

John 12: Mary's Devotion and Entering Jerusalem

These stories contrast a private act of devotion towards Jesus and a dramatic but fickle public response to him.

How do you express devotion? What does it feel like to be devoted to someone or something?

(53) From that day on the Jewish authorities made plans to kill Jesus. (54) So Jesus did not travel openly in Judea, but left and went to a place near the desert, to a town named Ephraim, where he stayed with the disciples. (55) The time for the Passover Festival ^a was near, and many people went up from the country to Jerusalem to perform the ritual of purification before the festival. (56) They were looking for Jesus, and as they gathered in the Temple, they asked one another, "What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?" (57) The chief priests and the Pharisees ^b had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, he must report it, so that they could arrest him.

(12:1) Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, the man he had raised from death. (2) They prepared a dinner for him there, which Martha helped serve; Lazarus was one of those who were sitting at the table with Jesus. (3) Then Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house. (4) One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot, the one who was going to betray him, said, (5) "Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?" (6) He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would help himself from it. (7) But Jesus said, "Leave her alone! Let her keep what she has for the day of my burial. (8) You will always have poor people with you, but you will not always have me."

(9) A large number of people heard that Jesus was in Bethany, so they went there, not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from death. (10) So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus too, (11) because on his account many Jews were rejecting them and believing in Jesus.

^a The Passover festival celebrated God rescuing God's people from slavery. The writer sees this as an illustration of what Jesus would do.

^b The Pharisees and teachers of the law were the Bible experts and the religious police.

How do you think the authorities might have tried to justify their actions?

What do you think it would be like to follow Jesus at this point?

What do you think the people would have been speculating about Jesus?

What would Lazarus, Mary and Martha have believed about Jesus?

What do you think it would be like to have Jesus round for dinner?

Why do you think Mary made such an extravagant gesture towards Jesus?

What do you think Judas was thinking when he protested?

What do you make of Jesus' response to Judas?

What do these verses show us about the chief priests?

What do you think Lazarus would have made of this?

How are the Pharisees and chief priests, Judas and Mary contrasted in this story?

Have you ever invested hope in a public figure? What attracted you to them?

(12) The next day the large crowd that had come to the Passover Festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. (13) So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the King of Israel!" (14) Jesus found a donkey and rode on it, just as the scripture says, (15) "Do not be afraid, city of Zion! Here comes your king, riding on a young donkey." (16) His disciples did not understand this at the time; but when Jesus had been raised to glory, they remembered that the scripture said this about him and that they had done this for him. (17) The people who had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from death had reported what had happened. (18) That was why the crowd met him, because they heard that he had performed this miracle. (19) The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, we are not succeeding at all! Look, the whole world is following him!"

(20) Some Greeks ^c were among those who had gone to Jerusalem to worship during the festival. (21) They went to Philip (he was from Bethsaida in Galilee) and said, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." (22) Philip went and told Andrew, and the two of them went and told Jesus. (23) Jesus answered them, "The hour has now come for the Son of Man to receive great glory. (24) I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains. (25) Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal. (26) Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am. And my Father will honour anyone who serves me. (27) "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Shall I say, 'Father, do not let this hour come upon me'? But that is why I came, so that I might go through this hour of suffering. (28) Father, bring glory to your name!" Then a voice spoke from heaven, "I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again."

What do you think the crowds would have believed about Jesus?

Why does the writer tell us that this is a fulfilment of scripture?

Why did Jesus ride on a donkey when the traditional transport for a king would have been a horse?

Why does the writer tell us that the disciples did not understand what was happening at the time?

^c Jesus understood himself to be the Jewish Messiah. Greeks here means non-Jews.

Why do you think the writer sets the Pharisees statement in (19) against (20)?

Why does Jesus answer Philip as he does in (23)?

What is Jesus saying about his death in (24)?

What do you think the disciples would have understood by (25) – (26)? How do you think they would have felt about it?

What do we learn about Jesus in (27) – (28)?

What do you make of the linking of death, life and glory in this passage?

What do you think the disciples would have made of Jesus claiming that he was about to become king and about to die? How do you think they would feel about that?

How do these two stories compare and contrast?

What do you make of Jesus in this passage? Who can you most relate to?