

Daily Bible Study Commentary by Pastor Steve

We're excited to have you digging deeper into the Word. The best way to use this study guide is to read the Bible verse(s) first, then Pastor Steve's commentary. God bless you.

John 12:16

v16: John admits that at the time, none of the disciples understood why Jesus insisted on riding into the city on a donkey. Apparently they didn't ask, He didn't explain and not one of them recognized the symbolism from Zechariah. Riding on a donkey would have been a very familiar sight, so John says they didn't see its meaning until after Jesus was "glorified." In other words, only after Jesus had been resurrected and ascended into heaven (Jn 2:22; 7:39) did someone finally realize that the young donkey was a prophetic symbol not a mode of transportation. John doesn't say how that revelation arrived, but it may have come while reading Zechariah 9:9. The prophet specifically says that the Messiah will ride on a "colt, the foal of a donkey," and someone must have remembered that Jesus instructed them to bring not only a donkey, but a donkey with its colt, and that He had actually ridden on the colt (Mt 21:2; Mk 11:2, 7; Lk 19:30, 33, 35). Once that connection was made Jesus' message would have opened up to them. But if His own disciples hadn't seen the symbolism as He rode down the Mount of Olives, we can assume that few, if any, in the crowd understood either. Jesus may have left the event unexplained because He was using it like a parable. Those who longed to understand would reflect on it later on and see its spiritual meaning.

John 12:16

v16 (continued): By mentioning that the disciples didn't understand until after Jesus was glorified, John may be telling us more than how long it took before they saw the truth. He may be telling us why they finally saw it. It is evident from his writings that John was very aware that one of the main ministries of the Holy Spirit is to teach people about Jesus (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14; 1Jn 2:20, 27). He records Jesus saying, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to remembrance all that I said to you" (Jn 14:26). The disciples did not receive this new relationship to the Holy Spirit until ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven. Before departing, Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for what He described as a "baptism" with the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:4-5). That baptism arrived, for the disciples, on the Day of Pentecost (Ac 2:1-4, 15-18). Afterward they proclaimed Christ with a new clarity and boldness (Ac 4:13) and quoted freely from Messianic passages in the Old Testament.

John 12:17

v17: Jesus had done many miracles over the past two to three years, so by now large crowds normally gathered whenever He ministered. But for such a huge number of people to go out to welcome Him as He rode into Jerusalem, and for them to chant Psalm 118 and lay their coats on the road so He could ride over them, required an explanation. That level of excitement was unusual even for Jesus. John says that enthusiasm was stirred up by a specific group of people, those who had been present when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. For the past several weeks (Jn 11:54-55) those who witnessed that event had been acting like evangelists, telling everyone who would listen to what they had seen with their own eyes. And the sincerity of their testimony was infectious. Even the pilgrims who had come to celebrate Passover were soon told about what had happened. So when word reached the city that Jesus was coming, people poured out of its gates and marched up the road to meet Him.

John 12:18-19

v18: John says they responded that way "because they heard that He had done this sign" (literal). By using the term "sign," he reminds us that raising Lazarus was more than a miracle; it was a miracle full of prophetic meaning. God used that amazing event to reveal an important truth about Jesus' identity. It proved that He was more than a teacher or even a prophet. He is "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25); He is the One whose voice will call the dead to life at the end of the age (Jn 5:25-29). **v19:** When those Pharisees who did not believe in Jesus (v11) watched (Lk 19:39-40) or heard the reports about this massive response to His arrival, they became overwhelmed. Their battle to turn the hearts of the nation against Jesus appeared, for the moment, to have failed. Some blamed others for allowing the situation to get out of hand. Most likely it was those who had wanted to kill Jesus years earlier, who blamed those who had argued for patience. They may have said, "If we had killed Him then this never would have happened."

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John 12:20-22

vs20-22: As we noted earlier, (vs12-13) Jesus actually made three different visits to the temple during that final week leading up to the cross. The first one, which John is describing (vs12-36), took place on Sunday. On that day Jesus triumphantly rode into the city, went into the temple, looked around and then returned to Bethany (Mk 11:1-11). Apparently, while He was still in the temple courtyard a group of Greek-speaking people came up to Philip and asked him to introduce them to Jesus. They may have chosen Philip because he also spoke Greek. John mentions that Philip was from Bethsaida, which was located just a few miles from the Decapolis, a region controlled by ten Greek-speaking cities. Philip would have been raised in an environment where the Greek language was common. Even Philip's name is Greek, very Greek. Philip of Macedonia was Alexander the Great's father. So Philip's parents must have been, to some degree, "Hellenized." Interestingly, Philip discussed their request with Andrew, who was also from Bethsaida and whose name is also Greek. This group, of either Jewish proselytes from a Greek-speaking region or Hellenized Jews, may have needed someone to translate for them.

John 12:20-23

vs20-22 (continued): Their request, for some reason, must have been awkward because Philip went to Andrew to discuss what to do. The two men decided to go together to present it to Jesus. **v23:** He responded by saying that His season of ministering to people, the way He had been doing, had ended. He said His "hour" of suffering had already begun (v27). All of His attention would now be focused on preparing Himself and them for the cross. But even as He spoke these things a crowd was standing nearby, listening (v29). **v23** (continued): Jesus didn't say, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be crucified." He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." To be glorified means to be made glorious. Waiting on the other side of the cross was His resurrection and ascension into heaven. He chose to focus His attention on the prize, not the price, on the salvation He would win, not the sacrifice He must make. The cross was simply the doorway through which He must pass in order to enter into His glory. He was not unaware of the horrible realities He was about to experience. He had already begun suffering mental torment. He said, "Now My soul has become troubled, and what shall I say, 'Father save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour" (v27). Yet He deliberately set His mind on the reward His suffering would bring.

John 12:24

v24: Jesus compared His decision to die on the cross to a farmer sowing wheat. He said, "Unless the grain of wheat which falls into the earth dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit" (literal). Just as a grain of wheat must be buried and "die" in order to reproduce, it was necessary for Him to die and be buried in order to reproduce the life that was in Him. He was not going to be a victim. He was strategically offering His body as a sacrifice so that many others might live. But He also meant this statement to apply to those who believe in Him. There is a sense in which all believers must choose to "die" in order to reproduce the spiritual life God gives us. However, it is important to distinguish between the death required of Jesus and the "death" He requires of us. He was unique. He alone is the eternal Son of God who came from heaven for the very purpose of rescuing us by His physical death and resurrection. No other human can do that. Our physical death has no power to atone the sins of others. We're simply not good enough, nor is our death needed because His death was more than sufficient to rescue every human who ever has or will live. Yet His words do warn us that if we follow Him, we too must endure a form of death. In order to serve God and others we must choose to put aside our own ambitions, safety, comfort and goals.