

THE COMING OF THE KING A SERMON ON JOHN 12:1-37

by Rev. Russell B. Smith

Gilbert Kaplan was an highly successful publisher and editor of a prominent investment magazine. He was a man who was at the top of his profession. One day in 1965, he went to hear a rehearsal of Mahler's second symphony. This is how he describes his response "I found myself unable to sleep. I went back for the performance and walked out of the hall a different person. It was the beginning of a long love affair." After that performance, Gilbert Kaplan dedicated himself to learning how to conduct Mahler's second symphony. This man, who until this time had had no musical training whatsoever, hired his own symphony to help him learn and practice the art of conducting. He spent vast amounts of his time, energy, and personal finances toward his goal of conducting Mahler's second symphony. His great love of the piece resulted in astounding performances. His 1988 recording of the symphony with the London Symphony received acclaim by the New York Times as one of the five finest classical recordings of the year. The Mahler Society of New York called it "the outstanding recorded performance." Gilbert Kaplan found a passion that transformed and energized his life, and through that passion, he was able to accomplish astounding things.

I believe most people hunger for such passion in their lives. We long for significance — we long to be a part of a story grander than ourselves. We long to give our lives over to something of lasting significance. John 12 gives us snapshots of people as they find that lasting significance in Jesus Christ. This chapter is designed to show Jesus as the triumphant king — the king to whom we can give our loyalty. So the chapter focuses on Jesus kingship, but John also gives us pictures of the effect of Jesus' kingship on those around him. Now John gives us these pictures in a specific order — he moves from Jesus close disciples, to the crowds of Jerusalem, to visitors from Greece. He does this to show the ever-widening scope of Jesus royal authority and influence. Today, however, we're going to take them in reverse order so we can see the levels of intensity of commitment to Christ. First we see **asking**, then **adulating**, and finally **adoring**. That having been said, let's dig into the text.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 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.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages. " 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.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

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. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 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! Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

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

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. 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. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

"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. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

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'?"

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. 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 (12:1-37).

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

Notice first the verse with which we ended — verse 37. It reminds us that as commitment to Christ intensified, so did opposition to Christ. As the light becomes brighter, the shadows become more distinct. As goodness becomes more pronounced, evil intensifies its attack. So it is in John and so it is in our own lives. The more we commit our lives to Christ, the more opposition we may encounter, even from well meaning friends and family.

However, counter against that the rising level of commitment to Jesus. Verses 20-22 shows people asking about Jesus. A group of Greeks came seeking Jesus out. They had come from a distant land and they heard stories of miracles and wonders and authoritative teaching. Their interest was aroused and they came asking. They found Jesus' disciples and requested a personal interview. Now at this point, their story is dropped, but look at what Jesus says in reply "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified..." Now that the Gentiles are finding out about Jesus, now that the nations are hearing of his reign as king, Jesus will be glorified.

The nations started asking then, and they haven't stopped for 2000 years. All over the world, people are asking about Jesus. Just this week, I was in Joseph Beth bookstore, and there were no fewer than four titles in the New Release section that dealt with Jesus. People across this country are talking about Jesus. They may be mistaken in their understanding, or they may be mad at his followers, but one thing is clear — Jesus Christ cannot be ignored. People are asking questions, the scriptures give us answers. Those answers we'll see in just a minute. Here we see the commitment to asking questions is the first stage and is a legitimate stage.

The next stage of commitment after asking is **adulating**. Adulating is overflowing praise and admiration. Looking at verses 12-15, we see a group of people who have been exposed to Jesus and his teaching for the past three years. They have been intellectually persuaded that he is the king. When he comes in they gather and wave palm branches. They shout Hosanna — a term from Psalm 118 that literally means "Give us salvation now!" Then they literally call him the king. They shower praise and adoration upon Jesus.

This is where a lot of people are. They come to church and sing and listen to the sermon. They genuinely believe, but they haven't been through the trial yet — their faith hasn't yet come through the furnace of testing. This crowd sings Jesus praise now, but remember when the soldiers come marching through the streets — when Jesus is carried away in chains and his core follower scatter, most of this crowd changes their adulation to acrimony. Their praises become cries for punishment. When the time of trial comes, they don't get better, they get bitter. This is not to say that everyone who is at this stage of commitment will turn during the trial, nor is it to say that those who turn won't eventually come back with a stronger faith than before. My point is simply this: that the faiths of those in the adulation stage haven't had their faith strengthened by testing yet. Jesus doesn't promise a pain-free life — he promises a purpose-filled life. Our faith in him carries us through the pain, even when it seems unbearable.

Bill Bouknight was pastor of my home church in Columbia as I was growing up. He had two sons, Brad, who was my age, and Aaron who was several years younger. A few years into his pastorate there, Aaron developed a

brain tumor. My father was one of the doctors who tried to help Aaron, but in the end he died. I can't imagine the pain Bill went through. But somehow, he and Gloria and Brad came through and for all of them their faith was strengthened. Bill became an even better minister and today he's pastor of Christ the King in Memphis, one of the most exciting and energetic Methodist churches in the country. Bill knew the secret that God uses our trials to transform our faith into an adoring faith.

Look at verses 1-8. Here we have Mary who has long been a disciple of Jesus. In Luke 10, we saw Mary sitting at Jesus feet, absorbing his word. Remember, in John 11, her faith was put to the test because her brother Lazarus was sick, and she sent for Jesus, but Jesus never came. And then her brother died. But her faith came through intact. And when Jesus showed up and revealed himself in an astounding new way, then her faith deepened to a new level.

Mary brings in a container of expensive perfume. Nard is distilled from the spikenard plant — it had to be imported from India. She takes a whole pint, a lavish amount, and pours it on his feet. The other gospel accounts tell us that she also anointed his head with this perfume. There was so much perfume that the house was filled with the fragrance. And she proceeded to let down her hair and wipe Jesus feet. What we see here is an expression of adoration, devotion. Indeed, it was an expression of worship. When you've been through the trial and you know Jesus is for real, you don't care how much it costs, you don't care what other people think — you simply want to enjoy his presence. And look what happens — Judas (and the other gospel accounts tell us all the disciples thought this too) says that this was a waste — the perfume should've been sold for the poor. And Jesus corrects him saying "Leave her alone!" — This is not to say we shouldn't be concerned with the poor — Jesus other statement throughout the gospels show us we should care for the poor. What this passage says is that lavish acts of worship and adoration are acceptable. If Gilbert Kaplan found such satisfaction from adoring a musical piece, how much more can we find satisfaction in adoring the living God. If Gilbert Kaplan invested such energy into pursuing his passion for Mahler, how much more can we invest in pursuing a passion for Christ. For those who are searching for passion and meaning — those who are asking questions, they can look to Mary for the answer — adoration of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, it's about worship.

We see here that worship is more about attitude than activity. Worship is about a heartfelt commitment. Dr Kalsbeek, in preaching on this chapter earlier in Wednesday worship, said that faith is not just an academic exercise, but an energizing life stance. It's something you feel in your gut, you know in your head, and you live in your life. Adoration is feeling a palpable anticipation before worship on a Sunday. Adoration is reading the Scriptures and being so moved you kneel where you are and begin to confess and pray to be changed.

Adoration is being in the park and being so struck with the majesty of creation that all you can do is take a deep breath and say, “Amen, God.” Adoration is when you are so scared — you look around and all your options seem to be gone and you go to your prayer closet and say, “All right, God, I need you now more than ever.” Adoration is that closeness of relationship to God that only comes because Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, is our mediator and king.

The king has come. From him, all questions we could ever **ask** are answered. To him belongs all **adulation**. In him, we live lives of **adoration**. Let's take that to heart. Amen.