

John 12:1-19

Mary's Worship, Priests Plot, Jesus Openly Presents Himself as Messiah

Review: In chapter 11, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. However, rather than causing the leaders to reassess their opposition to Jesus, it caused them to determine to kill him. Because of this plot, Jesus left town (**read 11:54**). However, the leaders suspected He would be back for Passover, and they readied to arrest Him when He came into town (**read 11:57**).

**** **Why did Judas object to a remarkable act of worship by Mary?** On the surface, it was to express concern for the poor. In reality, it was because he stole money out of the common purse, 12:4-6. He was a bad egg, through and through.

ESV **Luke 16:10** [Jesus] . . . one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

According to 12:1, how many days before Passover did Mary anoint Jesus? It was six days before Passover. That means that the next seven chapters (John 12-19) cover only six days. By way of comparison, the previous eleven chapters (John 1-11) cover three *years*! This suggests that the last half of the book is far more important than the first half. John put the next six days under a microscope.

In 12:1, what's the "therefore" link back to? It ties back to the transitional paragraph, 11:55-57. The leaders anticipated that Jesus would come back to Jerusalem for the Passover, and He did.

What was the occasion for this dinner (12:1-2)? It was in appreciation of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

- **"dinner" (12:2):** The Greek here is *deipnon*, typically "the meal toward evening", though it could refer to any meal.¹ It is the same word used to refer to the Lord's Supper, which was an actual meal in New Testament times.
- **"reclining" (12:2):** Lazarus and Jesus were reclining (not sitting) at the table. There were no chairs. It was customary to recline around a low table when dining. No one put his feet under the table. Thus, Mary would have had easy access to Jesus' feet.

Why did Mary choose this extraordinary way to worship Jesus (12:3)? It could be because she knew He would soon die, but I doubt it. More likely, it was a very personal and expensive act of worship that showed great love and devotion.

- a) What an amazing contrast between Mary's response to Jesus and the Jewish leadership's response to Jesus!
- b) Her voluntary anointing of Jesus' feet was also a contrast with Jesus' own disciples, who later had to be instructed to wash one another's feet (13:1ff).²
- c) Finally, she wiped His feet not with a towel, but with her *hair*. She didn't care what anyone else thought. *Do you treasure Jesus more than your pride?*³ Jesus hung naked on a cross for us, yet often we are so inhibited in our worship or in letting others know we believe in Him.

¹ Carson, *John*, 427.

² Carson, *John*, 427.

³ Steven J Cole, "Lesson 64: Wasting Your Life on Jesus (John 12:1-11)", bible.org. Accessed February 14, 2020.

What is nard (12:3)? This word is transliterated from *nardos*, a Sanskrit word describing an herbal plant from India that produces an odorous oil.⁴ John recorded that Mary **1)** had half a pound of the Nard, **2)** that it was pure, and **3)** that it was expensive (worth three hundred denarii—a year’s wages for a common laborer).

Application: John recorded in 12:3 that the aroma filled the room. It was also in Mary’s hair, so the fragrance went with her wherever she went. *Can people smell the fragrance of Christ on you?*

In 12:4, beyond stating his name, how did John identify Judas? John identified Judas as the one who betrayed Jesus. John’s readers obviously already knew that Jesus had been betrayed by one His own close, inner circle. This identification follows closely behind John’s statement that the leaders were looking for someone to tell them of Jesus’ whereabouts:

ESV **John 11:57** Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Based on 12:7-8, how was what Mary did fittingly prophetic? It was the custom of the Jews to mix spices in with the burial clothes of the dead. What Mary did prefigured this burial custom that would within the week be done for Jesus.

ESV **John 19:38-40** Nicodemus . . . who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

Also, Jesus clearly stated that he would not always be with them, but they did not have ears to hear.

Secondary Applications: What can we learn about giving from John 12:8?

a) Jesus made reference to Deuteronomy 15:11 and believed in the importance of giving to help the poor.

ESV **Deuteronomy 15:11** . . . there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'

b) However, based on Mary’s actions, it is also right to give sacrificially to the work of the Lord. This includes evangelism, church planting, foreign missions, elders worthy of double honor, and the needs of the local church (a meeting place, utilities, janitorial fees, etc).

Watchman Nee applied what Mary did this way: Waste yourself on Jesus! Jesus is worthy of you to devote all your life and give all you have to Him. A life spent in selfless devotion to Jesus is not wasted. *Do you value Jesus more than your stuff?* (Mary applied ointment worth a year’s wages!). *If other people knew what you give, would they conclude that you love Jesus a lot?*⁵

⁴ Thayer, *Lexicon*, #3487; *New Bible Dictionary*, 854.

⁵ Cole, “Lesson 64”.

Literary Purpose: Why do you suppose John chose to record Mary's extraordinary worship and Judas' reactions? How does this serve to advance John's purpose in writing? John wrote to unbelieving Jesus so that they would believe in Jesus. A valid concern would be why Judas, a close disciple of Jesus, would betray Jesus. Judas was right there when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, yet he betrayed Him anyway. A skeptic would wonder if Judas, an insider, knew something sinister about Jesus that convinced him Jesus needed to be stopped. John is here showing that the problem was with Judas, who was bad from the beginning.

Judas application: There will always be people like Judas in the church. They have their own selfish motives to be here. For many Judas-single men, it is access to the young women. For Judas-insurance salesmen it is access to new customers; for Judas-dentists, new patients; for Judas-financial agents, new clients. The problem is, like Judas, they only appear to be following Jesus. Be sure you follow Jesus for who He is (God), not simply for what you can get out of it.

******Why was Lazarus in mortal danger (12:9-11)?** Many people were flocking to see both Jesus and Lazarus, and as a result left believing in Jesus.⁶ The murderous, evil, religious leaders plotted to kill Lazarus to get rid of the evidence that Jesus really was a miracle worker.

Literary Purpose: This explains to John's readers why the leadership of Judea rejected Jesus. Rather than change their beliefs in the face of irrefutable evidence, these leaders chose instead to destroy the evidence. Sin causes irrational behavior. As in Romans 1, they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. They ultimately lost their lives because they wanted to hold onto them. As Jesus would soon say:

ESV **John 12:25** Whoever loves his life loses it . . .

Witnessing Application: Lazarus had been raised from the dead by Jesus. Lazarus reclined at the table with Jesus, spending time in fellowship with Him. Many people believed in Jesus because of Lazarus. That ought to be the same with us. We've been raised out of spiritual death by Jesus. If we spend time with Jesus in fellowship, people should believe in Him because of the resurrection life they see in us. *Can you put your name in 12:11—"on account of _____ many were believing in Jesus"?*⁷

*****What reason did John give for why the crowd rushed out to greet Jesus (12:12-19)?** The reason they did this was because Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead (12:17-18). This was enough for them to conclude that Jesus was the Christ. This, by the way, is basis for the Christian observance now called Palm Sunday.

⁶ This would appear to be an instance of where "the Jews" refers to more than just the religious leaders.

⁷ Cole, "Lesson 64".

What did the crowd declare about Jesus in 12:13? They proclaimed Jesus to be the King of Israel. (Hosanna means “give salvation now”).⁸

What was the connection between palm branches and declaring Jesus King (12:13)? The waving of date-palm branches was an extra-biblical, inter-testament tradition that symbolized victory over Israel’s enemies. When the Simon Maccabee drove foreign invaders out of the Promised Land, the people celebrated by waving palm branches. Now, with Jesus, they doubtless hoped the Romans would be driven out).⁹ For example, when the Jews later did rebel against Rome, the insurgents issued coins with palm branches stamped on them.¹⁰ These people not doubt expected a new era of peace and prosperity.

The only other time the New Testament mentions palm branches is in the book of Revelation.

ESV Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Based on 12:14, did Jesus encourage or discourage this declaration? Jesus encouraged it. He purposely sought out a donkey to ride in on, specifically so as to fulfill Zechariah 9:9. By His actions, Jesus was clearly declaring Himself to be the Messiah.

What is the significance of entering Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt rather than a war horse (12:14-15)? A conquering king triumphantly rode on a war horse. That Jesus came on a donkey’s colt (a young donkey) not only fulfilled Scripture (Zechariah 9:9), but symbolized coming in peace. Jesus did not come the first time as a political Christ.

Even though their timing was wrong, why was the crowd right to expect a political Messiah (12:13)? In the Hebrew Scriptures, God predicted that He would one day send a descendant of King David to rule forever over God’s enemies. He would be a political Messiah (Psalm 2 embodies this). This will happen at Jesus’ second appearing, when He will come on a war horse:

ESV Revelation 19:11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

According to 12:16, when did the disciples finally figure out what Jesus was doing on the donkey? They did not realize it was a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 until after Jesus’ resurrection.¹¹ There was just too much happening, too fast. They consistent had a hard time understanding the peaceful nature of Jesus’ Messiahship and the inevitability of the cross.

⁸ Carson, *John*, 432.

⁹ *ESV Study*, 2048.

¹⁰ Carson, *John*, 432.

¹¹ The quotation is from two Old Testament texts combined together. Carson, *John*, 433.

What did Jesus' triumphal entry cause the Pharisees to conclude (12:19)? It looked to them like all their efforts to oppose Jesus had failed and that the whole world now was following Jesus. This would have given them even more incentive to kill Jesus.

- **“world” (12:19):** The Pharisees used “world” here in the sense of everyone in the Jerusalem area (which included Jews from all over the Roman Empire).¹² John used “world” to refer to all people everywhere without racial distinction, but who are in rebellion against God:

ESV **John 3:17** God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Literary Purpose: One reason John may have recorded this entry was to show that it was not Jesus' purpose, even though He truly is the Christ, to overthrow the Roman Empire and re-establish Jewish political sovereignty. It has been suggested that rather than the triumphal entry, this would be better called Jesus' tragic entry, because it triggered events that led directly to His crucifixion.¹³

******How did Jesus respond to the news that some Greeks¹⁴ wanted to see him (12:20-26)?**

He responded by talking about a grain of wheat going into the dirt and that thus “dies”, but in so doing sprouts and bears much more grain, a veiled reference to His own soon death.

Literary Significance: The arrival of these Greek-speaking Gentiles was like a trigger; it signaled the end of Jesus' earthly ministry to the Jews.¹⁵ The focus of Jesus' earthly ministry was on the Jews. However, it was God's plan from the beginning for the Gospel to be offered to both Jew and Gentile.

Jesus knew that after His death and glorification, all types of people would be drawn to Him (such as Greeks), not just Jews. Their request triggered in Jesus that the “hour” of his crucifixion had arrived. Prior to this, Jesus had said His time had not yet come:

- When His mother told Him at the wedding that they had run out of wine, He replied that His hour had not yet come, 2:4.
- When His brothers advised Him to go to the feast to make Himself public, Jesus replied that His time was not yet here, 7:4.
- When the Jews tried to seize Him they were unable to do so, because His hour had not come, 7:30.
- When Jesus taught openly in the temple, the Jews could not seize Him because His hour had not yet come, 8:20.¹⁶

¹² Carson, *John*, 435.

¹³ Steven J Cole, “Lesson 65: Following Jesus for the Right Reason (John 12:12-19)”, Bible.org. Accessed February 15, 2020.

¹⁴ The term Greeks refers to any Greek-speaking Gentiles in the Roman Empire, not just those from Greece.

¹⁵ *ESV Study*, 2048.

¹⁶ Steven J. Cole, “Lesson 67: Why You Should Hate Your Life (John 12:24-26)”, Bible.org. Accessed February 15, 2020.

These Greeks signaled a turning point in which the Jewish people have rejected Jesus and so now the gospel would go out to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Salvation would now be proclaimed to the whole world. But His death had to happen first.

Thus:

ESV **John 12:32** . . . when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

•**“draw” (12:32):** To “draw” simply means to pull. The brand name of the trailer hitch on my truck is “Draw-Tite”. The hitch draws the trailer tightly along behind the truck. You draw water from a well. In English, sometimes “draw” has the idea of being attracted to something, such as a bee that is drawn to the flower, or a man to a woman’s beauty, but that is not at all what the underlying Greek means. From from *helko*, it means to haul, to drag, to pull, to tug.¹⁷ Here are other places the same Greek word (*helko*) is used:

ESV **John 18:10** . . . Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it . . .

ESV **John 21:6** He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.

ESV **Acts 21:30b** They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple . . .

ESV **James 2:6b** Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?

Significantly, this is the same Greek word used back in John 6:44.

ESV **John 6:44** No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Since draw is such a strong word, in what sense will Jesus draw “all” people to Himself (12:32)? If Jesus were to draw all men *without exception* to Himself, then everyone will come to faith in Jesus. However, Scripture states there will be men in hell. What Scripture teaches is that Jesus will draw all men *without distinction*, that is, all kinds of people. The arrival of the Greeks to see Jesus (12:20-21) reminds that it was time for the process to begin. For the moment, they hesitated to go directly to Jesus. After the cross, all types of men could go to Him as freely as any Hebrew.

So What?

How was what John wrote in chapter 12:1-19 designed to cause an unbelieving Jew to believe in Jesus?

1. This chapter reveals the evil that existed in the heart of Judas long before he betrayed Jesus (he stole from the common purse).

¹⁷ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 251.

2. This chapter shows the murderous intent of the leaders despite overwhelming evidence of Jesus' true identity through miracles (they plotted to kill Lazarus, too).
3. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilled Hebrew prophecy (Zechariah 9:9).

**** = Ask this question before reading the text. This will engage people's minds and focus their attention.

•You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.com/NTRF.

•Stephen E. Atkerson
NTRF.org
Revised 02/16/2020