

A summary of John 12:1-26

- 1. Why did Jesus go to Bethany (v.1)?** John's gospel does not give us too many details concerning Jesus' visit to Bethany. John tells us in verse 1 that Jesus came to Bethany six days before the Passover. However, Luke tells us in 21:37 that every day He was teaching in the temple, but at night He and His twelve disciples (Mark 11:11) went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet, where Bethany was located (Mark 11:1). Why did Jesus go to Bethany every night during the six days that He was in Jerusalem? We know that there were thousands, perhaps as many as ten thousand, people who had believed in Him. Matthew 21:9 and John 12:12 tell us that there were crowds or multitudes of people who shouted "Hosanna" (meaning "God saves") while He entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He was royally welcomed and appreciated by many. Why, then, would He make the nightly journey to Bethany? This question may be beneficial to ask because it may challenge us by causing us to ask ourselves the following question: are we satisfied to live a church life where everything may seem to be going smoothly? Many people may be coming to the gatherings, and many may even believe in Jesus. Yet, in all of this, do we have the Lord's presence in the church life? Do we have the Lord's presence in our family life, at home? Do we know that the Lord is with us? The Pharisees knew the Old Testament Scriptures, but did they have Jesus, and did they believe in Him? However, there were a few that really loved Him. Martha and Mary and Lazarus were a family that really loved the Lord, as we saw in chapter 11. Simon the leper, in whose house the first eight verses take place, and to whose house he had invited the Lord and His twelve disciples, also loved the Lord. This shows that the Lord's presence does not depend on how many brothers and sisters there are in the church life, but on their heart, and on how many really love the Lord, like Martha and Mary. Just because a congregation is growing in number does not automatically mean that the Lord's presence is there. Indeed, many may believe, and many may also love the Lord, but is the Lord satisfied? Are we satisfied to be in Jerusalem, and "love the Lord" in a conventional or acceptable or "balanced" way, or do we desire to be where the Lord is, at "Bethany," and love Him in a "crazy" way, like Martha and Mary. Sometimes, we may criticize, or murmur against, those who apparently love the Lord too crazily. Such were the Pharisees, who rebuked the disciples for crying out their Hosannas during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:39-40). We need to grow, from the experience of being a part of the multitude in Jerusalem, to become those in Bethany who seek the Lord and love Him. This is not to say that those in Jerusalem did not love the Lord. Therefore, we must treasure the church life, and all the brothers and sisters, typified by Jerusalem. At the same time, we should also seek to find the Lord and treasure His presence, and satisfy Him by loving Him crazily (the experience of Bethany).
- 2. Loving Jesus is costly (v.5).** Mary's offering was costly. Judas, and in another Gospel (Mark 14:5) the disciples, observed that the ointment could have been sold for 300 denarii, one hundred denarii more than Phillip's estimate of what he thought it would take to feed 5000 men, not including women and children (John 6:7). According to Matthew 20:2, one denarius was a day's salary. Therefore, 300 denarii were the equivalent of 300 days' wages, almost a year's salary. Therefore, Mary offered almost a year's income to honor the Lord. Is our offering cheap, or costly? Are we willing to offer 300 denarii to the Lord? Again, this does not imply just money, but our heart, our time, from early morning to late evening, our energy, our mind, our intellect, our emotions, our living. To love the Lord is not something cheap, or relaxed, or something "to do" in our spare time, or when we have time. A costly offering is a desperate fight to find time, to make time. Is the Lord that valuable to us? Is He that precious of a treasure? The whole house was filled with the aroma or fragrance of Mary's offering. Is the church life filled with the aroma of our costly offering? Mary "wasted" herself on the Lord, without regard to consequences. She offered, in a sense, to the point of no return. She spent all on the Lord. May we grow in our love for the Lord to such a consecration.

- 3. Why not give the offering to the care of the poor? (v.5).** A good question! Actually, God treasures the poor, and the Bible looks out for the poor, and so should we. Many Christian groups care, or endeavor to care, for the poor, and we must honor them. We have seen how Jesus met so many human needs. He did not just come to teach, but He came to heal, to restore, to feed and to raise up people with sicknesses, needs and hurts. Even Paul was reminded of the need to remember the poor, and he appreciated that reminder (Galatians 2:10). Of course, Judas Iscariot's motive for objecting to the use of the ointment offered by Mary was impure (the Bible calls him a thief). However, in other Gospels, the other disciples raise the same objection. Notice Jesus' response in John 12:8. He did not negate the fact that we should not care for the poor. He said that we always have the poor, but we do not always have Him. Therefore, when we endeavor to address human needs (people looking for a job, students struggling with their studies), do we have the Lord? Do we realize that the best gift is Jesus Christ as the eternal life, and as the resurrection? Yes, the poor need to be taken care of. But what about the gospel tract that we distribute? Do we realize that that is the best gift we can give to someone because God may use that to lead someone to believe into His Son. Human needs may be met, but they will arise again and again. Only God's life is eternal. This is the difference between Judas' "offering" and Mary's "offering." Judas' and the disciples' offering was not bad. Yet it lacked eternity. What about us? When we help people find a job or study, do we lead them to know Christ and His life in them. If they get the job, can they praise the Lord? If they do not get the job, can they still praise the Lord and stay in the church life? Much depends on the focus and the goal of our offering.
- 4. Do we rob God? (v.6).** Verse 6 says Judas was a thief. However, in Malachi 3:8-9, God accuses the Israelites, after the captivity of both the northern and the southern kingdoms, of robbing Him. In our church life, we may be captured by other gods. Yes, God chose us, but we end up in captivity, worshipping idols. God is not as gentle in Malachi as He is in the Gospel of John. He tells His people that they are robbing Him (progressive case, i.e. a continuous action). May we treasure Mary and the offering that she made. It is easy to say that we should not be like Judas, but hard to live like Mary.
- 5. We need to grow in our praising of the Lord (vv.12-13)?** Many crowds praised Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. Many had believed in Him. Jesus even rebuked the Pharisees for criticizing such a praising (Luke 19:40). Yet the same crowds a few chapters later would shout "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" This shows that we need to grow in our praising of the Lord. For example, we may praise the Lord on Lord's Day for how He has blessed us with a job, or with a good grade. If that is our experience, we should still have the freedom to praise the Lord, where we are. But we need to grow to realize that if we get a job, the Lord has given us a job. If we lose a job, the Lord may have allowed us to lose the job. In either case, the Lord is in control. Can we praise the Lord for who He is, not just for what He does for us? If we praise Him only for what He does for us, we may not have much to praise Him for. In that case, we may shout "Crucify Him!," if not verbally, then in our heart.
- 6. Are we willing to die to ourselves (vv.24-25).** The proof of the death of a grain of wheat is the yielding of many grains, or much fruit. Jesus was the one grain that fell into the ground and bore many grains. Who are the many grains? Millions of believers all around the world over the last two millennia. What a testimony. What about us? We may claim that we die to ourselves, but the test is how much fruit increase there is in the church life. We may like to be a "lone ranger." In other words, we may serve well and diligently, but alone, in an independent way. We may think we can do everything, and that we don't need anyone else. This may mean that we have not yet "fallen into the ground" and "died." Are we with companions? Are we serving in a team? Are we praying in one accord with the saints? If we preach the gospel, do we preach the gospel with other saints? Do we endeavor to blend with other churches? If there is little fruit because of our labor, or our serving, then we do need to ask whether we have indeed experienced dying to our self.