

JOHN 12

John 12:1–11. Mary Anoints Jesus; Plot to Kill Lazarus

Aware of the danger He is in as a result of having raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus returns to the vicinity of Jerusalem. Despite the risk to His life, He intends to keep the Passover. The portrait of the Bethany family—Martha, Lazarus, and Mary—is consistent with what we see in Luke 10:38–42. Matthew and Mark also mention the anointing detailed in verse 3 but do not name the woman (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9). This is probably because Mary of Bethany does not appear elsewhere in their narratives. The thoughtful Mary seems to recognize that Jesus is going to His death at Jerusalem and has performed this action in recognition of it.

Judas protests; he does not understand the significance of Jesus’s impending death and sees in the ointment only an opportunity to enrich himself. He is not far from betraying his Master for a monetary reward.

Connecting this scene to the previous episode, the Evangelist observes that the raising of Lazarus from the dead has greatly increased Jesus’s popularity. The phrase “went away” (Greek *hypagō*) indicates that “many of the Jews” were changing allegiance, choosing to follow Jesus. Lazarus has become living proof (in more than one sense of the word) of Jesus’s divine power, and thus the chief priests have decided to also eliminate Lazarus for his alleged role in leading people into apostasy (John 12:10–11).

John 12:12–19. Entry into Jerusalem

This account is the most triumphant of all the Gospels’ entry-into-Jerusalem stories, hence we think of this event as Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowd’s quotation of Psalm 118 and the narrator’s mention of Zechariah 9:9 remind us of the royal expectations Jews had of the Messiah. Once again, the Evangelist reminds us how important a role the raising of Lazarus has played in this reception.

Though Jesus will soon be scorned and humiliated, for now He enters Jerusalem as its rightful king. We may consider this to be the high-water mark of Jesus's popularity since Jesus will fade from the public eye in the days preceding His execution.

John 12:20–36. Jesus Speaks of His Self-Sacrifice

We do not know much about these Greeks who have come to see Jesus other than the fact that they seem to be Greek proselytes to Judaism, not Greek-speaking Jews, nor is there a resolution to their story. Their narrative function seems to be to demonstrate that the Gentiles have begun to seek Jesus, too. Perhaps this foretold moment is what leads Jesus to reflect on the nearness of His coming sacrifice.

The parable of the seed is an apt metaphor for Jesus's sacrifice. Paradoxically, through His death, life can come to all. The paradoxes continue in verses 25 and 26 as Jesus discusses keeping one's life by forfeiting it and honoring servants. These demonstrate the great gap between human knowledge and divine wisdom. For a moment, Jesus, pained by His coming agony, considers asking for deliverance (as He will in Gethsemane as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but He recognizes that His great, eternal purpose will require Him to persevere through the trial.

No one present recognizes the divine voice, even though it came "for [their] sakes"; this is a consistent theme in John. Just as few understand the deeper, important meaning behind Jesus's divine words, few comprehend the Father's words here. Jesus's language in verse 32 is incredibly important—"lifted up" has the double meaning of crucifixion (see verse 33) and glorification. In the Gospel of John, these two events are one and the same. We are also reminded of 3 Nephi 27:14–15, wherein Jesus expounds on this statement and applies it to His followers. Death by crucifixion was calculated to produce public humiliation for the crucified, who stood exposed and shamed for all to see. Jesus's death reverses this, finally exposing His glory and power to all humankind.

The people who answer have not understood the significance of Jesus's words. They focus only on the troubling fact that Jesus speaks of coming death. This does not square with their messianic expectations. Jesus warns them that the window for faith is closing; He is present and with them for only a short time longer. This is a fitting way for Jesus's public ministry to end, and so it does since He now goes into hiding, avoiding the public eye until His arrest.

John 12:37–43. Disbelief in Jesus

The people's repeated failure to understand and believe in Jesus leads the Evangelist to reflect for several verses (this may remind us of the "and thus we see" passages in the Book of Mormon). This passage closes what many have called the Book of Signs, which is John 1–12 (chapters 13–21 constitute what is called the Book of Glory), in which Jesus reveals His power and identity through a series of miracles. The Evangelist

sees a fulfillment of Isaiah's words and affirms that the ancient prophet foresaw the glory of Jesus. Isaiah 6:9–10 contains some of the most difficult verses to interpret in scripture given what we know about God's loving care for His children, but John's point is clear enough: because of spiritual blindness and hardened hearts, many of Jesus's contemporaries are unable to recognize who He really is.

The Evangelist mentions another class of people: those who have believed in Jesus but failed to act on such belief out of fear or concern for worldly things. We may wonder whether they *truly* believed. If they did believe that what Jesus offered them was more valuable than worldly things, then it is expected that they would act on that belief. In a sense, this class is more worthy of blame than the first—those who are blinded and hardened may not be truly accountable for their unbelief, but those who recognize the truth but are unwilling to fully embrace it have sinned against greater light and knowledge.

John 12:44–50. Jesus Summarizes His Mission

No audience or setting is given for this last speech; Jesus has already left the public eye, so it serves as a summary of His overall message. Jesus rehearses several important themes: He is the Father's authorized representative (verses 44–45); He is a light to guide believers through the darkness of the world (verse 46); His mission is one of salvation, not condemnation (verse 47); judgment still awaits those who do not accept Him (verse 48); His message comes from the Father (verse 49); following the commandment of God through Jesus brings eternal life (verse 50). Jesus has taught about each of these themes elsewhere in the Gospel of John. Therefore, this short discourse represents His teachings in miniature.

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