

## 11:55-12:50

This next section is filled with many different episodes, which, upon first reading, can feel like they were haphazardly placed. But, as we'll see, the author is deftly preparing his readers for Jesus' final week on earth by setting the stage through different but interconnected events. Taking a step back shows us that each scene contributes in some way to Jesus' death.

For instance, by mentioning the Passover (11:55), John sets a critical chronological marker for his audience. This was not just any ordinary Passover. This particular Passover would be the one where the Messiah died. Just like the many lambs slain on Israel's behalf, the Lamb of God—i.e., Jesus—would be killed on humanity's behalf (cf. 1:29, 36).

From there, John describes Jesus's anointing in Bethany (12:1-8). And this anointing, while seemingly performed out of gratitude, was really in preparation for Jesus' burial (12:7). We're also reintroduced to Judas (12:4). The last time he was mentioned was way back in 6:71. And, as John's audience knows, this so-called "disciple" will soon play a pivotal role in Jesus' crucifixion (cf. 13:21-30; 18:1-5).

After that, our faithful narrator reports about the famous Triumphal Entry (12:12-19), one of the few scenes recorded in all four gospels (cf. Mat. 21:1-11; Mar. 11:1-11; Lu. 19:28-44).<sup>1</sup> But it is crucial to John's readership because it is a partial fulfillment to which many of his messianic inferences had been pointing (cf. 1:19-28, 41; 3:28-30; 4:25-26, 29, 42; 6:68-69; 7:26-27, 31, 41-42; 9:22; 10:24; 11:27). However, it is only when both his entry and his exit are taken together that God's Messiah is indeed revealed. Though he will enter Jerusalem riding a donkey as the King of Israel (12:14), he will leave the city carrying his own cross like some villainous traitor (cf. 19:17). From our perspective, this strikes us as a contradiction, whereas, from God's perspective, it is consistent with his will.

After relaying the Triumphal Entry, the Evangelist recounts a peculiar event. A group of Greeks approached wanting to meet with Jesus (12:20-26). But instead of meeting with them, we're told that Jesus takes their arrival as an indicator that his "hour" had finally come (12:23). This decisive "hour" had been hinted at for some time (cf. 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 8:20). But once it

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the other scenes recorded in all four gospels are as follows: feeding of the five thousand (cf. Mat. 14:21; Mar. 6:44; Lu. 9:14-16; Jhn. 6:10-11); Jesus' anointing at Bethany (cf. Mat. 26:6-13; Mar. 14:3-9; Lu. 7:36-50); Peter's denial of Jesus (cf. Mat. 26:69-74; Mar. 14:66-71; Lu. 22:55-62; Jhn. 18:15-18); Jesus' being crucified as the 'King of the Jews' (cf. Mat. 27:35-37; Mar. 15:25-26; Lu. 23:33, 37-38; Jhn. 19:18-19); and, most importantly, Jesus' resurrection (cf. Mat. 28:1-10; Mar. 16:1-14; Lu. 24:1-44; Jhn. 20:1-29).

had come to a close, the Lord will end up drawing "all" people unto himself (12:32), not just the Jews. By his death, even the Greeks will be incorporated into the fold (cf. 10:16).

Finally, 12:37-50 acts as a sort of mid-book epilogue.<sup>2</sup> Thus, before giving us a peak into Jesus' private conversations with the disciples, John stops the narrative to officially close the first half of his account. And, in his closing, our narrator accomplishes three things. First, he shows that the lack of belief by some was not a surprise. It had, in fact, been prophesied long ago (12:37-41). Secondly, the disciple whom Jesus loved answered the question, "If there were some who did believe in Jesus, why didn't they do anything to stop the crucifixion?" Sadly, even though one might be a believer, both a fear of the world and love for the world kept them from confessing their beliefs publicly (12:42-43). Lastly, he allows Jesus to summarize everything that's come before (12:44-50). Whether one believes or not in the Messiah is really a matter if one believes Jesus was "sent" by God. As the Father directed, the Son obeyed, and so must we believe. Failure to do so leaves us condemned in the sight of God.

All told, death hangs thick in the air, waiting for an opportunity to strike. However, little did anyone know this was Jesus' plan all along. And it wouldn't be until much later that the disciples finally understood what their master always knew (12:16). The Messiah came to die so that his followers might have eternal life (12:50).

### **Exegesis**

**11:55-57** – John explains that "the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves." The word "many" referred to how the city swelled from a population of about a hundred thousand inhabitants to around one million.<sup>3</sup> To say Jerusalem was bursting at the seams would be an understatement. Also, John's comment that the Jews were "to purify themselves" referred to how the Law required that people cleanse themselves from any and all ceremonial uncleanness before participating in the Passover (cf. Lev. 7:21; Num. 9:6; 2 Chron. 30:17-18).<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, a Jew could be deemed "unclean" for a variety of reasons, and, depending on the cause, they would remain in that state anywhere between one to fifty days (cf. 18:28).<sup>5</sup> Thus,

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<sup>2</sup> Beasley-Murray, George, *John*, World Biblical Commentary, Volume 36, Revised Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 1999), p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> Köstenberger, Andreas J., *John*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 254.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, Leon, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 1995), p. 505.

<sup>5</sup> General Editors, "What does it mean to be ceremonially unclean?" September 12, 2022, *Got Questions*, <https://www.gotquestions.org/ceremonially-unclean.html>, [accessed, January 31, 2023].

because many Jews at Passover would've been from Gentile countries, their impurity would've been assumed. Non-Jews did not follow a lifestyle that sought to avoid ritualistic contaminants. For instance, Gentiles were known to bury their dead near their houses.<sup>6</sup> That a Jew living in a foreign land would've come in contact, in some way, with a person's grave would be more likely than not. In which case, their "uncleanness" would've lasted a week (cf. Num. 19:16). To ensure that they wouldn't miss the Passover, foreign Jews would need to come early. If they failed, they'd have to observe it a month later (cf. Num. 9:9-11).<sup>7</sup>

The author's mention of the Passover also has an air of gravitas and solemnity. This particular Passover would be the one where the Messiah died. Just like the many lambs slain on Israel's behalf, the Lamb of God—i.e., Jesus—would be killed on humanity's behalf (cf. 1:29, 36).<sup>8</sup> Most, if not all, of John's readership, would've been familiar with Jesus' timeline.<sup>9</sup> They would've counted this as the third and final Passover of Jesus' life (cf. 2:13, 6:4),<sup>10</sup> and so, upon reading these words, they would've immediately thought, "Jesus has only a week left to live."

Amongst the scores of Jews in their hurried preparations, John tells us about a common topic of conversation heard within the Temple precincts at this time was, "What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?" Just as with the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus is the one everyone was talking about (cf. 7:11).<sup>11</sup> And Israelites far and wide, young and old, rich and poor, all wondered if Jesus would avoid this year's feast. Considering this question is framed in the negative ("not"), they expected the Lord would lay low and avoid the city at all costs.<sup>12</sup> They thought this because everyone knew about the Sanhedrin's intent to capture Jesus, as John explains, "Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him." In this, the Pharisees made it so that anyone withholding information regarding Jesus' whereabouts would be complicit. Any Jew refusing to help the Sanhedrin was, essentially, aiding and abetting a criminal. Thus, given the tense situation, the Jews wrongly assumed that Jesus would stay out of harm's way.

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<sup>6</sup> Köstenberger (Baker, 2008), p. 255.

<sup>7</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Thompson, Marianne Meye, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library, (Louisville, KY; Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), p. 258, "As the Lamb of God who takes away sin, Jesus is without blemish (cf. Lev. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; etc.) and has no need of cleansing: God's Holy One brings other into the realm of God's holiness."

<sup>9</sup> Keener, Craig S., *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 2:858.

<sup>10</sup> Carson, D.A., *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 424, notes that the unnamed feast of chapter 5 could've been a Passover. However, he considers this theory to be unlikely.

<sup>11</sup> Carson (1991), p. 424.

<sup>12</sup> Morris (1995), p. 506.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 29

Text: John 11:55-12:50

Tonight, we'll get an overview of John's next significant section. And this section is filled with many different episodes, which, upon first reading, can feel like they were haphazardly placed. But, as we'll see, the author is deftly preparing his readers for Jesus' final week on earth by setting the stage through different but interconnected events. Taking a step back shows us that each scene contributes in some way to Jesus' death.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: