another time when the disciples would be scattered because of persecution, perhaps the situation that John was writing to when he first wrote the gospel

***But a time is coming and has come***

*when you will be scattered, each to his own home 16 v32*

Certainly the events of Holy Week see the disciples scatter when Jesus is arrested with only John being close to Jesus at his death (John 19 v26-27) and there is a further scattering when the persecutions hit the early church. (Acts 8v1)

On the night following his betrayal Jesus prays

*After Jesus had said this, he looked to heaven and prayed  
'Father **the time has come,**  
Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you' 17 v1*

- ***Secondly this reference to time and the hour is accompanied by reference to a far wider consequence of Jesus forthcoming death.***

The crowd hear a voice from heaven

*I have glorified it and I will glorify it (his name)*

This is not just for the benefit of Jesus as when he was Baptised and according to Luke heard a voice from heaven. John says this is for the benefit of those who heard it as

*now is the time for judgement on this world  
now the prince of this world will be driven out*

*John 12 v31*

There is another dimension at work here. It is of cosmic and eternal significance. (Eschatological significance). It is not just about Jesus ministry coming to a climax. This is a pivot point in the history of God's relationship with the world.

This is the reversal of Eden when the prince of this world, Satan, sowed doubt into the minds of Eve & Adam and they were thus for ever banished from the place where God had meant them to be.

All the signs that Jesus has performed so far will culminate in the ultimate 'sign' that of his death and rising to life.

- ***Thirdly there is concern expressed that he can't be the Christ as his kingdom is meant to be everlasting.***

*We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain for ever... v34*

God promised to King David that we would establish a kingdom from his line that would last for ever.

*He is the one who will build a house for my name,  
and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 2 Samuel 7 v13*

Yet the route to this everlasting and universal kingdom is through the cross not through some earth bound king limited to a life time and geographic borders.

These three factors

- Time/hour:
- glorification of his name and defeat of the prince of this world:
- the true meaning of an everlasting kingdom

all point to the eternal consequences of the passion of Christ.

Application

How do these different aspects surrounding the coming death of Christ be applied to our society today?

- An understanding of God's timing and control over world events.
- A greater appreciation of the cosmic battle to be won at the cross over evil.
- An appreciation of the true meaning of an everlasting kingdom that is not bound by time or space.

## **The Passion of Christ demands a Personal Response.**

It is noticeable how Jesus draws his disciples into the path that he has to follow.

*The man who loves his life will lose it  
while the man who hates his life will keep it for eternal life.*

Jesus continues

*Whoever serves me must follow me:  
and where I am my servant will be also.*

*John 12 v26*

In other words the values of this world are turned upside down where there is so much emphasis on enjoying this life. The common attitude is to eat drink and be merry, when for the follower of Jesus **we live with a set of very different priorities.** Jesus could feast but he could also fast. He could enjoy a wedding but he could also sweat blood. If we concentrate just on the here and now, on gaining popularity and success in this life, then we will eventually lose it.

If we are to follow Jesus to the Cross then we need to reconsider our priorities. Lent provides a wonderful opportunity to reassess just what our lives about? Are we living for this life or the one that is to come? Are we so concerned about guarding this life that we actually lose life itself?

Later to the ones who still could not grasp who this Son of Man was Jesus tells them simply to stick to the light that they can see.

*Put your trust in the light while you still have it  
so that you may become sons of light.  
John 12 v36*

The days will get darker but if they and we put out trust in him then not only will we have light to live by but we will also become sons of light for the sake of others who are in darkness.

### **Application**

Bring to God the Father any situation of darkness that you are facing and ask him to show you his light in the midst of that darkness. Be prepared as you do so to reflect the light of Christ in the manner by which you hold on in the midst of darkness as you continue to follow Jesus even to the cross

### **WITNESS**

Perhaps as a group you might think even now of who you can invite to an appropriate event or service during Lent and Holy Week. Who are the 'God Fearers' that group members know?