

The Priority of Worship

John 12:1–11 (NKJV)

12 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. ² There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. ³ Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

⁴ But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, ⁵ "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

⁷ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. ⁸ For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

⁹ Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus

Introduction

It doesn't need to be said because it's been said plenty that Jesus Christ divides everything. He even divides the calendar of history. Everything before Him is B.C. Everything after Him is A.D. He divides humanity. All people are either for Him or against Him. He divides destiny. He divides families. He divides marriages. He divides friendships. He divides association.

He came not to bring peace, but a sword. There's no one else like Him who evokes the antithetical extremes of love and hate, devotion and rejection, worship and blasphemy, faith and unbelief. He divides believers from unbelievers, sheep from goats, wheat from tares, children of God from children of the devil. Again, you are either for Him or against Him, and the for is extreme and the against can be extreme. John wrote this history to present Christ as the second person of the trinity in human form; fully God, fully man as the promised messianic King that God declared would come to take back the earth, establish His rule, and bring an everlasting righteousness.

John presents Him as the only Savior of the world, the only means of forgiveness, the only hope of eternal life.

Lesson

The Service of Martha

The Sacrifice of Mary

The Sacrilege of Judas

The Scolding by Jesus

The Seeking of the Jews

The Sin of the Leaders

1. Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.

In this passage, which relates the story of Mary's anointing of Jesus, the themes of belief and unbelief are particularly clear. The worshipful act of Mary epitomizes faith and love; the cold, calculated, cynical response of Judas epitomizes unbelief and hatred.

The section also records other reactions to Jesus, including the devoted service of Martha, the indifference of the crowd, and the hostility of the religious leaders.

The Lord's raising of Lazarus had stirred up murderous opposition from the hostile Jewish leaders (11:46–53). They decided that they had to kill both Jesus and Lazarus.

Since His hour to die had not yet come (7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1), Jesus left the vicinity of Jerusalem and stayed in the village of Ephraim (11:54), about a dozen miles to the north on the edge of the wilderness.

From there He made a brief visit to Samaria and Galilee (Luke 17:11–19:28) and then, **six days before the Passover, came once more to Bethany.** His arrival would have been on the Saturday before the Passover.

(Because the distance people were permitted to travel on the Sabbath was limited [cf. Acts 1:12], the Lord may have arrived after sundown on Friday. That, according to Jewish reckoning, would have been after the Sabbath had begun.) John described **Bethany** as the village **where Lazarus** lived, and Lazarus as its now most famous resident, since **Jesus had raised him from the dead.**

Lesson

I. The Service of Martha

2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

The Sanhedrin had decreed that anyone who knew where Jesus was should report that information to them (11:57). But rather than turning Him in like some criminal, the Lord's friends in Bethany gave **a supper** in His honor.

The purpose of the event was to express their love for Him, and especially their gratitude for His raising of Lazarus. Since *deipnon* (**supper**)

deipnon: dinner, supper

Original Word: δεῖπνον, ου, τό

Part of Speech: Noun, Neuter

Transliteration: deipnon

Phonetic Spelling: (dipe'-non)

supper, especially a formal meal usually held at evening: Luke 14:17, 24; John 13:2, 4; John 21:20; plural: Matthew 23:6; Mark 12:39; Luke (Luke 11:43 Lachmann in brackets); Luke 20:46; used of the Messiah's feast, symbolizing

salvation in the kingdom of heaven: [Revelation 19:9, 17](#); κυριακόν δεῖπνον (see κυριακός, 1), [1 Corinthians 11:20](#); ποιεῖν δεῖπνον, [Luke 14:12](#) (ἄριστον ἢ δεῖπνον); [Luke 14:16](#) ([Daniel 5:1](#) (Theod.)); with the addition τίτι, [Mark 6:21](#); [John 12:2](#).

From the same as [dapane](#); dinner, i.e. The chief meal (usually in the evening)

...refers to the main meal of the day, it would have been a lengthy one, designed with much time for leisurely conversation.

The guests were surely **reclining**, leaning on one elbow with their heads toward a low, U-shaped table. How many people were there is not known, but at least Jesus, the Twelve, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and probably Simon the leper were present.

Luke records a visit by Jesus to the home of Mary and Martha several months earlier, which provides insight into Martha's attachment to serving, even when it was not the priority:

(Luke 10:38–42)

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and

she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Even after such a rebuke, here again being true to her interest, **Martha was** involved in **serving** the meal.

(That John describes **Lazarus** as **one of** the guests **reclining at the table with** Jesus suggests that the feast was not in his and his sisters’ home.) Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3 make more than a suggestion, stating specifically that the meal was held in the house of Simon the leper. Though the descriptive name stuck to him, he obviously had been healed from his disease, for people would never have gathered in the home of someone with an active case of leprosy. Not only would they have feared contagion, but also to socialize would have ceremonially defiled them, since lepers were unclean (Lev. 13:45). Nor is it likely that Simon would have owned a house and hosted a meal in it if he had still been sick, since lepers were social outcasts (Num. 5:2).

Because cures for leprosy were beyond the limited medical knowledge of that time, it is reasonable to believe that Jesus had earlier healed him.

Though others were served also, Martha's service on this occasion was primarily directed at Jesus, and was commendable for two related reasons:

1. it was motivated by loving gratitude to Him,
2. and by a desire to generously honor Him in the way she best knew how.

There was no rebuke as in the earlier incident. Like her, all Christians are to be engaged in selfless service (Rom. 12:11; cf. Gal. 5:13; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:14).

Romans 12:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ not **lagging** in **diligence**, **fervent** in spirit, **serving** the Lord;

lagging Original Word: ὀκνηρός, ἄ, ὄν

Part of Speech: Adjective

Transliteration: oknéros

Phonetic Spelling: (ok-nay-ros')

Definition: shrinking, timid, idle, lazy, troublesome

Usage: slothful, backward, hesitating; of things: irksome.

3636 oknērós (from 3635 /oknéō, "to delay") – properly, hesitate and hence be tardy (delayed); (figuratively) reluctant, slothful, indolent ("dragging one's feet").

3636 /oknērós ("indolent") refers to a reluctant attitude, unwilling to act (participate) – i.e. slothful (lazy), unambitious, disinterested.

diligence

spoudé: haste, diligence

Original Word: σπουδή, ἥς, ἡ

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: spoudé

Phonetic Spelling: (spoo-day')

Usage: (a) speed, haste, (b) diligence, earnestness, enthusiasm.

4710 spoudé (from 4692 /speúdō, "move quickly, speed on") – properly, swiftness to show zealous diligence, i.e. one's "best" (full effort by making haste).

For the believer, 4710 /spoudé ("speedy diligence") means quickly obeying what the Lord reveals is His priority. This elevates the better over the good – the more important over the important – and does so with earnest swiftness (intensity).

fervent in spirit, —Pres Act Part Plural

zeó: to boil, be hot**Original Word:** ζέω**Part of Speech:** Verb**Transliteration:** zeó**Phonetic Spelling:** (dzeh'-o)**Definition:** to boil, be hot**Usage:** (lit: I boil, am boiling), I burn (in spirit), am fervent.

Cognate: 2204 zéō (onomatopoetic for the sound of boiling water, perhaps a primitive verb) – properly, to bubble over because hot enough to boil (J. Thayer); (figuratively) to show great zeal; be ardently passionate (literally "boiling" with interest or desire); "to be deeply committed to something, with the implication of accompanying desire – 'to be earnest, to set one's heart on, to be completely intent upon' " (L & N, 1, 25.76); very fervent. [See 2205](#) (zēlos).

[[2204](#) (zéō) is "formed from the participle of the Latin ferveo, 'to boil or ferment,

serving the Lord; Pres. Act. Part.

douleuó: to be a slave, to serve**Original Word:** δουλεύω**Part of Speech:** Verb**Transliteration:** douleuó

Phonetic Spelling: (dool-yoo'-o)

Definition: to be a slave, to serve

Usage: I am a slave, am subject to, obey, am devoted.

Cognate: 1398 douleúō (from 1401 /doúlos) – properly, to serve as a slave, having all personal ownership-rights assigned to the owner; (figuratively) to willingly give over the prerogative to be self-governing. [See 1401](#) (doulos).

Galatians 5:13 (NKJV)

¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Colossians 3:23–24 (NKJV)

²³ And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

Hebrews 9:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to **serve** the living God?

latreuó: to serve

Original Word: λατρεύω

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: latreuó

Phonetic Spelling: (lat-ryoo'-o)

Usage: I serve, especially God, perhaps simply: I worship.

3000 latreuó (from latris, "someone hired to accomplish a technical task because qualified") – properly, to render technical, acceptable service because specifically qualified

Romans 12:1 (NKJV)

12 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

Jesus said,

“The greatest among you shall be your servant” **(Matt. 23:11)**

and declared of Himself,

“I am among you as the one who serves” **(Luke 22:27)**, and,

“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” **(Matt. 20:28)**.

Paul repeatedly described himself as a bond servant of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; cf. 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:23), as did James (James 1:1), Peter (2 Peter 1:1), Jude (Jude 1), and John (Rev. 1:1).

In **John 12:26** the Lord promised those who faithfully serve Him,

“If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”

Although it tends to be overshadowed by Mary’s dramatic act of worship, Martha’s humble service on this occasion was no less commendable and pleasing to the Lord.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2008). [John 12–21](#) (pp. 3–4). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

II. The Sacrifice of Mary

3 Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair.

And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

In keeping with her portrayal elsewhere in the Gospels (cf. 11:32–33; Luke 10:39), Mary once again appears as the more pensive, reflective, and emotional of the two sisters.

3 Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard

In a startling, spontaneous outpouring of her love for Him, she **took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus.** A pound (a Roman measure, equivalent to about twelve ounces by today's standards) was a large amount of **perfume.** **Nard** was a fragrant oil extracted from the root and spike (hence the translation “spikenard” in some English versions) of a plant native to the mountains of northern India.

Perfume made from **nard** was **very costly** because of the great distance from which it had to be imported.

Mary's **nard** was **pure** in quality, making it even more valuable. Some were thinking it was worth “over

three hundred denarii” (Mark 14:5), and Judas agreed with that valuation (John 12:5).

such an amount would be equal to a year’s wages. The expensive alabaster vial in which it was stored also added to its value (Matt. 26:7). She broke the vial (Mark 14:3), thus giving up the whole thing—both contents and container. The perfume likely made up a sizeable portion of Mary’s net worth.

But like David (2 Sam. 24:24), she refused to offer the Lord something that cost her nothing. She acted in unrestrained love and worship.

Matthew’s (26:7) and Mark’s (14:3) parallel accounts note that Mary poured the perfume on Jesus’ head, while John says that she **anointed His feet**.

All three accounts are in perfect harmony. Since the Lord was reclining at a low table, with His feet extended away from it, Mary could have easily poured the perfume first on His head, then His body (Matt. 26:12), and finally on His feet.

Then, in an act that shocked the onlookers even more than the pouring out of expensive perfume, she **wiped His feet with her hair**. The Jews considered washing the feet of another person to be degrading, a necessary task to be done only by the most menial slaves (cf. John 1:27).

None of the Twelve at the coming Passover meal in the upper room were willing to serve the others by

washing their feet, so in a supreme act and example of lowliness, Jesus did it (cf. 13:1–15).

But even more shocking than her costly and lowly washing of Jesus' feet was the fact that Mary let down her hair. For a respectable Jewish woman to do that in public would have been considered indecent, perhaps even immoral.

But Mary was not concerned with the shame she might face as a result. Instead, she was solely focused on pouring out her love and in honoring Christ, with no thought of any perceived shame that it might bring to her.

John's note that **the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume** is the kind of vivid detail an eyewitness would recall. It also testifies to the extravagance of Mary's act of humble devotion. She was heedless of its cost, both financially and to her reputation. The measure of her love was her total abandonment to Jesus Christ. Consequently, Mary's noble act would, as the Lord declared, be spoken of as a memorial of her love wherever the gospel is preached (Mark 14:9).

Mark 14:9–10 (NKJV)

9 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

It must be noted here that Luke records a very similar incident:

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." (Luke 7:36–39)

That this is a completely different event is clear because it took place in Galilee, not Bethany; it featured a woman who was a sinner (likely a prostitute), not Mary; and occurred much earlier in our Lord's life, not during Passion Week. It also was an event at the house of a Pharisee, not Simon the leper.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2008). *John 12–21* (pp. 4–6). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

Jesus Never refused Worship.

Matthew 2:10–11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come

into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 8:2 (NKJV)

² And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”

Matthew 9:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live.”

Matthew 14:32–33 (NKJV)

³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

³³ Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.”

Matthew 15:22,25 (NKJV)

²² And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.”

²⁵ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

John 9:35–38 (NKJV)

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, “**Do you believe in the Son of God?**”

³⁶ He answered and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”

³⁷ And Jesus said to him, “**You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.**”

³⁸ Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped Him.

Matthew 28:9 (NKJV)

The Appearance of Jesus to the Women

⁹ And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “**Rejoice!**” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.

Matthew 28:16–17 (NKJV)

The Appearance of Jesus to the Disciples

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.

¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

It needs to be pointed out at this point of the profound emphasis that is placed on the worship of Jesus in this passage.

As is the case on the earlier account of Mary and Martha in Luke 10

Luke 10:38–42 (NKJV)

³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹ **And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word.** ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said to her, "**Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴² But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.**"

With all the things that need to be done, and all the service ministries that can be good...nothing replaces that priority of sitting at the feet of Jesus in Worship and listening to His Word.

This is a word we need to hear today. So many of us are like Martha, we are Busy and busy serving, but what priority do we give to worship and the study of the Word. We can let the business of serving Christ get in the way of Worship and listening to His Word.

But what is worse... is to let the things of this world take our attention away for worship.

We will allow all kinds of things and activities take priority of the importance of Worship.

Some believers can't make it enough priority to come 2 Sundays in a row. But Monday comes, We will do whatever it takes to make sure that we get to our secular jobs, so we can make our paper money to buy things that will eventually be burned up.

We will spend thousands of dollars on vacations for ourselves but what about the needs of ministry and the missions and the Body of Christ.

Years ago when the billionaire Howard Hughes died, his company's public relations director asked the casinos in Las Vegas, where Hughes owned multiple casinos, to show him respect by giving him a minute of silence. For an uncomfortable sixty seconds, the casinos fell eerily silent. Then a pit boss looked at his

watch, leaned forward, and whispered, “Okay, roll the dice. He’s had his minute.” (From the book, *Howard Hughes: The Hidden Years*, cited in “Our Daily Bread,” 11/77.)

I wonder if sometimes we treat God as those gamblers in Las Vegas treated Howard Hughes. We interrupt our busy schedules once a week, rush into church, give God “His hour,” and then forget about Him and get back to what we’d rather be doing.

John MacArthur was certainly correct to title his book on worship, *The Ultimate Priority* [Moody Press, 1983]. God created us for the ultimate priority of worshiping Him. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Or, as John Piper modifies it, our chief end is “to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever” (*Desiring God* [Multnomah Books], 1996 edition, p. 15).

John Piper wrote (*Let the Nations be Glad* [Baker], p. 17), “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.”

It’s no accident that the longest book in the Bible, Psalms, is all about praising and worshiping God. When we get to the end of the Bible, we see the saints and angels in heaven falling on their faces and worshiping God ([Rev. 4:10-11](#); [5:8-14](#); [7:9-11](#)). Since

worship will be our ceaseless activity and greatest joy in heaven, we ought to be practicing it now.

Here are a few definitions of worship:

John MacArthur: “Worship is our innermost being responding with praise for all that God is, through our attitudes, actions, thoughts, and words, based on the truth of God as He has revealed Himself” (*The Ultimate Priority* [Moody Press], p. 127). Or, he gives a simpler definition: “Worship is all that we are, reacting rightly to all that He is” (*ibid.*, p. 147).

William Temple: “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God” (cited in MacArthur, *ibid.*, p. 147).

Also, John MacArthur gives this helpful clarification (on gty.org, “Messiah: The Living Water,” part 2): “Worship, by the way, is not music. Worship is loving God. Worship is honoring God. Worship is knowing God for who He is, adoring Him, obeying Him, proclaiming Him as a way of life. Music is one way we express that adoration.” As Paul states ([1 Cor. 10:31](#)), “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Thus all of life is to be oriented “God-ward,” permeated with a sense of His majesty and glory.

Jesus' words about worship to this unnamed Samaritan woman occur in the context of His witness to bring this woman to saving faith. We might not think that witnessing is the right context to talk about the priority of worship. But Jesus takes her implicit question (4:20) about whether Samaritan worship or Jewish worship is correct and uses it to zero in on the aim of the gospel: to turn sinners into true worshipers of God. We learn: *Since God is seeking true worshipers who worship Him in spirit and truth, we should make it our priority to become such worshipers.*

As Jonathan Edwards argued, God created the world for His own glory (see John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* [Crossway Books]). Everything, including the salvation of His elect and even the damnation of the wicked, will result in glory to God. So God now is seeking worshipers who will bring Him glory, not just for an hour on Sunday, but every day through all their activities. We can't properly worship God on Sundays if we're not worshiping Him throughout the week.

Steven Cole

John 4:20–24 (NKJV)

²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the

Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Philippians 3:3 (NKJV)

³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

Luke 4:8 (NKJV)

⁸ And Jesus answered and said to him, “*Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’*”

III. The Sacrilege of Judas

4 But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, who would betray Him, said,

5 “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”

6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

4 But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, who would betray Him, said,

The stunned silence that must have followed Mary's startling and unexpected act was suddenly broken by a voice raised in protest. The conjunction *de* (**but**) introduces the stark contrast between Mary's selflessness and Judas's selfishness. As is always the case in the Gospels, John's description of **Judas Iscariot** emphasizes two facts. First, he was **one of** the Lord's **disciples** (Matt. 10:4; 26:14, 47; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:3, 47; John 6:71); second, he **was intending to betray Him** (Matt. 26:25; 27:3; Mark 3:19; 14:10; Luke 6:16; 22:4, 48; John 6:71; 13:2, 26–29; 18:2, 5; cf. Acts 1:16).

So shocking and singularly defining was Judas's betrayal that the gospel writers could not think of him or refer to him apart from it. That he was not merely a follower of Christ, but one of the Lord's inner circle, makes his betrayal all the more heinous. It was the most despicable act in all of

human history—and the one that merited the most severe punishment.

In the chilling words of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24).

5 “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”

Wanting to appear philanthropic, Judas acted outraged over such a profligate waste of money, exclaiming, **“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?”** Chronologically, these are Judas’s first recorded words in the New Testament.

They expose the avarice, ambition, and selfishness that ruled his heart. He had cast his lot with Jesus, expecting Him to usher in the political, earthly messianic kingdom most Jewish people were looking for. As one of the inner circle, Judas had eagerly anticipated an exalted position in that kingdom. But now, for him, that dream had turned to ashes. Jesus

had so antagonized the Jewish leaders that they intended to kill Him (John 7:1; 11:53).

Not only that, the Lord Himself warned the disciples that His death was inevitable (e.g., Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33). And when the Galilean crowds sought to crown Jesus as the earthly king Judas thought He would be, the Lord refused to cooperate with them (John 6:14–15).

6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

Disillusioned, Judas—facing the end of his ambitions—decided to at least get some financial compensation for the three years he had wasted on Jesus. John, not seeing it at that moment, but writing in retrospect many years later, makes the appropriate inspired comment on Judas's real motive: he **said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.**

As noted above, Mary's perfume was worth a lot of money; since a denarius was a day's wages for a

common laborer (Matt. 20:2), **three hundred denarii** equaled a year's wages (allowing for Sabbaths and other holy days on which no work was done).

Seeing that much money elude his grasp infuriated Judas, and he lashed out at Mary. "Judas' disapproval of Mary's action related not to loss of opportunity to do more for the poor but to his own loss of opportunity to steal from the common purse" (Colin Kruse, *The Gospel According to John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 263). So persuasive was his seemingly righteous indignation that others joined in his protest (Matt. 26:8–9; Mark 14:4–5).

Though some have tried to attribute noble motives to Judas (i.e., by arguing that he was a misguided patriot, trying to prod Christ into ushering in His kingdom), the New Testament portrays him as nothing but a greedy thief and a murderous traitor—even a Devil (John 6:70–71; cf. 13:2, 27).

Judas is the greatest example of missed opportunity in history. He lived day in and day out with Jesus Christ, God incarnate, for three years. Yet in the end Judas rejected Him, betrayed Him, was overcome by guilt (but not genuine repentance), committed suicide, and went "to his own place" (Acts 1:25)—that is, hell (John 17:12) in its most potent form.

IV. The Scolding by Jesus

7 But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.

8 For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

7 But Jesus said, “Let her alone

“Let her alone

Aorist Act Imperative, 2 person singular

The Lord immediately defended Mary, sternly rebuking Judas (the verb translated **let alone** is in the second person singular, meaning “you”)

“you leave her alone”

aphiémi: to send away, leave alone, permit

Original Word: ἀφίημι

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: aphiémi

Phonetic Spelling: (af-ee'-ay-mee)

Definition: to send away, **leave alone**, permit

Usage: (a) I send away, (b) I let go, release, permit to depart, (c) I remit, forgive, (d) **I permit**, suffer.

863 aphíēmi (from 575 /apó, "away from" and hiēmi, "send") – properly, send away; release (discharge).

by commanding him, “**Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial.**” Jesus obviously did not mean that Mary would keep the perfume (or at least part of it) until His burial, since she had just poured it all out (cf. Mark 14:3).

While commentators disagree on how to understand these words, the most satisfactory solution is to understand an ellipsis in the Lord’s statement. Supplying the missing words, the sense would be, “Let her alone; she did not sell the perfume [as you wish she had], so that she could keep it for the day of my **burial**”

(cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 429–30; cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 363–64).

The **burial** of which Jesus prophetically spoke was not the actual placing of His dead body in the tomb, but the anointing she had just done, which He saw as a symbol of His soon coming death and burial. Part of the lavish expenditures associated with many first-century funerals was the cost of perfumes to mask the odor of decay (cf. John 11:39).

This act by Mary, as in the case of Caiaphas (11:49–52) revealed a far greater reality than she realized at the time.

Her anointing prefigured the one Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would later perform on His body after Jesus' death (John 19:38–40).

8 For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

ptóchos: (of one who crouches and cowers, hence) beggarly, poor

Original Word: πτωχός, ή, όν

Part of Speech: Adjective

Transliteration: ptóchos

Phonetic Spelling: (pto-khos')

Definition: (of one who crouches and cowers, hence) beggarly, poor

Usage: poor, destitute, spiritually poor, either in a good sense (humble devout persons) or bad.

4434 ptōxós (from ptōssō, "to crouch or cower like a beggar") – properly, bent over; (figuratively) deeply destitute, completely lacking resources (earthly wealth) – i.e. helpless as a beggar. 4434 (ptōxós) relates to "the pauper rather than the mere peasant, the extreme opposite of the rich" (WP, 1, 371).

If Judas had really wanted to help the poor, he would not have lacked opportunity since, as Jesus reminded

them all (the verb and pronoun in this phrase are plurals), “**You always have the poor with you**” (cf. Mark 14:7).

The Lord was not disparaging the giving of charity to the poor (cf. Deut. 15:11), but rather was challenging the disciples to keep their priorities straight. The opportunity to do good to Him, as Mary had done, would not last long, because they would **not always have** Him physically present with them. Here again the Lord’s words were a prediction of His coming death, now less than a week away.

Judas now stood at the crossroads. Unmasked as a hypocrite, pretending to care for the poor while in reality embezzling from the common purse, he faced the ultimate decision. He could fall at Jesus’ feet in humble, penitent repentance, confess his sin, and seek forgiveness. Or he could pridefully harden his heart, refuse to repent, surrender to Satan’s influence, and betray the Lord.

Tragically and sinfully, he chose the latter course, with full and sole culpability for its consequences, though it fulfilled the purpose of God for the sacrifice of His Son (cf. 13:18–19). Immediately after this incident, “Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time” (Mark 14:10–11).

V. The Seeking of the Jews

9 Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.

After the Sabbath, a **large crowd of the Jews** who were in Jerusalem for Passover **learned that Jesus was** in Bethany. (The term **Jews** here does not refer to the religious leaders, but to the common people [cf. 11:55-56].)

They **came** to Bethany **not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.**

News of that sensational miracle had spread, and the curious crowd wanted to see both the miracle worker, and the one whom He had raised.

These people were not yet openly hostile to Jesus, like Judas and the religious leaders, but neither were they committed to Him, like Martha and Mary.

They were the thrill seekers, following the latest sensation, superficially interested in Jesus, but

spiritually indifferent and ultimately antagonistic to Him.

Like the members of the Laodicean church, they were “lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold” (Rev. 3:16).

At the triumphal entry they would hail Him, shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel” (John 12:13).

But only a few days later they would scream, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” (John 19:15), and some would come to mock Him as He was hanging on the cross (Matt. 27:39–40).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2008). [John 12–21](#) (p. 9). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

VI. The Sin of the Leaders

10 But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also,

11 because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

By no means did the crowds that flocked to Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus escape the notice of the Jewish authorities. The ruthless **chief priests** had already plotted to kill Jesus (11:53); now they expanded the plot and **planned to put Lazarus to death also.**

As living proof of Jesus' miraculous power, the resurrected Lazarus presented a great threat to the Sadducees, because **on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus** (cf. 11:48).

He was an undeniable testimony to the Lord's messianic claims. Not only that, a resurrected man was also an embarrassment to the Sadducees in another way: they denied the resurrection of the dead (Matt. 22:23), and he was an undeniable refutation of that error. Unable to counter the incontrovertible testimony Lazarus provided by being alive, they sought to destroy the evidence by killing him.

Their tangled web of deception was expanding,

as **Leon Morris notes:** "It is interesting to reflect that Caiaphas had said, 'it is expedient for you that one man die for the people' (11:50). But one was not enough. Now it had to be two. Thus does evil grow" (*The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 582).

No one is neutral regarding Jesus Christ; as He Himself warned,

“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters” (Luke 11:23).

Whether loving and serving Him, like Mary and Martha, being indifferent and vacillating toward Him, like the crowd, or hating and opposing Him, like Judas and the chief priests, everyone takes a stand somewhere.

What that stand is determines each person’s eternal destiny, since

“there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2008). [John 12-21](#) (pp. 9–10). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

