

# John 12 (Part 1) :1–19 • Jesus anointed by Mary and hailed as Messiah by the people

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John 12. We're going to read through the first 19 verses of the chapter, and then we'll get into it here. So, follow along with me as I read:

*"<sup>1</sup> Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. <sup>3</sup> Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said,*

*<sup>5</sup> 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' <sup>6</sup> He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said, 'Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.'*

*<sup>9</sup> When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*

*<sup>12</sup> The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!' <sup>14</sup> And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,*

*<sup>15</sup> 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!'*

*<sup>16</sup> His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. <sup>17</sup> The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. <sup>18</sup> The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. <sup>19</sup> So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'"* (ESV)

Let's stop there. Pray with me.

Father, as we take these first 19 verses of this chapter, we pray for Your Holy Spirit to move in our hearts and to speak to us of that which is true. We are fed a steady diet of lies, half-truths, and flat-out deceptions all week long, and we come here today to partake of the truth; the truth of Your word, the truth of who You are. Speak to us, Lord, because we know that when we know the truth, we are set free. Do that work we pray in us through Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

You'll notice that John begins this chapter with a time reference telling us that it was now six days before the Passover, and of course Jesus died during Passover. And we'll talk about that as we get a little further into this because there's such powerful insights that we gain into the sacrifice of Jesus and the timing of that sacrifice during the Passover season. I mean, it was just – it's just God all over.

But anyway, we're told that Jesus came to Bethany, or I should say back to Bethany, He had been there to raise Lazarus from the dead. But then when the opposition against Him mounted, He went off to an area north of Jerusalem that was less populated to let things cool down. But now He has come back to Bethany and we are in the final week of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

It's interesting to note that John spends more time giving us the detail and the insight into this final week, that which we call Passion Week, than any of the other gospel writers. But verse 2 goes on to tell us that He was at a dinner that was given in His honor. We learned from the other accounts that it was held in the home of a man named Simon, whom we don't really know much about other than he at one time had leprosy. We know that he no longer had leprosy because if he had, he wouldn't have been able to gather for dinner with other people. We assume that he had been healed miraculously by Jesus.

And so, the dinner is at his home. Martha and Mary and Lazarus are there. We're told that Martha was serving, true to Martha's personality and so forth. But then the highlight of the dinner is a time when Mary, the sister of Lazarus,

did something rather interesting and rather incredible. In verse 3, we're told that she took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard. Your Bible even may say, "Oxnard", and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. And we're told that the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Now we know because we've already read these verses, that this was a prophetic act on Mary's part from the standpoint that it signaled a preparation for the upcoming burial of our Lord. Although I doubt Mary probably even knew what she was doing completely.

But this was also an act of worship in the sense that Mary's act was one of sacrifice, because she was using this very expensive ointment to honor her Lord. You say, "how expensive was it?" Well, I found out some interesting things as I did my study, and that is that this ointment was a perfumed, very rare ointment that was imported from India, believe it or not. And it came in these alabaster jars, but it was so expensive that some people actually kept it for investment purposes, much like people today will invest in gold or real estate, so they'll have something to fall back on or whatever. People actually held onto this stuff as a safety investment if you will.

But what Mary did by taking this ointment and using it to anoint Jesus, beginning with His feet, was culturally daring on several fronts. First of all, women simply did not let down their hair in public unless she was a sinful woman; a brazen woman. Perhaps a prostitute or something like that. It just simply wasn't done. And yet Mary did it, not because she was in any way like that, but because she longed to show her love to her Savior.

And it's clear from the passage that Jesus connected her actions with His upcoming death and burial and again, how much Mary knew about that, I have my sincere question. Who knows, we're not told; we would just be guessing to try to kind of speculate. I seriously doubt personally that she probably knew the full implication of what she was doing. All we really can see, and I think all she really knew, is that she loved Him. She loved Him, and I mean, she had an intense love for Him because of who He was. She loved Him enough to give Him everything, holding back nothing.

Later on, we're going to find out that Judas, as he objects to this action, says that this ointment was worth something like 300 denarii. Well, a denarii was roughly a day's wages. So, if you multiply that by 300, you come very close to a year's, pay to a basic worker. So, a year, an annual – I mean, think about what you receive in a year, and then just giving that to the Lord.

What does it take to do that? Well, I submit to you it takes love. I mean, sure you can do it out of legalism, I suppose. If somebody's putting pressure on you and saying, "Well if you're *really* a Christian, you're going to do this or do that," I suppose you could be forced into some sort of an action. Even though we're told in the scripture that we are not to give that way. We're not to give because we've had our arm twisted. We're to give because we're moved upon our hearts to give.

And Mary was moved to give; to show this kind of love. No matter how precious or costly that gift might be. And she loved Him enough to throw off these cultural boundaries and barriers that would've otherwise prohibited her from doing what she did.

And her actions as we look into this and really think about it, force us to ask ourselves the question if our love for Jesus would go that far. What is it that you wouldn't give? I mean, is there a point that if God were to move upon your heart to give, is there a point where you would say, "that's too much, Lord."

I think a legitimate question for each of us to ask, because I think if we're going to be honest with ourselves, we're going to admit that there are times in our lives that we just don't really want to be inconvenienced. And giving sometimes, however that giving may be – with your time, your energy, or your resources or whatever – that can be a huge inconvenience. I have other things, Lord, that I want to do. I have other things that I want to accomplish. I don't really have the day to give to You completely, or the week or whatever the case might be.

But of course, whenever you begin to show this kind of unrestrained love like Mary is showing us here, it's always going to attract criticism by people. People who think, "Boy, that's stupid." And John tells us in verse 5 that Judas is the one who spoke up this word of criticism saying, "*Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?*"

So, Judas wondered aloud, and it sounds by his comment that he's being altruistic. I mean, it sounds like, "Well, yeah, it's kind of a waste, taking this ointment that could have been sold for this much money."

I mean, that's a lot of money. A year's wages, you do the math what that would be today. How much would a year's wages average feed poor people? And so, the criticism has an error of legitimacy to it, helping the poor. I mean, who has a problem with helping the poor? But what we get here is we begin to see this character sketch that John has been slowly giving us and will continue to give us through this gospel of Judas and the kind of a man that he was.

And he goes on to explain that Judas didn't care any, he didn't care a snit about the poor. In fact, the only reason he said this is because he would regularly dip into the money bag for his own purposes. And John refers to him here as a thief because of that. So, we know that even though his words sounded honorable, they were not.

But there was another reason why Judas couldn't just let this thing pass without speaking up. I mean, Mary does this incredible act of love, and that's what it is to her Savior, to her Lord, and the reason that Judas has to speak up a word of criticism is because he does not have that love. And whenever someone doesn't love the Lord like you love the Lord, they're going to be critical of your expressions of love toward the Lord. They're going to be critical of your expressions.

And [Correction: John] goes on to say here in verse 6, *“he said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief and having charge of the money bag and used to help himself to what was put in it.”* So, you'll notice also that Jesus also gave a sound rebuke to Judah saying, *“Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”*

Now you need to understand that Jesus is not speaking here against the poor. He's not saying you shouldn't help the poor. He is simply making the point that His time on Earth was quickly coming to a close, and Mary's actions were not only deeply personal, but they were deeply meaningful. Meaning that even though she didn't understand and the people in the room didn't understand what was going on, later they would, and they would understand that this was a preparation for His burial.

And then John tells us, look with me in verse 9, it says, *“When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came not only on account of him, but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead.”*

So, we read here that Lazarus became somewhat of a celebrity due to the fact that he had been previously dead for four days. I probably, I would've wanted to talk to him. Wouldn't you? Say, “Laz? What was that like? Man, talk to me here!”

Kind of reminds me of that conversation in Star Trek 4. Do you guys watch the Star Trek movies? Remember Spock died and then in Star Trek the fourth Picture, Bones is asking him what it was like, and Spock says, “well, it'd be

impossible to talk about it without a common frame of reference.” He says, “You’re kidding, I have to die?!”

But you know, we’re all curious. We’re all curious about what the thing would’ve been like he said, and people obviously were and so forth. And even some of the Jewish religious leaders came and so forth. But for some of them, Lazarus was a problem, and that’s what they saw him as. So, in verse 10, look with me here again in your Bible it says:

*“So the chief priest made plans to put Lazarus to death as well.”* I’m almost surprised that one of them didn’t speak up and say “Um...he’s already been dead and it didn’t take. So, I don’t know. I’m not sure that’s a good idea. The guy’s already been dead.”

But anyway, it goes on to say that because of him on account of him, and of course that means account of the fact that Jesus raised him from the dead, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. The point there is that more and more people were putting their faith in Jesus as Messiah.

So, verse 12 says, *“The next day, the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and they went out to meet him crying ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel!’”*

Now, we’ve mentioned to you many times in the past that this is the very first time in the ministry of Jesus when He publicly allowed his disciples, or anyone for that matter, to publicly proclaim Him as Messiah. Up to this point, He always told people after he healed someone, “Don’t say anything. Don’t tell anybody. Go to the priest. Show yourself.”

And of course, people didn’t always follow that, they would tell people anyway. But this is the first time he allowed a public declaration of His Messiahship. And although I seriously doubt any of these people had any idea what He came to do as Messiah, they didn’t know that He had come to give His life on the cross to pay for their sins. They, of course, saw Him coming in terms of being a political and military leader.

They expected Him to be crowned king of the Jews and to basically tell Rome they could leave. “You can now leave; we have our own king.” And so, they were expecting a physical king who would overthrow the Romans and establish Israel as the jewel of the nations of the world and so forth.

But almost in an effort to quell that kind of thinking, we're told in verse 14 that Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it and rode that on His way into the city of Jerusalem. And then John goes on to say that this was a fulfillment of a passage, which he outlines there in verse 15, which is a quotation from Zechariah 9:9. Let me put that one on the screen for you. It says:

**Zechariah 9:9 (ESV)**

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

And the words that you need to really pay attention to there are “humble.” Humble, He's coming to you, humble.

And what that means is when a king would ride in as a conqueror, he would ride in on a stallion to show that he was a conquering king. But when he would ride into a city to bring or to declare peace, he would come in humbly on a donkey. And that's what Jesus came to communicate.

Even though the people are saying, “Here he is the king!”, He's coming in on a donkey, literally on the foal of a donkey to communicate that He's coming in peace and not in a time of war. And John tells us that all of this symbolism and all the things that Jesus is trying to communicate, were pretty much all just lost on the disciples. Verse 16 says that *“His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.”*

Can you imagine what it was like for the disciples to be there and see these things take place, and then later on to find out that they were fulfillment of prophecy? I mean, can you imagine what that was like? Can you just think about that? When they would go back and read through these prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures, and they would say, “We were there when this happened, and we didn't know that it was a fulfillment of prophecy, but now we see it so clearly.”

And it's very similar to what happens in the life of a new believer when they begin to read through the scriptures and they begin to see things as a believer for the first time. Because if you're like me, I was raised in church, but that doesn't mean I came to Christ as a young person because I was raised in a very liberal denomination here in the United States, and they never told us once in all my years of going to Sunday school, sitting through church, I never remember them once sharing the gospel and saying, “This is how you're saved.”

There was a belief in universalism, the idea that, Jesus died and so we're all saved. It doesn't really matter what you believe or what you do. So, this is kind of what I was raised with, but I also heard the scriptures. I mean, going to Sunday school, all those years I didn't understand it, but I heard them. And then I got saved, and I started getting into the Word of God and I was like, "Oh!"

Do you guys remember when the light bulb came on for you? And you're reading through the Bible and you've read it before, but now you're reading it with new understanding and the Holy Spirit is now bringing insight and illumination to the things that you're reading, and suddenly you're just like, "Okay, I get it. This is amazing!"

And suddenly there's this thread from Genesis to Revelation. It's all God's Word, and it's just truly amazing. And that must have been something about like what the disciples were seeing as they saw these things kind of come into place.

Verse 17 goes on, it says *"The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness."*

We don't use that term "bear witness". It just simply means that they were talking here as people are gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Those who had been in Bethany and seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, they kept talking about it and they're talking about it, and they're talking about it. And that is why John tells us in verse 18 the crowd went out to meet Him.

So, the whole triumphal entry was predicated on the raising of Lazarus from the dead. That's why the crowd came up the way they did and so forth. And of course, the more people that gathered, that infuriated the religious leaders and so forth. And so, they go on to say, "I think the whole world has gone after him." which of course is an exaggeration. But they're angry, they're frustrated, they're jealous. And so, they want to do something about this.

But one thing that we've learned about the popularity as it is expressed by the masses is that the masses are very fickle people. It is one thing to be excited about Jesus. It is another thing completely to be surrendered to Him. Do you guys know that? You can come to church and be excited. You can even read your Bible at home or whatever. You can be excited about Jesus; that doesn't mean you've surrendered your life to Him.

I've told you guys many times before that I heard the gospel at a school event. That's back in the days when they let Christians come into schools. And then



they had an evening event after that; they invited us to come and it was like, I forget what the organization was, but I heard the gospel about the age of 15, and I understood what they were saying. I understood that Jesus paid for my sins.

I was 15 years old and I accepted what He did. I embraced what He did. I remember saying, “Lord, I accept the forgiveness that you offer through your death on the cross.” Took me 9 – 10 years to get around to the place of actually surrendering my life to Him. Had you met me between the ages of 15 and almost 25, you might have wondered if I was a believer because my life really hadn't changed a great deal.

I really truly believed that Jesus was my Savior. I mean, I was trusting in him to be my Savior. My confidence was in Him. I knew that I couldn't save myself, and I knew that He was the only Savior. He's the only way to be saved. I knew that, but I didn't live for Him. I hadn't surrendered to Him.

That took the collapse of my marriage, and Sue and I had been married for almost 5 years, and it went bad. I mean, it went sour, and that's what got my attention. And that is when I surrendered finally to my Savior. He took on a very fundamentally different role in my life from that point onward.

He had been my Savior for a good 10 years, but He then became my Lord.

Because Lord is a very interesting word that speaks – it's obviously where we get the word *Lordship*. And Lordship is all about surrendering and giving your life to Him and living for Him and saying, “Lord, my life is not my own. I've been living my life for myself all these years, and now I give my life to You. I surrender to You.”

And of course, what it took in my life was seeing my marriage literally go down in flames. That's what it took. It took the reality, the grief, the horror frankly, of seeing what *I* had made out of my marriage for me to turn to the Lord and say, “Lord, look what I have done.”

And the Lord very graciously picked me up and said, “Now I want to show you what I can do.”

And He brought healing. Next month, Sue and I will be married 45 years. Can you believe that? That's not possible, I'm only 23 years old! But still, you do the math because I can't. But we are together and in love because of God's grace, but it is a matter of surrender.

That is such a key element, and when we see this throng of people coming, and waving their palm branches and “Hail, the Messiah! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”, don't get all that excited. Because the masses are fickle, and it will be less than a week when many of them will cry, “Crucify Him.”

I don't know if you're aware of it, but there was another woman who anointed Jesus' feet with oil, with ointment. It was a different situation. It's given us in the Book of Luke, but there's some interesting things about it. There are some similarities about it.

In this case that we read here in John 12, they were having dinner at the home of a man named Simon, the leper. In Luke's account, which is a different account of a different event, they were having dinner in the home of a man named Simon the Pharisee.

Now keep in mind, Simon was a common name, incredibly common. And so, and it was a very different sort of a situation at that time, but it was similar in some respects. And I want to – we're going to on the screen read this story quick from Luke, and we're going to end with this morning. But while I'm reading this, I'm going to ask the worship team to come up and get ready because we're going to have one final song. So, you guys come on up and we're going to read this. On the screen from Luke 7, it says:

#### **Luke 7:36-47**

*One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at the table in the Pharisees house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.*

*Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?”*

*Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me*

*no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.*

Now this is an important story in the gospel accounts, but you need to be careful. You need to be careful in your interpretation of this story, because Jesus isn't saying that because the woman loved much, she was forgiven. He's actually not saying that at all. He's saying quite the opposite.

He's saying that because she understood the depth and the magnitude of her sin, and because she knew that she had been forgiven of all that sin, she loved much. In other words, she was overwhelmed by the mercy of Jesus.

Mercy, you'll remember, is not getting what we deserve. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. She was overwhelmed because she knew what she deserved, and she knew she wasn't getting it. In fact, what she was getting was forgiveness, and she was so overwhelmed with that, she loved much. In other words, it stimulated her love.

And so, what was the situation with the Pharisee in whose home Jesus was having dinner? Well, the Pharisees didn't really feel like they were that bad of sinners, if at all. "What do I need a savior for?"

And there are some people who are like that even today. And maybe you've even met somebody who, when you talk about sin, they'll maybe acquiesce to that to some degree. They'll say, "Well, I'm not perfect, but I'm not as bad as some." That person isn't going to love Jesus very much because they didn't really feel like they had to be forgiven of very much.

When anybody starts off a phrase by saying, "I'm not perfect," you know they've got a long way to go to really fully understand the depth and the gravity of their sin. Because if we really understand our sin, the word *perfect* doesn't even cross our lips.

What we probably ought to say is, you know what, I'm a scuzz bag. I am lost without Jesus. I am nothing. And I deserve the hottest spot in hell. But that's not what I get because Jesus came and he bore my sin on the cross, and I get forgiveness. Just by putting my faith in what He did, I'm forgiven of all of my sin.

When that reality hits you like a freight train, you do things like these ladies. You're willing to give it all. You're willing to lay it all down. Doesn't matter how expensive, how precious, how much you previously sought to hang onto or keep those things in this life, you're willing to say, you know what, Lord, it's all Yours, I don't care. I am Yours. I give You my life. I give You my future. You are my hope. All that I have is Yours. Why? Because all You gave to me. You laid it all down for me and now I lay it all down for You.

Amen.