

**The close of the public ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem
Jesus and His Friends
(John 12:1-11)**

Outline of this section:

- I. The purpose (12:1-2a): A dinner is given to honor Jesus.
- II. The people (12:2b): Among those attending are Lazarus and his sisters.
- III. The perfume (12:3) : Mary anoints Jesus with some expensive perfume.
- IV. The protest (12:4-8)
 - A. The denouncing of Mary (12:4-6): Judas Iscariot rebukes Mary for this.
 1. What he says (12:4-5): "That perfume ... should have been sold and the money given to the poor!"
 2. Why he says it (12:6): He wants to keep some of that money for himself.
 - B. The defending of Mary (12:7-8): Jesus says she has done this in preparation for his burial.
- V. The popularity (12:9): Many Jews now come to see both Lazarus and Jesus.
- VI. The plot (12:10-11): The godless Jewish leaders lay plans to kill both Lazarus and Jesus!

Introduction

In John 12, we see Jesus as He relates to four different groups of people, there are lessons that we can learn from each group as we study this section.

1. Jesus and His friends (12:1-11).
2. Jesus and the Passover Pilgrims (John 12:12-19)
3. Jesus and the Gentile Visitors (John 12:20-36)
4. Jesus and Unbelieving Jews (John 12:37-49)

As the Passover week approaches Jesus stays with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. One night a woman slips in and pours expensive perfume on His feet. Judas responds in anger as this outward expression of extravagant love and worship. He states that the gift should have been sold and the funds turned over to the group's treasurer-Judas himself. Things seem to be good; many hearing of Lazarus being raised from the dead are openly expressing allegiance to Jesus.

The Lord knew that the Jewish leaders were out to arrest Him and kill Him (John 11:53, 57), but He still returned to Bethany, only two miles from the very citadel of His enemies. Why? So that He might spend a quiet time with His dear friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. True to their personalities, Martha busily served and Mary worshiped at the feet of Jesus (see Luke 10:38-42).

Jesus and His friends (12:1-11).

I. The Anointing (John 12:1-3)

Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

A. Observations:

1. This event took place six days before Passover, which would put it on the Friday, the day before His triumphant entry into Jerusalem; which takes place the next day.

2. Jesus is anointed in Bethany; which literally means, "house of fishes," this probably indicates the trade of the people living there.
3. There were two places in Israel with that name.
 - 1) East of the Jordan, Bethsaida Julias, referred to in Luke 9:10; Mark 8:22;
 - 2) On the western shore of the Lake of Galilee, the birthplace of Andrew and Peter (John 1:44). See also Mark 6:45; Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13; John 12:21.
4. Mary's anointing of the Lord must not be confused with a similar event recorded in Luke 7:36-50.
 - a. The unnamed woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee was a converted harlot who expressed her love to Christ because of His gracious forgiveness of her many sins, in the house of Simon the (healed) leper.
 - b. The incident of the anointing at Bethany is important because of its connection with the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. The specific time reference (six days before the Passover; 1) is significant for John and may be compared with the six days recorded at the commencement of the ministry. The pint of pure nard would have been a very expensive amount of ointment, as is clear from Judas's estimate that it amounted to a year's wages. It is probable the ointment was a liquid perfume. Although it was the normal procedure to anoint the head (as recorded in Mt 26:7; Mk. 14:3) it may be significant that John records the anointing of the feet, in view of the feet-washing incident narrated in the next chapter. In the parallel case of anointing in Lk. 7:38, it was also the feet that were anointed. However, in spite of some similarities between the two narratives, there are sufficient differences to make it unlikely that the two incidents are the same. In Luke's record the woman is described as a sinful woman who is deeply penitent, whereas Mary of Bethany is seen as a woman deeply devoted to Jesus, and John's picture of her agrees completely with Luke's portrait of the same person. In both instances the woman wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair. It would have been against Jewish convention for a woman to appear in the presence of men with her hair untied, but in Mary's case love was stronger than convention. John's mention of the odor filling the house is a vivid eyewitness detail.
 - c. Mark puts this story between the accounts of the plot to arrest Jesus, (Mark 14:1-11). Neither Mark nor Matthew names the woman, but John tells us that it was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1-2).
5. The pure nard

Was a fragrant oil prepared from the roots and stems of an aromatic herb from northern India. It was an expensive perfume, imported in sealed alabaster boxes or flasks which were opened only on special occasions.
6. Mary's gift

The gift likely represented Mary's life savings, as 500 denarii (Gk.) was a very large sum to ordinary people. It represents a simple yet profound motive. Mary wanted to give Jesus her best.

Mary's lavish gift (a pint) expressed her love and thanks to Jesus for Himself and for His restoring Lazarus to life. The house was filled with the fragrance. This is one of John's many side comments which indicate that he was an eyewitness of much of Jesus' ministry.

When Mary gave her best at the feet of Jesus, she started a "wave of blessing" that has been going on ever since. She was a blessing to Jesus as she shared her love, and she was a blessing to her home as the fragrance spread. Were it not for Mary, her village, Bethany, would probably have been forgotten. The account of her deed was a blessing to the early church that heard about it and, because of the records in three of the Gospels, Mary has been a blessing to the whole world-and still is! The Lord's prediction has certainly been fulfilled.

B. Insights:

1. Extravagant worship

Mary expressed her love to Christ because He was going to the cross to die for her. She prepared His body for burial as she anointed His head (Mark 14:3) and His feet (John 12:3). She showed her love for Jesus while He was still alive.

It was an expensive offering that she gave to the Lord. Spikenard was imported from India, and a whole jar would have cost the equivalent of a common worker's annual income. Mary gave lavishly and lovingly. She was not ashamed to show her love for Christ openly.

2. There were three consequences to her act of worship.

First, the house was filled with the beautiful fragrance of the ointment (John 12:3; also note 2 Cor. 2:15-16). There is always a "spiritual fragrance" in that home where Jesus Christ is loved and worshiped.

Second, the disciples, led by Judas, criticized Mary for wasting her money! It sounded so pious for Judas to talk about the poor, when in reality he wanted the money for himself! (John 12:4-6)

Even in the Upper Room, six days later, the disciples still thought Judas was concerned about helping the poor (John 13:21-30).

It is interesting that the word translated "waste" in Mark 14:4 is translated "perdition" in John 17:12 and applied to Judas! Judas criticized Mary for "wasting money," but he wasted his entire life!

Third, Jesus commended Mary and accepted her gracious gift. He knew the heart of Judas and understood why the other disciples followed his bad example. He also knew Mary's heart and quickly defended her (Rom. 8:33-39).

3. Our concern should be His approval alone.

No matter what others may say about our worship and service, the most important thing is that we please the Lord. The fact that others misunderstand and criticize us should not keep us from showing our love to Christ.

4. Mary gave her best in faith and love;

Judas gave his worst in unbelief and hatred. He solved the problem of how the Jewish leaders could arrest Jesus without causing a riot during the feast. He sold his Master for the price of a slave (see Ex. 21:32), the basest act of treachery in history.

5. Mary is found three times in the Gospel story;

Each time, she is in the same place: at the feet of Jesus.

Luke 10:38-42; She sat at His feet and listened to His Word.

John 11:32; She fell at His feet and shared her sorrow.

John 12:3; and she came to His feet and poured out her worship.

It is interesting to note that in each of these instances, there is some kind of fragrance:

Luke 10, it is food;
John 11, it is death;
John 12, it is perfume;

II. The protest (John 12:4-8):

But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."

A. Observations:

1. Judas Iscariot:

Judas was the group's treasurer (13:29), and would pocket some of the benevolence money for himself. Whereas Mary gave openly and sacrificially, Judas wanted to hoard money for himself secretly and selfishly. He even betrayed Jesus for money-30 pieces of silver (this was the price of a gored slave; Ex. 21:32; Zech. 11:12-13).

The complaint of Judas against this expensive waste is fully in character with other accounts of him in the Gospels. He was stricken not only with the deadly sins of greed and covetousness, but also with dishonesty.

According to Mark (14:4-5) the other disciples picked up his criticism and rebuked her harshly.

2. Jesus defends Mary

Normally anointing was something festive. But in this case the anointing was in anticipation of His burial. Living by God's Word, Jesus knew that as the suffering Servant, He must endure pain, die, and be buried (Isa. 53:9).

So He immediately defended Mary's act of love and devotion. You will always have the poor among you is not a divine endorsement of poverty or an encouragement to do nothing about poverty. Instead, Jesus was saying that the causes of poverty are many and people will always have occasions to help the poor (Mark 14:7). But the opportunity to show love to Jesus on earth was limited. You will not always have Me, that is, here on earth (John 12:35; 13:33; 14:3-4).

B. Insights:

Judas objected to this lavish waste (in his viewpoint). His objection-that money from the sale of the perfume should have been given to the poor-was not honest (cf. v. 6).

Evil quickly spreads, and even leaders can be carried along by Satan's tools. The value of the perfume was a year's wages (lit., "300 denarii") perhaps a lifetime of savings.

"Judas" (12:4-6). Even Christ's betrayer tried to sound spiritual, expressing a concern for the poor that he surely did not feel. Watch out for those who criticize your or others' best instincts by using religion against you. Piety often cloaks hidden motives.

Contrasts:

Mary and Martha are often contrasted

It is as though each believer must make a choice: be a worker like Martha or a worshiper like Mary. Certainly our personalities and gifts are different, but that does not mean that the Christian life is an either/or situation.

Mary vs. Judas and the religious leaders

The Gospels contrast the treachery of Judas and the religious leaders, with the love and loyalty of Mary. The ugliness of their sins makes the beauty of her sacrifice even more meaningful.

III. The popularity (12:9):

Many Jews now come to see both Lazarus and Jesus.

John 12:9 The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.

IV. The plot (12:10-11):

The godless Jewish leaders lay plans to kill both Lazarus and Jesus!

John 12:10-11 But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

Application:

1. Worship is at the heart of all that we are and all that we do in the Christian life.

It is important that we be busy ambassadors, taking the message of the Gospel to lost souls. It is also essential to be merciful Samaritans, seeking to help exploited and hurting people who need God's mercy. But before we can represent Christ as we should, or imitate Him in our caring ministry, we must spend time with Him and learn from Him. We must "take time to be with Him."

2. God wants our best!

Mary's gift likely represented her life savings, as 500 denarii (Gk.) was a very large sum to ordinary people. It represents a simple yet profound motive. Mary wanted to give Jesus her best.

3. Blessed are the balanced!

It seems evident that the Lord wants each of us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work.

4. Piety often cloaks hidden motives.

Even Christ's betrayer (Judas), tried to sound spiritual, expressing a concern for the poor that he surely did not feel. Watch out for those who criticize you or others' best efforts by using what appeared to be biblical conviction against you.

Special Note: the title "Son of Man" will be used in the next section in the following verses:

John 12:23 And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

John 12:34 The crowd then answered Him, "We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

Messianic title used by Jesus to express his heavenly origin, earthly mission, and glorious future coming. It does not refer merely to his human nature or humanity, as some church fathers or contemporary scholars believe. Rather, it reflects on the heavenly origin and divine dignity of Jesus, on the mystery of his manifestation in human form, and on his earthly mission which involved suffering and death but which issued in heavenly glory to be followed by eschatological vindication.

The background of the term "Son of man" is to be found in the OT. The Book of Ezekiel is the general source, since this prophet used "Son of man" 90 times as a cryptic, indirect reference to himself. For example, God addresses him, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." (2:1). Jesus' use of the term "Son of Man" and numerous themes from Ezekiel suggest his

desire to identify himself as the eschatological prophet who, like Ezekiel (ch 4, 7, 10, 22, 40-48), had the last word about the destruction of Jerusalem and the restoration of the kingdom of God to Israel (Mt 23, 24; Acts 1:6-8).

The specific source of the term is Daniel 7:13, 14, with its vision of one "like a son of man" who "comes with the clouds" into the presence of "the Ancient of Days" who gives him the universal and eternal kingdom of God. Jesus repeatedly quoted parts of this text in teaching about his second coming (Mt 16:27; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31; 26:64). Clearly, Jesus understood this passage as a prophetic portrayal of his own person: his incarnation, ascension, and inheritance of the kingdom of God.

In the Gospels, the term "Son of man" is used by Jesus some 80 times as a mysterious, indirect way of speaking about himself (Mt, 32 times; Mk, 14; Lk, 26; Jn, 10). In all these texts, Jesus is always the speaker, and no one ever addresses him as "Son of Man." In some texts the reference is cryptic enough for some interpreters to insist that Jesus is speaking about another person. Such uncertainty is recorded in only one text in John, where the crowd asks Jesus, "Who is this 'Son of Man'?" (12:34). In most texts, the identification is clear; in some it is explicit: "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" ... "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:13, 15). The conclusion generally drawn is that Jesus used the term as a messianic title for himself, so that he could speak modestly about his person and mission, yet convey the exalted content he wished to reveal about himself. He could do this with considerable originality because the term was not fraught with popular misconceptions concerning messiahship.

The term occurs only four other times in the NT. In Acts 7:56, Stephen says, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Hebrews 2:6 quotes Psalm 8:4 as applying to Jesus. Finally, Revelation 1:13 and 14:14 record visions of someone "like a son of man" who is undoubtedly the glorified Jesus.

In the synoptic Gospels, the first theme in Jesus' self-revelation with his use of the title "Son of man" concerns his coming to earth to accomplish his messianic mission.

A general comparison of Jesus' present earthly condition with that of his previous heavenly glory is expressed in the logia: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58). Some scholars believe this text refers merely to the poverty of his earthly situation. It is too simplistic for Jesus to mean that, unlike birds and foxes, he accepts the lifestyle of a drifting vagabond. This logia really means that the Son of Man gave up his heavenly home to suffer all the humiliations of his earthly ministry (Phil 2:5-11).

Some interpret Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34 to be a mere comparison of John the Baptist as an ascetic, with Jesus as the Son of Man who "came eating and drinking." This view is entirely too earthbound, because even John was a heaven-sent messenger (Lk 3:2; Jn 1:6). Thus the "coming" of the Son of Man ought to be seen as an allusion to his heavenly origin and to his mission in this sinful world.

Jesus uses the title to claim divine prerogatives, saying, "the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath" (Mt 12:8; Mk 2:28; Lk 6:5). The Sabbath, a divine institution, may not be revised by ordinary men. But, since Jesus is the Son of Man from heaven, he is free to rule as Lord even of the Sabbath, because he alone is in filial harmony with the same Lord who instituted the Sabbath (Gn 2:2; Ex 20:8-11). Indeed, the Lord of the Sabbath is also the creator of all things (Jn 1:3, 10).

After healing the paralytic at Capernaum, Jesus claimed that he as "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mt 9:6; Mk 2:10; Lk 5:24). Previously, forgiveness of sins came from heaven and from God; but now forgiveness comes from Capernaum and is given by Jesus.

This group of texts clearly reveals the heavenly origin and divine authority of Jesus for his earthly mission.

A second aspect of Jesus' use of the "Son of Man" title concerns his suffering, death, and glorious resurrection as the mysterious method he would use to fulfill his earthly mission as the Son of Man.

Jesus began expounding this passion theme after Peter confessed him to be Messiah and Son of God (Mt 16:16). Jesus' prediction of his passion as the Son of Man begins in Mark 8:31, 32, and is repeated in several other texts. The Gospels expand the theme to include his suffering of mockery and scourging (Mt 17:12; 20:18; Mk 8:31; Lk 9:22), betrayal by Judas (Mt 17:22; 26:24; Mk 14:21, 41), rejection by the Jewish leaders (Mt 20:18), death by gentile crucifixion (Mt 20:19; Mk 9:12, 31; 10:33), burial for three days (Mt 12:40; Lk 11:30), and resurrection after three days (Mt 17:22, 23; Mk 8:31).

In the famous ransom text, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45), Jesus teaches that his death was a vicarious sacrifice for the salvation of his people. This idea of substitutionary atonement is a new element in the Son of Man material and derives from Jesus' understanding of himself as the suffering servant of the Lord (Is 53).

Jesus also used the "Son of Man" title to teach about his second coming. As the eschatological Son of Man, Jesus will return to earth from heaven in the glory of his Father with the angels (Mt 16:27; Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26). First, he will be seated at the right hand of God, and then he will come again (Mt 26:64; Mk 14:62; Lk 22:69), with the clouds (Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27). This coming will be unexpected (Mt 24:27; Lk 12:40), like a flash of lightning or the flood of Noah (Mt 24:37; Lk 17:24). His coming will be for the gathering of the elect, the judgment of all the nations of the earth (Mt 19:28; 25:32), and the restoration of final righteousness in the world (Mt 19:28; 25:46).

In these passages, Jesus' focus shifts from the provisional victory in his passion and resurrection to the final victory of the Son of Man at his second coming from heaven. Here again, the dramatic emphasis is on the heavenly origin and divine prerogatives of the Son of Man. This man Jesus, the Son of Man, will be the final judge (cf. Acts 17:31).

The Gospel of John has its own distinctive material concerning the Son of Man. The angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man (1:51), probably signifying that he is a preexistent person who has come from heaven (3:13; 6:62). His being lifted up (by crucifixion) will bring about eternal life for all who believe in him (3:14). The Son of Man (3:14) is also the Son of God (v 16), his Son (v 17), and God's one and only Son (v 18). The Father has given authority to raise the dead and to judge the world to his Son, the Son of Man (5:25, 27). The Son of Man gives food that endures unto eternal life; this food is his flesh and blood (6:53). Jesus' passion is the hour of the lifting up and glorification of the Son of Man (8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34; 13:31). In John's Gospel, the "Son of Man" title is equivalent to the title "Son of God." It reveals his divinity, preexistence, heavenly origin, and divine prerogatives: it affirms his present earthly condition for revelation and passion, and his future eschatological glory.

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