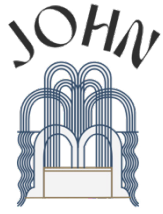


An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“A Funeral Pre-Arrangement”

John 12:1-11

Theme: The level of our devotion demonstrates the level of our discernment.

Introduction: Most of us find it difficult to talk about funeral arrangements. Yet making those arrangements in advance can be an act of love. It spares our family difficult decisions and gives us the opportunity to think carefully about how we want our life remembered.

But there is a deeper preparation no funeral director can make for us. We can choose a service, a burial site, and the songs we would like sung, yet still leave the most important question unanswered: Are we ready to meet the Lord?

Our sermon today is titled **“A Funeral Pre-Arrangement.”** In John 12, Mary honors Jesus before His death. Her example also invites us to consider how we will honor Jesus before our own death. Preparing for the life to come begins with how we respond to Him in the life we have now.

Let us be clear: our devotion does not buy eternal life. Our hope rests in Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again. We receive salvation by trusting Him. The Savior who gives us that hope is worthy of our love, fellowship, and service today.

As our passage opens, Jesus is sharing a meal in Bethany. Martha serves, and Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, reclines at the table. Mary brings a costly perfume, anoints Jesus’ feet, and wipes them with her hair. As its fragrance fills the house, she offers Him something precious while the moment is still hers.

This moment presents a tender challenge to each of us. We often assume there will be more time—time to listen to the Lord, draw near to Him, serve Him, or surrender what we have been holding back. Mary’s offering reminds us how precious today’s opportunity is. We can honor Jesus now.

As we enter this home together, we will see **DEVOTION IN WORSHIP**, expressed in Martha’s service, Lazarus’s fellowship, and Mary’s sacrificial service. We will hear **A DEFENSE OF WORSHIP** as Jesus responds to criticism of Mary’s offering and affirms its significance. In this we see that spiritual discernment recognizes the worth of Jesus and the value of costly devotion to Him. We will also consider **THE DIVISION OVER WORSHIP** as people respond to Him with curiosity, opposition, or faith. Our response to Jesus reveals whether curiosity and self-interest will keep us from trusting and honoring Him.

Each response brings us back to our hearts and to our theme: **The level of our devotion reflects the level of our discernment.** As we come to understand who Jesus is and what He has done for us, we see more clearly that He deserves our devotion.

One day, our earthly lives will end. What a comfort to face that day trusting the Savior—and what a privilege to spend the days before then honoring Him. As we consider this “funeral pre-

arrangement,” let us ask: Are we trusting Jesus for the life to come, and are we treasuring Him in the life He has given us today?

I. The Devotion in Worship – *12:1-3*

A. Worshipping God through Activity – *vv. 1-2a*

1. Jesus leaves the wilderness of Ephraim and joins the stream of pilgrims heading to Jerusalem – *“Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany ...”*
2. Instead of proceeding directly into Jerusalem, He stops two miles outside the city at the town He had recently been forced to vacate because of threats from the Jews – *“... where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.”*
3. It is interesting that it had been only a couple of weeks (at most) since Lazarus had been raised, and they were eager to show Christ great honor – *“So they made Him a supper there ...”*
4. This *“supper”* often refers to an elaborate dinner celebration¹ and indicates that Jesus was a particular guest of honor.
5. Christian service grows from grace already received; we serve with gratitude rather than attempting to place Christ in our debt.
6. It is understood that this was not at the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha – cp. *Matthew 26:6-7*.
7. This gesture of worship was even bolder considering the Sanhedrin’s charge that anyone who knew where Jesus was should report it – cp. *John 11:57*.
8. Instead of shrinking back in fear, the servants of Christ were all the more intent on paying Him public homage – letting their affection for Him be seen in an honest, sincere expression of their love
9. One of the most eloquent ways to express love for Christ is through “acts of service” – a particularly encouraging “dialect” of the love languages!
10. Here we see one of the most eloquent “servants” busily occupied showing her adoration to Christ through serving – *“... and Martha was serving.”* – cp. *1 Corinthians 15:58*.
 - a) *“was serving” [δῆκόνει] – (Imperfect, Act., Ind.) - she was active serving throughout the meal.*

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 215.

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN

- b) *The hands that prepared the meal were reflecting a heart of adoration that treasured the Savior.*

B. Worshipping God through Association – v. 2b

1. Yet another way people show their adoration for the Lord is through deep devotional fellowship with Him – “... *but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.*”
2. This is a beautiful picture of someone who has been the recipient of the tremendous grace of God, delighting in the presence of the Lord
3. We know there were at least 15 people at this meal – Jesus, the “Twelve,” Simon the Leper (the host), and Lazarus, but likely there were others.
4. Special mention is made of Lazarus being present – a particularly poignant illustration of the goal of God’s grace in a sinner’s life – the ability to fellowship with Him – cp. *Ephesians 2:5-6.*
5. There was never such complete a joy as in this picture - the gracious Master and the grace-filled sinner sharing tremendous fellowship because of the operation of God’s glorious grace.
6. This was in spite of the dangers of associating with Jesus, as John 11:57 shows.
7. Such is the sinner's enjoyment of the presence of the One who is Himself Grace – an occasion that evokes the most intense and purest worship.

C. Worshipping God through Attitudes – v. 3

1. We’ve seen someone worship through their activity on Christ’s behalf and through association with the One who is so gracious, but the final involvement centers on a deed that demonstrates an adoring attitude toward the Savior.
2. We are told that “*Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus*”
3. This ointment was a very precious perfume, acquired at great cost – a year’s salary – cp. v. 5.
 - a) *It was associated with luxury and distinction – used as an ingredient in ancient perfumes – belonging to the world of prized fragrances (like Roja Haute Luxe “ROH-zuh ought leeks” today).*
 - b) *It was associated with love in ancient Israel at the King’s table – cp. *Song of Solomon 1:12.**
 - c) *It was at times (according to Pliny) used to pay tribute to the dead, but other fragrances were more common due to the cost of Nard.*

4. We learn that it was sealed in an alabaster vial that had to be broken to release the oil (*Mark 14:3*).
5. She first anointed the Lord's head – a sign of great respect and love.
6. However, she wouldn't stop there ... treating this most expensive *"pure nard"* as though it were only common water, she poured the rest of the perfume on the feet of the Lord – an act of great devotion and worship.
7. So much had been used that she had to *"wipe His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."*
8. Such a loss of "decorum" was disgraceful for a woman – to let her hair down in public.
9. By doing this, she bears witness that no sacrifice is too costly for her and that no service is too menial, since she gives all to Him.
10. Thus, Mary demonstrates an attitude of fabulous devotion and sacrifice – withholding nothing dear to her from use in the worship of the Son of God.

II. The Defense of Worship – *12:4-8*

A. A Faulty Call to Secular Priorities – *vv. 4-6*

1. What is it that calls men to demonstrate their devotion to the Lord Jesus – that they will, by means of their activities, associations, and attitudes, hold Christ as the most precious thing?
2. We are first introduced to something tragic that serves as a contrast, helping us appreciate the proper motivation more clearly.
3. As Mary finishes drying the feet of Christ with her hair, *"Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor people?'"*
4. The problem is not a concern for the poor but a failure to appreciate the value of serving Christ.
5. Judas had been with the Lord throughout His ministry and had heard the same teaching and preaching as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.
6. However, he had held strong secular priorities during the most masterful teaching ever delivered, or ever to be delivered.
7. Yet he was offended that such a great "waste" had occurred in the worship of the Lord when there were better uses for such a tremendous amount of money
8. We are informed that Judas could not have cared less about the plight of the poor – *"Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor,*

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN

but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.”

9. However, we are told in the Synoptics that others of the disciples were angry with Mary for wasting this ointment – cp. *Matthew 26:8; Mark 14:4.*
10. His words invited others to admire his compassion while concealing his covetousness.
11. While Mary gives what she has to honor Jesus, Judas takes what Jesus had to gratify himself.
12. Exposure to truth, ministry responsibility, and familiarity with Christian language should lead us to examine our response to Christ, rather than assume its genuineness.

B. A Fruitful Comprehension of Salvation – vv. 7-8

1. However, in contrast to Judas, Mary may have been the best “listener” Jesus ever had – cp. *Luke 10:39.*
2. It is likely that she believed what no one else had believed – that before long, Jesus would be put to death by His enemies – cp. *John 10:11, 15; Matthew 16:21.*
3. Jesus immediately comes to her defense and confirms the insights Mary demonstrated – *“Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial.”*
4. This is best understood to mean that this ointment had been saved for the occasion of my burial.
5. However, if she believes she may not have another opportunity to show devotion to me, why would she wait until I’ve died to show me her devotion?
6. This corresponds to the Synoptic accounts of Christ’s statements about Mary’s motivation for what she had just done – see *Matthew 26:12; Mark 14:8.*
7. He then confirms her fear, saying, *“For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me.”*
8. Her devotion to the Lord seemed to spring from an awareness of what Jesus was about to do – she had listened well, and the Word had done its work in her heart – she may have been one of the first true believers in Jesus.

III. The Division Over Worship – 12:9-11

A. The Prevalence of Personal Curiosity – v. 9

1. At this point, focus on worship is curtailed because all those who had wondered whether Jesus would have the courage to show up for Passover heard that Jesus was in Bethany.
2. More than likely, they heard about Jesus' whereabouts from those who had traveled with Him from Ephraim and had proceeded into Jerusalem after Jesus stopped off in Bethany - *"the large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there."*
3. However, some of them were looking for Him out of carnal curiosity – not necessarily out of devotion to Christ – *"... and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead."*
4. Thus, we go from the purest form of worship to a challenge to worship – those who do not believe but are curious to know whether there are any sensational or dramatic displays for their amusement.
5. Curiosity may bring a person within hearing of the gospel; our responsibility is to direct that interest toward faith in Christ.
6. However, curiosity cannot merely be indulged; it needs to lead people to faith - Some indeed were led to believe in Jesus – cp. v. 11.
7. Some people first approach Christianity because of an unusual experience, a changed friend, or an unanswered question. Their initial interest need not be dismissed. We should meet it patiently with the truth about Jesus.
8. There is always a danger that churches can pander to a curious crowd at the expense of true worship.

B. The Priority of Personal Calculation – vv. 10-11

1. Another obstacle to worship is those who are so interested in their own vindication that they hate those who confront them with truth – *"But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because of account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus."*
2. The chief priests were the Sadducees – the sect that denied the reality of the resurrection – so Lazarus was a tremendously aggravating reality that embarrassed them doctrinally.
3. Their determination to silence Jesus now required them to silence what Jesus had done.
4. Religious leaders must ask whether they are protecting the truth or their position – too often, churches struggle under leadership that makes

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN

questions a form of personal attack.

5. Faith in Christ can require a change of allegiance when an authority, tradition, or relationship demands what contradicts Him – “... *many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.*”
6. Like many people today, Christianity will be rejected at all costs because it infringes on preconceived notions or encroaches on the world being enjoyed.

So What?

1. What would costly devotion to Jesus look like in your circumstances?
2. How can you distinguish wise stewardship from reluctance to give Jesus your best?
3. How should Jesus’ defense of Mary shape the way you evaluate other people’s expressions of love for him?
4. What draws you to Jesus, and how are those motives shaping your response to him?

Theme: The level of our devotion demonstrates the level of our discernment.

A Funeral Pre-Arrangement

John 12:1–11

The level of our devotion demonstrates the level of our discernment.

01 The Devotion in Worship

— John 12:1–3 —

Activity • Association • Attitudes

Martha serves with gratitude.
Lazarus delights in fellowship.
Mary gives in costly devotion.

02 The Defense of Worship

— John 12:4–8 —

Christ is worthy of our sacrifice.
Judas masks greed with concern.
Jesus defends Mary’s offering.
Her anointing anticipates His burial.

03 The Division Over Worship

— John 12:9–11 —

Curiosity • Opposition • Faith

The crowd comes to see Lazarus.
The chief priests seek to silence him.
Many believe in Jesus.