

Table of Contents

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 1-11

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21

THE MACARTHUR
NEW TESTAMENT
COMMENTARY
JOHN 1-11

John MacArthur Jr.

MOODY PUBLISHERS/CHICAGO

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
Preface	vii
Introduction to John	1
1. The Divine Word (John 1:1–5)	13
2. Responding to the Incarnate Word (John 1:6–13)	25
3. The Glory of the Incarnate Word (John 1:14–18)	37
4. John the Baptist’s Testimony to Christ (John 1:19–37)	47
5. The Balance of Salvation (John 1:38–51)	59
6. Christ’s First Miracle (John 2:1–11)	75
7. Jesus Displays His Deity (John 2:12–25)	85
8. The New Birth (John 3:1–10)	97
9. Responding to the Divine Offer of Salvation (John 3:11–21)	109
10. From John to Jesus (John 3:22–36)	121
11. The Living Water (John 4:1–26)	135
12. The Savior of the World (John 4:27–42)	151
13. Christ’s Response to Unbelief (John 4:43–54)	161
14. The Persecuted Jesus (John 5:1–16)	169
15. The Most Startling Claim Ever Made (John 5:17–24)	181
16. The Two Resurrections (John 5:25–29)	193

17.	Witnesses to the Deity of Christ (John 5:30–47)	203
18.	A Miraculous Meal (John 6:1–15)	217
19.	Characteristics of True and False Disciples (John 6:16–29)	227
20.	The Bread of Life—Part 1: Jesus, the True Bread from Heaven (John 6:30–50)	239
21.	The Bread of Life—Part 2: Appropriating the Bread of Life (John 6:51–59)	255
22.	The Bread of Life—Part 3: Responding to the Bread of Life (John 6:60–71)	265
23.	Following the Divine Timetable (John 7:1–13)	275
24.	Verifying the Claims of Christ (John 7:14–24)	285
25.	Reactions to the Claims of Christ (John 7:25–36)	299
26.	Answering Life's Ultimate Question (John 7:37–52)	309
27.	Jesus Confronts Hypocrisy (John 7:53–8:11)	321
28.	Jesus: The Light of the World (John 8:12–21)	331
29.	How to Die in Your Sins (John 8:22–30)	341
30.	The Truth Will Make You Free (John 8:31–36)	351
31.	Children of Abraham, or Satan? (John 8:37–47)	363
32.	Jesus Confronts His Enemies (John 8:48–59)	375
33.	Jesus Opens Blind Eyes (John 9:1–12)	387
34.	Unbelief Investigates a Miracle (John 9:13–34)	397
35.	Spiritual Sight or Spiritual Blindness? (John 9:35–41)	409
36.	The Good Shepherd (John 10:1–21)	421
37.	Rejecting the Claims of Christ (John 10:22–42)	437
38.	The Resurrection and the Life—Part One: Sickness for the Glory of God (John 11:1–16)	449
39.	The Resurrection and the Life—Part Two: The Arrival of the Savior (John 11:17–36)	459
40.	The Resurrection and the Life—Part Three: The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:37–44)	469
41.	The Resurrection and the Life—Part Four: Reactions to the Resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:45–57)	477
	Bibliography	487
	Index of Greek Words	489
	Index of Scripture	491
	Index of Subjects	503

The Divine Word

1

(John 1:1–5)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (1:1–5)

The opening section of John's gospel expresses the most profound truth in the universe in the clearest terms. Though easily understood by a child, John's Spirit-inspired words convey a truth beyond the ability of the greatest minds in human history to fathom: the eternal, infinite God became a man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The glorious, incontrovertible truth that in Jesus the divine "Word became flesh" (1:14) is the theme of John's gospel.

The deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is an essential, nonnegotiable tenet of the Christian faith. Several lines of biblical evidence flow together to prove conclusively that He is God.

First, the direct statements of Scripture affirm that Jesus is God. In keeping with his emphasis on Christ's deity, John records several of those statements. The opening verse of his gospel declares, "the Word [Jesus]

was God" (see the discussion of this verse later in this chapter). In John's gospel Jesus repeatedly assumed for Himself the divine name "I am" (cf. 4:26; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19: 18:5, 6, 8). In 10:30, He claimed to be one in nature and essence with the Father (that the unbelieving Jews recognized this as a claim to deity is clear from their reaction in v. 33; cf. 5:18). Nor did Jesus correct Thomas when he addressed Him as "My Lord and my God!" (20:28); in fact, He praised him for his faith (v. 29). Jesus' reaction is inexplicable if He were not God.

To the Philippians Paul wrote, "[Jesus] existed in the form of God," possessing absolute "equality with God" (Phil. 2:6). In Colossians 2:9 he declared, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Romans 9:5 refers to Christ as "God blessed forever"; Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 call Him "our God and Savior." God the Father addressed the Son as God in Hebrews 1:8: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom." In his first epistle John referred to Jesus Christ as "the true God" (1 John 5:20).

Second, Jesus Christ receives titles elsewhere in Scripture given to God. As noted above, Jesus took for Himself the divine name "I am." In John 12:40 John quoted Isaiah 6:10, a passage which in Isaiah's vision refers to God (cf. Isa. 6:5). Yet in verse 41 John declared, "These things Isaiah said because he saw His [Christ's; cf. vv. 36, 37, 42] glory, and he spoke of Him." Jeremiah prophesied that the Messiah would be called "The Lord [YHWH] our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6).

God and Jesus are both called Shepherd (Ps. 23:1—John 10:14); Judge (Gen. 18:25—2 Tim. 4:1, 8); Holy One (Isa. 10:20—Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27; 3:14); First and Last (Isa. 44:6; 48:12—Rev. 1:17; 22:13); Light (Ps. 27:1—John 8:12); Lord of the Sabbath (Ex. 16:23, 29; Lev. 19:3—Matt. 12:8); Savior (Isa. 43:11—Acts 4:12; Titus 2:13); Pierced One (Zech. 12:10—John 19:37); Mighty God (Isa. 10:21—Isa. 9:6); Lord of lords (Deut. 10:17—Rev. 17:14); Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8—Rev. 22:13); Lord of Glory (Ps. 24:10—1 Cor. 2:8); and Redeemer (Isa. 41:14; 48:17; 63:16—Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12).

Third, Jesus Christ possesses the incommunicable attributes of God, those unique to Him. Scripture reveals Christ to be eternal (Mic. 5:2; Isa. 9:6), omnipresent (Matt. 18:20; 28:20), omniscient (Matt. 11:27; John 16:30; 21:17), omnipotent (Phil. 3:21), immutable (Heb. 13:8), sovereign (Matt. 28:18), and glorious (John 17:5; 1 Cor. 2:8; cf. Isa. 42:8; 48:11, where God states that He will not give His glory to another).

Fourth, Jesus Christ does the works that only God can do. He created all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16), sustains the creation (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3), raises the dead (John 5:21; 11:25-44), forgives sin (Mark 2:10; cf. v. 7), and His word stands forever (Matt. 24:35; cf. Isa. 40:8).

Fifth, Jesus Christ received worship (Matt. 14:33; 28:9; John 9:38;

Phil. 2:10; Heb. 1:6)—even though He taught that only God is to be worshiped (Matt. 4:10). Scripture also records that both holy men (Acts 10:25–26) and holy angels (Rev. 22:8–9) refused worship.

Finally, Jesus Christ received prayer, which is only to be addressed to God (John 14:13–14; Acts 7:59–60; 1 John 5:13–15).

Verses 1–18, the prologue to John’s presentation of the deity of Christ, are a synopsis or overview of the entire book. John clearly defined his purpose in writing his gospel in 20:31—that his readers “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [they] may have life in His name.” John revealed Jesus Christ as “the Son of God,” the eternal second person of the Trinity. He became a man, the “Christ” (Messiah), and offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins. Those who put their faith in Him will “have life in His name,” while those who reject Him will be judged and sentenced to eternal punishment.

The reality that Jesus is God, introduced in the prologue, is expounded throughout the book by John’s careful selection of claims and miracles that seal the case. Verses 1–3 of the prologue teach that Jesus is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father; verses 4–5 relate the salvation He brought, which was announced by His herald, John the Baptist (vv. 6–8); verses 9–13 describe the reaction of the human race to Him, either rejection (vv. 10–11) or acceptance (vv. 12–13); verses 14–18 summarize the entire prologue.

The prologue also introduces several key terms that appear throughout the book, including light (3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36, 46), darkness (3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46), life (3:15–16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:21, 24, 26, 39–40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47–48, 51, 53–54, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2, 3; 20:31), witness (or testify; 2:25; 3:11; 5:31, 36, 39; 7:7; 8:14; 10:25; 12:17; 15:26–27; 18:37), glory (2:11; 5:41, 44; 7:18; 8:50, 54; 11:4, 40; 12:41; 17:5, 22, 24), and world (3:16–17, 19; 4:42; 6:14, 33, 51; 7:7; 8:12, 23, 26; 9:5, 39; 10:36; 11:27; 12:19, 31, 46–47; 13:1; 14:17, 19, 22, 27, 30–31; 15:18–19; 16:8, 11, 20, 28, 33; 17:5–6, 9, 11, 13–16, 18, 21, 23–25; 18:36–37).

From the first five verses of John’s gospel prologue flow three evidences of the deity of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ: His preexistence, His creative power, and His self-existence.

THE PREEXISTENCE OF THE WORD

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. (1:1–2)

Archē (**beginning**) can mean “source,” or “origin” (cf. Col. 1:18; Rev. 3:14); or “rule,” “authority,” “ruler,” or “one in authority” (cf. Luke 12:11;

20:20; Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1). Both of those connotations are true of Christ, who is both the Creator of the universe (v. 3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) and its ruler (Col. 2:10; Eph. 1:20–22; Phil. 2:9–11). But *archē* refers here to the **beginning** of the universe depicted in Genesis 1:1.

Jesus Christ **was** already in existence when the heavens and the earth were created; thus, He is not a created being, but existed from all eternity. (Since time began with the creation of the physical universe, whatever existed before that creation is eternal.) “The Logos [Word] did not then begin to be, but at that point at which all else began to be, He already *was*. In the beginning, place it where you may, the Word already existed. In other words, the Logos is before time, eternal.” (Marcus Dods, “John” in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. *The Expositors’ Bible Commentary* [Reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002], 1:683. Emphasis in original.). That truth provides definitive proof of Christ’s deity, for only God is eternal.

The imperfect tense of the verb *eimi* (**was**), describing continuing action in the past, further reinforces the eternal preexistence of the Word. It indicates that He was continuously in existence before the beginning. But even more significant is the use of *eimi* instead of *ginomai* (“became”). The latter term refers to things that come into existence (cf. 1:3, 10, 12, 14). Had John used *ginomai*, he would have implied that the Word came into existence at the beginning along with the rest of creation. But *eimi* stresses that the Word always existed; there was never a point when He came into being.

The concept of the **Word** (*logos*) is one imbued with meaning for both Jews and Greeks. To the Greek philosophers, the *logos* was the impersonal, abstract principle of reason and order in the universe. It was in some sense a creative force, and also the source of wisdom. The average Greek may not have fully understood all the nuances of meaning with which the philosophers invested the term *logos*. Yet even to laymen the term would have signified one of the most important principles in the universe.

To the Greeks, then, John presented Jesus as the personification and embodiment of the *logos*. Unlike the Greek concept, however, Jesus was not an impersonal source, force, principle, or emanation. In Him, the true *logos* who was God became a man—a concept foreign to Greek thought.

But *logos* was not just a Greek concept. The word of the Lord was also a significant Old Testament theme, well-known to the Jews. The word of the Lord was the expression of divine power and wisdom. By His word God introduced the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15:1), gave Israel the Ten Commandments (Ex. 24:3–4; Deut. 5:5; cf. Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:10),

attended the building of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:11-13), revealed God to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:21), pronounced judgment on the house of Eli (1 Kings 2:27), counseled Elijah (1 Kings 19:9ff.), directed Israel through God's spokesmen (cf. 1 Sam. 15:10ff.; 2 Sam. 7:4ff.; 24:11ff.; 1 Kings 16:1-4; 17:2-4., 8ff.; 18:1; 21:17-19; 2 Chron. 11:2-4), was the agent of creation (Ps. 33:6), and revealed Scripture to the prophets (Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 1:3; Dan. 9:2; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Mal. 1:1).

John presented Jesus to his Jewish readers as the incarnation of divine power and revelation. He initiated the new covenant (Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:15; 12:24), instructs believers (John 10:27), unites them into a spiritual temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21), revealed God to man (John 1:18; 14:7-9), judges those who reject Him (John 3:18; 5:22), directs the church through those whom He has raised up to lead it (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-3), was the agent of creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), and inspired the Scripture penned by the New Testament writers (John 14:26) through the Holy Spirit whom He sent (John 15:26). As the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ is God's final word to mankind: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2).

Then John took his argument a step further. In His eternal pre-existence **the Word was with God**. The English translation does not bring out the full richness of the Greek expression (*pros ton theon*). That phrase means far more than merely that the Word existed with God; it "[gives] the picture of two personal beings facing one another and engaging in intelligent discourse" (W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* [Chicago: Moody, 1979], 49). From all eternity Jesus, as the second person of the trinity, was "with the Father [*pros ton patera*]" (1 John 1:2) in deep, intimate fellowship. Perhaps *pros ton theon* could best be rendered "face-to-face." The Word is a person, not an attribute of God or an emanation from Him. And He is of the same essence as the Father.

Yet in an act of infinite condescension, Jesus left the glory of heaven and the privilege of face-to-face communion with His Father (cf. John 17:5). He willingly "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. . . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). Charles Wesley captured some of the wonder of that marvelous truth in the familiar hymn "And Can It Be That I Should Gain?":

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.

Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

John's description of the Word reached its pinnacle in the third clause of this opening verse. Not only did the Word exist from all eternity, and have face-to-face fellowship with God the Father, but also **the Word was God**. That simple statement, only four words in both English and Greek (*theos ēn ho logos*), is perhaps the clearest and most direct declaration of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture.

But despite their clarity, heretical groups almost from the moment John penned these words have twisted their meaning to support their false doctrines concerning the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Noting that *theos* (**God**) is anarthrous (not preceded by the definite article), some argue that it is an indefinite noun and mistranslate the phrase, "the Word was divine" (i.e., merely possessing some of the qualities of God) or, even more appalling, "the Word was *a* god."

The absence of the article before *theos*, however, does not make it indefinite. *Logos* (**Word**) has the definite article to show that it is the subject of the sentence (since it is in the same case as *theos*). Thus the rendering "God was the Word" is invalid, because "the Word," not "God," is the subject. It would also be theologically incorrect, because it would equate the Father ("God" whom the Word was with in the preceding clause) with the Word, thus denying that the two are separate persons. The predicate nominative (**God**) describes the nature of the Word, showing that He is of the same essence as the Father (cf. H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* [Toronto: MacMillan, 1957], 139-40; A. T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* [Reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], 67-68).

According to the rules of Greek grammar, when the predicate nominative (**God** in this clause) precedes the verb, it cannot be considered indefinite (and thus translated "a god" instead of **God**) merely because it does not have the article. That the term **God** is definite and refers to the true God is obvious for several reasons. First, *theos* appears without the definite article four other times in the immediate context (vv. 6, 12, 13, 18; cf. 3:2, 21; 9:16; Matt. 5:9). Not even the Jehovah's Witnesses' distorted translation of the Bible renders the anarthrous *theos* "a god" in those verses. Second, if John's meaning was that the Word was divine, or a god, there were ways he could have phrased it to make that unmistakably clear. For example, if he meant to say that the Word was merely in some sense divine, he could have used the adjective *theios* (cf. 2 Peter

1:4). It must be remembered that, as Robert L. Reymond notes, “No standard Greek lexicon offers ‘divine’ as one of the meanings of *theos*, nor does the noun become an adjective when it ‘sheds’ its article” (*Jesus, Divine Messiah* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presb. & Ref., 1990], 303). Or if he had wanted to say that the Word was a god, he could have written *ho logos ēn theos*. If John had written *ho theos ēn ho logos*, the two nouns (*theos* and *logos*) would be interchangeable, and God and the Word would be identical. That would have meant that the Father was the Word, which, as noted above, would deny the Trinity. But as Leon Morris asks rhetorically, “How else [other than *theos ēn ho logos*] in Greek would one say, ‘the Word was God’?” (*The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 77 n. 15).

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John chose the precise wording that accurately conveys the true nature of the Word, Jesus Christ. “By *theos* without the article, John neither indicates, on the one hand, identity of Person with the Father; nor yet, on the other, any lower nature than that of God Himself” (H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John* [Reprint; Winona Lake, Ind.: Alpha, 1979], 48).

Underscoring their significance, John restated the profound truths of verse 1 in verse 2. He emphasized again the eternity of the Word; **He** already **was** in existence **in the beginning** when everything else was created. As it did in verse 1, the imperfect tense of the verb *eimi* (**was**) describes the Word’s continuous existence before **the beginning**. And as John also noted in verse 1, that existence was one of intimate fellowship **with God** the Father.

The truth of Jesus Christ’s deity and full equality with the Father is a nonnegotiable element of the Christian faith. In 2 John 10 John warned, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching [the biblical teaching concerning Christ; cf. vv. 7, 9], do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting.” Believers are not to aid heretical false teachers in any way, including giving those who have blasphemed Christ food and lodging, since the one who does so “participates in [their] evil deeds” (v. 11). Such seemingly uncharitable behavior is perfectly justified toward false teachers who deny the deity of our Lord and the gospel, since they are under God’s curse:

There are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:7–9)

Emphasizing their deadly danger, both Paul (Acts 20:29) and Jesus (Matt. 7:15) described false teachers as wolves in disguise. They are not to be welcomed into the sheepfold, but guarded against and avoided.

Confusion about the deity of Christ is inexcusable, because the biblical teaching regarding it is clear and unmistakable. Jesus Christ is the eternally preexistent Word, who enjoys full face-to-face communion and divine life with the Father, and is Himself God.

THE CREATIVE POWER OF THE WORD

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (1:3)

Once again John expressed a profound truth in clear language. Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, created everything that **came into being**. John underscored that truth by repeating it negatively; **apart from Him nothing** (lit., “not even one thing”) **came into being that has come into being**.

That Jesus Christ created everything (cf. Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) offers two further proofs of His deity. First, the Creator of all things must Himself be uncreated, and only the eternal God is uncreated. The Greek text emphasizes the distinction between the uncreated Word and His creation, since a different verb is used here than the one used in verses 1 and 2. As noted in the previous point, John used a form of the verb *eimi* (“to be”), which denotes a state of being, to describe the Word in verses 1 and 2; here, speaking of the creation of the universe, he used a form of the verb *ginomai* (**came into being**). That Jesus is the Creator also verifies His deity, because God is portrayed throughout the Bible as the Creator (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 102:25; Isa. 40:28; 42:5; 45:18; Mark 13:19; Rom. 1:25; Eph. 3:9; Rev. 4:11).

By stressing the role of the Word in creating the universe, John countered the false teaching that later developed into the dangerous heresy known as Gnosticism. The Gnostics embraced the philosophical dualism common to Greek philosophy that held that spirit was good and matter was evil. They argued that since matter was evil, the good God could not have created the physical universe. Instead, a series of spirit beings emanated from Him until finally one of those descending emanations was evil and foolish enough to create the physical universe. But John rejected that heretical view, strongly affirming that Jesus Christ was the Father’s agent in creating everything.

The present world, however, is radically different from God’s original good creation (Gen. 1:31). The catastrophic results of the fall not only

affected the human race, but also the entire creation. Jesus therefore will one day redeem not only believers, but also the material world as well, as Paul noted in Romans 8:19-21:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

When the curse is lifted during Christ's millennial reign,

The wolf will dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little boy will lead them.
Also the cow and the bear will graze,
Their young will lie down together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.
They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:6-9)

The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain, says the Lord. (Isa. 65:25)

THE SELF-EXISTENCE OF THE WORD

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (1:4-5)

Displaying yet again his Spirit-inspired economy of words, John in these two brief verses summarized the incarnation. Christ, the embodiment of **life** and the glorious, eternal **Light** of heaven, entered the sin-darkened world **of men**, and that world reacted in various ways to Him.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the themes **life** and **Light** are common in John's gospel. *Zōē* (**life**) refers to spiritual life as opposed to *bios*, which describes physical life (cf. 1 John 2:16). Here, as in 5:26, it refers primarily to Christ having life in Himself. Theologians refer to that as aseity, or self-existence. It is clear evidence of Christ's deity, since only God is self-existent.

This truth of God's and Christ's self-existence—having life in themselves—is foundational to our faith. All that is created can be said to be “becoming,” because nothing created is unchanging. It is essential to understand that permanent, eternal, non-changing being or life is distinct from all that is becoming. “Being” is eternal and the source of life for what is “becoming.” That is what distinguishes creatures from the Creator, us from God.

Genesis 1:1 establishes this fundamental reality with the statement, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Because it is the most important truth in the Bible, it is the one most assaulted. Unbelievers know that to be rid of creation is to be rid of a Creator. And to be rid of God leaves men free to live in whatever way they want, with no judgment.

The whole universe falls into the category of “becoming” because there was a point when it did not exist. Before existence it was the self-existent eternal being—the source of life—God, who is pure, self-existent being, pure life, and never becoming anything. All creation receives its life from outside, from Him, but He derives His life from within Himself, depending on nothing for His life. There was a point when the universe did not exist. There was never a point when God did not exist. He is self-existence, life, “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14). He is from everlasting to everlasting. Acts 17:28 rightly says: “In Him we live and move and exist.” We cannot live or move or be without His life. But He has always lived and moved and been.

This is the purest ontological description of God—and to say Jesus is the **life** is to say the most pure truth about the nature of God that He possesses. And, as in verse 3, He then is the Creator.

While as the Creator Jesus is the source of everything and everyone who lives, the word **life** in John's gospel always translates *zōē*, which John uses for spiritual or eternal life. It is imparted by God's sovereign grace (6:37, 39, 44, 65; cf. Eph. 2:8) to all those who believe savingly in Jesus Christ (1:12; 3:15–16, 36; 6:40, 47; 20:31; cf. Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9–10; 1 John 5:1, 11–13). It was to impart spiritual life to sinners who “were dead in [their] trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) that Jesus came into the world (10:10; cf. 6:33).

While it is appropriate to make some distinction between life and light, the statement **the life was the Light** halts any disconnect between the two. In reality, John is writing that **life** and **light** cannot be separated. They are essentially the same, with the idea of light emphasizing the manifestation of the divine life. **The life was the Light** is the same construction as “the Word was God” (v. 1). As God is not separate from the Word, but the same in essence, so life and light share the same essential properties.

The light combines with life in a metaphor for the purpose of clarity and contrast. God's life is true and holy. **Light** is that truth and holiness manifest against the darkness of lies and sin. Light and life are linked in this same way in John 8:12, in which Jesus says: "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." The connection between light and life is also clearly made in the Old Testament. Psalm 36:9 says: "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light."

"The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4) is nothing more than the radiating, manifest life of God shining in His Son. Paul specifically says: "God . . . is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (v. 6). So light is God's life manifest in Christ.

In addition to its connection to life, light carries its own significance, as seen in the contrast between light and darkness, which is a common theme in Scripture. Intellectually, light refers to truth (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23; 2 Cor. 4:4) and darkness to falsehood (Rom. 2:19); morally, light refers to holiness (Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5) and darkness to sin (Prov. 4:19; Isa. 5:20; Acts 26:18). Satan's kingdom is the "domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13; cf. Luke 22:53; Eph. 6:12), but Jesus is the source of **life** (11:25; 14:6; cf. Acts 3:15; 1 John 1:1) and the **Light** that **shines in the darkness** of the lost world (8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36, 46).

Despite Satan's frantic, furious assaults on the **Light, the darkness did not comprehend it**. *Katalambanō* (**comprehend**) is better translated "overcome." Even a small candle can drive the darkness from a room; the brilliant, glorious **Light** of the Lord Jesus Christ will utterly destroy Satan's realm of darkness. Since He came into the world, "the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining" (1 John 2:8).

The thrust of this verse, then, is not that the **darkness** failed to understand the truth about Jesus; on the contrary, the forces of darkness know Him all too well. In Matthew 8:29 some demons "cried out [to Jesus], saying, 'What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?'" In Peter's house in Capernaum, Jesus "cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was" (Mark 1:34). Luke 4:41 records that "demons also were coming out of many, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ." In Luke 4:34 a terrified demon pleaded, "Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" The demons not only know the truth about Christ, but they also believe it. "You believe that God is one," wrote James, "You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19).

It is because they understand with total clarity the judgment that awaits them that Satan and the demons have tried desperately throughout history to kill the **life** and extinguish the **Light**. In the Old Testament, Satan tried to destroy Israel, the nation from which the Messiah would come. He also tried to destroy the kingly line from which the Messiah would descend (2 Kings 11:1–2). In the New Testament, he prompted Herod's futile attempt to kill the infant Jesus (Matt. 2:16). At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Satan vainly tried to tempt Jesus to turn aside from the cross (Matt. 4:1–11). Later, he repeated the temptation again through one of His closest followers (Matt. 16:21–23). Even Satan's seeming triumph at the cross in reality marked his ultimate defeat (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; cf. 1 John 3:8).

Similarly, unbelievers are eternally lost not because they do not know the truth, but because they reject it:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom. 1:18–21)

(For a further discussion of this point, see the exposition of 1:9–11 in chapter 2 of this volume.)

No one who rejects Christ's deity can be saved, for He Himself said in John 8:24, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." It is fitting, then, that John opens his gospel, which so strongly emphasizes Christ's deity (cf. 8:58; 10:28–30; 20:28), with a powerful affirmation of that essential truth.

THE MACARTHUR
NEW TESTAMENT
COMMENTARY
JOHN 12-21

John MacArthur

MOODY PUBLISHERS/CHICAGO

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
Preface	vii
1. The Climax of Love and Hate (John 12:1–11)	1
2. The King Comes to Die (John 12:12–16)	11
3. The Gospel Reaches Out: A Preview of Gentile Salvation (John 12:17–26)	19
4. Facing the Cross (John 12:27–34)	33
5. The Day the Light Went Out (John 12:35–50)	45
6. The Humility of Love (John 13:1–17)	59
7. Unmasking the Betrayer (John 13:18–30)	71
8. The Supreme Standard of Sacrificial Love (John 13:31–38)	83
9. Comfort for Troubled Hearts (John 14:1–14)	95
10. The Legacy of Jesus (John 14:15–26)	109
11. Supernatural Peace (John 14:27)	121
12. What Jesus' Death Meant to Him (John 14:28–31)	131
13. The Vine and the Branches (John 15:1–11)	141
14. The Friends of Jesus (John 15:12–16)	155
15. Hated by the World (John 15:17–25)	165
16. Holy Spirit–Empowered Witness (John 15:26–27)	177

17.	The Holy Spirit Convicts the World (John 16:1–11)	187
18.	The Holy Spirit Reveals the Truth (John 16:12–15)	199
19.	From Sorrow to Joy (John 16:16–24)	211
20.	Three Cardinal Christian Virtues (John 16:25–33)	221
21.	The Real Lord's Prayer (John 17:1)	233
22.	Jesus' Prayer and the Eternal Plan of God (John 17:1 <i>b</i> –5)	245
23.	Jesus Prays for His Disciples—Part 1: As Those Whom the Father Had Given Him (John 17:6–10)	257
24.	Jesus Prays for His Disciples—Part 2: As Those Whom He Is about to Leave (John 17:11–19)	271
25.	Jesus Prays for All Believers—Part 1: That They Would Be Presently United in Truth (John 17:20–23)	285
26.	Jesus Prays for All Believers—Part 2: That They Would One Day Be Reunited in Glory (John 17:24–26)	295
27.	Jesus' Betrayal and Arrest (John 18:1–11)	303
28.	Jesus' Trial; Peter's Denial (John 18:12–27)	313
29.	Jesus Before Pilate—Part 1: Phase One of the Civil Trial (John 18:28–38)	323
30.	Jesus Before Pilate—Part 2: Phase Three of the Civil Trial (John 18:39–19:16)	333
31.	The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ (John 19:17–30)	345
32.	The Death-Conquering Savior (John 19:31–20:10)	359
33.	The Resurrected Christ (John 20:11–31)	371
34.	Epilogue—Part 1: Self-effort or Spiritual Power? (John 21:1–14)	387
35.	Epilogue—Part 2: How to Be a Committed Christian (John 21:15–25)	397
	Bibliography	407
	Index of Greek Words	409
	Index of Scripture	410
	Index of Subjects	420

The Climax of Love and Hate (John 12:1–11)

1

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. 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. 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. Therefore Jesus said, “Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.” 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. 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. (12:1–11)

The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ marks the zenith of history. His life not only divides the calendar (B.C. means “before Christ”; A.D. [“anno Domini”] means “in the year of the Lord”), but also human destiny. As Jesus Himself warned those who rejected Him, “Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24), and on another occasion, “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division” (Luke 12:51; cf. Luke 2:34). Like no one else, Jesus Christ evokes the antithetical extremes of love and hate, devotion and rejection, worship and blasphemy, and faith and unbelief. How people respond to Him divides the sheep from the goats; the wheat from the tares; believers from unbelievers; the saved from the lost.

John wrote his gospel to present Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (20:31). In so doing, he also recorded how people reacted to Jesus’ messianic claims and miraculous signs. The apostle accordingly cites numerous examples of those who believed in Jesus (1:35–51; 2:11; 4:28–29, 41–42, 53; 6:69; 9:35–38; 10:42; 11:27, 45; 12:11; 16:27, 30; 17:8; 19:38–39; 20:28–29), and those who rejected Him (1:10–11; 2:20; 3:32; 5:16–18, 38–47; 6:36, 41–43, 64, 66; 7:1, 5, 20, 26–27, 30–52; 8:13–59; 9:16, 29, 40–41; 10:20, 25–26; 11:46–57; 12:37–40).

In this passage, which relates the story of Mary’s anointing of Jesus, the themes of belief and unbelief are particularly clear. The worshipful act of Mary epitomizes faith and love; the cold, calculated, cynical response of Judas epitomizes unbelief and hatred. The section also records other reactions to Jesus, including the devoted service of Martha, the indifference of the crowd, and the hostility of the religious leaders.

The Lord’s raising of Lazarus had stirred up murderous opposition from the hostile Jewish leaders (11:46–53). They decided that they had to kill both Jesus and Lazarus. Since His hour to die had not yet come (7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1), Jesus left the vicinity of Jerusalem and stayed in the village of Ephraim (11:54), about a dozen miles to the north on the edge of the wilderness. From there He made a brief visit to Samaria and Galilee (Luke 17:11–19:28) and then, **six days before the Passover, came once more to Bethany**. His arrival would have been on the Saturday before the Passover. (Because the distance people were permitted to travel on the Sabbath was limited [cf. Acts 1:12], the Lord may have arrived after sundown on Friday. That, according to Jewish reckoning, would have been after the Sabbath had begun.) John described **Bethany** as the village **where Lazarus** lived, and Lazarus as its now most famous resident, since **Jesus had raised him from the dead**.

From the account of the supper given there in His honor, five varied reactions to Jesus emerge: Martha responded with heartfelt service,

Mary with humble sacrifice, Judas with hypocritical self-interest, the people with hollow superficiality, and the religious leaders with hostile scheming.

THE HEARTFELT SERVICE OF MARTHA

So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. (12:2)

The Sanhedrin had decreed that anyone who knew where Jesus was should report that information to them (11:57). But rather than turning Him in like some criminal, the Lord's friends in Bethany gave **a supper** in His honor. The purpose of the event was to express their love for Him, and especially their gratitude for His raising of Lazarus. Since *deipnon* (**supper**) refers to the main meal of the day, it would have been a lengthy one, designed with much time for leisurely conversation. The guests were surely **reclining**, leaning on one elbow with their heads toward a low, U-shaped table. How many people were there is not known, but at least Jesus, the Twelve, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and probably Simon the leper were present.

Luke records a visit by Jesus to the home of Mary and Martha several months earlier, which provides insight into Martha's attachment to serving, even when it was not the priority:

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

Even after such a rebuke, here again being true to her interest, **Martha was** involved in **serving** the meal. (That John describes **Lazarus** as **one of the guests reclining at the table with** Jesus suggests that the feast was not in his and his sisters' home.) Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3 make more than a suggestion, stating specifically that the meal was held in the house of Simon the leper. Though the descriptive name stuck to him, he obviously had been healed from his disease, for people would never have gathered in the home of someone with an active case of leprosy. Not only would they have feared contagion, but also to socialize would

have ceremonially defiled them, since lepers were unclean (Lev. 13:45). Nor is it likely that Simon would have owned a house and hosted a meal in it if he had still been sick, since lepers were social outcasts (Num. 5:2). Because cures for leprosy were beyond the limited medical knowledge of that time, it is reasonable to believe that Jesus had earlier healed him.

Though others were served also, Martha's service on this occasion was primarily directed at Jesus, and was commendable for two related reasons: it was motivated by loving gratitude to Him, and by a desire to generously honor Him in the way she best knew how. There was no rebuke as in the earlier incident. Like her, all Christians are to be engaged in selfless service (Rom. 12:11; cf. Gal. 5:13; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:14). Jesus said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:11) and declared of Himself, "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27), and, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). Paul repeatedly described himself as a bond servant of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; cf. 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:23), as did James (James 1:1), Peter (2 Peter 1:1), Jude (Jude 1), and John (Rev. 1:1). In John 12:26 the Lord promised those who faithfully serve Him, "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." Although it tends to be overshadowed by Mary's dramatic act of worship, Martha's humble service on this occasion was no less commendable and pleasing to the Lord.

THE HUMBLE SACRIFICE OF MARY

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. (12:3)

In keeping with her portrayal elsewhere in the Gospels (cf. 11:32–33; Luke 10:39), Mary once again appears as the more pensive, reflective, and emotional of the two sisters. In a startling, spontaneous outpouring of her love for Him, she **took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus**. A pound (a Roman measure, equivalent to about twelve ounces by today's standards) was a large amount of **perfume**. **Nard** was a fragrant oil extracted from the root and spike (hence the translation "spikenard" in some English versions) of a plant native to the mountains of northern India. Perfume made from **nard** was **very costly** because of the great distance from which it had to be imported. Mary's **nard** was **pure** in quality, making it even more valuable. Some were thinking it was worth "over three

hundred denarii" (Mark 14:5), and Judas agreed with that valuation (John 12:5). As noted in the discussion of verse 5 below, such an amount would be equal to a year's wages. The expensive alabaster vial in which it was stored also added to its value (Matt. 26:7). She broke the vial (Mark 14:3), thus giving up the whole thing—both contents and container. The perfume likely made up a sizeable portion of Mary's net worth. But like David (2 Sam. 24:24), she refused to offer the Lord something that cost her nothing. She acted in unrestrained love.

Matthew's (26:7) and Mark's (14:3) parallel accounts note that Mary poured the perfume on Jesus' head, while John says that she **anointed His feet**. All three accounts are in perfect harmony. Since the Lord was reclining at a low table, with His feet extended away from it, Mary could have easily poured the perfume first on His head, then His body (Matt. 26:12), and finally on His feet. Then, in an act that shocked the onlookers even more than the pouring out of expensive perfume, she **wiped His feet with her hair**. The Jews considered washing the feet of another person to be degrading, a necessary task to be done only by the most menial slaves (cf. John 1:27). None of the Twelve at the coming Passover meal in the upper room were willing to serve the others by washing their feet, so in a supreme act and example of lowliness, Jesus did it (cf. 13:1–15). But even more shocking than her costly and lowly washing of Jesus' feet was the fact that Mary let down her hair. For a respectable Jewish woman to do that in public would have been considered indecent, perhaps even immoral. But Mary was not concerned with the shame she might face as a result. Instead, she was solely focused on pouring out her love and in honoring Christ, with no thought of any perceived shame that it might bring to her.

John's note that **the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume** is the kind of vivid detail an eyewitness would recall. It also testifies to the extravagance of Mary's act of humble devotion. She was heedless of its cost, both financially and to her reputation. The measure of her love was her total abandonment to Jesus Christ. Consequently, Mary's noble act would, as the Lord declared, be spoken of as a memorial of her love wherever the gospel is preached (Mark 14:9).

It must be noted here that Luke records a very similar incident:

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If

this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.” (Luke 7:36–39)

That this is a completely different event is clear because it took place in Galilee, not Bethany; it featured a woman who was a sinner (likely a prostitute), not Mary; and occurred much earlier in our Lord’s life, not during Passion Week. It also was an event at the house of a Pharisee, not Simon the leper.

THE HYPOCRITICAL SELF-INTEREST OF JUDAS

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. Therefore Jesus said, “Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.” (12:4–8)

The stunned silence that must have followed Mary’s startling and unexpected act was suddenly broken by a voice raised in protest. The conjunction *de* (**but**) introduces the stark contrast between Mary’s selflessness and Judas’s selfishness. As is always the case in the Gospels, John’s description of **Judas Iscariot** emphasizes two facts. First, he was **one of** the Lord’s **disciples** (Matt. 10:4; 26:14, 47; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:3, 47; John 6:71); second, he **was intending to betray Him** (Matt. 26:25; 27:3; Mark 3:19; 14:10; Luke 6:16; 22:4, 48; John 6:71; 13:2, 26–29; 18:2, 5; cf. Acts 1:16). So shocking and singularly defining was Judas’s betrayal that the gospel writers could not think of him or refer to him apart from it. That he was not merely a follower of Christ, but one of the Lord’s inner circle, makes his betrayal all the more heinous. It was the most despicable act in all of human history—and the one that merited the most severe punishment. In the chilling words of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24).

Wanting to appear philanthropic, Judas acted outraged over such a profligate waste of money, exclaiming, **“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?”** Chronologically, these are Judas’s first recorded words in the New Testament. They expose the avarice, ambition, and selfishness that ruled his heart. He had cast his lot with Jesus, expecting Him to usher in the politi-

cal, earthly messianic kingdom most Jewish people were looking for. As one of the inner circle, Judas had eagerly anticipated an exalted position in that kingdom. But now, for him, that dream had turned to ashes. Jesus had so antagonized the Jewish leaders that they intended to kill Him (John 7:1; 11:53). Not only that, the Lord Himself warned the disciples that His death was inevitable (e.g., Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33). And when the Galilean crowds sought to crown Jesus as the earthly king Judas thought He would be, the Lord refused to cooperate with them (John 6:14-15).

Disillusioned, Judas—facing the end of his ambitions—decided to at least get some financial compensation for the three years he had wasted on Jesus. John, not seeing it at that moment, but writing in retrospect many years later, makes the appropriate inspired comment on Judas's real motive: 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.** As noted above, Mary's perfume was worth a lot of money; since a denarius was a day's wages for a common laborer (Matt. 20:2), **three hundred denarii** equaled a year's wages (allowing for Sabbaths and other holy days on which no work was done). Seeing that much money elude his grasp infuriated Judas, and he lashed out at Mary. "Judas' disapproval of Mary's action related not to loss of opportunity to do more for the poor but to his own loss of opportunity to steal from the common purse" (Colin Kruse, *The Gospel According to John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 263). So persuasive was his seemingly righteous indignation that others joined in his protest (Matt. 26:8-9; Mark 14:4-5).

Though some have tried to attribute noble motives to Judas (i.e., by arguing that he was a misguided patriot, trying to prod Christ into ushering in His kingdom), the New Testament portrays him as nothing but a greedy thief and a murderous traitor—even a Devil (John 6:70-71; cf. 13:2, 27). Judas is the greatest example of missed opportunity in history. He lived day in and day out with Jesus Christ, God incarnate, for three years. Yet in the end Judas rejected Him, betrayed Him, was overcome by guilt (but not genuine repentance), committed suicide, and went "to his own place" (Acts 1:25)—that is, hell (John 17:12) in its most potent form.

The Lord immediately defended Mary, sternly rebuking Judas (the verb translated **let alone** is in the second person singular, meaning "you") by commanding him, **"Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial."** Jesus obviously did not mean that Mary would keep the perfume (or at least part of it) until His burial, since she had just poured it all out (cf. Mark 14:3). While commentators disagree on how to understand these words, the most satisfactory solution is to understand an ellipsis in the Lord's statement. Supplying the missing words, the sense would be, "Let her alone; she did not sell the perfume

[as you wish she had], so that she could keep it for the day of my burial” (cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 429–30; cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 363–64).

Mary’s act was a spontaneous outpouring of her love and devotion to Christ. Yet, like Caiaphas’s unwitting prophecy (11:49–52), it had a deeper significance. In Matthew 26:12 Jesus said, “When she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial” (cf. Mark 14:8). The **burial** of which Jesus prophetically spoke was not the actual placing of His dead body in the tomb, but the anointing she had just done, which He saw as a symbol of His soon coming death and burial. Part of the lavish expenditures associated with many first-century funerals was the cost of perfumes to mask the odor of decay (cf. John 11:39). This act by Mary, as in the case of Caiaphas (11:49–52) revealed a far greater reality than she realized at the time. Her anointing prefigured the one Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would later perform on His body after Jesus’ death (John 19:38–40).

If Judas had really wanted to help the poor, he would not have lacked opportunity since, as Jesus reminded them all (the verb and pronoun in this phrase are plurals), **“You always have the poor with you”** (cf. Mark 14:7). The Lord was not disparaging the giving of charity to the poor (cf. Deut. 15:11), but rather was challenging the disciples to keep their priorities straight. The opportunity to do good to Him, as Mary had done, would not last long, because they would **not always have** Him physically present with them. Here again the Lord’s words were a prediction of His coming death, now less than a week away.

Judas now stood at the crossroads. Unmasked as a hypocrite, pretending to care for the poor while in reality embezzling from the common purse, he faced the ultimate decision. He could fall at Jesus’ feet in humble, penitent repentance, confess his sin, and seek forgiveness. Or he could pridefully harden his heart, refuse to repent, surrender to Satan’s influence, and betray the Lord. Tragically and sinfully, he chose the latter course, with full and sole culpability for its consequences, though it fulfilled the purpose of God for the sacrifice of His Son (cf. 13:18–19). Immediately after this incident, “Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time” (Mark 14:10–11).

THE HOLLOW SUPERFICIALITY OF THE PEOPLE

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. (12:9)

After the Sabbath, a **large crowd of the Jews** who were in Jerusalem for Passover **learned that Jesus was** in Bethany. (The term **Jews** here does not refer to the religious leaders, but to the common people [cf. 11:55–56].) They **came to Bethany not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.** News of that sensational miracle had spread, and the curious crowd wanted to see both the miracle worker, and the one whom He had raised.

These people were not yet openly hostile to Jesus, like Judas and the religious leaders, but neither were they committed to Him, like Martha and Mary. They were the thrill seekers, following the latest sensation, superficially interested in Jesus, but spiritually indifferent and ultimately antagonistic to Him. Like the members of the Laodicean church, they were “lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold” (Rev. 3:16). At the triumphal entry they would hail Him, shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel” (John 12:13). But only a few days later they would scream, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” (John 19:15), and some would come to mock Him as He was hanging on the cross (Matt. 27:39–40).

THE HOSTILE SCHEMING OF THE LEADERS

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. (12:10–11)

By no means did the crowds that flocked to Bethany to see Jesus and Lazarus escape the notice of the Jewish authorities. The ruthless **chief priests** had already plotted to kill Jesus (11:53); now they expanded the plot and **planned to put Lazarus to death also.** As living proof of Jesus' miraculous power, the resurrected Lazarus presented a great threat to the Sadducees, because **on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus** (cf. 11:48). He was an undeniable testimony to the Lord's messianic claims. Not only that, a resurrected man was also an embarrassment to the Sadducees in another way: they denied the resurrection of the dead (Matt. 22:23), and he was

an undeniable refutation of that error. Unable to counter the incontrovertible testimony Lazarus provided by being alive, they sought to destroy the evidence by killing him. Their tangled web of deception was expanding, as Leon Morris notes: "It is interesting to reflect that Caiaphas had said, 'it is expedient for you that one man die for the people' (11:50). But one was not enough. Now it had to be two. Thus does evil grow" (*The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 582).

No one is neutral regarding Jesus Christ; as He Himself warned, "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters" (Luke 11:23). Whether loving and serving Him, like Mary and Martha, being indifferent and vacillating toward Him, like the crowd, or hating and opposing Him, like Judas and the chief priests, everyone takes a stand somewhere. What that stand is determines each person's eternal destiny, since "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).