



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 12:1-11 Commentary New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

(John 12:1) Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

Many Jews went up from the country to go to Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover Festival and purify themselves, so Jesus went back to Jerusalem and stopped at Bethany on the way (about 2 miles from Jerusalem) six days before the Passover (see John 11:55). Having taken His disciples to the small town of Ephraim where He could teach them more truth and where He could heal and teach all who came to Him, without all the contentious Pharisees interfering, He now returned to Jerusalem to die during Passover according to the plan of God. He went to the home of Lazarus, where He could further teach Martha, Mary, Lazarus and all who came to Lazarus' home to see Lazarus and learn more about Jesus and His having raised Lazarus from the dead. Six days before the Passover would have been the Sabbath: the Saturday before Palm Sunday.

(John 12:2) There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

The dinner in Lazarus' home would have been a joyful "thanksgiving" dinner prepared by those who loved Jesus (and ones Jesus loved) to honor Jesus and thank Him for raising Lazarus from the dead. The dinner would have given those who needed more teaching from Jesus the opportunity to learn more about His Father and His purposes. Having the gift of hospitality, Martha served the dinner; while serving, she could have heard much of Jesus' teaching too. Jesus and Lazarus sat together where Jesus could have explained more about being the Resurrection and the Life and where He could have answered people's questions about how to receive the gift of eternal life. Because they ate together, people could see that Lazarus was not a ghost, but one who had been dead that Jesus raised to new life and who could talk, eat, and drink as they did. Jesus did something similar to prove He was not a ghost but resurrected from the dead when He appeared to His disciples as reported in Luke 24:41-44, "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.'" Thus, they heard Jesus talk and saw Jesus do what Lazarus could do after Jesus raised him from the dead. He asked for fish to eat because "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering." He convinced them of the truth when He talked and ate with them—He had risen indeed.

(John 12:3) Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

We do not know when Mary purchased her costly imported perfume. One reason it was costly was because it was pure. She would never have used anything impure or of less value for Jesus than she would have used for herself. Mary loved Jesus and wanted to honor and thank Him for raising her brother from the dead. Mary probably had the gift of teaching, for she had sat at the Lord's feet at other dinners and had listened intently to what He taught (see Luke 10:38-42). Sharing the truths Jesus taught her during her four days of grieving, we see how Mary must have comforted, taught,

and prepared those grieving with her after Lazarus' died. The mourners from Bethany and Jerusalem would have learned much about Jesus from her, and all would have good reasons to believe in Jesus after He (surprising to everyone!) raised Lazarus from the dead (see the *International Bible Study Commentary* on John 11). By anointing Jesus' feet, she publicly demonstrated her faith in Jesus and proclaimed that Jesus is worthy to be praised and worshiped, for Jesus is the One His Father sent as Lord and Savior of the world. Mary taught by words and deeds. She humbly got down on her knees and anointed Jesus' feet. Perhaps she had forgotten a towel to wipe His feet, for she took down her hair and wiped His feet dry. Mary was totally unaware of herself and totally absorbed in giving homage to Jesus when she took down her hair in public, which was considered a disgraceful act for a woman to do in public. What she did blessed everyone in the house as they enjoyed the fragrance of the perfume and thought about what she had done and what they might do for Jesus, for she showed He is worthy to be served. Whatever we do for Jesus Christ directly will always directly and indirectly bless others as well as ourselves. No doubt, the providence of God directed Martha and Mary to use their God-given gifts in the best possible ways before Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

(John 12:4) But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said,

As we have seen, people can see, hear, and learn the very same things about and from Jesus, and some will believe in Him and others will not. Judas Iscariot was one of Jesus' twelve disciples, but he never honored or obeyed Jesus from his heart as did Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and the other disciples. Judas was a common name. In Mark 6:3, we learn that one of Jesus' brothers was named Judas (the writer of the Book of Jude). In John 14:22, we read about a different Judas, "Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?'" In Acts 15:22, we learn about a prophet named Judas Barsabbas. The last name of Judas is Iscariot. In John 6:71, we learned that Judas was the son of Simon Iscariot, which most probably means "man from Kerioth." In John 12:6, we will learn more about Judas' character.

(John 12:5) “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”

It is easy for someone to complain about how someone else uses their own money or possessions in the cause of Jesus Christ and the Church. It is easier to complain when someone does not know or appreciate Jesus Christ and those who seek to give and serve Jesus Christ, the Church, and others. It is even easier when someone wants that money or those possessions for themselves instead of it going to someone else or some other worthy purpose. Interestingly, Judas had the ability to appraise the value of costly items. Perhaps he had many years of experience selling stolen goods. In those days, three hundred denarii would have been the equivalent of one year’s wages for a laborer. Mary had good reasons to honor Jesus as she did, even if she did not consciously know that the hand of His Father was leading her to glorify Jesus and lead people to faith in Him by her actions.

(John 12:6) (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

John carefully explained the motive behind Judas’ complaint. He was not actually concerned about the poor. He wanted to sell the perfume for his own personal profit. John plainly declared that Judas was a thief. He was the disciples’ treasurer who paid for their daily needs and helped the poor from contributions. We know that Jesus and the disciples were also financially poor because all their financial means were carried by Judas in a small box or purse. Unfortunately, Judas kept some of the people’s contributions for himself. We know Jesus and the disciples habitually gave to the poor, because when Judas left Jesus’ last supper to betray Him, John reported in John 13:29, “Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the festival’; or, that he should give something to the poor.” Judas loved money, and his love of money led him further from Jesus and His Father. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” For three years, Judas heard Jesus teach, but he continued his

unrepentant stealing. Eventually, Judas came to the point of hating and despising God because he loved money. He became devoted to acquiring more money; therefore, it finally became easy for him to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15). By continuing to practice sin and refusing to repent, Judas acted according to the person he became. Notice: love for God and Jesus moved Mary to give Jesus perfume valued at a year's wages for a laborer. Judas loved money, so he betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. What both did is remembered and spoken of even today.

(John 12:7) Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.

Jesus defended Mary's action and commanded Judas to say no more. Then, He looked ahead and once again foretold His future death. In less than a week, Jesus would die on a cross. We do not know how much Mary knew about Jesus' coming death, but we do know that in God's providence He intended Mary do all she did for Jesus. I believe that on this evening she first anointed Jesus' feet. Then, after further consideration of Jesus' words in her defense and about His burial, her love for Jesus increased and the Holy Spirit moved her to anoint Jesus' head a few days later. [Some commentators think two different women anointed Jesus on two different occasions before His death. They may be right, for the Bible does not tell us everything that we would like to know or answer all our questions.]

(John 12:8) You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

John's gospel shows that Jesus and the disciples helped the poor (see John 13:29). Jesus also affirmed that He would soon die and would no longer be with them. Sometimes believers must choose between doing one of two or more “good works,” because they cannot do all of them at one time. The followers of Christ must set priorities and pray for the Holy Spirit to help them do what is most important at the time and what they can do later. That night, Mary chose to do a “good work” for Jesus with her time and money instead of using her money to help the poor. As a friend and follower of Jesus, Mary would have helped the poor in the past and would continue to help the poor in the future. The Church in the New Testament insisted

Christians help the poor, as Paul wrote about in Galatians 2:10, when he met with James, Peter, and John: “They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.” Christians eagerly help others! When we think of doing various charitable works, we need to pray for Jesus to show us what to do when with the gifts He gives us. When Christians prayerfully help the poor and others God’s way, they are doing it for Jesus and with Jesus, and Jesus is helping the poor through them. The Holy Spirit will guide our giving in answer to our prayers.

(John 12:9) When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

Lazarus served as a live demonstration that Jesus could raise someone from the dead who had been dead four days and who should have been decaying in the tomb before He raised him. Jesus did what they knew only God could do. Jesus never failed to do anything He chose to do because He always did His Father’s will. When the Jews in Jerusalem learned that Jesus was in nearby Bethany, they went to see both Jesus and Lazarus and a great crowd gathered. They heard and saw that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, and what they learned served as preparation for them to believe even more in Jesus when they learned that Jesus had risen from the dead.

(John 12:10) So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well,

The chief priests were usually Sadducees, who were wealthy and politically involved with the Romans. As Sadducees, they only believed in the first five books of the Old Testament. They rejected the prophets and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The same as Judas, they loved money. If Jesus were the Messiah (and they knew that everything Jesus said and did pointed in the direction that Jesus was the Messiah), then they would lose power and influence with the Romans. To them, the Messiah was only a political figure and a threat. They did not want a revolution that might destroy their favored political status within the Roman empire. They served as the highest ranking religious leaders in Judea, but they loved themselves supremely, hated God as revealed in the Bible, and despised

Jesus; therefore, they not only planned to kill an innocent man (Lazarus) they also planned to kill a godly man, the Son of God.

(John 12:11) since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Lazarus proved Jesus had the authority to raise the dead. If Lazarus remained alive, he could bear testimony to Jesus as the Son of God without even saying a word. If the chief priests killed Jesus but kept Lazarus alive, Lazarus would have continued as a silent witness (at the very least) for Jesus as the Messiah. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He proved that God the Father had sent Him and that His teachings were true, for His signs authenticated what He taught and what He claimed about himself. Therefore, those who remained teachable and considered the evidence before them repented of their sins, turned from their allegiance to the chief priests, and placed their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think Mary felt motivated to anoint Jesus' feet?
2. What reason did Jesus give to explain why Mary anointed His feet?
3. Who complained about Mary's actions? What reason did he give for complaining about her good deed?
4. What did John say about the one who complained?
5. Why did the chief priests plan to put Lazarus to death?

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