

## [John 12:1-8](#)

### Making Much of Jesus

#### **Introduction**

A young man gets his degree in accounting. Then, he becomes a campus minister at a major university. He wants to make much of Jesus in the life of his family and the lives of college students. A young woman attends medical school. She becomes one of the finest trauma and critical care surgeons in the nation. After having her first child, she decided to be a stay-at-home mom. She wanted to make much of Jesus in the life of her family.

These are real-life examples. The young man was Sam Brunsvold, who was my brother-in-law. He was fatally shot outside of his home in 1997. The young woman is Kathryn Butler. She is currently a homeschooling mom and author who regularly contributes articles to Desiring God Ministries.

In both examples, there was second-guessing by peers, friends and relatives. It appeared Sam and Kathryn wasted something valuable, such as their skills and education, to make much of Jesus. But here's an important question. Is it ever wasteful to give up something valuable to make much of Jesus?

In the text ([John 12:1-8](#)), Mary did something extraordinary. There at the dinner table, with everyone looking on, she made much of Jesus in an extravagant way. She poured a costly and fragrant ointment on the Lord Himself. Her apparent waste of something valuable honored Jesus' power and presence, anointed Him as King and High Priest and prepared for what lay ahead at the cross, His suffering and death.

So, in this beautiful Scripture, John describes a scene that is poignant and powerful. In order to get the full effect of this text, there are three (3) points that I'd like for us to examine. They are that Jesus is made much of because of His:

- Presence and Power
- Kingship and Priesthood
- Suffering and death

#### **Background**

The setting of the text ([John 12:1-8](#)) is a few days before the Passover, which is also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread ([Luke 22:1-6](#)). This is a week-long festival instituted by God in order that the Jewish people remember and celebrate God delivering His people from slavery in Egypt. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is one of three Jewish festivals involving a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the other two being the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles.

On the first evening of Passover, Jewish families slaughtered a lamb without blemish, then placed the lamb's blood on the door posts of their home. This was a powerful reminder that on the night God set His people free, the angel of death would see the

sacrificial blood and "pass over" the Israelite's homes. The lamb's blood meant the difference between life and death. Here's [Exodus 12:13](#).

The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

[Ex 12:13](#) (ESV)

By God's sovereignty, within a few days of the meal with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ would be slaughtered on the cross. Just as the Passover lamb was sacrificed, Jesus willingly gave Himself as the perfect sacrifice. The Lamb of God's blood means the difference between life and death. All who trust that His blood paid the price for sin, or atoned for sin, are rescued from God's wrath and are made right with God. That's the gospel, the good news message of the cross.

So, let's savor and taste and see that the Lord is good. Let's make much of Jesus' power and presence, His Kingship and Priesthood and His suffering and death.

### **1. Jesus' Presence and Power**

Jesus came to the village of Bethany where the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. Lazarus was the one who became ill and died and then was raised from the dead by Jesus ([John 11](#)). The family made much of Jesus' presence by giving a dinner in His honor ([John 12:1-2](#)). Imagine the delight, gratitude and joy as friends gathered around the table. It would be comparable to the best Thanksgiving dinner we've ever had. Jesus was present. Who could ask for anyone better to be at the dinner table?

But there had to be something much more to Jesus' power and presence than just being the One who came to dinner; the One who could do miracles. His compassion, grace and mercy was evident in His deep love for His friends. Mary, Martha and Lazarus loved Jesus; He loved them ([John 11:5](#)).

Jesus' presence is a powerful thing. Consider the examples we've seen so far in the book of John where Jesus impacts the lives of the least, the lost and the lonely. The woman at the well ([John 4](#)), healing the man who was an invalid for 38 years ([John 5](#)), the feeding of the 5,000 ([John 6](#)), healing the man born blind ([John 9](#)) and raising Lazarus from the dead ([John 11](#)). In fact, in all of these accounts, the Holy Spirit inspired John's writing to make much of Jesus' power and presence. He is the living water, the bread of life, the good shepherd and the resurrection and the life.

Jesus' presence here on this sin-filled earth through the Holy Spirit is a marvelous thing. But it's nothing compared to being in His presence in heaven. If Jesus weren't in heaven, it would be hell. But in fact He is there. In Jesus' presence, faith becomes sight. Looking into a mirror dimly becomes crystal clear face-to-face. All is perfect. All is new. Some glorious day all will be made new here on earth ([Revelation 21:1-4](#)). There will be no more death, sickness or sorrow in His presence.

Let me tell you about how great God is to show His power and presence in a real-life example. Recently, I traveled to my home state of North Carolina to assist my sister in taking care of our parents who are in declining health. To see my mom and dad in their frailness and weakness was an extremely difficult experience. Yet, it was exactly what I needed. God's presence and power was evident amidst all of the trials associated with my parent's old age and my melancholy state.

In a hard situation, I admittedly didn't want to be in, the Holy Spirit began changing my sad and critical spirit into more of a hopeful and caring spirit. Even though God's blessings were evident in changing me on the inside, the Lord didn't make the experience of serving my aging parents any easier. Too often, we believe God's blessings result in the lifting of burdens. Sometimes that's true; sometimes it's not. How is the presence and power of Christ changing your life? What issue are you wrestling with today that the power and presence of Jesus would make the difference?

The presence of Christ doesn't mean life will be free of difficulty and trials. Jesus Himself said to find peace in Him because there will be tribulation in the world, but take heart because He has overcome the world ([John 16:33](#)). Jesus' presence assures that all of the promises of God will find their "yes" in Him ([2 Corinthians 1:20](#)). The Holy Spirit guarantees that blood-bought brothers and sisters in Christ, the faith-family, have an inheritance kept safely and securely in heaven ([1 Peter 1:4](#)). In Christ, God's mercies are new every morning; grace is lavished without question and steadfast love endures forever. Make much of Him! O praise Him! Alleluia!

Yes, Jesus' presence and power, as Mary, Martha and Lazarus knew very well, is a wonderful thing. Those who find the presence and power of Christ to be their refuge and fortress can also make much of Him because of His Kingship and Priesthood.

## **2. Jesus' Kingship and Priesthood**

While Jesus was reclining at the table, Mary took pure nard, a very expensive and fragrant ointment, and poured it on Jesus' feet. Then, she wiped his feet with her hair ([John 12:3](#)). Reaction among the dinner guests probably ranged from disbelief to disgruntled. There are two (2) important facets of this extraordinary event that we need to apprehend from this portion of the text.

First of all, kings and priests chosen by God were anointed with oil as a signature of being set apart above anyone else to rule and reign. For example, David and his son, Solomon, were anointed with oil to signify their kingship ([1 Samuel 16:12-13](#) and [1 Kings 1:39](#)). Aaron, Moses' brother, was anointed high priest over God's people, as the LORD had commanded ([Leviticus 8:12](#)).

Second, kings and priests deserve the finest of things. How much more then does Jesus, King of kings and Great High Priest, deserve the finest adoration and worship. Consider the account of the wise men bringing the Christ child, God incarnate, gifts of frankincense and myrrh, which are aromatic resins used in perfumes ([Matthew 2:11](#)).

In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, which was also written by the apostle John, Jesus is described as the King of kings and Lord of lords ([Revelation 19:16](#)). Jesus is the King chosen by God. He is the Messiah, the Anointed One. He rules and reigns over everything. There is no one who is not under His Kingship, which spans across the annals of history.

Jesus is also the Great High Priest. He is perfect and holy in every way, interceding on behalf of God's people and atoning for sin in order that sinners are made right with God. As Great High Priest, Jesus sympathizes with man's weaknesses. He is the only One who made the way to come boldly into God's throne room. Here's [Hebrews 4:15-16](#).

<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[Heb 4:15-16](#) (ESV)

Now, if you know anything about kings and queens, you know there is much pageantry and pomp associated with them. For example with the Queen of England, everything is done according to a protocol. Women are required to curtsy. One is not supposed to shake the Queen's hand. Scheduling an appointment with the Queen is reserved for the “upper crust” of society.

However, with the King and Great High Priest Jesus, there is no pageantry, pomp or protocol when dealing with people like you and me. His throne is not off limits to those considered the marginalized of society. In fact, Tim Keller, pastor, theologian and author says this about having access to King Jesus, “The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 a.m. for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access.”

Consider Lazarus' sister, Mary, who poured the ointment on Jesus. She was rebuked by Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus, for apparently wasting the perfume that was worth nearly a year's wages for a laborer ([John 12:5](#)). Yet, Jesus didn't criticize her for what she'd done. In fact, He rebuked Judas and praised Mary. What she had done was in preparation for Jesus' burial in just a few days. In an indescribable moment of time, Mary made much of Jesus. She anointed Him with the costliest and most fragrant ointment, amounting to a little less than the liquid in a can of pop. Why would she do that? Why would she anoint Jesus' feet and wipe His feet with her hair?

Here's what John Piper, founder of Desiring God Ministries, author and pastor says about this particular account in Scripture: "The lowliest aspect of Jesus is infinitely more precious than the highest gift of man." So, here is the God-Man, the Lord Jesus, and Mary anoints and wipes His smelly, dirty feet.

In the culture at the time, the lowest, most humbling job was to clean and wipe people's feet. Instead of humiliation, Mary displayed humility in making much of Jesus. What could be more humble than Mary sitting at the Lord's feet, anointing them and wiping them with her hair?

In just a few days, Jesus stooped down and humbled Himself by washing the feet of His disciples, including His betrayer, during the Last Supper ([John 13:1-5](#)). Jesus set a humble example as the King of kings and the Great High Priest. He came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many ([Mark 10:45](#)).

Yes, Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross ([Philippians 2:8](#)). Jesus, King of kings and the Great High Priest suffered and died on the cross. He was forsaken so that sinners like us could be forgiven; He was condemned so that messed up people like us could be accepted by God. Alleluia! What a Savior! Let's make much of Jesus through His suffering and death.

### **3. Jesus' Suffering and Death**

After Mary poured the costly ointment on Jesus, Judas reprimanded her for the apparent waste. However, Jesus defended Mary's actions as preparation for His burial. Here's [John 12:5](#) and [John 12:7](#).

“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”  
[John 12:5](#) (ESV)

Jesus said, “**Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.**”  
[John 12:7](#) (ESV)

Now when there's a burial, there's been a death. And with death usually comes suffering. How in the world can we make much of Jesus' suffering and death? After all, this is death we're talking about. Death does have a sting and the suffering that goes with it is painful. It's something we don't like to deal with or talk about. Experiencing the suffering and death of a loved one is hard. Mary and Martha knew firsthand what that was like when Lazarus died. There was real pain. There was sadness, loneliness and despair.

And yet, here was Jesus dining with his dear friends in the town of Bethany, which is close to Jerusalem ([John 11:18](#)). Yes, the Lord Jesus was headed toward His eventual suffering and death, not away from it. He was headed into what is called Passion Week, the time leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. The word passion means an intense love and desire for something. However, the Latin word for passion, *passio*, means to endure suffering. Jesus knew that within a few days His hour would come; He would endure suffering unto death to be glorified and to glorify His Father's name ([John 12:23-28](#)).

In just a few days, the Prince of Peace, the King of kings and Lord of lords would be mocked, beaten, spit upon, and plated with a crown of thorns. The religious leaders who'd had enough of Jesus would get what they wanted - His suffering and death.

Even one of the twelve disciples, Judas, which Jesus Himself had chosen, would betray Him to suffering and death ([John 12:4](#)). Mary's true love for Jesus was reflected in anointing Him with a fragrant, expensive ointment to honor Him, anoint Him and prepare Him for the day of His burial ([John 12:7](#)). Judas' counterfeit love for Jesus was reflected in his words of reprimand to Mary at the dinner table.

It appeared Mary had wasted something valuable when she poured the ointment on Jesus. In reality, what she did was to honor the One who is worthy to be made much of. Mary knew Jesus as Friend and Lord; she knew Him in a personal way. Mary's joy was in Jesus. Her treasure was in the Person of Christ, who gave His life, so that others would live. Take a look at [John 15:13](#).

**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**  
[John 15:13](#) (ESV)

On January 13, 1982, a commercial jet crashed just after takeoff in the Potomac River near Washington, D.C. Six survivors managed to cling to a section of the aircraft's tail in the icy waters. A helicopter dispatched to the accident dropped a life-line for each surviving passenger, one at a time. And each time, one of the survivors, Arland Williams Jr., would hand the life-line to another passenger. On the final pass, the helicopter's life-line was dropped to Mr. Williams, but he was gone. He had given his life, so that others would live.

In this desperate life-and-death situation, people knew they would die unless they took hold of the life-line. This is a picture of the gospel. Someone laid down his life so that others could live. Unless the life-line is taken hold of, death is certain. Jesus laid down His life so that others like you and me could live eternally. He is the only Life-Line to God. Sin causes all of us to be in a desperate situation. Only Jesus' blood that was shed in His suffering and death makes the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

Death has a sting and that sting is sin. Jesus is the only One who gives victory over sin, suffering and death. Take a look at [1 Corinthians 15:56-57](#).

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
[1 Cor 15:56-57](#) (ESV)

In the aforementioned air crash example, rejecting Mr. Williams' giving the life-line would be a tragedy. Rejecting Jesus, the Life-Line to God, is the most tragic decision one could ever make. If you haven't received Jesus through faith alone by God's grace alone, you can do that now. Simply trust God at His Word. Trusting in Jesus' suffering and death sets sinners free from captivity to sin and abolishes the power of death.

What about those of us who've been trusting the Lord Jesus, perhaps for decades? God in Christ is calling us to give up something that's significantly valuable for something even more significantly valuable – Himself. What's our flask of pure nard? Would we be willing to pour it all on Jesus in order to make much of His name?

### **Conclusion**

Making much of Jesus is what the Christian life is all about. His power and presence upholds the Universe. Yet, He stops and stoops into our messiness and pain. The same hands that crafted Adam and Eve are the same hands that gave sight to the man born

blind. The same hands that created the sun, moon and stars are the same hands that rescue lost souls from hell and eternal damnation.

He is to be worshiped and praised as King of kings and Great High Priest. Yet, in all of His deity and high priestly status, Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. God made Him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Christ, sinners might become the righteousness of God ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)).

His suffering and death is a testimony to His covenant-keeping faithfulness. He came to save sinners and to give His life as a ransom for many. No one or nothing else will do; it's only God in Christ Jesus that calls sinners out of the darkness into His marvelous light ([1 Peter 2:9](#)).

In conclusion, remember the question I asked at the beginning of the sermon - "Is it ever wasteful to give up something valuable to make much of Jesus?" The answer is "no". There is no one or nothing that is more valuable than Jesus. He is better than anything or anyone. He deserves to be made much of. Amen.