

Back in Jerusalem for the Last Time (John 12:1-50)

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Session 14

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Gospel of John, John 12, Triumphal Entry, Greeks, Lazarus, Isaiah, Unbelief, Glorification

Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. David Turner explores John 12:1–50, marking the conclusion of Jesus's public ministry as He returns to Jerusalem for the final time. The session covers key narrative events such as the anointing at Bethany, the triumphal entry, and the arrival of Greek seekers, which signal that Jesus's hour of glorification has arrived. Additionally, the lecture provides a theological examination of Israel's widespread unbelief, explaining it as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies while calling believers to persevere in faith.

Outline

I. Introduction

A. Previous Context (John 11)

1. Raising of Lazarus from the dead is the climactic sign of John's Gospel
2. Widespread belief among witnesses of the miracle
3. Heightened hostility: Religious leaders resolve to put Jesus to death as a result

B. Jesus's Temporary Withdrawal to Ephraim

1. Retreats to maintain personal safety as Passover approaches
2. People in Jerusalem left in suspense, wondering if He will attend the festival
3. Council issues orders to report His whereabouts for arrest

C. Return to Bethany

1. Jesus returns to the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary
2. Anointing of Jesus by Mary at a dinner with Lazarus
3. Lazarus becomes "exhibit A" of Jesus's power and signs
4. Jewish leaders resolve to kill both Jesus and Lazarus to eliminate the witness

II. Narrative Flow of John 12 (John 12:1-50)

A. The Anointing at Bethany

1. Mary anoints Jesus's feet, preparing Him for burial

2. Setting the stage for His final entry into Jerusalem

B. The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

1. Re-engagement with synoptic traditions
2. Jesus enters with great fanfare riding a donkey
3. Fulfillment of Psalm 118 (Hosanna) and Zechariah 9:9
4. Disciples did not understand significance at the time, only after glorification

C. Inquiry of the Greeks (John 12:20-22)

1. Greeks approach Philip with request: "Sir, we would like to see Jesus"
2. Philip tells Andrew, and both communicate the request to Jesus
3. The narrative leaves the meeting itself unrecorded, transitioning to Jesus's reflection

D. Tragic Reflection on Israel's Unbelief (John 12:37-43)

1. Jesus's public signs fail to yield belief (John 12:37 as the "saddest verse")
2. Prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah 53:1 (unbelief) and Isaiah 6:9-10 (hardened hearts)
3. Isaiah's vision of Jesus's glory (Isaiah 6) as evidence of His high divinity
4. Secret believers among leaders (e.g., Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea) who fear synagogue exclusion
5. Leaders love human praise more than praise from God

E. Jesus's Final Summary of His Public Ministry (John 12:44-50)

1. Belief in Jesus equates to belief in the Father who sent Him
2. Seeing Jesus is seeing the Father
3. Jesus has come into the world as a light to dispel darkness
4. Mission to save the world, not judge it; however, His words will judge on the last day
5. Jesus speaks only what the Father commanded, which leads to eternal life

III. Thematic Analysis and Key Theological Issues

A. Simmering Conflict Coming to a Head

1. Narrative buildup of hostility from the early temple clearing to John 12
2. Lazarus's resurrection serves as the ultimate catalyst for the arrest plot

B. The Arrival of "The Hour" (John 12:23)

1. Shift from "hour has not yet come" to a definitive declaration that "the hour has come"
2. Metaphor of the kernel of wheat: death must precede fruitfulness and glorification

C. Identity and Significance of the Greeks

1. Three potential identities:
 - a. Curiosity-seeking tourists visiting Jerusalem for Passover
 - b. Hellenistic Jews from the Diaspora reading the Septuagint

- c. Gentile "God-fearers" who worship the God of Israel (most likely)
 - i. Parallels in Luke 7 (the centurion who built the synagogue)
 - ii. Parallels in Acts 13 (God-fearers in Antioch of Pisidia synagogue)

2. Theological significance of their request:

- a. Signals completion of Jesus's public ministry to Israel
- b. Anticipates "other sheep" not of this fold (John 10:16)
- c. Fulfills Caiaphas's prophecy of gathering the scattered children of God (John 11:51-52)
- d. Underscores the universal scope of the Gospel in John (Lamb of God, Light of the World)

D. Scriptural Fulfillment and Jesus's Divinity

- 1. Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118 fulfill the Triumphal Entry
- 2. Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:9-10 fulfill the widespread unbelief
- 3. John 12:41 asserts Isaiah saw Jesus's glory, demonstrating His divine identity

E. The Problem of Ambiguous Faith

- 1. Secret faith among leaders due to fear of the Pharisees and synagogue banishment
- 2. Contrast between loving human praise and seeking praise from God
- 3. Dr. David Turner's perspective on perseverance in the faith:
 - a. Human beings lack the capacity to judge the hearts of others
 - b. Emphasizes the need for personal perseverance, fruitfulness, and abiding in Christ
 - c. Shift from judging others' faith to personal self-examination ("Could it be me?" in John 13)

F. Submission and the Troubled Soul (John 12:27)

- 1. John's thematic equivalent to the Garden of Gethsemane narrative
- 2. Jesus is troubled but rejects praying to be saved from "this hour"
- 3. Submission expressed in: "Father, glorify your name"
- 4. Audible heavenly voice confirms glorification, though misinterpreted by the crowd
- 5. Modeling ultimate submission and glorifying God through personal difficulties

IV. Conclusion

- A. Completion of Jesus's public ministry in John 1-12
- B. Call to self-reflection, abiding in Christ, and personal faithfulness