

**John 12:1-19**  
**September 28, 2025**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: What does “selfless devotion” to Jesus look like? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** We will see a beautiful act of selfless devotion when Mary anoints Jesus’s feet with expensive perfume. There is such a cultural significance of wiping feet with hair that signifies an act of profound humility and love. In ancient Jewish culture, hair symbolized a woman’s glory and worth, making its use in such an intimate and publicly inappropriate way a willing sacrifice of dignity. It demonstrated a deep respect and love for the recipient.

But Mary’s act of devotion to Jesus is just the beginning of this text! We will also see Judas’s hypocrisy, the crowd’s political expectations vs Jesus’s true mission, and the disciples’ misunderstanding of Jesus’s coming kingship and the deeper meaning of his sacrifice. There is a lot for us to process, so let’s begin!

**BOOK:**

**Jesus Anointed at Bethany**

**12** Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, <sup>5</sup> “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, <sup>11</sup> for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

**The Triumphal Entry**

<sup>12</sup> The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! (A Hebrew expression meaning “Save!”)”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Psalm 118:25, 26)

“Blessed is the King of Israel!”

<sup>14</sup> Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written,

<sup>15</sup>“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”  
(Zech. 9:9)

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. <sup>19</sup> So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

The perfume Mary used was an expensive luxury item for herself, but she selflessly used it as devotion to Jesus. That she poured it on the feet of Jesus was an act of humility, for attending to the feet of another person was the work of a servant. Wiping the oil with her hair was also unusual, for respectable women did not unbraid their hair in public. Mary exhibited unrestrained love and devotion to Jesus that went against personal cost and concern for perception. How are we showing our humility and love for Jesus on a daily basis?

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 338-341)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

John 12 records the second major crisis in the ministry of our Lord as seen by John the apostle. The first occurred when many of His disciples would no longer walk with Him (John 6:66), even though He is “the way” (John 14:6). In this chapter, John tells us that many would not believe in Him (John 12:37ff), even though He is “the truth.” The third crisis will come in John 19: even though He is “the life,” the leaders crucified Him.

John opened his book by telling us that Jesus “came unto His own [world], and His own [people] received Him not” (John 1:11). In the first twelve chapters, John presented one witness after another, and one proof after another, to convince us that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God. All of this evidence was seen firsthand by the leaders of the nation, and yet they rejected His claims. Having been rejected by “His own” nation, Jesus then retired with “His own” disciples (John 13:1) whom He loved to the uttermost.

We see in John 12, the Lord Jesus Christ as He relates to four different groups of people, and there are lessons that we can learn as we study this section.

#### **Jesus and His Friends (John 12:1–11)**

Our 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). The account of Mary’s anointing of her Lord is found also in Matthew 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9. But it must not be confused with the account given in Luke 7:36–50, where a former harlot anointed Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Mary was a virtuous woman, and she anointed Jesus in the house of Simon the (former) leper (Mark 14:3). The Luke 7 event took place in Galilee, while the account we are now considering occurred in Judea. The fact that there are two “Simons” involved should not surprise us, for Simon was a common name in that day.

When you combine all three accounts, you learn that Mary anointed both His head and His feet. It was an act of pure love on her part, for she knew her Lord was about to endure suffering and death. Because she sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to Him speak, she knew what He was going to do. It is significant that Mary of Bethany was not one of the women who went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1).

In a sense, Mary was showing her devotion to Jesus *before* it was too late. She was “giving the roses” while He was yet alive, and not bringing them to the funeral! Her act of love and worship was public, spontaneous, sacrificial, lavish, personal, and unembarrassed. Jesus called it “a good work” (Matt. 26:10; Mark 14:6) and both commended her and defended her.

It would have required a year’s wages from a common laborer to purchase that ointment. Like David, Mary would not give to the Lord that which cost her nothing (2 Sam. 24:24). Her beautiful act of worship brought a fragrance to the very house in which they were dining, and the

blessing of her deed has spread around the world (Matt. 26:13; Mark 14:9). Little did Mary realize that night that her love for Christ would be a blessing to believers around the world for centuries to come!

When she came to the feet of Jesus, Mary took the place of a slave. When she undid her hair (something Jewish women did not do in public), she humbled herself and laid her glory at His feet (see 1 Cor. 11:15). Of course, she was misunderstood and criticized; but that is what usually happens when somebody gives his or her best to the Lord.

It was Judas who started the criticism, and, sad to say, the other disciples took it up. They did not know that Judas was a devil (John 12:4), and they admired him for his concern for the poor. After all, he was the treasurer; and especially at Passover season, he would want to share with those who were less fortunate (see John 13:21–30). Until the very end, the disciples believed that Judas was a devoted follower of the Lord.

John 12:4 records Judas' first words found anywhere in the four Gospels. His last words are found in Matthew 27:4. Judas was a thief and was in the habit of stealing money from the money box that he carried. (The Greek word translated "bag" meant originally a small case in which mouthpieces were kept for wind instruments. Then it came to mean any small box, and especially a money box. The Greek version of the Old Testament uses this word in 2 Chron. 24:8–10 for King Joash's money chest.) No doubt Judas had already decided to abandon Jesus, and he wanted to get what he could out of what he considered a bad situation. Perhaps he had hoped that Jesus would defeat Rome and set up the kingdom; in which case, Judas would have been treasurer of the kingdom!

What Mary did was a blessing to Jesus and a blessing to her own life. She was also a blessing to the home, filling it with fragrance (see Phil. 4:18); and today, she is a blessing to the church around the world. Her one act of devotion in the little village of Bethany still sends "ripples of blessing."

But not so Judas! We call our daughters "Mary," but no parent would call a son "Judas." His very name is listed in the dictionary as a synonym for treachery. Mary and Judas are seen in contrast in Proverbs 10:7—"The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot." "A good name is better than precious ointment," says Ecclesiastes 7:1; and Mary had both. Matthew 26:14 gives the impression that immediately after this rebuke, Judas went to the priests and bargained to deliver Jesus into their hands. But it is likely that the events recorded in Matthew 21–25 took place first. No doubt the Lord's rebuke of Judas at Bethany played an important part in his decision actually to betray Jesus. Also, the fact that Jesus once again openly announced His death would motivate Judas to escape while the opportunity was there.

As we look at this event, we see some "representative people" who are examples to us. Martha represents *work* as she served the dinner she had prepared for the Lord. This was just as much a "fragrant offering" as was Mary's ointment (see Heb. 13:16). Mary represents *worship*, and Lazarus represents *witness* (John 11:9–11). People went to Bethany just to be able to see this man who had been raised from the dead!

As mentioned we have no recorded words from Lazarus in the New Testament, but his miraculous life was an effective witness for Jesus Christ. (In contrast, John the Baptist did no miracles, yet his words brought people to Jesus. See John 10:40–42.) We today ought to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) because we have been “raised from the dead” (Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 3:1ff). Actually, the Christian life ought to be a beautiful balance of worship, work, and witness.

But the fact that Lazarus was a walking miracle put him into a place of danger: the Jewish leaders wanted to kill *him* as well as Jesus! Our Lord was right when He called them children of the devil, for they were murderers indeed (John 8:42–44). They threw the healed blind man out of the synagogue rather than permit him to bear witness to Christ every Sabbath, and they tried to put Lazarus back into the tomb because he was leading people to faith in Christ. If you will not accept the evidence, you must try to get rid of it!

This quiet evening of fellowship—in spite of the cruel way the disciples treated Mary—must have brought special encouragement and strength to the Savior’s heart as He faced the demands of that last week before the Cross. We should examine our own hearts and homes to ask whether we are bringing joy to His heart by our worship, work, and witness.

### **Jesus and the Passover Pilgrims (John 12:12–19)**

John shifted the scene from a quiet dinner in Bethany to a noisy public parade in Jerusalem. All four Gospels record this event, and their accounts should be compared. This was the only “public demonstration” that our Lord allowed while He was ministering on earth. His purpose was to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy (Zech. 9:9). The result was a growing animosity on the part of the religious leaders, leading eventually to the crucifixion of the Savior.

There were three different groups in the crowd that day: (1) the Passover visitors from outside Judea (John 12:12, 18); (2) the local people who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus (John 12:17); and (3) the religious leaders who were greatly concerned about what Jesus might do at the feast (John 12:19). At each of the different feasts, the people were in keen expectation, wondering if Jesus would be there and what He would do. It looked as though Jesus was actually seeking to incite a revolution and establish Himself as King, but that was not what He had in mind.

What did this event mean to Jesus? For one thing, it was a part of His obedience to the Father’s will. The Prophet Zechariah (Zech. 9:9) prophesied that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem in that manner, and He fulfilled the prophecy. “Daughter of Zion” is another name for the city of Jerusalem (Jer. 4:31; Lam. 2:4, 8, 10). Certainly, Jesus was openly announcing to the people that He indeed is the King of Israel (John 1:49), the promised Messiah. No doubt many of the pilgrims hoped that *now* He would defeat the Romans and set the nation of Israel free.

What did this demonstration mean to the Romans? Nothing is recorded about the Roman viewpoint, but it is certain that they kept a close watch that day. During the annual Passover feast, it was not uncommon for some of the Jewish nationalists to try to arouse the people; and perhaps they thought this parade was that kind of an event. I imagine that some of the Roman soldiers must have smiled at the “Triumphal Entry,” because it was nothing like their own “Roman triumph” celebrations in the city of Rome.

a Roman general was victorious on foreign soil, killing at least 5,000 of the enemy, and gaining new territory, he was given a “Roman triumph” when he returned to the city. It was the Roman equivalent of the American “ticker-tape parade,” only with much more splendor. The victor would be permitted to display the trophies he had won and the enemy leaders he had captured. The parade ended at the arena where some of the captives entertained the people by fighting wild beasts. Compared to a “Roman triumph,” our Lord’s entry into Jerusalem was nothing.

What did the “Triumphal Entry” mean to the people of Israel? The pilgrims welcomed Jesus, spread their garments before Him, and waved palm branches as symbols of peace and victory (Rev. 7:9). They quoted from Psalm 118:26, which is a messianic psalm; and they proclaimed Him the “King of Israel.” But while they were doing this, Jesus was weeping! (Luke 19:37–44) The name *Jerusalem* means “city of peace” or “foundation of peace”; and the people were hoping that Jesus would bring them the peace that they needed. However, He wept because He saw what lay ahead of the nation—war, suffering, destruction, and a scattered people. At His birth, the angels announced “peace on earth” (Luke 2:13–14); but in His ministry Jesus announced “war on earth” (Luke 12:51ff). It is significant that the crowds shouted “peace in heaven” (Luke 19:38), because that is the only place where there is peace today!

The nation had wasted its opportunities; their leaders did not know the time of God’s visitation. They were ignorant of their own Scriptures. The next time Israel sees the King, the scene will be radically different! (Rev. 19:11ff) He will come in glory, not in humility; and the armies of heaven will accompany Him. It will be a scene of victory as He comes to defeat His enemies and establish His kingdom.

It is a repeated theme in Scripture that there can be no glory unless first there is suffering. Jesus knew that He must die on the cross before He could enter into His glory (Luke 24:26). The Jewish theologians were not clear in their minds concerning the sufferings of the Messiah and the glorious kingdom that the prophets announced. Some teachers held that there were two Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign. Even our Lord’s own disciples were not clear as to what was going on (see John 11:16).

How did the Jewish leaders respond to the “Triumphal Entry” of the Lord? As they watched the great crowd gather and honor Jesus, the Pharisees were quite sure that Jesus had won the day. They were anticipating some kind of general revolt during the Passover season. Perhaps Jesus would perform a great miracle and in that way capture the minds and hearts of the restless people. How little they really understood the mind and heart of the Master! What they did not realize was that Jesus was “forcing their hand” so that the Sanhedrin would act *during the feast*. The Lamb of God had to give His life when the Passover lambs were being slain.

The statement, “Behold, the world is gone after Him!” (John 12:19) was both an exaggeration and a prophecy. In the next section, we meet some visitors from outside Israel.

**Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 316-317) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

### 1. The Anointing (12:1–8)

John in chapter 12 concluded his record of Jesus' public ministry with (a) the account of Mary's anointing of Jesus (which set the stage for His coming sacrifice), (b) His Triumphal Entry, and (c) the prediction of His death.

12:1–2. The time schedule now was more definite and critical: It was **six days before the Passover. Jesus** went back from Ephraim (11:54) to **Bethany, where Lazarus lived**, and attended **a dinner** in His **honor**. Mark wrote that the place was Simon the Leper's home (Mark 14:1–11). The dinner must have been a joyous occasion with Mary, **Martha**, and **Lazarus** there. The relationship of this family to Simon is not known, but it must have been close since **Martha served**.

12:3. 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. 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.

12:4–5. **Judas Iscariot ... 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). According to Mark (14:4–5) the other disciples picked up his criticism and rebuked her harshly. 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.

12:6. John with the hindsight of history was able to state why Judas said **this**. Judas, evidently the group's treasurer (cf. 13:29), 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 (the price of a gored slave; cf. Ex. 21:32; Zech. 11:12–13).

12:7–8. 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 (cf. 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 (cf. John 12:35; 13:33; 14:3–4).

2. the triumphal entry (12:9–19).

12:9–11. Jesus was such a controversial Person that it was impossible for Him to be near Jerusalem and remain unnoticed. From all over the country, people came to the Passover feast. Many sought out **Jesus** (cf. 11:56) and **also ... Lazarus**. Because Lazarus had been restored,

**many ... Jews believed in Jesus. So the chief priests planned to kill two men—Jesus and Lazarus!**

12:12–13. A wild enthusiasm over **Jesus** broke out. Thousands of Galilean pilgrims **had come** to the Passover, and they had seen many of His mighty works. Previously He had rejected the role of a political Messiah (6:15) but, they thought, perhaps now was the right moment. **Jerusalem** was the city of the great King and He was coming to it. Waving their **palm branches**, symbols of victory, the people were **shouting** (*ekraugazon*; cf. comments on 11:43) **Hosanna!** “Hosanna” in Hebrew means “Please save” or “Save now” (cf. Ps. 118:25). It came to be a shout of praise. Quoting Psalm 118:26, they ascribed messianic titles to Him: **He who comes** (lit., “the Coming One”; cf. John 11:27) and **the King of Israel**.

12:14–15. Jesus’ riding into the city on a **young donkey** was a sign of peace (cf. comments on Matt. 21:2, which speaks of Jesus riding on a donkey *and* a colt). He did not ride a war horse or carry a sword or wear a crown. Nor did He ride in a wheeled vehicle, as did many kings. His manner of entry fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy which contrasted Jesus’ coming (Zech. 9:9) with the coming of Alexander the Great (Zech. 9:1–8). **Daughter of Zion** is a poetic way of referring to the people of Jerusalem, the city built on Mount Zion. Here, in quoting Zechariah 9:9, John called Jesus Israel’s **King**.

12:16. The **disciples**, though close to **Jesus** and participants in these events, **did not understand** them. They lacked the perspective of the Cross and the Resurrection (when He was **glorified**). They were unaware that Zechariah’s prophecy **had been written about Him**. Their faith was weak, and they needed the ministry of the Holy Spirit (16:12–14).

12:17–18. The size of **the crowd** kept increasing. The news of the great **miraculous sign—Lazarus raised from the dead—**spread through the city, and other groups surged **out to meet Him**. It was a day of great popular acclaim, but sadly the people had little spiritual perception.

12:19. The mass reception of Jesus made the plans of **the Pharisees** impossible. They “were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill Him. ‘But not during the Feast,’ they said, ‘or the people may riot’ ” (Mark 14:1–2). Pessimistically they acknowledged, **The whole world has gone after Him**. Irony is again evident, for most of those people did not really believe in Jesus.

**White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 480-481). Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

### **Devotion or Death (12:1–11)**

This portion of John’s Gospel contains a host of important elements. First, there is the devotion of Mary. The perfume used was expensive, a luxury item for herself, selflessly given in devotion to Jesus. That she poured it on the feet of Jesus was an act of humility, for attending to the feet of another person was the work of a servant. Wiping the oil with her hair was also unusual, for respectable women did not unbraided their hair in public. Mary exhibited unrestrained love and devotion to Jesus that went against personal cost and concern for perception.

Second, is the deceit and corruption of Judas. This is the sole passage that reveals the wicked character of Judas prior to his betrayal of Jesus. While the author of this Gospel relates Judas's dishonesty in hindsight, at the time Judas must have been highly esteemed, for he was trusted with caring for the money bag. All too often individuals have been able to deceive people regarding their relationship with God, but never is God Himself deceived, for He sees into the very heart of every person.

Third, is the judgment of Jesus on both Mary and the poor. Jesus affirmed Mary's act of devotion and linked it to His own burial. Mary did not intend for this to be the significance of her act, but it was perceived by Jesus in this manner, knowing of the growing shadow of the cross. In discussing the use of the expensive perfume on Himself rather than selling it to assist the poor, Jesus said, "You will always have the poor among you." Unfortunately, many throughout the centuries of Christian history have misinterpreted this statement by Jesus as an excuse to neglect the poor. This was far from the intent of Jesus, who exhibited care and concern for the poor throughout His ministry. The point Jesus was making was that Mary's act of devotion at that particular time and place was worthy of the cost.

### **Praising the King (12:12–19)**

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem coincided with the Passover Feast. The palm branches were symbolic and used in celebration of victory. The response of the crowds to Jesus was spectacular. The shout of "Hosanna!" is a Hebrew term meaning save which had become an expression of praise.

The Gospel of John emphasizes the royalty of Jesus. Here is the only Gospel that records that the people also shouted, "Blessed is the King of Israel!" The crowd's exultation, as well as Jesus' riding a colt, was not seen by the disciples until after His death, burial, and resurrection as the fulfillment of prophecy. This moment, perhaps more than any other, was the high mark of Jesus' popularity and influence. In only a matter of days, however, the "Hosanna!" would turn to "Crucify him!" (19:15).

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 12:1-19. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**