

Daily Bible Study Commentary by Pastor Steve

We're excited to have you digging deeper into the Word. The best way to use this study guide is to read the Bible verse(s) first, then Pastor Steve's commentary. God bless you.

John 12:1-5

vs1-2: On the Friday before Passover, which would begin that year on the following Thursday evening, in spite of the danger, Jesus boldly walked into Bethany, and word of His arrival spread like wildfire (v9). On one of the days while He was there, possibly the following Tuesday (Mk 14:1), Mary, Martha and Lazarus provided a special meal for Him and His disciples. The meal was not served in their home but at another location in town. Matthew and Mark's gospels tell us that the event was held at the home of a man named "Simon the Leper" (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-8). **vs3-5:** During the meal Mary came up to Him while He was seated (reclining) at a table and poured an extremely expensive perfume first over His head (Mt 26:7; Mk 14:3) and then on His feet. After that she proceeded to wipe the oil off His feet with her hair. John mentions the type of perfume she used. He says it was "genuine nard" which is a sweet-smelling oil pressed from the roots and stems of a plant that grows in the mountains of northern India (Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, Zondervan, 1980, p.246).

John 12:3-5

vs3-5 (continued): Mark mentions that she actually broke the neck of an alabaster vial in order to open it (Mk 14:3). Judging by Judas Iscariot's angry response, the value of that perfume was equal to a year's income for an average worker. He exclaimed, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denari (a denarius was a day's wage for a laborer) and given to the beggars" (literal). **vs3-5** (continued): This was not the first time perfume had been poured on Jesus. A woman with a troubled past had poured perfume on His feet but not His head (Lk 7:36-48). Then she had wet His feet with her tears and wiped them clean with her hair. After His feet had been washed, she poured perfumed oil on them and kissed them. Her actions were an expression of profound sorrow for her sins. Obviously she must have heard Him preach about the mercy of God, and in this manner she was begging for forgiveness, which she, indeed, received (Lk 7:48). But Mary was led by the Holy Spirit to anoint Jesus with perfumed oil for an entirely different reason. She was symbolically preparing His "dead body" for burial. Just as Lazarus had been washed and anointed with perfumed oil for his burial only weeks earlier (Jn 11:1-2), she was in effect telling Jesus, "I know we're going to lose You, and we may not be able to bury You properly when that awful moment comes, so I want to care for You now while I can."

John 12:6

v6: Judas Iscariot presents quite a problem: How could a man who spent so much time with Jesus remain an unbeliever? For years he traveled with Him as one of the Twelve. He listened to Him teach. He observed His character and watched Him perform countless miracles. He himself ate from the loaves and fish (Jn 6:1-13); he was in the boat when Jesus walked on water (Jn 6:16-21); he stood nearby when sick people were healed and demonized people were delivered; he was even present when Lazarus walked out of the tomb (Jn 11:38-44). Yet his heart remained unmoved. It had not swelled with faith; instead it had grown increasingly angry at Jesus. John doesn't mention what Judas did after Mary poured the perfume over Jesus, but Matthew and Mark do. They reveal that this was the event that prompted Judas to go to the temple officials and bargain with them for a sum of money in order to betray Jesus (Mt 26:14-16; Mk 14:10-11).

John 12:6

v6 (continued): But John provides here two pieces of information about Judas that the other gospels (Matthew, Mark) don't. First he tells us that Judas was the disciple who carried the small bag or box that held the gifts people gave to support Jesus' ministry (Jn 13:29) and second that he was a thief who regularly stole from the money entrusted to him. Judas' angry response to Mary in that tender moment may provide a clue as to why his heart grew so hard: He loved money. Apparently he became a disciple because he thought Jesus was the Messiah and that He had come to set up God's glorious kingdom on earth. As one of His close followers, Judas expected that he would naturally be given an exalted position in that kingdom. But as time went on Jesus made it abundantly clear that He was not seeking an earthly kingdom but intended to die as a sacrifice for human sin. And that was not why Judas chose to follow Him, so he felt betrayed and grew angry even though Jesus had never promised him anything else. In his mind Jesus was foolishly passing up a tremendous opportunity to deliver Israel from its enemies and bring great prosperity to them all. Then, with all that frustration building in him, when he watched Mary "waste" all that valuable perfume in an act that symbolized Jesus' burial, something snapped inside Judas.

Daily Bible Study Commentary by Pastor Steve

We're excited to have you digging deeper into the Word. The best way to use this study guide is to read the Bible verse(s) first, then Pastor Steve's commentary. God bless you.

John 12:7

v7: Mary's actions were an expression of her devotion to Jesus, but they were also an expression of the Father's love for His Son. With that oil, Mary was prophesying. Not only was she announcing that Jesus was going to die soon, but through her the heavenly Father was telling His Son how much He cherished Him. Jesus' body would soon be savaged as He endured the process of the crucifixion. Violent men, who had no respect for Him, would treat Him shamefully. But in that wonderful moment, as Mary poured oil on His head and feet, the Father was honoring Him for His obedience and assuring Him that He would see that His body was buried properly. Seven hundred and fifty years earlier, through the prophet Isaiah, God the Father had described, in detail, the death Jesus was about to die (Isa 52:13-53:12). But in that same prophecy He had also said He would honor His Son's dead body. He promised He would be buried "with a rich man in His death" (Isa 53:9; Mt 27:57-60).

John 12:7

v7 (continued): Mary, knowingly or unknowingly, was allowing the Father to remind Jesus of that promise. She was allowing the Father to assure His Son of His love and to thank Him for the sacrifice He was about to make. And who can doubt that the sweet fragrance of that oil still lingered on Jesus a few days later as He hung on the cross, a sweet reminder of God's love in His darkest hour. **v7 (continued):** Jesus, understanding perfectly what that moment meant, replied to Judas' protest that the oil had been wasted with these words, "Leave her [alone] so that she may keep it for the day of My burial" (literal). If we take those words literally it appears Mary may not have emptied the entire container of oil. After all, that alabaster vial held an entire pound of perfume (v3), so some of it may have been left over. In that case Jesus' statement to Judas would have meant, "Let her alone, so that she may keep [the rest of] it until the day of My burial." Indeed, a group of women, which may or may not have included Mary of Bethany, went out to Jesus' tomb on the morning of His resurrection to put "spices and perfumes" on His body (Mk 16:1-3; Lk 23:55-24:1).

John 12:8

v8: Judas suggested that the perfume be sold, and the money from the sale be given to "beggars." The word he used ("beggars") can be applied to poor people in a general sense, but it literally means "those who crouch or cringe" by the wayside. Jesus' response to him was not a rejection of the idea that they should be generous to people who are in desperate need. In fact it appears that one of Judas' responsibilities, as the person who carried the purse, was to distribute funds to beggars on behalf of Jesus and His disciples (Jn 13:29). What Jesus was trying to explain to him by saying, "For the beggars you always have with you, but you do not always have Me" (literal) was that the season in which people could openly honor Him was about to end. Human need is always present, and the Word of God constrains believers to "divide [their] bread with the hungry" (Isa 58:7). But caring for human need does not replace our responsibility to lavishly worship God. He deserves our best which is why Mary was pouring one of their family treasures onto the head and feet of Jesus.