

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN12A_Mary Shows Devotion to Jesus)

Introduction

John 12 marks the end of that portion of John's Gospel in which Jesus is presented to the world as God. In this chapter of John's Gospel, the "hour has come" (12:23) whereas, until this point in the narrative, Jesus' time had not yet come (2:4; 7:30; 8:20). Therefore, chapter 12 represents a watershed chapter in John's narrative, since the remainder of the Gospel is focused upon Jesus' hour that had now come (cf. 12:23, 27, 31; 13:1, 31; 16:32).

Since Jesus' first conflict with the Jerusalem Jews (5:18), the atmosphere has been one of continuing tension between those who do not believe and those who are inclined to believe. However, in chapter 12, the tension had reached a point where a decision had to be made by every single individual. The days in which one could enjoy the privilege of pondering and contemplating without committing to a decision were fast drawing to a close. An outline of John 12 would contain four sections as follows:

- ❑ Mary Anoints Jesus for Burial (12:1-11)
- ❑ The Messianic Entry into Jerusalem (12:12-19)
- ❑ The Significance and a Prediction of Jesus' Death (12:20-36)
- ❑ The Responsibility of Jewish Unbelief (12:37-50)

Mary Anoints Jesus for Burial (vv. 1-11)

John notes in verse 1 that it was only six days prior to the Passover when Jesus came to Bethany while on His way to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. As we noted in our previous study, Jesus often stayed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus when He visited Jerusalem since Bethany was reasonably close to Jerusalem. Since the resuscitation of Lazarus in chapter 11, Jesus had been retiring quietly at Ephraim with His disciples (11:54).

The crowds that came to Jerusalem every year were so great that it was impossible to accommodate them all. Prior to participating in the Passover rituals, the Mosaic Law required that purification rites be performed in the Temple (see Num 9:10 cf. 2 Chron 30:17-18; Jn 11:55). An estimate of the "many" mentioned by John would be approximately "85,000 to 125,000 pilgrims were added to a city population of 25,000."¹ Word about Jesus' teaching and works during His three years of public ministry had spread among the general populace. As John notes, the pilgrims wondered aloud if Jesus would be at the Passover festivities. "His absence would, after the work which He had done these three years, the claim which He made, and the defiant denial of it by the priesthood and the Sanhedrin, have been regarded as a virtual surrender to the enemy."² The religious leaders had commanded that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they should report it so that Jesus could be seized (Jn 11:57). They sought to avoid taking Jesus in the Temple in order to limit the possibility of the multitudes opposing them. The attention of the multitudes was upon Jesus. Perhaps many of these multitudes simply looked forward to the entertainment value provided by the conflict that would inevitably arise between the religious leaders and Jesus.

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City, New York: Double Day, 1966-70), Vol 1, 445 quoted in Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2002), 482.

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (United States: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 720.

The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders was well known. While multitudes were persuaded by their leaders that Jesus was not the Messiah, there were many who took delight in seeing those leaders discomfited by the Lord. They welcomed the conflict that was certain to come if Jesus attended the feast. Because of the plot against Him, Christ had withdrawn from the area in which the Sanhedrin exercised its authority (vv. 53-54).³

As was their custom, Mary and Martha prepared Jesus and the disciples a meal. In this chapter, it is once again Mary who demonstrates her devotion and love for the Lord. Mary knew that Jesus was to die (v. 7) and she wanted to express her love for Him in a way that reflected her gratitude. In chapter 11, it was Martha who supported Jesus with her demonstration of trust and obedience (11:27, 38-44). However, in chapter 12, Mary is once again the more prominent of the two. Mary proved by the costliness of her gift⁴ and the humble act of servitude her devotion to the Lord. (A Jewish woman's hair was a source of personal pride – 1 Corinthians 11:15 – and it was to be bound in public). Could there be any doubt that these two women believed Jesus to be the Messiah and Son of God? Could there be any doubt that Mary knew what awaited Jesus in the face of such a rising tide of religious opposition? What comfort this act must have brought to Jesus as He faced a test that no other man can ever face – suffering a physical and spiritual death as an innocent man in order to redeem other sinful men!

What a contrast John provides in his Gospel narrative between Mary's act of love and servitude and Judas' selfish and hypocritical behavior! The contrast between the scene of devotion represented by Mary's wiping Jesus' feet with her hair and Judas' statement only highlights the satanic power within Judas. His words not only served to crush the spirit of Mary, but they deprecated the value of the recipient of such an act. If he was so interested in the poor, why was he stealing from the common purse? Judas is just like some men today who place a "Reverend" in front of their name and play on the jealousy of the disenfranchised to enrich themselves under the guise of the greater good. A self-focused covetousness rules their souls rather than a Christ-centered, self-sacrificial, spiritual orientation to life.

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And **many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you** with deceptive words. (2 Pe 1-3a)

If someone says 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (1 Jn 4:20)

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 Jn 9-11)

Jesus' statement that – "the poor you have with you always" – has sometimes been distorted by those who are trying to justify not getting involved in charitable endeavors. The

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study in the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 369.

⁴ Edersheim in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 721, notes that the sum spent was very large "remembering that 200 dinars ... nearly sufficed to provide bread for 5,000 men with their families, and that the ordinary wages of a labourer amounted to only one dinar a day."

context of the passage leads to a different interpretation. Jesus is not providing a basis for a lack of involvement in legitimate charity. Rather, Jesus is providing justification for Mary's focus upon Him. Jesus would only be with them for a short period longer. The poor would be with them for a much longer time. Therefore, they would have plenty of opportunity to minister to the poor after Jesus' departure.

Matthew 2:13 and Mark 14:9 record the Lord's command that, wherever the gospel is preached, Mary's act of devotion and service be remembered. Little did Mary realize that this outpouring of devotion to her beloved Lord would be remembered throughout human history and into eternity! The same is true of the widow and her two small coins (Lu 21:2-4) and the same will be true of all Christians when they stand at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ. There will be many acts by Christians that have gone totally unrecognized because they were hidden from the eyes of the world, but they will be recognized by our Lord.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Co 5:10)

The focus of the pilgrim's attention as they made their way toward Jerusalem was upon Jesus. They kept looking for Jesus (11:56). In addition, they wanted to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead (12:9). The Jews reasoned that if Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah and He instituted a kingdom, Rome would move in and destroy the Jewish rival kingdom.⁵ They also needed to eliminate the evidence that Jesus was Who He claimed to be. They needed to kill Lazarus who was a testimony of Christ's claims. Isn't it amazing how the conscience of people can become seared (1 Tim 4:2) when they rationalize their actions in the name of the "common good" or "religion?"

⁵ Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus*, 369.