

Anointing in Bethany and Christ's Final Week Parts 1 and 2

John 12:1-11; 12:26; 27-50

CONNECTING

1. Welcome and opening prayer.
2. Introduce any guests.



(use this lesson guide for the following 3 weeks)

LOVING ONE ANOTHER (Deepening Spiritual Growth)



Jerusalem and the villages round about are buzzing with the news of how Jesus raised a man after four days in the tomb. Pilgrims from Galilee are pouring into the Holy City and adding their own testimony about the teacher from Nazareth. Everyone has the same question: Is this the Messiah, the King who will deliver Israel from Roman oppression and bring the golden age of peace and prosperity? But such speculations must be whispered, for the Sanhedrin regards Jesus as a criminal and has decreed that to conceal His whereabouts is a punishable offense (11:55-57). Jesus has not been seen since the miracle, and many doubt that He will dare to appear in Jerusalem for the Passover. This is the crucial moment: Will Jesus defy the Sanhedrin and claim His throne, or will He retreat? But neither the plotters nor the crowds understand Jesus' heart. Read 12:1-50.

I. March 14th Discuss "Anointing in Bethany" (12:1-8)

Six days before the Passover (12:1). Jesus arrived on Friday evening, and the *dinner* (12:2) was a sabbath meal.

A pint of pure nard (12:3). A large amount of very expensive scented oil. It was customary to pour such oil on a guest's head on a festive occasion to honor him. To pour it on *Jesus' feet* was an act of extreme humility, since the feet symbolized lowliness (recall 1:27). Only a menial slave would attend to someone's feet. Moreover, Mary *wiped his feet with her hair*, which Jews considered to be a woman's glory (1 Cor. 11:15). "A Jewish lady never unbound her hair in public. That apparently was a mark of loose morals. But Mary did not stop to calculate public reaction."

Those present would have interpreted Mary's act as signifying devotion, humility, and above all, festivity. But Jesus discerned the meaning of anointing a body for *burial* (12:7). It was the Jewish custom to wrap bodies in linen with scented oils and spices (19:40). Jesus knew He was the Messiah, the "Anointed One," but His mind was on anointing not for kingship or celebration but for burial. *A year's wages* (12:5). Three hundred denarii was about a year's wages for a manual laborer.

1. How do you interpret Mary's feelings and reasons for what she does in 12:3?
2. What attitudes about Himself, His mission, and His friends' priorities does Jesus express in 12:7-8?

The chief priests (12:10). They are panicking—one death was enough before (11:50), but now two will be necessary to protect priestly control. The priests are especially hostile to Lazarus because as Sadducees they reject the Pharisaic doctrine of resurrection. Lazarus is a living example of what they assert to be impossible.

II. March 21st Discuss “Christ’s Final Week Part 1: Triumphal entry” (12:12-19)

The next day (12:12). Sunday.

The great crowd (12:12). These were “the country people who were coming up to Jerusalem for the feast, probably most of them from Galilee.”⁹⁷ Many of these had seen and heard of Jesus’ works in Galilee, so when they heard that He was nearby and coming to the feast, and when they learned of a miracle even more amazing than any they had seen, they went to meet Him. They had tried earlier to proclaim Him the Messiah, but He had resisted (6:15). This time He accepted their acclamation, and they went wild.

Palm branches (12:13). These had “political overtones”—they were carried when the Temple was liberated from the Syrians in 164 BC and when the Jerusalem citadel was retaken from enemies in 142 BC. They symbolized kingship, victory, and nationalism. The crowds *went out to meet* Jesus—“This was the normal Greek expression used to describe the joyful reception of Hellenistic sovereigns into a city.” They shouted *Hosanna* (O save!), a term of praise to God and of greeting to kings (2 Samuel 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26; Psalm 118:25). They quoted the acclamation for the Messiah in Psalm 118:26— *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*. They added another title, *the King of Israel* to make their meaning explicit.

Donkey (12:14-15). Faced with this tumult, Jesus sent His disciples to fetch a donkey that had never been ridden (Luke 19:29-36). Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was a prophetic action that expressed Jesus’ idea of messiahship in response to the crowd’s nationalism. A warrior would ride a warhorse, but a king on a mission of peace would ride an unbroken (ritually dean) donkey.¹⁰¹ Jesus was purposely fulfilling Zech. 9:9, a prophecy of the Messiah.

His disciples did not understand (12:16). They perceived that Jesus was at last claiming to be the Messiah, but like the crowds, they did not understand what Jesus was saying about what messiahship meant. They, too, saw only the nationalism and victory.

3. When the Galileans tried to proclaim Jesus King, He refused (6:15). But at this Passover, He chose to ride into Jerusalem on a royal donkey amid public acclaim. Why do you think He accepted the acclaim this time?

4. What impresses you most about the scene in 12:12-19? (For instance, what details strike you as most significant or personally relevant? Why is the scene important? What do you think John wants to teach or reinforce to his readers? How does the scene make you feel?)

A prediction of death (12:20-36)

The *Synoptics* include many of Jesus’ words and acts after entering Jerusalem in triumph. (See, for example, Luke 19:41-21:38.) But John records only a few items to climax Jesus’ public ministry.

Greeks (12:20). These were Gentiles who had abandoned pagan gods and come to worship the God of Israel at the feast. They are not called proselytes, so they were probably not circumcised. There is evidence that hundreds of Gentiles across the Empire found the morality and monotheism of Judaism appealing, although they did not care for the rules, especially circumcision, required of full converts. “Greeks” does not imply that they came from Greece. There were many “Greeks” (Gentiles who spoke Greek) in Galilee and across the Jordan. These Gentiles did not want just to *see* (12:21) in the sense of glimpsing Him in the crowd. They wanted to see Him in the sense of getting to know Him in some conversation.

March 28th Discuss: “Christ’s Final Week Part 2: John 12:27-50”

11. Recall the meaning of light from earlier in this Gospel (1:9; 3:19-21; 8:12). What is Jesus saying in 12:35-36?

Sons of (12:36). A Semitic idiom for one who is “characterized by the quality in question.”

12. According to 12:37-41, why did almost none of the Jews believe in Jesus, despite His signs that pointed to His identity and mission?

Saw Jesus’ glory (12:41). Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord (Isaiah 6:3) and foresaw the rejection, death, and exaltation of Jesus (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

Study Skill—Hebrew Thought

It is important for us to remember that most of the writers of the Bible came from a largely oriental culture and thought like Jews. We in the West are taught to think with the logic developed by the Greeks. This logic says, for instance, that contradictions are impossible. The Hebrew mind, by contrast, assumes that contradictions and paradoxes do coexist, so it has no trouble holding seemingly contradictory truths in tension. Western minds resist paradoxes, so we try to reason them out logically. Our debates about predestination and free will are prime examples of this effort. The Jews knew that God was supreme, so everything that happened must be at least indirectly caused by Him. Yet they knew that He had given people freedom to make moral choices for which they were responsible. God caused hard hearts, yet men chose hard hearts (Exodus 8:15; Exodus 9:12). Because their Hebrew minds could accept this tension, the biblical writers did not reason it out for us. We need to learn to think like Hebrews if we are to understand the Bible.

13. Many prominent people did privately believe that Jesus was the Christ. What priorities kept them from confessing their faith publicly (12:42-43)?

Cried out (12:44). This suggests that Jesus declared these words in public (compare 7:37; 11:43), probably before He “hid himself” (12:36) from the Jews. John apparently positioned Jesus’ final appeal to His people here as a fitting summary and conclusion to Jesus’ public ministry. Hereafter, Jesus will not appear to the crowds until He is crucified.

14. What does Jesus say in His final appeal (12:44-50) about . . .

His identity and relationship to the Father?

His mission?

those who reject Him and His words?

Your response

15. What one insight from chapter 12 seems most personally relevant to you right now?

16. How do you fall short or need to grow in this area?

17. What can you do to begin conforming your life more to God's will in this area?

18. List any questions you have about 12:1-50.

SEEKING GOD (Drawing Near to God)



1. Conversational prayer is a very effective way to pray in a small group. It is a prayer that unites people in conversation with God and with each other. Like normal conversations, anyone can speak (pray) as many times as they wish and several people will often pray in agreement for the same request. (Begin your time by praising God for who He is and what He has done.)
2. Consider praying an application prayer, "Lord, help me to do _____(what you have show me during this study)?"

SHARING CHRIST (Declaring the Good News)



1. During the past month, how have you sought to build relationships with those on your Prayer, Care and Share in order to direct them toward a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
2. What activities might we do as a group or with another ministry of our church in order to reach out to our unsaved friends?

SERVING OTHERS (Demonstrating God's Love)



1. God has called us to serve one another within the church and together to serve those within the community. What effect does it have when Christians demonstrate God's love through simple but tangible acts of service to those who do not yet know Jesus Christ personally?
 - o Volunteer for 2nd Harvest Food Distribution, the fourth Friday of each month. Call Dean Van Der Werf at 763-561-0146, email derwerf@comcast.net or sign-up online

www.brooklynparkchurch.org/2harvest.