

That You May Continue to Believe...



AN Exposition of the gospel of John

The End of Jesus' Public Ministry John 12:1-50

In most stories that are worth reading or in most movies that are worth watching there is a notion of movement. Now, that movement doesn't have to be from one place to another. The idea of movement can be focused around location or it can be centered on a particular idea or way of looking at things. Let me illustrate what I mean.

One of my favorite movies is called "**Twelve Angry Men.**" It stars Henry Fonda and that whole movie takes place in one very tight, hot, sweaty jury deliberation room. Now, what's funny about the movie is that even though the whole movie takes place in that one little room it is filled with movement. It starts out that eleven of the twelve jurors want to convict a young boy for murder. Only one juror, Henry Fonda, believes the boy might be innocent. During the course of the movie, Fonda argues, sways and cajoles the other men over to his position. Now in that instance, the movement is not from a location but from a perception, a thought or a viewpoint. Even then, the movement is not instantaneous. It is transitional.

In the movie, the **“*Hunt for Red October*”** there is also a point that makes up a really interesting transition in the story. It occurs right at the beginning when one of the characters is reading a passage from the book of the Revelation in Russian. The camera comes down and focuses tightly upon his lips as he reads and when he pronounces the word **“*Armageddon*”** the camera pulls back and suddenly he is reading in English and the viewer is left instantly gratified that they are not going to have to listen to two hours of Russian dialogue.

Now, I bring that up because there is a tremendous transition that occurs in the Gospel of John between chapters twelve a thirteen.

You see there is a sense in which chapter twelve marks the end to the public ministry of Jesus in the book of John. After John 12, Jesus no longer publicly addresses the masses.¹ He no longer does any signs in front of unbelievers. For example, John does not include the fact that Jesus healed the ear of the high priest’s servant after Peter whacked it off with a sword. Now, understand what I am saying. I know that Jesus healed the man’s ear. But I also know that John chose not to record the fact and the question is, **“*Why is that?*”**²

It is because it would have been a sign to unbelievers.³ You see in the second half of John, Jesus speaks only with those with whom He is intimate. He focuses on His sheep as He resolves Himself to finish the work of His Father. His words are to them. His affections are to them.

Now, you can see that distinction between the two halves of John in the dialogue of Jesus. You can see it in the characters that are included and you can even see it in things like the vocabulary. For example in John the word “believe” is used 98

times. In the first half of the book it is used 76 times. In the second half, it is only used 22 times. That tells you that there is a difference in emphasis in the two sections. Of course, it is possible to read too much into such observations but I think in the case of the word "believe" it shows that the first half of the book is encouraging its readers to keep on believing while the second half shows something of the benefits associated with believing.⁴

Now, it is true that in the second half of the book, Jesus does speak to Pilate and to Annas, the high priest. But He does that, I think, because one represents the supreme authority of the Jewish world and one the supreme authority of the Gentile world. He does speak to them but does not show them any signs nor do they feign belief. Besides their role is primarily one of being witnesses. Beyond that, when Jesus does talk to the high priest in John, this is what he says...

^{NIV} John 18:20... "I have spoken (a perfect tense verb) openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret."

Now, the perfect tense is used to indicate completed action in the past and I think the point can be made that Jesus is saying, **"I have said all I have to say to you and yours. Still, you persist in unbelief."**

Now, let me point out just one other thing. In the other gospels, Jesus refuses to talk to Herod; in John, there is no Herod. Now the reason for that is that in John Jesus has ended His public ministry and Herod as a minor functionary of the Roman government is part of that public.

Now the question is, **"Why did John structure his gospel that way?"**

You will remember that I have been arguing right along that John wrote his gospel to first century Jewish fence straddlers, who were trying to decide between Jesus and the synagogue. They were being pressured by those attached to the synagogue to forsake Jesus and to return to Judaism. What John is doing in his gospel is pointing out the difference between the two groups. He is showing how one group feigned belief and then turned against Jesus. He is also showing how one group cast their lot with Him and how their loyalty responded to the revelation of God's glory in Jesus. Now let me ask you, **"Which group would you want to be associated? Would you want to be a part of the fickle masses that turn on Jesus or a part of those that understand Jesus and His beauty and cleave to Him?"**

Well, of course, I know the answer to that but that is what John is trying to drive us to. Perhaps, no place is that easier to see than in the chapter we have before us this morning, John 12. Let's turn there.

^{NIV} **John 12:1**...Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

The text says it was six days before the Passover. If you count backwards from Friday when the crucifixion occurred that means it was after sundown the previous Saturday evening when Jesus arrived in Bethany⁵. Anyway, either Lazarus' family or perhaps the people of Bethany prepared a dinner in honor of Jesus (You can't tell from looking at the Greek because it simply says ἐποίησαν οὖν αὐτῷ δεῖπνον ἐκεῖ ...*they made therefore for him a supper there*...although some argue that the fact the Martha served meant it had to be in her home.⁶) You

will notice that Lazarus reclined with Him at the table and the point of including Lazarus is that he was very much alive. Dead men do not eat.

Martha, on the other hand, served which is in perfect keeping with the picture of her painted by Luke (Luke 10:40).

Now before I go on, I should add one more point. It was often quite common for first century Jews to hold a small dinner or feast at the end of the Sabbath. It was a dividing point between the Sabbath and the rest of the week. If that is what is being held here it may be that John is pointing out that Jesus is in fact the long awaited Sabbath rest of the Jews or that proper Sabbath worship directs itself toward Jesus⁷. It would be, then, just one more example of how Jesus was superior to some aspect or ceremony of Judaism. Still, the story is primarily concerned with what happens in verse 3.

^{NIV} **John 12:3**...Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Now, I want to comment on this passage but before I do that I want you to notice the similarity of this particular passage with the parallel version in Mark (which is the same as the its parallel in Matthew).

^{NIV} **John 12:1**...Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

^{NIV} **Mark 14:1**...Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. ³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

Now, let's look first at the similarities.

A few days before Passover and His death

At Bethany

A woman pours nard on Jesus

Observers (and you have to look at the whole context to see this) complain about the extravagance

Now, let's look at the differences.

In Mark, the event takes place two days before Passover, not six.

It takes place at Simon the Leper's house.

The woman is not identified.

The woman pours the perfume on Jesus head and not His feet.

If we were to go and look at Luke, we would find out that story of anointing there is not at Bethany, is not at the house of Simon, is not by Mary, is not before the Passover and involves both tears and perfume and her hair and is never objected to by anyone, except for the fact that Jesus lets a sinner touch Him.⁸

^{NIV} **Luke 7:37**...When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸ and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. ³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is-- that she is a sinner."

Now, I point out those differences because you will occasionally run into commentators who will say something like, **“Do you see the writers were all drawing from similar sources and they took a common story and altered it to suit their fancy? Now, since they did that why do you argue the Scripture to be without error?”**

Now, how would you respond to that kind of charge?

First, let me say this, **“I believe the Scripture is holy, inerrant and infallible. I also believe it is easy to account for the differences between John and Mark. I also believe that biblical writers sometimes emphasized the elements of an event that were important to them. That in no way makes their report in error.”**

Let me just take one element of this story as an example. There are those that argue that John changed the story to suit his purpose and messed it up by combining two separate events, the one contained in Mark and the one contained in Luke. They argue that Mark never included anything about anointing Jesus feet and that John just changed the story to suit His purpose. Now one response to that would involve looking carefully at Mark 14:8. It contains Jesus’ response to the objection of the disciples.

^{NIV} **Mark 14:8**...She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

Now notice the word Jesus uses. It is the word **“body”**. It is not the word **“head”** like you would expect. I think the point is Mark emphasized the anointing of Jesus’ head because that is what you do to kings. I think he emphasized that even

though Jesus head and feet were both anointed. I think John emphasized the anointing of Jesus' feet because of the connection with what happens next week in chapter 13 or perhaps because he is trying to identify exactly who Jesus is. You see when you are in the presence of God you anoint what you see which are His feet.

^{NIV} **John 12:3**...Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Now the word for "pint" here is the Latin word λίτραν which was about 12 ounces. It is sometimes translated "pound" but "pint" is closer. As far as the perfume itself was concerned, it was extremely expensive. The phrase "**a years wages**" is literally 300 denarii's. Since a denarius was a day's wage, three hundred denarii's would be just about the amount a person could make in a year doing manual labor. There was a reason, of course, why "**nard**" so expensive. "**Nard**" came from a small plant that grew on the mountainsides in the Himalayas. One reference book I have says it grows at an altitude of around 13,000 feet.⁹ Now, think about that. It had to be collected, prepared and transported all the way from India to Palestine. It was typically sealed in precious, alabaster flasks that insured it would not become diluted or mixed prior to being opened by the owner.

Now, the principal point I want to make here is the costliness of this gift. I think you could argue backward from this passage and from John 6 the amount of money involved here was extraordinary even by our standards today. I think you could argue that it was enough to feed 5,000 people (200 denarii may not

have been but 300 probably was). I think that would mean by today's standards that we are talking about an amount around thirty or forty thousand dollars. Now here's the point, Mary was not giving up her favorite perfume or even her investment portfolio. She was giving up her security, her future, her welfare and her hope. Mary was giving up her life to honor Jesus. Alfred Edersheim writes this...

And so she poured the precious ointment over His Head, over His Feet — then, stooping over them, wiped them with her hair, as if, not only in evidence of service and love, but in fellowship of His Death. **'And the house was filled' — and to all time His House, the Church, is filled — 'with the odor of the ointment.'**¹⁰

Now, I want to make here if I can a brief application. It seems to me that most of us go through life holding back in our service to Christ. Now, I don't mean that we don't love Him or that we don't feel genuine gratitude for what He has accomplished on our behalf. What I mean is rather that we hold back the best we have. There are recesses or corners of our hearts that we don't want to give up to Christ. Sometimes, those parts of our lives involve our hopes or dreams or aspirations and the intrusiveness of Christ actually winds up grieving us. Imagine that. Now, I think it is clear from the text that Mary didn't feel that way. She gave all she had left. But it wasn't just the value of her offering. She gave up her pride, her dignity and her self-respect. For an ancient Jewish woman to let down the tresses of her hair in public before other men was unheard of in Jesus' day. Mary's gift and act of affection and worship to Jesus demonstrated not only her love for Jesus but also that she was beyond caring about what other people thought.

Now, by way of application let me say that my heart's desire and prayer for you, for each of you, is that God will move you out of the realm of the safe into the realm of radical Christian living. I know for each of you that might mean something different. For some of you, it might mean that you will become more verbal about your faith. For some of you, it might mean that you will have to change your expectation of the standard of living. For some of you, it might mean continuing on as a single person. For some of you, it might mean changing where you live. My prayer is not for God to do any one thing in your life. Rather, my prayer is that God might so impress upon your hearts and minds the beauty of what Christ has accomplished for you that there will be no going back to "normal Christian living".

Now, think about Mary's offering. As far as we know, she faded into oblivion after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus but she retains this abiding witness of her love to Jesus. Mark writes...

^{NIV} **Mark 14:9**...I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

But John says the same thing but a different way. He says, "**the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume**" which I think, means that John could still remember the wonderful aroma of her offering to Jesus years after the event. It is the kind of thing only an eyewitness would remember. It is the kind of thing only an older person would think about. I remember a few years ago I was cleaning up my closet one day when I pulled out quite by accident my Dad's old hunting jacket. I pulled it off the hanger and held to my face and I could smell

quail and shotgun shells and my even my Dad and my heart felt, for moment, like it was going to burst.

I can remember, at other times, my wife being out of town and missing her so much that I slept on her pillow just to remember her smell. That is what John is describing here and brothers and sisters make no mistake about it he is trying to get you to feel the same thing he did. He is trying to evoke in you that same kind of affection that Mary had. He is trying to get you to feel what he did when he thought to that moment and the beautiful aroma of genuine worship. He wants you to think in your heart, **"I wish I could have done that."**

That is the kind of emotion John wants you to feel and he wants you to feel it so that you will hate what Judas says in verse 4.

^{NIV} **John 12:4...**But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ **"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."**

Judas, of course, was imminently practical. Now I am not arguing against frugality here. I am not arguing against wise stewardship or protecting your assets. We are Presbyterians and we are known historically for holding our money tightly. What I am arguing for here is an unrestrained love for Jesus. Of course, John goes on in the next verse to point out why Judas cared about Mary's extravagance.

^{NIV} **John 12:6...**He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

But Jesus takes notice of what Mary has done. In particular, He takes notice, I think, of her love for Him.

^{NIV} **John 12:7...** "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "*It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.*" ⁸ **You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.**" ⁹ Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹ for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Now remember that we have been arguing that John was written to encourage fence straddlers to stick with Jesus. Let me ask you from this story who do you want to be like? Do you want to be like Mary or like Judas? Do you want to be like Lazarus or like the Pharisees that are plotting to kill a man because he was raised from the dead?

Now starting in verse 12, John turns the scene to the next day. One commentator argues that the scene is prophetic. Here's what he means. He means that after Jesus is buried and risen (as indicated by Mary's anointing) He will go forth as the king of the world drawing all men, that is all kinds of men...men from every tongue, tribe and nation, to Himself. The commentator I have in mind says that is why John shows Jesus to be the fulfillment of such a wonderful prophecy.¹¹

^{NIV} **John 12:12...**The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "**Hosanna!**" "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**" "**Blessed is the King of Israel!**" ¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, ¹⁵ "**Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.**" ¹⁶ At first his disciples did not understand

all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.

Now the scene is intended to remind you of Tabernacles and the waving of palm branches. It was scene designed to reinforce Jesus peaceful intentions. It was a scene that would have reminded those in Jerusalem of something that had occurred once before. A scene like this had occurred only once before when Simon the Maccabee had cleansed the temple city of Jerusalem from its defilement (BC 141). The whole city had turned out in rejoicing.

^{NRS} **1 Maccabees 13:51**...On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred seventy-first year, the Jews entered it with praise and palm branches, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel.

Now, I want you to notice that John calls the crowd gathered at Passover the "great crowd". Josephus writes in book called the War of the Jews that at one Passover he attended there was somewhere around 2,700,000 people who participated in the ceremony not counting those who were defiled or pagan.¹² Now I want you to imagine that. Imagine a sea of jubilant, excited faces waving their palm branches and shouting out Hosanna, which means something like "**give salvation now**". Of course, the irony of the scene is extraordinary. They are shouting, "**Give salvation now**" and that is exactly what He had come to do. They mean they want Him to deliver them politically. John means something else altogether. In fact, John attaches great significance to the fact that Jesus comes riding on a donkey's colt. A few years ago, there was a movie that had in its promotion a line that went something like this, "Be afraid, be very afraid." Right now there is a movie out called Scoobie Do where the promotional line twists that line and says, "**Be afraid, be kinda afraid.**" I think that is pretty cute.

But the point John is making is that they are not to be afraid at all. Jesus, as the long awaited Messiah, is coming not as a conquering warrior but as a peaceful king. He is not riding upon an armored warhorse; instead, He comes meek and lowly and peaceful riding upon a young donkey. He is peace to His people but not in the way they think. He is going to deliver them not from the wrath of the Romans but from the wrath of God.

Now if you don't get any other picture in your mind get this one. The whole scene was tumultuous. There were hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of people waving their lulabs and singing and shouting. They are shouting "**Hosanna...Give salvation now.**" They are shouting, "**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**" (Psalm 118) They are shouting out to Him, "**Blessed is the King of Israel!**" which means, of course, "**Blessed are you Jesus the King of Israel!**"

John then makes the point that later they understood that Jesus riding on the donkey's colt was a fulfillment of the great Messianic promise of Zechariah 9.

^{NIV} **Zechariah 9:9**...Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

Now we could make a lesson out of Zechariah 9 just by itself. But I don't want to do that. Rather let me just point out the three elements of prophetic promise given there. They are all in verse 10. The coming of the gentle king means...

- 1) **The end of war...**I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken.
- 2) **Peace to the world...**He will proclaim peace to the nations.
- 3) **The extension of His reign...**His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Of course, the reason that all of those promises would be fulfilled is given in verse 11. Zechariah says all those things would be fulfilled because of God fulfilling His blood covenant to His people.

Now to get an idea of the tumult that Jesus caused I want you to think of two great masses of people rushing toward each other. Jesus was coming into the city with the crowd of people that had followed Him from Bethany and those in the city having heard of the miracles that He had done were rushing out to meet Him. The Pharisees were not surprisingly overwhelmed.

^{NIV} **John 12:17...** Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸ Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, "**See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!**"

In one sense, of course, they are right and the next element of the story brings that out. They say **“the whole world has gone after Him”** and the very next thing that happens is that some Greeks want to see Jesus.

^{NIV} **John 12:20...** Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. **“Sir,”** they said, **“we would like to see Jesus.”** ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

These Greeks would have been what the Jews called **“God-fearers”**¹³. That means they would have prescribed to Jewish doctrine in every sense except that they were not circumcised. They could have come from any part of the world or they could have come from Palestine itself. Because they were not proselytes, they would have been restricted to the large outer court of the Temple.¹⁴ You will remember from an earlier lesson that their part of the Temple was where the merchants set up their booths to sell sacrificial animals and exchange money.

John understands that these **“God-fearing Gentiles”** had come to Jesus because of the nearness of the fact that He is about to be crucified. Earlier, He had said that He had other sheep of a different pasture that He had to go and get. Now, He makes it clear that His atoning work is what allows the Gentiles to be included. Now what I want you to notice is that you cannot tell if Jesus ever spoke to the Gentiles or not. If He did, verses 23-28 must have been a part of His words to them. Here’s what I mean. In the story, when the Greek speaking Gentiles approach Jesus, John sets the scene not to let you hear the dialogue between Jesus and the Greeks but instead to show us that Jesus is about to go to the cross.¹⁵ It is like he is saying, **“Look the cross was so close the Gentiles had**

already started coming to Him. It was just like the Pharisees had said, 'The whole world was coming to Him.'"

What John does record is not any specific dialogue with the Greeks but rather Jesus talking about the significance of His own death.

^{NIV} **John 12:23...**Jesus replied, "**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷ "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!"** Then a voice came from heaven, "**I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.**"

Do you see what Jesus is saying? He is saying, **"In order for these Greeks to be included in the kingdom, I have to die. If I die, many will be included. But there is a sense in which that is true for you as my servants. You cannot straddle the fence regarding me. If you love me, you will take the path that I did."**

Now one thing that I think is particularly interesting is that God the Father verbally answers Jesus' prayer. In verse 29, we see that there are various interpretations of what had actually happened. Some say it was thunder. Some say it was an angel talking to Him. But God's Son hears God's voice and in John that should remind us of what Jesus had said when He said, **"My sheep hear my voice."**¹⁶

^{NIV} **John 12:29**...The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, "**This voice was for your benefit, not mine.** ³¹ **Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.** ³² **But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.**" ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Now there is a sense here that the crowd seems to understand something of what Jesus is saying. They seem to understand that He is saying He will be crucified but that leads them to ask, "**How can you be lifted up if you are the Messiah?**"

^{NIV} **John 12:34**...The crowd spoke up, "**We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?**" ³⁵ Then Jesus told them, "**You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.** ³⁶ **Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.**" When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Now, Jesus doesn't answer their question, as they expect. Instead, what He says is something like this, "**The clock is ticking. You only have Me for a short time now. Believe on Me while you can.**" Verse 36 contains Jesus last words to an unbelieving world. After He speaks to them this final time, He hides Himself from them. How strange and frightening that is.

Now something really remarkable occur sin verse 37-50. It is quite unlike anything in any of the other gospels. It is an editorial report that answers the question, "**Why didn't he Jews believe in Him?**" Now His answer is going to be something like this, "**Just as Jesus was a fulfillment of the prophecy in**

Zechariah so their unbelief is a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah." Let's read it.

^{NIV} **John 12:37...** Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "**Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?**" ³⁹ For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: ⁴⁰ "**He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn-- and I would heal them.**" ⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

You see what John is saying is that their unbelief was prophesied.

For God thus blinds and hardens, simply by letting alone and withdrawing His aid: and God can do this by a judgment that is hidden, although not by one that is unrighteous.¹⁷

Now, James Montgomery Boice says verse 41 is one of the most extraordinary verses in the Bible and I am inclined to agree with Him.¹⁸ You see what John does is take the vision Isaiah had of God and say that that vision was actually of Jesus. Now in case you don't remember the verse let me read it to you.

^{NIV} **Isaiah 6:1...**In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ "**Woe to me!**" I cried. "**I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.**"

Now listen to what Boice says here...

To us the reference may seem natural, for we are conditioned by centuries of Christian theology, in which full divinity has been ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth by many persons. But it was hardly natural to John, who was a Jew. Nor was it natural to his contemporaries. We must remember that for the Jew of Christ's time God had become something almost inaccessible and incomprehensible. God was the Holy One of Israel, and rightly so. He dwelt in glory unapproachable. None actually saw Him. When on occasion some extraordinary figure like Moses or Isaiah received a vision of God in His glory, this was not believed even then to be a viewing of God as He is in Himself but only what we might call an image of Him. And even this was extraordinary and filled with wonder. Moreover, of this limited number of visions, none was more glorious than that received by Isaiah, so that if one wanted to describe what God was like in Himself, nothing could come closer than this vision. Yet it is precisely this vision with all its breathtaking splendor that John blithely applies to Jesus. Without questioning, it would seem, John takes this, the most exalted portrait of Jehovah in the entire Old Testament, and says that it is a portrait of the humble carpenter from Nazareth, who was about to be crucified as a result of the hatred of His people and the indifference and calculating political expediency of the local Roman government—so great is his opinion of Jesus.¹⁹

^{NIV} **John 12:42**...Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

Now there are a few more verses in the chapter but I am going to leave them until another time and focus on in the time we have left here. You see I want to drive home the point that John was written to get fence straddlers off the fence. He does that here by zeroing in on their motivation. That motivation was fear. As far as John was concerned, those secret believers were fearful. They showed that fear by being more concerned about what men thought than what God thought. I want you to catch the significance of how John has ended this section. He is

saying that even though Jesus has revealed the glory of God just like Isaiah said these men who were so all-fired anxious to hang on to the synagogue and that way of life were willing even in the light of His glory to lay Him aside for the opinion of men. There is, of course, a lesson for us here as well and the lesson is to be gleaned I think from the whole of the chapter. It seems to me that the lesson is this, **“Either we can love Jesus for who He is and give ourselves over to Him fully like Mary or we can be like Judas or these hidden disciples and either reject Him for the things of this world or from the fear of men. For John there just does not seem to be any third option.”**

¹C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Notes and Commentary on the Greek Text*, (London: S.P.C.K, 1967), 358. Barrett writes: The public ministry of Jesus is now over; he returns into the obscurity out of which he emerged (11.54; 12.1) to make his last address to the Jews. Henceforward he holds only private intercourse with his disciples. The speech of vv. 44–50 is an epilogue rather than a speech within the main structure of the play.

The present section is a comment on the unbelief of Judaism. This unbelief was not fortuitous; it had been foretold in the very Scriptures upon which the Jews had set their hope. Once more the predestinarian element in the teaching of John comes to light: “they could not believe” (v. 39). They could not truly believe even when a superficial impulse moved them to do so, for they preferred the praise of men to the praise of God. The full significance of faith and unbelief in Jesus is next brought out. Jesus does not speak of himself; he speaks only the words of God his Father, who sent him. Thus to believe in Jesus is to believe in God, since God sends eternal life into the world through Jesus who utters his, God’s, command; to see Jesus is to see God, since Jesus in his perfect obedience reveals God. Conversely, to reject Jesus and his words, or to hear and not to keep them, is inevitably to incur judgment. Jesus himself came not to judge but to save; but the divine word he speaks (and the thought is not far distant of the divine Word he is) cannot but judge those who reject it. The judgment is as sure and clear as the distinction between light and darkness.

All this material is cast in characteristically Johannine form, but its substance is common to the synoptic gospels and to Paul. In Mark (4.1 ff.) the crucial words of Isa. 6. ff. are used to similar effect. Those who ‘are without’, to whom the “mystery of the kingdom of God” has not been given, will neither perceive nor understand. To hear and keep the word of Jesus is the all-important criterion by which men are judged (Matt. 7.24–7; Luke 6.47–9). Behind Jesus and his mission stands the Father who sent him (e.g. Matt. 10.40; Luke 9.43; 10.16). So also for Paul faith is no human activity, and the attempt to establish one’s own righteousness implies the rejection of God’s. Once more, and with the greatest dramatic emphasis and artistry, John sets forth the central and decisive significance, in mercy and in judgment, of the ministry of Jesus in the whole activity of God.

² Barrett, 362. He writes: It is particularly striking that John ends his final summary of the public ministry on this note. Jesus is not a figure of independent greatness; he is the Word of God or he is nothing at all. In the first part of the gospel, which here closes, Jesus lives in complete obedience to the Father; in the second part he will die in the same obedience.

³ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 347. This is one place where I think Bultmann is definitely on target about what the words say. He writes: **“At first sight it might seem that there is no good reason why the Evangelist should put these words (he is talking about the verses 8:21-29 which he thinks are dislocated) into Jesus’ mouth immediately after 12.44–50. The reason becomes clear when one sees that the saying contains the “too-late” theme, which in the source formed the conclusion of the discourse on light (12.3Sf.). This theme, which had already been announced at the beginning (9.4f.), is now worked up by the Evangelist into a scene in its own right.”**

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John V.29* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 513. Brown writes: It is worthy of note that in the Gospel most of the uses of *pisteuein* (74 out of 98) occur in chs. i–xii or the Book of Signs. This division of frequency agrees with the thesis that in the Book of Signs Jesus is presenting to men the choice of believing, while in the Book of Glory (chs. xiii–xx) he is speaking to those who already believe and, thus, is presuming faith. It is true that in xiv 10 Jesus decries the inadequacy of the faith of the disciples and that he tries to increase their commitment (xiv 1), but the groundwork of faith has been laid. The emphasis on the response of the disciples in the Book of Glory is in terms of love which is the perfection of the commitment of the believer.

⁵ Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 65-93.

⁶ John Calvin, *The Gospel According to John* (Sage Digital Library) 8:30-38, 414. Calvin writes: John does not mention the house, but shows plainly enough, that it was in some other place than the house of Lazarus and Martha that he supped; for he says that Lazarus was one of those who sat at table with him, that is, one who had been invited along with Christ. But see also Chrysostom, John. *Homilies on John’s Gospel* Sage Digital Library) 65. v.49-50. p. 546. (Who argues exactly the opposite conclusion.) And Martha ministered; whence it is clear that the meal was in her house, for they received Jesus as loving and beloved.

⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 427. Carson writes: If this *dinner* (*deipnon*, which can refer to a meal at any time of day) is in the evening of Saturday, the close of the Sabbath (*cf.* v. 1), it is probably connected with the ritual that separated the Sabbath from the of the week, including the *Habdalah*, the synagogue service that followed the meal (Mishnah *Berakoth* 8:5 suggests the rites were this early). However, this narrative lacks the concentration of suggestive elements that would support the hypothesis that the Evangelist is forging some sort of typological link — *e.g.* that Jesus himself is the true Sabbath-rest, or that proper Sabbath worship directs its devotion to Jesus. (Obviously, I don’t agree with Carson here, which is almost certainly folly on my part. I see the typology as almost certain.)

⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 414-415. Bultmann's explanation and the way redaction critics analyze the text is particularly informative here.

⁹ F. Nigel Hepper, *Baker Encyclopedia of Bible Plants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 143. As with so many names of plant products, nard was also applied to an entirely different species, referred to in the New Testament as 'precious' or 'pure' nard, used by Mary to anoint Jesus (Mark 14:3; John 12:3). Small wonder it was so costly, since the perfume comes from a plant growing on open mountainsides at an altitude of 4000 m (13,000 ft) in the Himalayas. Nard belongs to the Valerian family, which contains other fragrant and drug plants, such as valerian itself. The nard plant is a herbaceous perennial, with a small tuft of narrow three-nerved leaves at the tip of each short stem, which is itself covered with the brown fibrous bases of withered leaves. These stems, together with the taproot, are collected for the perfume.

¹⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing:), 359.

¹¹ C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 370. Dodd writes: The second narrative is that of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (xii. 12–15). It is related in terms not substantially different from the Synoptic forms, though shorter. Unlike Mark, John makes the crowd acclaim Jesus directly as *basileus*, as does Luke; and unlike Mark again, but like Matthew, he quotes the *testimonium* from Zech. ix. 9, which seems to be implied, though it is not quoted, in Mark and Luke. For John (as for Matthew in a different way) the idea of Christ's kingship has real importance. The special significance, however, which John wishes to attach to the incident, is best gathered from the 'editorial' additions in verses 16–19. (i) The disciples, we are told, did not understand the purport of the Triumphal Entry until Jesus was 'glorified' (xii. 16). In Johannine terms, Jesus was glorified in dying to rise again. We recall that after the narrative of the cleansing of the temple, we were similarly told that 'when he rose from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and believed both the scripture and the saying of Jesus' (ii. 22). The cleansing of the temple is thus understood as a symbol of the destruction and resurrection of Christ's 'Body'. So here, it is Christ dead and risen who is symbolically set forth in the Rider on the ass whom the crowds acclaim king.

¹² Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* Book 6, Chapter 9.3. Josephus writes: So these high priests, upon the coming of that feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour till the eleventh, but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice, (for it is not lawful for them to feast singly by themselves,) and many of us are twenty in a company, found the number of sacrifices was two hundred and fifty-six thousand five hundred; which, upon the allowance of no more than ten that feast together, amounts to two millions seven hundred thousand and two hundred persons that were pure and holy; for as to those that have the leprosy, or the gonorrhoea, or women that have their monthly courses, or such as are otherwise polluted, it is not lawful for them to be partakers of this sacrifice; nor indeed for any foreigners neither, who come hither to worship.

¹³ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 262.

¹⁴ B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1954), 180.

¹⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 421-422. This is a place where Bultmann's observation is both instructive and revealing. He writes: "Some "Greeks", who also have come to Jerusalem to be at the feast, desire to become acquainted with Jesus, though no motive for their request is mentioned. Doubtless they are so called proselytes; if they are not described as such (as προσηλυτοι or 'σεβομέοι) but are called Ἕλληνας obviously this is because they should be viewed as representatives of the Greek world. The way they have to take is complicated; they turn to Philip and he informs Andrew about it, and they both then present the request to Jesus. In the words that follow, however, Jesus appears to ignore the request. What he says in vv. 23ff. is at least not a direct answer, and in fact no such answer is given further on; indeed not a word more is said about the Ἕλληνας in the subsequent discourse.

The meaning of this scene is immediately clear from its position after v. 19; the unconscious prophecy there expressed, κόσμος ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ ἀπῆλθεν is illustrated through the request of the Ἕλληνας" the Greek world is asking after Jesus! Accordingly the fact that the Greeks must turn to the disciples in order to reach Jesus could also have a symbolic meaning: the access of the Greek world to Jesus is mediated through the apostles.

If 12.20–23 can be interpreted as a unity, yet another result emerges: the request of the Greeks to be led to the historical Jesus finds no fulfilment; it is a false request. Vv. 23–33 show that the Revealer, in order to be perfected as Revealer, must take his departure from the earth, that precisely as the exalted Lord he may "draw all men to himself" (v. 32). The question at issue is not at all the attaining of a direct historical "contemporaneity;" the important thing rather is to gain a relationship to the exalted Lord. It is therefore understandable that the request of the Greeks should come just at this point, for the ὥρα of the δοξασθῆναι has arrived."

¹⁶ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel V.2* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1942), 497.

¹⁷ Aurelius Augustine, *Gospel of John* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers V. 7, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 63.6, 293.

¹⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 847.

¹⁹ Ibid.