



THE JOHN CALVIN  
BIBLE COMMENTARIES

THE GOSPEL  
OF JOHN

12 - 21

# **Commentaries On The Gospel Of John Vol. 2**

**John Calvin**

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## **John Calvin - A Biography**

*By William Barry*

This man, undoubtedly the greatest of Protestant divines, and perhaps, after St. Augustine, the most perseveringly followed by his disciples of any Western writer on theology, was born at Noyon in Picardy, France, 10 July, 1509, and died at Geneva, 27 May, 1564.

A generation divided him from Luther, whom he never met. By birth, education, and temper these two protagonists of the reforming movement were strongly contrasted. Luther was a Saxon peasant, his father a miner; Calvin sprang from the French middle-class, and his father, an attorney, had purchased the freedom of the City of Noyon, where he practised civil and canon law. Luther entered the Order of Augustinian Hermits, took a monk's vows, was made a priest and incurred much odium by marrying a nun. Calvin never was ordained in the Catholic Church; his training was chiefly in law and the humanities; he took no vows. Luther's eloquence made him popular by its force, humour, rudeness, and vulgar style. Calvin spoke to the learned at all times, even when preaching before multitudes. His manner is classical; he reasons on system; he has little

humour; instead of striking with a cudgel he uses the weapons of a deadly logic and persuades by a teacher's authority, not by a demagogue's calling of names. He writes French as well as Luther writes German, and like him has been reckoned a pioneer in the modern development of his native tongue. Lastly, if we term the doctor of Wittenberg a mystic, we may sum up Calvin as a scholastic; he gives articulate expression to the principles which Luther had stormily thrown out upon the world in his vehement pamphleteering; and the "Institutes" as they were left by their author have remained ever since the standard of orthodox Protestant belief in all the Churches known as "Reformed." His French disciples called their sect "the religion"; such it has proved to be outside the Roman world.

The family name, spelt in many ways, was Cauvin latinized according to the custom of the age as Calvinus. For some unknown reason the Reformer is commonly called Maître Jean C. His mother, Jeanne Le Franc, born in the Diocese of Cambrai, is mentioned as "beautiful and devout"; she took her little son to various shrines and brought him up a good Catholic. On the father's side, his ancestors were seafaring men. His grandfather settled at Pont l'Evêque near Paris, and had two sons who became locksmiths; the third was Gerard, who turned procurator at Noyon, and there his four sons and two daughters saw the light. He lived in the Place au Blé (Cornmarket). Noyon, a bishop's see, had long been a fief of the powerful old family of Hangest, who treated it as their personal property. But an everlasting quarrel, in which the city took part, went on between the bishop and the chapter. Charles de Hangest, nephew of the too well-known Georges d'Amboise, Archbishop of Rouen, surrendered the bishopric in 1525 to his own nephew John, becoming his vicar-general. John kept up the battle with his canons until the Parliament of Paris intervened, upon which

he went to Rome, and at last died in Paris in 1577. This prelate had Protestant kinsfolk; he is charged with having fostered heresy which in those years was beginning to raise its head among the French. Clerical dissensions, at all events, allowed the new doctrines a promising field; and the Calvins were more or less infected by them before 1530.

Gerard's four sons were made clerics and held benefices at a tender age. The Reformer was given one when a boy of twelve, he became Curé of Saint-Martin de Marteville in the Vermandois in 1527, and of Pont l'Eveque in 1529. Three of the boys attended the local Collège des Capettes, and there John proved himself an apt scholar. But his people were intimate with greater folk, the de Montmor, a branch of the line of Hangest, which led to his accompanying some of their children to Paris in 1523, when his mother was probably dead and his father had married again. The latter died in 1531, under excommunication from the chapter for not sending in his accounts. The old man's illness, not his lack of honesty, was, we are told, the cause. Yet his son Charles, nettled by the censure, drew towards the Protestant doctrines. He was accused in 1534 of denying the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist, and died out of the Church in 1536; his body was publicly gibbeted as that of a recusant.

Meanwhile, young John was going through his own trials at the University of Paris, the dean or syndic of which, Noel Bédier, had stood up against Erasmus and bore hard upon Le Fèvre d'Etapes (Stapulensis), celebrated for his translation of the Bible into French. Calvin, a "martinet", or oppidan, in the Collège de la Marche, made this man's acquaintance (he was from Picardy) and may have glanced into his Latin commentary on St. Paul, dated 1512, which Doumergue considers the first Protestant book emanating

from a French pen. Another influence tending the same way was that of Corderius, Calvin's tutor, to whom he dedicated afterwards his annotation of I Thessalonians, remarking, "if there be any good thing in what I have published, I owe it to you". Corderius had an excellent Latin style, his life was austere, and his "Colloquies" earned him enduring fame. But he fell under suspicion of heresy, and by Calvin's aid took refuge in Geneva, where he died September 1564. A third herald of the "New Learning" was George Cop, physician to Francis I, in whose house Calvin found a welcome and gave ear to the religious discussions which Cop favoured. And a fourth was Pierre-Robert d'Olivet of Noyon, who also translated the Scriptures, our youthful man of letters, his nephew, writing (in 1535) a Latin preface to the Old Testament and a French one — his first appearance as a native author — to the New Testament.

By 1527, when no more than eighteen, Calvin's education was complete in its main lines. He had learned to be a humanist and a reformer. The "sudden conversion" to a spiritual life in 1529, of which he speaks, must not be taken quite literally. He had never been an ardent Catholic; but the stories told at one time of his ill-regulated conduct have no foundation; and by a very natural process he went over to the side on which his family were taking their stand. In 1528 he inscribed himself at Orléans as a law student, made friends with Francis Daniel, and then went for a year to Bourges, where he began preaching in private. Margaret d'Angoulême, sister of Francis I, and Duchess of Berry, was living there with many heterodox Germans about her.

He is found again at Paris in 1531. Wolmar had taught him Greek at Bourges; from Vatable he learned Hebrew; and he entertained some relations with the erudite Budaeus. About this date he printed a commentary on Seneca's "De

Clementiâ". It was merely an exercise in scholarship, having no political significance. Francis I was, indeed, handling Protestants severely, and Calvin, now Doctor of Law at Orléans, composed, so the story runs, an oration on Christian philosophy which Nicholas Cop delivered on All Saints' Day, 1532, both writer and speaker having to take instant flight from pursuit by the royal inquisitors. This legend has been rejected by modern critics. Calvin spent some time, however, with Canon du Tillet at Angoulême under a feigned designation. In May, 1534, he went to Noyon, gave up his benefice, and, it is said, was imprisoned. But he got away to Nerac in Bearn, the residence of the Duchess Margaret, and there again encountered Le Fèvre, whose French Bible had been condemned by the Sorbonne to the flames. His next visit to Paris fell out during a violent campaign of the Lutherans against the Mass, which brought on reprisals, Etienne de la Forge and others were burnt in the Place de Grève; and Calvin accompanied by du Tillet, escaped — though not without adventures — to Metz and Strasburg. In the latter city Bucer reigned supreme. The leading reformers dictated laws from the pulpit to their adherents, and this journey proved a decisive one for the French humanist, who, though by nature timid and shy, committed himself to a war on paper with his own sovereign. The famous letter to Francis I is dated 23 August, 1535. It served as a prologue to the "Institutes", of which the first edition came out in March, 1536, not in French but in Latin. Calvin's apology for lecturing the king was, that placards denouncing the Protestants as rebels had been posted up all over the realm. Francis I did not read these pages, but if he had done so he would have discovered in them a plea, not for toleration, which the Reformer utterly scorned, but for doing away with Catholicism in favour of the new gospel. There could be only one true Church, said the young theologian, therefore kings ought to make an utter

end of popery. (For an account of the "Institutes" see ) The second edition belongs to 1539, the first French translation to 1541; the final Latin, as revised by its author, is of 1559; but that in common use, dated 1560, has additions by his disciples. "It was more God's work than mine", said Calvin, who took for his motto "*Omnia ad Dei gloriam*", and in allusion to the change he had undergone in 1529 assumed for his device a hand stretched out from a burning heart.

A much disputed chapter in Calvin's biography is the visit which he was long thought to have paid at Ferraro to the Protestant Duchess Renée, daughter of Louis XII. Many stories clustered about his journey, now given up by the best-informed writers. All we know for certain is that the Reformer, after settling his family affairs and bringing over two of his brothers and sisters to the views he had adopted undertook, in consequence of the war between Charles V and Francis I, to reach Bale by way of Geneva, in July, 1536. At Geneva the Swiss preacher Fare, then looking for help in his propaganda, besought him with such vehemence to stay and teach theology that, as Calvin himself relates, he was terrified into submission. We are not accustomed to fancy the austere prophet so easily frightened. But as a student and recluse new to public responsibilities, he may well have hesitated before plunging into the troubled waters of Geneva, then at their stormiest period. No portrait of him belonging to this time is extant. Later he is represented as of middle height, with bent shoulders, piercing eyes, and a large forehead; his hair was of an auburn tinge. Study and fasting occasioned the severe headaches from which he suffered continually. In private life he was cheerful but sensitive, not to say overbearing, his friends treated him with delicate consideration. His habits were simple; he cared nothing for wealth, and he never allowed himself a holiday. His correspondence, of which 4271 letters remain, turns chiefly on doctrinal



subjects. Yet his strong, reserved character told on all with whom he came in contact; Geneva submitted to his theocratic rule, and the Reformed Churches accepted his teaching as though it were infallible.

Such was the stranger whom Farel recommended to his fellow Protestants, "this Frenchman", chosen to lecture on the Bible in a city divided against itself. Geneva had about 15,000 inhabitants. Its bishop had long been its prince limited, however, by popular privileges. The vidomne, or mayor, was the Count of Savoy, and to his family the bishopric seemed a property which, from 1450, they bestowed on their younger children. John of Savoy, illegitimate son of the previous bishop, sold his rights to the duke, who was head of the clan, and died in 1519 at Pignerol. Jean de la Baume, last of its ecclesiastical princes, abandoned the city, which received Protestant teachers from Berne in 1519 and from Fribourg in 1526. In 1527 the arms of Savoy were torn down; in 1530 the Catholic party underwent defeat, and Geneva became independent. It had two councils, but the final verdict on public measures rested with the people. These appointed Farel, a convert of Le Fevre, as their preacher in 1534. A discussion between the two Churches from 30 May to 24 June, 1535 ended in victory for the Protestants. The altars were desecrated, the sacred images broken, the Mass done away with. Bernese troops entered and "the Gospel" was accepted, 21 May, 1536. This implied persecution of Catholics by the councils which acted both as Church and State. Priests were thrown into prison; citizens were fined for not attending sermons. At Zürich, Basle, and Berne the same laws were established. Toleration did not enter into the ideas of the time.

But though Calvin had not introduced this legislation, it was mainly by his influence that in January, 1537 the

"articles" were voted which insisted on communion four times a year, set spies on delinquents, established a moral censorship, and punished the unruly with excommunication. There was to be a children's catechism, which he drew up; it ranks among his best writings. The city now broke into "jurants" and "nonjurors" for many would not swear to the "articles"; indeed, they never were completely accepted. Questions had arisen with Berne touching points that Calvin judged to be indifferent. He made a figure in the debates at Lausanne defending the freedom of Geneva. But disorders ensued at home, where recusancy was yet rife; in 1538 the council exiled Farel, Calvin, and the blind evangelist, Couraud. The Reformer went to Strasburg, became the guest of Capito and Bucer, and in 1539 was explaining the New Testament to French refugees at fifty two florins a year. Cardinal Sadolet had addressed an open letter to the Genevans, which their exile now answered. Sadolet urged that schism was a crime; Calvin replied that the Roman Church was corrupt. He gained applause by his keen debating powers at Hagenau, Worms, and Ratisbon. But he complains of his poverty and ill-health, which did not prevent him from marrying at this time Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist whom he had converted. Nothing more is known of this lady, except that she brought him a son who died almost at birth in 1542, and that her own death took place in 1549.

After some negotiation Ami Perrin, commissioner for Geneva, persuaded Calvin to return. He did so, not very willingly, on 13 September, 1541. His entry was modest enough. The church constitution now recognized "pastors, doctors, elders, deacons" but supreme power was given to the magistrate. Ministers had the spiritual weapon of God's word; the consistory never, as such, wielded the secular arm. Preachers, led by Calvin, and the councils, instigated by his opponents, came frequently into collision. Yet the

ordinances of 1541 were maintained; the clergy, assisted by lay elders, governed despotically and in detail the actions of every citizen. A presbyterian Sparta might be seen at Geneva; it set an example to later Puritans, who did all in their power to imitate its discipline. The pattern held up was that of the Old Testament, although Christians were supposed to enjoy Gospel liberty. In November, 1552, the Council declared that Calvin's "Institutes" were a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Thus the State issued dogmatic decrees, the force of which had been anticipated earlier, as when Jacques Gouet was imprisoned on charges of impiety in June, 1547, and after severe torture was beheaded in July. Some of the accusations brought against the unhappy young man were frivolous, others doubtful. What share, if any, Calvin took in this judgment is not easy to ascertain. The execution of however must be laid at his door; it has given greater offence by far than the banishment of Castellio or the penalties inflicted on Bolsec — moderate men opposed to extreme views in discipline and doctrine, who fell under suspicion as reactionary. The Reformer did not shrink from his self-appointed task. Within five years fifty-eight sentences of death and seventy-six of exile, besides numerous committals of the most eminent citizens to prison, took place in Geneva. The iron yoke could not be shaken off. In 1555, under Ami Perrin, a sort of revolt was attempted. No blood was shed, but Perrin lost the day, and Calvin's theocracy triumphed.

"I am more deeply scandalized", wrote Gibbon "at the single execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which have blazed in the autos-da-fé of Spain and Portugal". He ascribes the enmity of Calvin to personal malice and perhaps envy. The facts of the case are pretty well ascertained. Born in 1511, perhaps at Tudela, Michael Served y Reves studied at Toulouse and was present in

Bologna at the coronation of Charles V. He travelled in Germany and brought out in 1531 at Hagenau his treatise "De Trinitatis Erroribus", a strong Unitarian work which made much commotion among the more orthodox Reformers. He met Calvin and disputed with him at Paris in 1534, became corrector of the press at Lyons; gave attention to medicine, discovered the lesser circulation of the blood, and entered into a fatal correspondence with the dictator of Geneva touching a new volume "Christianismi Restitutio," which he intended to publish. In 1546 the exchange of letters ceased. The Reformer called Servetus arrogant (he had dared to criticize the "Institutes" in marginal glosses), and uttered the significant menace, "If he comes here and I have any authority, I will never let him leave the place alive." The "Restitutio" appeared in 1553. Calvin at once had its author delated to the Dominican inquisitor Ory at Lyons, sending on to him the man's letters of 1545-46 and these glosses. Hereupon the Spaniard was imprisoned at Vienne, but he escaped by friendly connivance, and was burnt there only in effigy. Some extraordinary fascination drew him to Geneva, from which he intended to pass the Alps. He arrived on 13 August, 1553. The next day Calvin, who had remarked him at the sermon, got his critic arrested, the preacher's own secretary coming forward to accuse him. Calvin drew up forty articles of charge under three heads, concerning the nature of God, infant baptism, and the attack which Servetus had ventured on his own teaching. The council hesitated before taking a deadly decision, but the dictator, reinforced by Farel, drove them on. In prison the culprit suffered much and loudly complained. The Bernese and other Swiss voted for some indefinite penalty. But to Calvin his power in Geneva seemed lost, while the stigma of heresy; as he insisted, would cling to all Protestants if this innovator were not put to death. "Let the world see"

Bullinger counselled him, "that Geneva wills the glory of Christ."

Accordingly, sentence was pronounced 26 October, 1553, of burning at the stake. "Tomorrow he dies," wrote Calvin to Farel. When the deed was done, the Reformer alleged that he had been anxious to mitigate the punishment, but of this fact no record appears in the documents. He disputed with Servetus on the day of execution and saw the end. A defence and apology next year received the adhesion of the Genevan ministers. Melanchthon, who had taken deep umbrage at the blasphemies of the Spanish Unitarian, strongly approved in well-known words. But a group that included Castellio published at Basle in 1554 a pamphlet with the title, "Should heretics be persecuted?" It is considered the first plea for toleration in modern times. Beza replied by an argument for the affirmative, couched in violent terms; and Calvin, whose favorite disciple he was, translated it into French in 1559. The dialogue, "Vaticanus", written against the "Pope of Geneva" by Castellio, did not get into print until 1612. Freedom of opinion, as Gibbon remarks, "was the consequence rather than the design of the Reformation."

Another victim to his fiery zeal was Gentile, one of an Italian sect in Geneva, which also numbered among its adherents Alciati and Gribaldo. As more or less Unitarian in their views, they were required to sign a confession drawn up by Calvin in 1558. Gentile subscribed it reluctantly, but in the upshot he was condemned and imprisoned as a perjurer. He escaped only to be twice incarcerated at Berne, where in 1566, he was beheaded. Calvin's impassioned polemic against these Italians betrays fear of the Socinianism which was to lay waste his vineyard. Politically he leaned on the French refugees, now abounding in the city, and more than equal in energy — if

not in numbers — to the older native factions. Opposition died out. His continual preaching, represented by 2300 sermons extant in the manuscripts and a vast correspondence, gave to the Reformer an influence without example in his closing years. He wrote to Edward VI, helped in revising the Book of Common Prayer, and intervened between the rival English parties abroad during the Marian period. In the Huguenot troubles he sided with the more moderate. His censure of the conspiracy of Amboise in 1560 does him honour. One great literary institution founded by him, the College, afterwards the University, of Geneva, flourished exceedingly. The students were mostly French. When Beza was rector it had nearly 1500 students of various grades.

Geneva now sent out pastors to the French congregations and was looked upon as the Protestant Rome. Through Knox, "the Scottish champion of the Swiss Reformation", who had been preacher to the exiles in that city, his native land accepted the discipline of the Presbytery and the doctrine of predestination as expounded in Calvin's "Institutes". The Puritans in England were also descendants of the French theologian. His dislike of theatres, dancing and the amenities of society was fully shared by them. The town on Lake Lemman was described as without crime and destitute of amusements. Calvin declaimed against the "Libertines", but there is no evidence that any such people had a footing inside its walls. The cold, hard, but upright disposition characteristic of the Reformed Churches, less genial than that derived from Luther, is due entirely to their founder himself. Its essence is a concentrated pride, a love of disputation, a scorn of opponents. The only art that it tolerates is music, and that not instrumental. It will have no Christian feasts in its calendar, and it is austere to the verge of Manichaeian hatred of the body. When dogma fails the Calvinist, he becomes, as in the instance of Carlyle,

almost a pure Stoic. "At Geneva, as for a time in Scotland," says J. A. Froude, "moral sins were treated as crimes to be punished by the magistrate." The Bible was a code of law, administered by the clergy. Down to his dying day Calvin preached and taught. By no means an aged man, he was worn out in these frequent controversies. On 25 April, 1564, he made his will, leaving 225 French crowns, of which he bequeathed ten to his college, ten to the poor, and the remainder to his nephews and nieces. His last letter was addressed to Farel. He was buried without pomp, in a spot which is not now ascertainable. In the year 1900 a monument of expiation was erected to Servetus in the Place Champel. Geneva has long since ceased to be the head of Calvinism. It is a rallying point for Free Thought, Socialist propaganda, and Nihilist conspiracies. But in history it stands out as the Sparta of the Reformed churches, and Calvin is its Lycurgus.

## **COMMENTARIES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN VOL. 2**

### **CHAPTER 12**

#### **JOHN 12:1-8**

**1.** Jesus therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had been dead, whom he had raised from the dead. **2.** There therefore they made him a banquet, and Martha served; <sup>f330</sup> and Lazarus was one of those who sat at table with him. **3.** Then Mary took a pound of ointment of costly spikenard, and anointed the

feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. **4.** Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, who was to betray him, saith, **5.** Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor? **6.** Now he said this, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the purse, and carried what was put into it. **7.** Jesus therefore said, Let her alone; for the day of my burial she hath kept it. **8.** For the poor you have always with you, but me you have not always.

**1.** *Jesus came to Bethany.* We see that they judged too rashly who thought that Christ *would not come to the feast,* <sup>f331</sup> (John 11:56;) and this, reminds us that we ought not to be so hasty as not to wait patiently and quietly, till the season arrive, which is unknown to us. Now *Jesus came first to Bethany,* that thence he might go three days afterwards to Jerusalem. Meanwhile, he intended to give Judas a fit time and place for betraying him, that he might present himself, ready to be sacrificed, at the appointed time; for he is not ignorant of what is to take place, but willingly comes forward to be sacrificed.

Having *come to Bethany six days before the passover,* he remained there four days; which may easily be inferred from Matthew and Mark. On what day the banquet was made for him, at which he was anointed by Mary, John does not state; but it seems probable that it took place not long after he had arrived. There are some who think that, the anointing mentioned by Matthew (Matthew 26:7) and Mark (Mark 14:3) is different from what is mentioned here; but they are mistaken. They have been led to adopt this view by a calculation of time, because the two Evangelists, (Matthew 26:2; Mark 14:1,) before relating that Christ was



anointed, speak of two days as having elapsed. But the solution is easy, and may be given in two ways. For John does not say that Christ was anointed on the first day after his arrival; so that this might happen even when he was preparing to depart. Yet, as I have already said, there is another conjecture which is more probable, that he was anointed one day, at least, or two days, before his departure; for it is certain that Judas had made a bargain with the priests, before Christ sent two of his disciples to make ready the passover. <sup>f332</sup> Now, at the very least, one day must have intervened. The Evangelists add, that he

sought a convenient opportunity for betraying Christ, (Matthew 26:16,)

after having received the bribe. When, therefore, after mentioning *two days*, they add the history of the anointing, they place last in the narrative what happened first. And the reason is, that after having related the words of Christ,

You know that after two days the Son of man shall be betrayed, (Matthew 26:2,)

they now add — what had been formerly omitted — in what manner and on what occasion he was betrayed by his disciple. There is thus a perfect agreement in the account of his having been anointed at Bethany.

**2.** *There therefore they made him a banquet.* Matthew (Matthew 26:7) and Mark, (Mark 14:3) say that he then supped at the house of Simon the leper. 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. Nor does it involve any contradiction, that Matthew and Mark relate that the *head* of Christ was anointed, while John relates that his *feet* were anointed. The usual practice was the anointing of *the head*, and on this account Pliny reckons it an instance of excessive luxury, that some anointed the ankles. The three Evangelists agree in this; that Mary did not anoint Christ sparingly, but poured on him a large quantity of ointment. What John speaks, about *the feet*, amounts to this, that the whole body of Christ, down to the feet, was anointed. There is an amplification in the word *feet*, which appears more fully from what follows, when he adds, that Mary *wiped his feet with her hair*.

**3.** *And the house was filled with the odor* of the ointment. It was not a simple liquor extracted from *spikenard*, but a compound of many odoriferous substances; and therefore it is not wonderful that *the whole house was filled with the odor*.

**4.** *One of his disciples, therefore, saith.* Next follows the murmuring of Judas, which Matthew (Matthew 16:8) attributes to the disciples indiscriminately, and Mark (Mark 14:4) to *some* of them; but it is customary in Scripture to apply to many, by way of synecdoche, what belongs to one or to a few. Yet I think it is probable, that the murmuring proceeded from Judas alone, and that the rest were induced to give him their assent, as murmurings, by fanning a flame, easily kindle in us a variety of dispositions; and more especially, as we are too prone to form unfavorable judgments, slanders are readily embraced by us. But the credulity which the Spirit of God reproves in the Apostles is a warning to us not to be too easy and credulous in listening to calumnious statements.

**5.** *Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii?* A pound of ordinary ointment, Pliny tells us, cost not more than ten denarii; but the same Pliny says, that the highest price of the best ointment was three hundred and ten denarii. Now the Evangelists agree, that this was the most costly ointment, and Therefore Judas is correct in valuing a pound of it at *three hundred denarii*, — a sum which, according to the computation of Budaeus, amounts to fifty *livres* of French money. And as almost every kind of luxury involves excess and superfluity, the greater the waste of money, the more plausible reason had Judas for murmuring; as if he had said, “Had Mary spent little, there would have been some excuse for her; but now, since, in a matter of no importance, she has wasted a vast sum of money, has she not done an injury to *the poor*, who might have obtained from such a sum great relief? What she has done, therefore, admits of no apology.”

**6.** *Because he was a thief.* The rest of the Apostles, not from any bad disposition, but thoughtlessly, condemn Mary. But Judas resorts to a plausible pretext for his wickedness, when he brings forward *the poor*, though he cared nothing about them. We are taught by this instance what a frightful beast the desire of possessing is; the loss which Judas thinks that he has sustained, by the loss of an opportunity for stealing, excites him to such rage that he does not hesitate to betray Christ. And probably, in what he said about *the poor* having been defrauded, he did not only speak falsely to others, but likewise flattered himself inwardly, as hypocrites are wont to do; as if the act of betraying Christ were a trivial fault, by which he endeavored to obtain compensation for the loss which he had sustained. He had but one reason, indeed, for betraying Christ; and that was, to regain in some way the prey which had been snatched from his hands; for it was

the indignation excited in him, by the gain which he had lost, that drove him to the design of betraying Christ.

It is wonderful that Christ should have chosen, as a steward, a person of this description, whom he knew to be *a thief*. For what else was it than to put into his hands a rope for strangling himself? Mortal man can give no other reply than this, that the judgments of God are a deep gulf. Yet the action of Christ ought not to be viewed as an ordinary rule, that we should commit the care of the poor, or any thing sacred, to a wicked and ungodly man. for God has laid down to us a law, who they are that ought to be called to the government of the Church, and to other offices; and this law we are not at liberty to violate. The case was otherwise with Christ, who, being the eternal Wisdom of God, furnished an opportunity for his secret predestination in the person of Judas.

7. *Let her alone*. When Christ bids them *let Mary alone*, he shows that they act improperly and unjustly who disturb their neighbors without a good reason, and raise a disturbance about nothing. Christ's reply, as given by the other Evangelists, is longer; but the meaning is the same. The *anointing*, which Judas finds fault with, is defended on this ground, that it will serve for his burial. Christ, therefore, does not approve of it as an ordinary service, or one which ought to be commonly used in the Church; for if he had intended that an office of this sort should be performed daily, he could have said something else instead of speaking of it as connected with his burial. God certainly does not approve of outward display. Nay, more, perceiving that the mind of man is too prone to carnal observances, He frequently enjoins us to be sober and moderate in the use of them. Those persons, therefore, are absurd interpreters, who infer from Christ's reply, that costly and magnificent worship is pleasing to God; for he rather

excuses Mary on the ground of her having rendered to him an extraordinary service, which ought not to be regarded as a perpetual rule for the worship of God.

*For the day of my burial she hath kept it.* When he says, that the ointment was *kept*, he means that it was not poured unseasonably, but with a due regard to the time when it occurred; for a thing is said to be *kept*, which is reserved in store to be brought cut at a fit time and place. It is certain that, if any person, at a former period, had burdened him with costly delicacies, he would not have endured it. But he affirms that Mary did not do this as a customary matter, but in order to discharge her last duty towards him. Besides, the anointing of bodies was not at that time a useless ceremony, but rather a spiritual symbol, to place before their eyes the hope of a resurrection. The promises were still obscure; Christ had not risen, who is justly designated *the first-fruits of them that rise*, (1 Corinthians 15:20.) Believers, therefore, needed such aids to direct them to Christ, who was still absent; and, accordingly, the *anointing* of Christ was not at that time superfluous, for he was soon to be buried, and he was *anointed* as if he were to be laid in the tomb. The disciples were not yet aware of this, and Mary unquestionably was suddenly moved to do, under the direction of the Spirit of God, what she had not previously intended. But Christ applies to the hope of his resurrection what they so greatly disapproved, in order that the usefulness, which he pointed out to them in this action, <sup>f333</sup> might lead them to renounce the fretful and wicked opinion which they had formed respecting it. As it was the will of God that the childhood of his ancient people should be guided by such exercises, so, in the present day, it would be foolish to attempt the same thing; nor could it be done without offering an insult to Christ, who has driven away such shadows by the

brightness of his coming. But as his resurrection had not yet brought the fulfillment of the shadows of the Law, it was proper that his burial should be adorned by an outward ceremony. The odor of his resurrection has now sufficient efficacy, without spikenard and costly ointments, to quicken the whole world. But let us remember that, in judging of the actions of men, we ought to abide by the decision of Christ alone, at whose tribunal we must one day stand.

**8.** *For the poor you have always with you.* We must observe what I have already pointed out, that a distinction is here drawn expressly between the extraordinary action of Mary, and the daily service which is due to Christ. Those persons, therefore, are apes, and not imitators, who are desirous to serve Christ by costly and splendid display; as if Christ approved of what was done once, and did not rather forbid that it should be done afterwards.

*But me you have not always.* When he says, that he will not always be with his disciples, this ought to be referred to that kind of presence to which carnal worship and costly honors are suitable. For as to his presence with us by the grace and power of his Spirit, his dwelling in us, and also feeding us with his flesh and blood, this has nothing to do with bodily observances. Of all the pompous ceremonies which the Papists have contrived for the worship of Christ, in vain do they tell us, that they have bestowed them upon him, for he openly rejects them. When he says, *that the poor will always be with us*, though, by this saying, he reproves the hypocrisy of the Jews, yet we may learn from it a profitable doctrine; namely, that alms, by which the wants of the poor are relieved, are sacrifices acceptable, and of sweet savor, to God, and that any other kind of expense in the worship of God is improperly bestowed.

## JOHN 12:9-15

**9.** Then a great multitude of the Jews knew that he was there, and came, not on account of Jesus only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. **10.** Now the chief priests consulted, that they might put Lazarus also to death; **11.** For many of the Jews on his account went away, and believed on Jesus. **12.** next day, a great multitude, who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was come to Jerusalem, **13.** Took branches of palm trees, trod went out to meet him, and shouted, Hosanna, Blessed be the King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord. **14.** And Jesus, having found a young' ass, sat upon it, as it is written, **15.** Fear not, daughter of Zion, because thy King cometh sitting on the foal of an ass.

**9.** *Then a great multitude of the Jews knew that he was there.* The more nearly the time of the death of Christ approached, it became the more necessary that his name should be universally celebrated, in order that it might be a preparation for stronger faith after his death. More especially, the Evangelist relates that the recent miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus had acquired great celebrity: and as Christ showed in it a remarkable proof of his Divinity, God intended that it should have many witnesses. When he says that *they came not on account of Jesus only*, but also for the sake of Lazarus, he does not mean that they came out of regard to Lazarus, as if they bestowed this mark of honor on him in particular, but that they might behold the astonishing display of the power of Christ in Lazarus.

**10.** *Now the chief priests consulted.* It certainly was worse than insane fury to endeavor to put to death one who had manifestly been raised from the dead by divine power. But such is the spirit of giddiness with which Satan torments the wicked, so that there is no end of their madness, even though God should bring heaven, and earth, and sea, to oppose them. For this wicked consultation is thus described, for the purpose of informing us that the enemies of Christ were led to so great obstinacy, not by mistake or folly, but by furious wickedness, so that they did not even shrink from making war against God; and also for the purpose of informing us that the power of God was not dimly seen in the resurrection of Lazarus, since ungodliness could contrive no other method of banishing it from remembrance than by perpetrating a base and shocking murder on an innocent man. Besides, since Satan labors with his utmost strength utterly to bury, or at least in some measure to obscure, the works of God, it is our duty to devote ourselves diligently to continual meditation on them.

**12.** *The next day, a great multitude.* This entrance of Christ is more copiously related (Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29) by the other Evangelists; but John here embraces the leading points. In the first place, we ought to remember Christ's design, which was, that he came to Jerusalem of his own accord, to offer himself to die; for it was necessary that his death should be voluntary, because the wrath of God could be appeased only by a sacrifice of obedience. And, indeed, he well knew what would be the result; but before he is dragged to the cross, he wishes to be solemnly acknowledged by the people as their King; nay, he openly declares that he commences his reign by advancing to death, but though his approach was celebrated by a vast crowd of people, still he remained unknown to his enemies until, by the fulfillment of prophecies, which we shall



afterwards see in their own place, he proved that he was the true Messiah; for he wished to omit nothing that would contribute to the full confirmation of our faith.

*A great multitude, which came to the feast.* Thus strangers were more ready to discharge the duty of paying respect to the Son of God than the citizens of Jerusalem, who ought rather to have been all example to all others. For they had sacrifices daily; the temple was always before their eyes, which ought to have kindled in their hearts the desire of seeking God; these too were the highest teachers of the Church, and *there* was the sanctuary of the divine light. It is therefore a manifestation of excessively base ingratitude in them that, after they have been trained to such exercise from their earliest years, they reject or despise the Redeemer who had been promised to them. But this fault has prevailed in almost every age, that the more nearly and the more familiarly God approached to men, the more daringly did men despise God.

In other men who, having left their homes, assembled to celebrate the feast, we observe much greater ardor, so that they eagerly inquire about Christ; and when they hear that he is coming into the city, they go out to meet and congratulate him. And yet it cannot be doubted that they were aroused by a secret movement of the Spirit to meet him. We do not read that this was done on any former occasion. But as earthly princes summon their subjects by the sound of a trumpet or by the public crier, when they go to take possession of their kingdom, so Christ, by a movement of his Spirit, assembled this people, that they might hail him as their king. When the multitudes wished to make him a king, while he was in the wilderness, (John 6:15,) he withdrew secretly into the mountain; for at that time they dreamed of no other kingdom than one under which they might be well fattened, in the same manner as

cattle. Christ could not therefore grant and comply with their foolish and absurd wish, without denying himself, and renouncing the office which the Father had bestowed upon him. But now he claims for himself such a kingdom as he had received from the Father. I readily acknowledge that the people who went out to meet him were not well acquainted with the nature of this kingdom; but Christ looked to the future. Meanwhile, he permitted nothing to be done that was not suitable to his spiritual kingdom.

**13.** *Took branches of palm-trees.* The *palm* was the emblem of victory and peace among the ancients; but they were wont to employ *branches of palm-trees*, when they bestowed kingly power on any one, or when they humbly supplicated the favor of a conqueror. But those persons appear to have taken into their hands *branches of palm-trees*, as a token of gladness and rejoicing at receiving a new king.

*Shouted, Hosanna.* By this phrase they testified that they acknowledged Jesus Christ to be the Messiah, who had anciently been promised to the fathers, and from whom redemption and salvation were to be expected. For the Psalm 118:25 from which that exclamation is taken was composed in reference to the Messiah for this purpose, that all the saints might continually desire and ardently long for his coming, and might receive him with the utmost reverence, when he was manifested. It is therefore probable, or rather it may be inferred with certainty, that this prayer was frequently used by the Jews, and, consequently, was in every man's mouth; so that the Spirit of God put words into the mouths, <sup>f334</sup> of those men, when they wished a prosperous arrival to the Lord Jesus; and they were chosen by him as heralds to attest that Christ was come.

The word *Hosanna* is composed of two Hebrew words, and means, *Save, I beseech you*. The Hebrews, indeed, pronounce it differently, (anA[yçwh) *Hoshianna*; <sup>f335</sup> but it usually happens that the pronunciation of words is corrupted, when they are transferred to a foreign language. Yet the Evangelists, though they wrote in Greek, purposely retained the Hebrew word, in order to express more fully that the multitude employed the ordinary form of prayer, which was first employed by David, and afterwards throughout an uninterrupted succession of ages, received by the people of God, and peculiarly consecrated for the purpose of blessing the kingdom of the Messiah. <sup>f336</sup> To the same purpose are the words which immediately follow, *Blessed be the King of Israel, who cometh in the name of the Lord*; for this is also a joyful prayer for the happy and prosperous success of that kingdom, on which the restoration and prosperity of the Church of God depended.

But as David appears to speak of himself rather than of Christ in that psalm, we must first of all solve this difficulty; nor will the task be hard. We know for what purpose the kingdom was established in the hand of David and of his posterity; and that purpose was, that it might be a sort of prelude of the everlasting kingdom which was to be manifested at the proper time. And, indeed, it was not necessary that David should confine his attention to himself; and the Lord, by the prophets, frequently commands all the godly to turn their eyes to a different person from David. <sup>f337</sup> So then all that David sung about himself is justly referred to that king who, according to the promise, was to arise from the seed of David to be the redeemer.

But we ought to derive from it a profitable admonition; for if we are members of the Church, the Lord calls upon us to cherish the same desire which he wished believers to cherish under the Law; that is, that we should wish with our whole heart that the kingdom of Christ should flourish and prosper; and not only so, but that we should demonstrate this by our prayers. In order To give us greater courage in prayer, we ought to observe that he prescribes to us the words. Woe then to our slothfulness, if we extinguish by our coldness, or quench by indifference, that ardor which God excites. Yet let us know that the prayers which we offer by the direction and authority of God will not be in vain. Provided that we be not indolent or grow weary in praying, He will be a faithful guardian of his kingdom, to defend it by his invincible power and protection. True, indeed, though we remain drowsy and inactive, <sup>f338</sup> the majesty of his kingdom will be firm and sure; but when — as is frequently the ease — it is less prosperous than it ought to be, or rather falls into decay, as we perceive it to be, at the present day, fearfully scattered and wasted, this unquestionably arises through our fault. And when but a small restoration, or almost none, is to be seen, or when at least it advances slowly, let us ascribe it to our indifference. We daily ask from God *that his kingdom may come*, (Matthew 6:10,) but scarcely one man in a hundred earnestly desires it. Justly, therefore, are we deprived of the blessing of God, which we are weary of asking.

We are also taught by this expression, that it is God alone who preserves and defends the Church; for He does not claim for himself, or command us to give him, anything but what is his own. Since, therefore, while He guides our tongues, we pray that he may preserve the kingdom of Christ, we acknowledge that, in order that this kingdom

may remain in a proper state, God himself is the only bestower of salvation. He employs, indeed, the labors of men for this purpose, but of men whom his own hand has prepared for the work. Besides, while he makes use of men for advancing, or maintaining the kingdom of Christ, still every thing is begun and completed, through their agency, by God alone through the power of his Spirit.

*Who cometh in the name of the Lord.* We must first understand what is meant by this phrase, *to come in the name of the Lord.* He who does not rashly put himself forward, or falsely assume the honor, but, being duly called, has the direction and authority of God for his actions, *cometh in the name of God.* This title belongs to all the true servants of God. A Prophet who guided by the Holy Spirit, honestly delivers to men the doctrine which he has received from heaven, — *cometh in the name of God.* A King, by whose hand God governs his people *cometh in the same name.* But as the Spirit of the Lord rested on Christ, and he is *the Head of all things,* (Ephesians 1:22,) and all who have ever been ordained to rule over the Church are subject to his say, or rather, are streams flowing from him as the fountain, he is justly said to have *come in the name of God.* Nor is it only by the high rank of his authority that he surpasses others, but because God manifests himself to us fully in him; for *in him dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily,* as Paul says, (Colossians 2:9,) and he is *the lively image* of God, (Hebrews 1:3,) and, in short, is the true *Immanuel,* (Matthew 1:23.) It is therefore by a special right that he is said to have *come in the name of the Lord,* because by him God has manifested himself fully, and not partially, as he had formerly done by the Prophets. We ought therefore to begin with him as the Head, when we wish to bless the servants of God.

Now since the false prophets arrogantly boast of *the name of God*, and shelter themselves under this false pretense, we ought to supply an opposite clause in the prayer, that the Lord may scatter and utterly destroy them. Thus we cannot bless Christ without cursing the Pope and that sacrilegious tyranny which he has raised up against the Son of God. <sup>f339</sup> He huffs his excommunications against us, indeed, with great violence, as if they were thunderbolts, but they are mere air-bladders, <sup>f340</sup> and therefore we ought boldly to despise them. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit here dictates to us an awful curse, that it may sink the Pope to the lowest hell, with all his pomp and splendor. Nor is it necessary that there should be any Bishop or Pontiff <sup>f341</sup> to pronounce the curse against him, since Christ at one time bestowed this authority on *children*, when he approved of their *crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David*, as the other Evangelists relate, (Matthew 21:15, 16.)

**14.** *And Jesus having found a young ass.* This part of the history is more minutely related by the other Evangelists, who tell us, that Christ *sent two of his disciples* to bring an ass, (Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29.) John, who was the latest writer of all the Evangelists, reckoned it enough to notice briefly the substance of what had been stated by the rest; and, on this account, he leaves out many circumstances. An apparent contradiction, by which many persons are perplexed, is very easily removed. When Matthew says, that Christ sat upon a *she-ass and her colt*, we ought to view it as a synecdoche. <sup>f342</sup> Some imagine that he sat first on the she-ass, and afterwards on her colt; and out of this conjecture they frame an allegory, that he first sat on the Jewish people, who had been long accustomed to bear the yoke of the Law, and afterwards. subdued the Gentiles, like an untrained *young ass* which had never