

Bible Study July 26, 2023

JOHN 12 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

¹ Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ 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.

Essence of nard was a fragrant ointment imported from the mountains of India. It was very expensive. The amount Mary used was worth a year's wages. Mark records Jesus as saying that Mary's act of love would be remembered throughout history and around the world (Mark 14:9).

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

Judas often dipped into the disciples' money bag for his own use. Jesus would have known what Judas was doing (2:24-25; 6:64), but he did not do or say anything about it. Similarly, when we choose the way of sin, God may not immediately do anything to stop us, but this does not mean he approves of our actions. We will get what we deserve.

Judas used a pious cover to hide his true motives. But Jesus knew what was in his heart. Judas's life had become a lie, and the devil was gaining more and more control over him (13:27). Satan is the father of lies, and a person like Judas with a lying character opens the door to his influence. Jesus' knowledge of us should make us want to keep our actions consistent with our words. Because we have nothing to fear with him, we should have nothing to hide.

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

This act—and Jesus' response to it—does not give us permission to ignore people who are poor, nor does it give us permission to spend excessively in our churches or Christian ministries. This was a unique act for a specific occasion—an anointing that anticipated Jesus' burial and a public declaration of faith in him as the Messiah. Jesus' words should have taught Judas a valuable lesson about the worth of money. Unfortunately, Judas did not take heed; soon he would sell his master's life for 30 pieces of silver.

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹ for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

The leading priests' blindness and hardness of heart caused them to sink ever deeper into sin. They rejected the Messiah and planned to kill him, and then plotted to murder Lazarus as well. One sin led to another. From the Jewish leaders' point of view, they could accuse Jesus of blasphemy because he claimed equality with God. But Lazarus had done nothing of the kind. They wanted Lazarus dead simply because he was a living witness to Jesus' power. Once more we see vividly how sin can work. Sin leads to more sin, a downward spiral that can be stopped only by repentance and the power of the Holy Spirit to change our behavior.

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Jesus began his last week on earth by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey under a canopy of palm branches, with crowds hailing him as their king. To announce that he was indeed the Messiah, Jesus chose a time when all Israel would be gathered at Jerusalem, a place where huge crowds could see him, and a way of proclaiming his mission that was unmistakable. (For more on the prophecy that Jesus was fulfilling here, see Zechariah 9:9 and the note there). On Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem as Lord of lords and King of peace.

The people who were praising God for giving them a conquering king had the wrong idea about Jesus. Many of them were sure he would be a national leader who would restore their nation to its former glory, and thus they were deaf to the words of their prophets and blind to Jesus' real mission. When they realized that Jesus would not fulfill these hopes, many people turned against him.

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

***¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey's colt.”***

16 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 these things had been done to him.

After Jesus' resurrection, the disciples understood for the first time many of the prophecies that they had missed along the way. Jesus' words and actions took on new meaning and made more sense. In retrospect, the disciples saw how Jesus had led them into a deeper and better understanding of the truth about him. Take time to think about the events in your life leading up to where you are now. How has God led you to this point? As you grow older, you will look back and see God's involvement more clearly than you do now.

17 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. 18 Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him.

The people flocked to Jesus because they had heard about his great miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. For some of them, their adoration may have been short-lived and their commitment shallow, for in a few days this cheering throng would do nothing to stop his crucifixion. Devotion based only on curiosity or popularity can fade quickly.

19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

Jesus Predicts His Death

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."

These Greeks were probably converts to the Jewish faith who had come to the Passover celebration. They may have gone to Philip because, though he was a Jew, he had a Greek name. He was from Bethsaida near the territory inhabited by many Gentiles, including Greeks, and he almost certainly spoke their language.

22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

This is a beautiful picture of the necessary sacrifice of Jesus. Unless a kernel of wheat is buried in the soil, it will not become a living plant producing many more seeds. Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin and to show his power over death. His resurrection proves he has eternal life. Because Jesus is God, he can give this same eternal life to all who believe in him (see 1 Corinthians 15:36, 42-44).

We must be so committed to living for Jesus that we “care nothing” for our lives by comparison. This does not mean that we long to die or that we are careless or destructive with the lives God has given us, but rather that we are willing to die if doing so will glorify Christ. We must disown the tyrannical rule of our own self-centeredness. By laying aside our striving for advantage, security, and pleasure, we can serve God lovingly and freely. Releasing control of our lives and transferring control to Jesus brings eternal life and genuine joy.

26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Many believed that Jesus came for the Jews only. But when Jesus said, “Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me,” he was talking to these Greeks as well. No matter who the sincere seekers are, Jesus welcomes them. His message is for everyone. Don’t let racial, social, or economic differences become barriers to sharing the Good News. Take the Good News to all people.

27 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

Jesus knew his crucifixion lay ahead, and because he was human, he dreaded it. He knew he would have to take the sins of the world upon himself, and he knew this would temporarily separate him in his humanity from his Father. Being fully human, he wanted to be delivered from this horrible death, but being fully God, he knew that God the Father had sent him into the world to die for our sins, in our place. Jesus said no to his human desires in order to obey his Father and glorify him. Although we will never have to face such a difficult and awesome task, we are still called to obedience. Whatever the Father tells us to do, we should do his will and bring glory to his name.

28 Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

30 Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine.

For the third time in Jesus’ life, God’s voice sounded from heaven in support of him and his ministry. The first was at Jesus’ baptism: “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy” (Matthew 3:13-19). The second was at the Transfiguration, when God said, “This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him” (Luke 9:28-36). The third is recorded here: “I have already brought glory to my name, and I will do so again.” These events would have been strong evidence of Jesus’ divinity to both Jews and Greeks.

31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

The ruler of this world is Satan, an angelic being who rebelled against God. Satan is real, not symbolic, and is constantly working against God and those who obey him. Satan tempted Eve in the Garden and persuaded her to sin; he tempted Jesus in the wilderness but did not persuade him to fall (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan has great power, but people can be delivered from his reign of spiritual darkness because of Jesus Christ's victory on the cross. Although Satan has power, Jesus' power is much greater. Jesus' resurrection shattered Satan's deathly power (Colossians 1:13-14). To overcome Satan we need faithful allegiance to God's Word, determination to stay away from sin, and the support of other believers.

32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

34 The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”

The crowd could not believe what Jesus was saying about a Messiah who would die. They were waving palm branches for a victorious Messiah who would set up a political, earthly kingdom that would never end. From their reading of certain Scriptures, they thought the Messiah would never die (Psalms 89:35-36; 110:4; Isaiah 9:7). Other passages, however, showed that he would (Isaiah 53:5-9). Jesus' words did not mesh with their concept of the Messiah; they were more interested in an immediate victory over Rome than an eternal victory over evil and death. First he had to suffer and die—then he would one day set up his eternal Kingdom. What kind of Messiah, or Savior, are you seeking? Beware of trying to force Jesus into your own mold. He won't fit.

35 Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. 36 Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Jesus said he would be with them in person for only a short time, and they should benefit from being in his presence while they had it. Like a light shining in a dark place, he would point out the way they should walk. If they walked in his light, they would become “children of the light,” revealing the truth and pointing people to God. As Christians, we are to be Christ's light bearers, letting his light shine through us. How brightly is your light shining? Can others see Jesus in your actions?

Belief and Unbelief Among the Jews

37 Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

***“Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”***

Jesus had performed many miracles, but most people still didn't believe in him. Likewise, many today won't believe despite all God does. Don't be discouraged if your witness for Jesus doesn't turn as many to him as you'd like. Continue as a faithful witness. You are responsible for reaching out to others, but they are responsible for their own decisions.

³⁹ For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

***⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes,
nor understand with their hearts,
nor turn—and I would heal them.”***

⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

People in Jesus' time, like those in the time of Isaiah, would not believe despite the evidence (12:37). As a result, God hardened their hearts. Does that mean God intentionally prevented these people from believing in him? No, he simply confirmed their own choices. After a lifetime of resisting God, they had become so set in their ways that they wouldn't even try to understand Jesus' message. For such people, it is virtually impossible to come to God—by their own choosing, their hearts have become permanently set against him. Other instances of hardened hearts because of constant stubbornness are recorded in Exodus 9:12; Romans 1:24-28; and 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12.

⁴² Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

Along with those who refused to believe, many believed but refused to admit it. Ultimately this did no good, and Jesus had strong words for such people (see Matthew 10:32-33). Those who will not take a stand for Jesus are usually afraid of rejection or ridicule and how that might affect their relationships or livelihood. Many Jewish leaders wouldn't admit to faith in Jesus because they feared excommunication from the synagogue, which would end many of their long-standing relationships and impact their livelihood by causing them to lose their prestigious place in the community. But the praise of others is fickle and short-lived. We should be much more concerned about God's eternal acceptance than about the temporary gratification of other people's approval.

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. ⁴⁵ The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.

We often wonder what God is like. How can we know the Creator when he doesn't make himself visible? But God has made himself visible—Jesus said plainly that those who see him see God, because he is God (see 14:9-11). If you want to know what God is like, study the person and words of Jesus Christ. Listen for his voice as you read his words. Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your mind so you can recognize his presence in your life more clearly.

46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

47 “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. 49 For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. 50 I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”