

John 12:1-19

II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (1:19-12:50)

R. Titles and Works (10:22-42)

S. The Seventh Sign – The Raising of Lazarus (11:1-57)

T. The Anointing and Triumphal Entry (12:1-19)

We are now in the last week of Jesus' life. The Passover mentioned in v. 1 is the one on which Jesus will be crucified. Jesus returns to Bethany, which is where we were in chapter eleven with the raising of Lazarus. Indeed, he and his sisters are present for a meal that is evidently being served at Simon's house (Matt 26:6; Mark 14:3). Martha is serving, Lazarus is at the table, and Mary is preparing to perform her own act of worship. In v. 3, we read how Mary took a costly amount of oil and anointed Jesus' feet with it. It caused the whole *house* to be *filled with the fragrance of the oil* (v. 3). As if that wasn't humbling and sacrificial enough, we're then told that she *wiped His feet with her hair* (v. 3).

This act of great humility could have possibly caused a stunned silence, much like it would today. Yet, that silence was broken by Judas, who laments the loss of income. It's from Judas' words that we come to understand just how *very costly* the oil was: *three hundred denarii*. That's three hundred days' wages; something like fourteen months' worth of work! If one didn't see Jesus as worthy of such an extravagant financial sacrifice, it would be easy to see how upsetting this would've been! But think of the financial hit this would've been. It was quite the sacrifice!

You know by now that I don't hammer giving the way other pastors do. Thankfully, the Lord graciously provides for our needs here at the church without me having to make it a constant issue. But the point is nevertheless well-taken: the Lord is worth the financial sacrifice for the sake of His honor and glory!

For his part, Judas' motives weren't entirely pure. His words made it sound as if he were concerned about the poor, but his intentions were less than honorable. He kept the *money box, and he used to take what was put in it* (v. 6). It seems as though Judas was regularly motivated by finances. After all, he betrayed Jesus for *thirty pieces of silver* (Matt 26:15).

As word spread that Jesus was in Bethany, and with Lazarus, no less, we read in v. 9 that *a great many of the Jews* started to gather together there. They wanted to see Jesus; they wanted to see Lazarus. Even more so, the chief priests wanted to put Lazarus to death because the fact that he was already raised from the dead was causing *many of the Jews* to believe *in Jesus* (v. 11).

The plotting and the gathering would continue into the next day as Jesus went up to Jerusalem. It was at this time that Jesus made His triumphal entry into the city. While we don't have the same level of details concerning the preparation as we do in Mark 11:1-11 with the gathering of the donkey, we nevertheless read of the palm branches being waved about as He made His way through the city. Why palm branches though? As F.F. Bruce notes:

From the time of the Maccabees palms or palm-branches had been used as a national symbol. Palm-branches figured in the procession which celebrated the rededication of the temple in 164 BC (2 Macc. 10:7) and again when the winning of full political independence was celebrated under Simon in 141 BC (1 Macc. 13:51). Later, palms appeared as national symbols on the coins struck by the Judean insurgents during the first and second revolts against Rome (AD 66-70 and 132-135). So well established was the use of the palm or palm-branch as a symbol for the Jewish nation that the Romans in their turn used it on the coins which they struck to celebrate the crushing of the Jewish

revolts. On this occasion, then, the palm-branches may have signified the people's expectation of imminent national liberation, and this is supported by the words with which they greeted our Lord (*The Gospel of John*, 259).

As they waved their palm branches in recognition that their Messiah had come, Jesus' actions further underscore how right they were to recognize Him as such (even though their political expectations were misplaced for their present day). Indeed, John notes how this very action was foretold in Zechariah 9:9 (as does Matthew in 21:5). While Jesus will one day return to rule and reign as king at His Second Coming, the Messianic task of spiritual deliverance was to take center stage during His First Coming. Nevertheless, the cries of *hosanna* (Hb. *deliver us, please!*) were still appropriate.

Incredibly, John tells us that *his disciples did not understand these things at first* (v. 16). How could they have been with Jesus that long, under His direct teaching no less, and still lack understanding? I believe we'll all be in for a bit of a surprise when we reach Glory and it's revealed how much we missed along the way!

Now! Before you have a chance to ask the question, let's address the "discrepancies" between Matthew-Mark and John. This account is also found in Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9. There are two aspects in particular we note:

1. Unique aspects to Matthew-Mark and John. These aspects aren't necessarily contradictory; different authors simply add different details.
 - a. M-M tell us it was held at Simon's house.
 - b. J tells us that Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were there; the lattermost being the unnamed woman of M-M.
 - c. J adds that the house was filled with the fragrance.
 - d. M-M include a greater detail of Jesus' response to Judas.
2. Seeming discrepancies between Matthew-Mark and John.
 - a. Was it two days (M-M) or six days (J)? This is the biggest seeming discrepancy. We are going to give John's account priority, because he tends to be more precise chronologically. M-M tend to play a little more loose with chronology for the sake of theme and literary devices. Therefore, this account does indeed take place the night before the Triumphal Entry. M-M record the event out-of-order directly before Judas' betrayal to contrast the selfless sacrifice of Mary with the selfish gain of Judas. Therefore, the "two days" of M-M is accurate to Judas' betrayal, and we could put parentheses around Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 to indicate that the authors are stepping out of time to introduce a contrast to Judas.
 - b. Was the oil poured on Jesus head (M-M) or feet (J)? In short, both! This was a good amount of oil. Pouring that amount out would have surely caused the house to be filled with the aroma. M-M were likely emphasizing the royal anointing aspect, while J was emphasizing the act of humility on Mary's part. The issue of head or feet is not contradictory; the authors merely only highlight a particular part of the action.
 - c. Were the disciples angry (M-M) or Judas (J)? Again, this seeming contraction isn't one at all. The action might have caused a stir among all the disciples (M-M); after all, Jesus' disciples didn't always comprehend everything right away (cf. John 12:16). Yet, it was Judas who was bold enough to speak up and voice the complaint. It's not like they would have voiced the complaint in unison!

The Word of God is trustworthy! It does not contain contradictions, although sometimes we need to think through some things from time to time!