

# Mary Anoints Jesus In Bethany

Jesus and the disciples have just arrived in Jerusalem from the city of Jericho. John 12:1 says that it is six days before the Passover (Nisan 14) when Christ will be betrayed and crucified. In the Jewish calendar, a day began at 6:00 p.m. and ended the next day at 6:00 p.m. Therefore, six days before Nisan 14 would correspond to Nisan 8. So, Jesus and the disciples arrived in Jerusalem on Nisan 8 (25 March A.D. 33) and then Christ died on Nisan 14 (1 April A.D. 33). These two dates are very important because Daniel 9:24-26 prophesied the Messiah would die after the date of Nisan 7, (24 March A.D. 33). Nisan 8 marks the date that Jesus returned to Jerusalem. The second important date is Nisan 14, (April 1, A.D. 33). When Jesus died on that day, He fulfilled the prophecy. The gospels state that Jesus was crucified on a Friday during Passover. Passover is scheduled during a full moon. So, this date is easily determined using astronomy, which affirms that Jesus died on 14 Nisan 3793, (April 1, A.D. 33).

So John 12:1 reveals that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem one or two days after the end date of Daniel's prophecy, and six days before the Passover. Since Jesus died on Nisan 14 or April 1, this study is about the last week before Christ died. In this study Mary anoints the feet of Jesus. On the next day, the triumphal entry of Christ takes place (Nisan 9). The last three chapters in Mathew and Mark, the last six chapters in Luke, and the last ten chapters in John are devoted to the last week of Jesus' life and a few events that occurred later. We have entered a wonderful and fascinating time in the last days before Christ died. Our study is in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 11:55-12:11.

**Arriving In Jerusalem To Die.** In the last study, Zacchaeus was saved and Jesus declared that He had come to seek and to save the lost. That wonderful statement captures the reason He came to earth. He came to die so that those who believe in Him will be saved from their sins. Earlier He had told them they were going to Jerusalem and there He would die. It was time for Him to die to satisfy God the Father's wrath against our sin. 1 John 2:2 says that Jesus was the propitiation for our sins.

Romans 3:25 states that Jesus became the propitiation for our sins when His blood was shed. That is, He satisfied the Father's wrath against sin. As a result, men and women could now be saved.

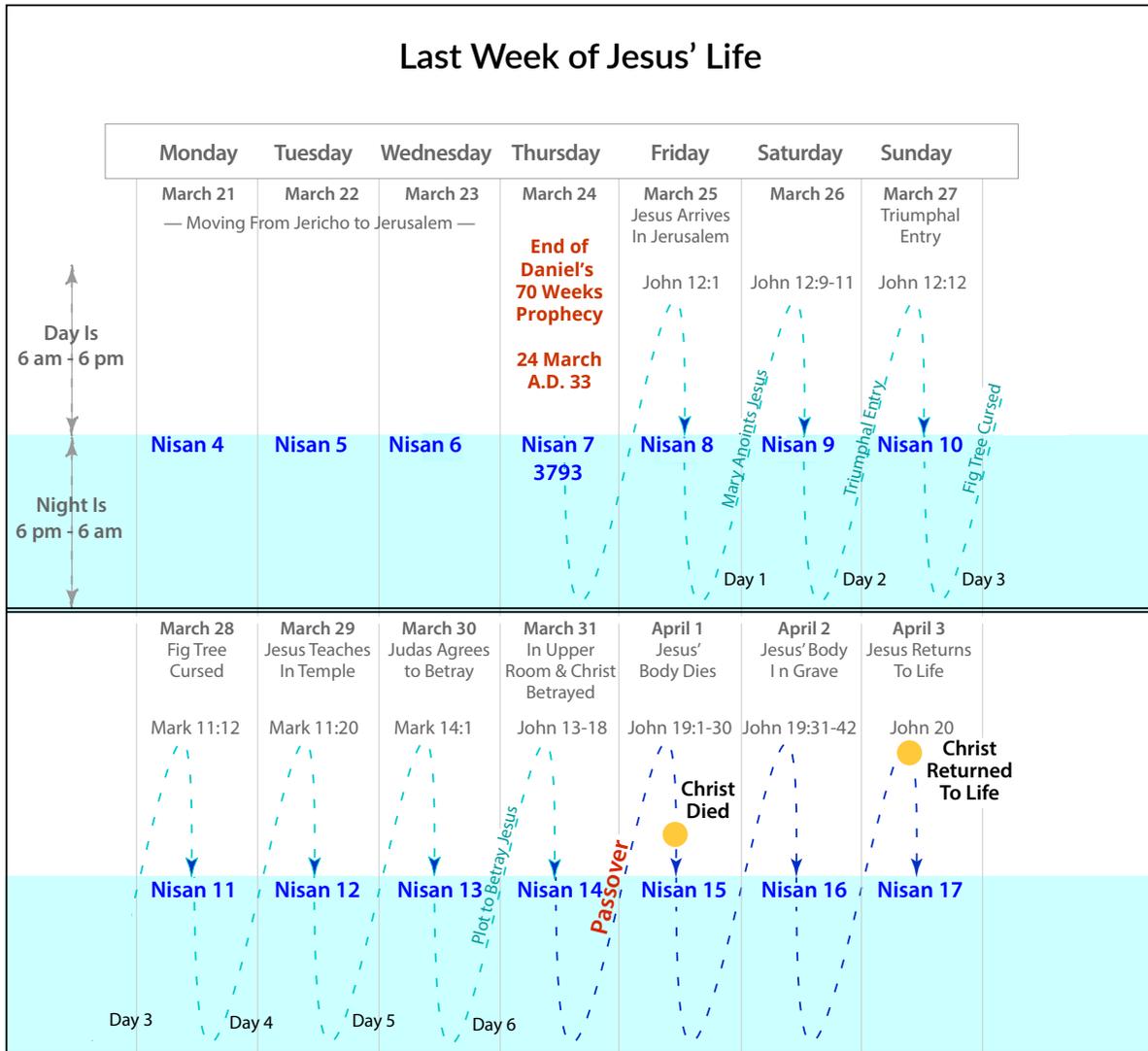
A small number of people were

saved during His three years of ministry. His preaching and miracles convicted people of their sin and need for a Savior. Zacchaeus was the last one person who had been saved. Now they are in Jerusalem. The climax of Jesus' ministry is just six days away.

If we look back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the gospel of John we discover that the first six days in Jesus' ministry were described. John 1:19-28, 29-34, 35-42, and

43-51 refer to the "next day" four times, and then describe an event. Jesus' miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee is described in John 2:1-11. We are told that occurred on the second day, or the sixth. That was the beginning of His ministry. Now





the last six days of Jesus' ministry are going to be described (John 12:1, 12; Mark 11:12, 20; 14:1; John 19:1-30). At the beginning of His ministry, John the Baptist announced that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Five men (James, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael) heard him and confidently believed Jesus was the Messiah. Now Jesus will soon be welcomed as the King of Israel and then be rejected as the King of the Jews. At the beginning of His ministry, He performed a miracle to demonstrate that He is our God and the promised Messiah. Now the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies will occur, proving Jesus is the promised Messiah. He will die and be resurrected. We are entering the final, glorious, six days of Jesus' ministry that prove He is also our Messiah and the eternal Son, our God (Romans 1:3-4).

**Hateful Enemies of Christ.** John 11:55-57 tell us the Passover feast was near. Historians say that about one to two million Jews came to Jerusalem for the Passover. They came from various countries around the Mediterranean, from the west, east, north, and from the south. Here is the passage.

Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him. John

## 11:55-57 (NASB)

Verse 55 says that many Jews came from “out of the country.” That is, they came from outside Judea. They came for the Passover to purify themselves and also to see Jesus. Jesus’ reputation had spread far and wide around the nearby countries. The people were wondering if Jesus would come for the feast. The chief priests and the Pharisees were hoping He would come. They wanted to kill Him. That decision had already been made months ago (John 11:50). So they gave orders to the people to report to them if Jesus arrived.

**Jesus in Bethany Before Passover.** Jesus did come! He came six days before the Passover. John 12:1-2 say,

**Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. John 12:1-2 (NASB)**

In the Jewish calendar, the sixth day before Passover would be 8 Nisan 3793 (25 March A.D. 33).<sup>1</sup> Verses 1-3 reveal that on this day, Nisan 8, Jesus had dinner with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. The Greek for supper is *deipnon*. It referred to the main meal of the day. This word was also used of the Last Supper which occurred in the evening hours (John 13:2, 4). So, most likely the dinner occurred during the evening hours of Nisan 8 or Friday evening.

John 12:9 refers to a large crowd of the Jews. The order of the words in the Greek text emphasizes the word “learned.” That is, a large crowd learned about Jesus and came looking for Him. It is not likely the crowd heard about Him in the evening and immediately came to Him. Most likely they came the next day, the daylight hours of Saturday, on the last part of Nisan 8, or March 26. So, the dinner and the crowd arrived on parts of Nisan 8.

Then John 12:12-13 states the Triumphal Entry occurred the next day, that is Nisan 9, which would be during the daylight hours of Nisan 10 or Sunday. That is when the

Triumphal Entry occurred. So, that is the chronology of John 12:1 to the Triumphal Entry. That is, John 12:1 occurred before the Triumphal Entry.

However, there is some confusion about the date of when the dinner actually occurred. Both Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:1-9 seem to imply this same dinner occurred just two days before the Passover—not six days. Consequently, some struggle with this chronological difference. But the problem is solved by remembering an important principle that the Holy Spirit wrote all of Scripture, and God cannot lie. Thus, both Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:1-9 have not given us conflicting information but more data about what happened.

Therefore, how do we combine these three passages together? First, we must remember that Matthew has not always recorded everything in chronological order because his gospel is arranged topically. Second, Mark has been recording everything in chronological sequence. Third, the same is true for the gospel of John. This means that John 12:1 is historically accurate and Mark 14:1-9 is also historically accurate. Matthew 26:6-13 just provides a summary for his own purpose.

So how can both Mark and John be accurate? The starting point is to trust the Holy Spirit that John 12:1 accurately records the event in proper historical sequence. John 12:1 says it happened before the Triumphal Entry.

Second, Mark refers to the dinner in Mark 14:3-9 after telling us that there are only days before the Passover.

**Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; for they were saying, “Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people.” Mark 14:1-2 (NASB)**

Then Mark 14:3 says, “While He was in Bethany.”

**While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His**

<sup>1</sup> B. F. Wescott. The Gospel According to St. John. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975. p. 176. Also, Alfred Edersheim. The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. Eerdmans Publishing, 1973. Part 2, p. 357.

[head. Mark 14:3 \(NASB\)](#)

The “while He was in Bethany,” refers back to the time that Jesus was in Bethany and the dinner was served before the Triumphal Entry in John 12:1. This means that Mark 14:3 is simply a memory of the events that occurred at dinner before the Triumphal Entry.

Mark 14:3-9 recalls the event, apparently to help us understand that it helped motivate Judas to betray Jesus. Notice that verse 10 says that Judas then went to the chief priests in order to betray Jesus.

[Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them.](#)

[Mark 14:10 \(NASB\)](#)

Verse 11 says the chief priests agreed to give him money. Matthew 26:14-15 adds that Judas negotiated the price for the betrayal.

In summary, the event described in Matthew 26:6-13

agrees with Mark 14:3-9 and provides the same explanation of Judas’ decision to betray Jesus. The money motivated Judas to betray Jesus because he wanted money.

So, we have discussed the differences between Matthew, Mark, and John about the date of the supper. Also, we will discuss Judas’ financial negotiations with the chief priests in exchange for betraying Jesus later in verse John 12:4.

**A Celebration for Jesus.** John 12:1 tells us that Jesus arrived in the small village called Bethany. Bethany was about two miles (3.2 km) east of Jerusalem. This was the home-village of the two sisters, Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus (John 11:1-2). Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-46). It was an incredible miracle that had shocked Jerusalem, and panicked the religious leaders

(John 11:46-53). Because of the miracle, the leaders planned to kill Jesus. John 11:54 tells us that is the reason Jesus and the disciples had immediately traveled north into Galilee and spent most of their time in Perea (east side of the Jordan River). They had left because the time had not arrived for Jesus to die. But now it has been three months since they left Bethany. Jesus and the disciples have returned, because the time for His death had arrived. He will die in a few days.

John 12:1-2 tells us that Jesus met with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 add that Jesus had entered the home of Simon the Leper. That is, everyone met together in Simon’s home. All three gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John also tell us that Jesus was reclining at table. That is, Jesus had supper in Simon the Leper’s home with

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in celebration of Jesus’ arrival! Also, Matthew 26:8 says the disciples were present. That agrees with John 12:4.

This strongly implies that Simon had been healed by Jesus previously. Otherwise, they

would not be meeting in his home. To eat in the home of a leper was forbidden by Mosaic Law (Leviticus 13:45-46; Numbers 5:2; Deuteronomy 24:8-9). There was no cure for leprosy until modern times.

**Spiritually Sensitive Mary.** All three gospels tell us that a woman had anointed Jesus’ feet with a very costly perfume. Matthew and Mark do not give us her name, but the gospel of John tells us that her name was Mary. Martha did not anoint Jesus’ feet and neither did Mary Magdalene. We know this Mary was not Mary Magdalene because every time she is mentioned in the gospels she is described as Mary Magdalene.

[Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure](#)



nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. John 12:3 (NASB)

Matthew and Mark say that Mary anointed Jesus' head and the gospel of John adds that she also anointed His feet. The reason for the difference between the gospels may be that she spent less time anointing his feet. Most likely John recorded the anointing of Jesus later because Jesus washed the feet of the disciples in the Upper Room. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, it was a significant event that revealed Jesus' great humility. He humbled himself like a slave. In the time of Christ, only slaves washed another person's feet. Foot washing was considered a humiliating act. So, Mary displayed incredible humility as she washed Jesus' feet, and then used her hair to dry them! It was an act of incredible submission.

All three gospels tell us the perfume she used was very expensive. Matthew and Mark state the perfume was in an alabaster vial. Alabaster is an elegant material. Mark 14:3 adds that Mary broke the vial and then poured it on his head. That is, she destroyed the vial in order to anoint Jesus.

We are also told the perfume Mary used was pure nard or spikenard.<sup>2</sup> But how expensive was the perfume? Matthew 26:8-9 gives us two hints that the perfume was extremely expensive.

**But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor." Matthew 26:8-9 (NASB)**

First, we are told the disciples were 'indignant' that Mary did this. The Greek word for indignant means they were angry because they thought her action was wrong. That is, they thought she wasted the perfume.

The second reason we know the perfume was expensive is that the disciples agreed the perfume should have been sold, not poured on Jesus, and the proceeds then given to the poor. That also implies the perfume was very expensive.

**Spiritually Insensitive Disciples.** Mark 14:4-5

also tells us that some were indignant and scolded Mary because the perfume could have been sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor. The verse says,

**But there were some indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume could have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her. Mark 14:4-5 (NASB)**

John 12:4-6 reveals that Judas was one of the complainers.

**But 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 poor people?" Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. John 12:4-6 (NASB)**

John 12:3 has already told us the perfume weighed one pound, which would have been 327.5 grams, or twelve ounces of liquid.<sup>3</sup> That would have been an incredible act since the perfume was so very expensive. Both Mark 14:4-5 and John 12:5 state the perfume was worth three hundred denarii. Since a denarii was a day's wages for an hourly worker, the three hundred denarii would have been the wages for almost one year.

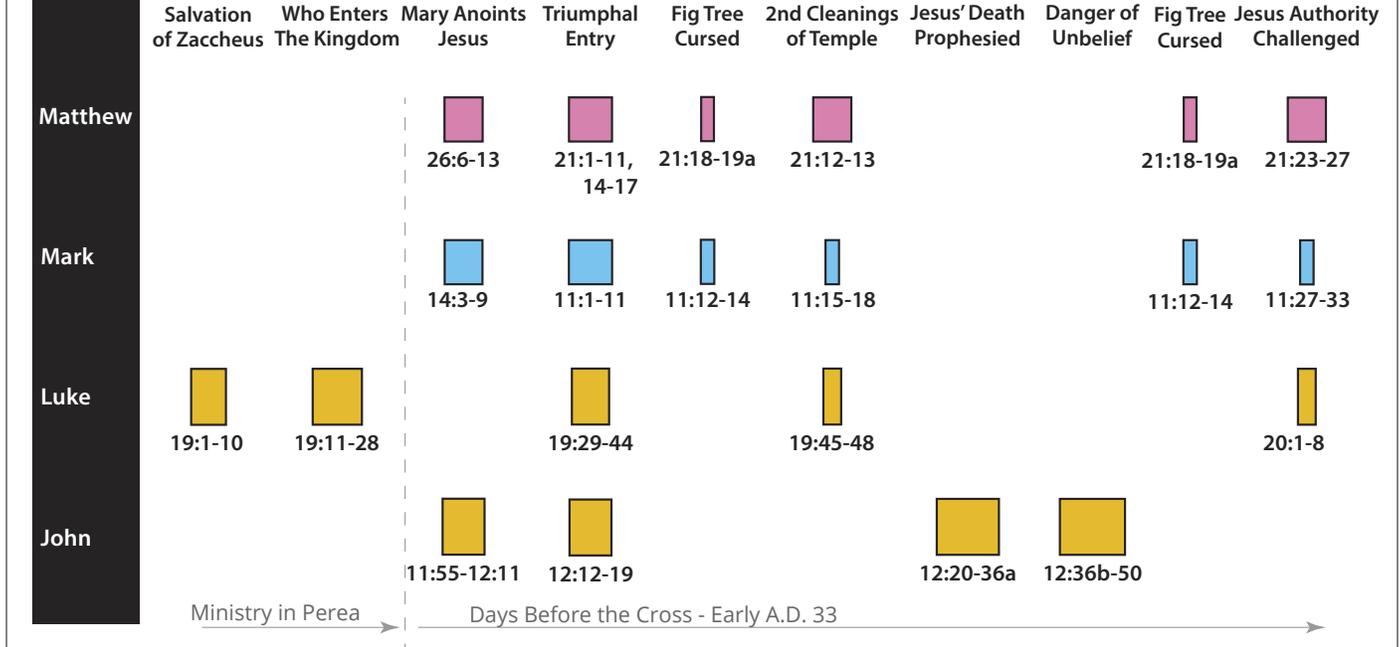
Now why did the gospel of John report that Judas complained about this huge sum of money? The Holy Spirit may have moved John to record this since Judas was greedy for money. If the perfume had been sold, the money would have first been put into the money box from which Judas could have stolen some of it. When Mary poured the perfume, Judas lost an opportunity to obtain some of it for himself. This probably motivated Judas to negotiate the price for betraying Jesus to the chief priests. That will occur in about five days. This event could have motivated Judas to betray Jesus. We can be confident Judas was disappointed the chief

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Wescott., p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Klink III. John. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Zondervan. 2016. p. 525.

# Life and Heart of Jesus

Days Before Jesus' Death - March A.D. 33



priests offered him only thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus. It is estimated the pieces of silver was about four months of wages, and not one year's wages. But Judas took it anyway. Surely he was disappointed. We will discuss Judas and the chief priests more later.

It is also important to notice that none of the disciples thought about Mary's desire to honor Jesus. They did not think about her act of worship. They did not care about Mary, so they scolded her. They valued the money more than Jesus. Even now, they did not realize that Jesus was God. What a contrast between Mary and the twelve disciples, especially Judas.

Mary sacrificed almost one year of wages because she loved Jesus and wanted to show Him the greatest honor she could. She worshiped Jesus. King David said,

**“For I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing.” 2 Samuel 24:24 (NASB)**

So Mary sacrificed a fortune for Jesus. But not the disciples, and especially Judas. They valued money more. Jesus said

that we either serve money or God. Mary worshiped Christ.

What a lesson for us! When some believers give to the Lord, they give as little as they can—what is comfortable. What is worse is that some give to the Lord and then selfishly want to be rewarded with money. When some people serve Christ in a ministry, they fail to serve Christ. Instead, they serve themselves. Some want a ministry so that they can feel good about themselves, rather than seeking to please Christ. Some seek approval or honor, rather than seeking to please Christ. Did the disciples object to the perfume because it sounded spiritual and that it might make them look spiritual? Whatever their motive, they did not have the heart of Mary. Then Jesus replied,

**“Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial.” John 12:7 (NASB)**

Jesus comes to Mary's defense. Jesus commands them to leave her alone. We can be confident that Mary appreciated Jesus' help. I would imagine she is feeling hurt by their criticism. His statement “so that she may keep it for the day of My

burial,” is best understood as meaning that she had kept the perfume for His burial. That agrees with Mark 14:8, which records these additional words from Jesus,

[She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Mark 14:8 \(NASB\)](#)

Jesus also defended her in two other ways. Jesus said that Mary had performed a good deed for Him (Mark 14:6). He also said ,

[“For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me.” Mark 14:7 \(NASB\)](#)

This does not mean we should not give to the poor. Rather, we should understand that Jesus is more important than the poor. We know that is true. So did Jesus. He simply spoke the truth. We would not want Him to say anything less. Then Jesus said,

[“Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the entire world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her.” Mark 14:9 \(NASB\)](#)

The disciples, including Judas, could not and did not appreciate the wonderful deed that Mary had performed. We are not told if Mary had the spiritual insight to understand that Jesus was about to be crucified and buried. She may have. But it is obvious the disciples did not. They were not thinking about Jesus!

**The Curious, Hateful People.** Now the gospel of John tells us about a large crowd on the next day. It is obvious that verse 9 describes the events of the next day. It is highly doubtful that a *large crowd* would have arrived on Friday evening, at the beginning of Nisan 8. Why would a large crowd gather in the evening hours after the supper? This means it is the morning or afternoon of Saturday, the rest of Nisan 8. Verse 9 states,

[The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was](#)

[there; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. John 12:9 \(NASB\)](#)

A large number of people came to see Jesus and Lazarus. They were the curiosity seekers. Jesus was the hottest attraction for everyone. His fame had spread around the Mediterranean Sea area. They wanted to see a sign or hear a speech.

Verse 10 adds that the chief priest planned to murder Lazarus too!

[But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus. John 12:10-11 \(NASB\)](#)

They wanted Jesus and Lazarus dead. They were motivated in opposition because Jesus had a tremendous following and people were believing in Him.

**Conclusion.** Within less than twenty-four hours, four groups of people had spoken with Jesus or been near Him. The first group of people were four friends who loved Him. They celebrated His return with a meal. They believed in Jesus and loved Jesus.

The second group of people were the twelve disciples. They were at the dinner too! They had become accustomed to Jesus. They had watched Jesus do many miracles and signs, such as feeding twenty-five thousand people, walking on the water, and exercising control over storms, winds, water, disease, and demons. It was exciting and thrilling. His teachings were incredible. So, when the perfume was poured on Jesus’ head and feet, they were more concerned about the money, especially Judas. Now someone should have been concerned that they shared Judas’ objection. The disciples were the indifferent people. They believed in Jesus too, except for Judas, but their love was not strong. In six days, they will flee when Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The third group of people were the curious. For them, Jesus was like a religious entertainer. They were the unbelievers who were curious about Jesus. But they would never seek His forgiveness.

The fourth group was the chief priests and Judas. They were the hateful unbelievers. They would slander, malign, and deny He is God. They wanted to kill Christ. One of them was Judas. He is like some people in the church who are not really Christians, but they are religiously moral. They won't leave the church, but they will not follow Jesus either.

The fifth group was one person, a woman named Mary. She represents every committed believer who is willing to sacrifice everything for Jesus and endure the scolding. Apparently, she had heard Jesus say that He was going to die, and so out of love for Him, she sacrificed a fortune in perfume in preparation for his burial. The last time Jesus was in Bethany, the disciples had warned Him the religious leaders wanted to stone Him (John 11:8). Maybe she had heard His comments. Whatever the reason, she represents every true believer. She sacrificially displayed her love and adoration for Christ by her actions. Do you?