

## His Final Steps Led to a Dinner Celebration

John 12:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup> But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, <sup>5</sup> "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." <sup>6</sup> He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. <sup>7</sup> "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." <sup>9</sup> Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, <sup>11</sup> for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

Church and meals go together. God called all the Israelites together year after year to partake in the Passover meal, celebrating their deliverance from the plague of death and their slavery in Egypt. Jesus celebrated that same meal with his 12 disciples the night before taking his final steps to the cross. That night he also instituted a new meal, his Supper, a meal that we as followers of Christ still partake in regularly that this is his body and his blood given and poured out for us for the forgiveness of our sins. The Christian Church following Jesus' ascension and the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost devoted themselves to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to meals, and to prayer. And you personally have enjoyed meals at church – whether it is the Lord's Supper or potlucks or Easter breakfast, a pancake supper, or a cookout.

So it shouldn't come as a surprise that "Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany... Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor." (verses 1,2) There are at least 10 different accounts in the Gospel books of the Bible of Jesus having a meal with people. What I found more interesting is with whom Jesus eats these meals.

Who's on the guest list for this dinner celebration from John chapter 12? Aside from Jesus, the Apostle John lists 3 other people right off the bat. Lazarus is there, the same guy that Jesus had raised back to life after he had been dead for 4 days. His sisters were there too – Mary & Martha. Martha was doing what we would probably expect of her character: she was serving. Mary was not just listening this time, but "took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair." (verse 3)

We also find out from John that all 12 of Jesus' disciples were there, including Judas Iscariot. And this isn't a passing reference to Judas. We're reminded of what he would do to move events so that Jesus's final steps led to the cross as Judas "was later to betray him." (verse 4) At this particular dinner party, Judas is also mentioned because he objected to Mary's use of the very expensive perfume, but John tells us that this concern was not genuine. "He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it." (verse 6) Judas was a thief, a betrayer, and a hypocrite – and Jesus knew all that, and still had meal after meal with him!

At the end of our account for tonight, we learn that a large crowd of Jews were at this dinner celebration. We don't know if they were invited, if they were party crashers who ate the food, or if they were more like a faceless paparazzi crowd just trying to get a glimpse of Jesus and Lazarus. And, I mean, who wouldn't?! The guy had been dead for 4 days, rotted in the tomb, but Jesus, just with his voice, brought him back to life, restored him fully. This made both Jesus and Lazarus celebrities at this dinner celebration, the ones everyone wanted to meet, spend time with, maybe even get their autographs.

Although they were mentioned as well, we're not sure if the religious leaders – the Pharisees and the chief priests – were actually at this dinner party. It may be that some of that faceless crowd went and reported seeing Jesus and Lazarus and the rest of the people at the dinner party to the religious leaders. But we know that Jesus at other times had celebrated dinner parties with Pharisees and teachers of the law - the Jewish religious leaders.

There is one more person at this dinner party that John does not mention by name, but Matthew and Mark do in their accounts. The host, the person's house at which everyone was having this dinner celebration, was a man named Simon the Leper. We don't get any of his background, but we can figure out why he was called Simon the Leper – because everyone knew that he had had leprosy, an infectious and contagious skin disease. What's remarkable about this is that Simon is obviously healed or all these people

wouldn't have been able to have a dinner party at his house as Simon would have been isolated in what is known as a leper colony. Maybe Jesus had healed him. Maybe Simon had simply got better on his own, showed himself to the priest, and was cleared to reenter society. We don't know. We also don't know how exactly he felt about Jesus.

So, if we categorize the kinds of people at this dinner party, we have close friends, students, a hypocrite, a thief, a backstabber, faceless crowds, possibly enemies, and maybe someone that you don't know where you stand with them. If you were arranging a dinner party, would this accurately represent your guest list?

Who would you invite to a dinner party that you hosted? Would you invite close friends to enjoy their company or people you barely know so that you can love on them and get to know them better? Would you invite the rich, so that you could rub elbows with them, get into their good graces? Would you invite poor people, the people who can't pay you back, who can't reciprocate the invitation? Would you invite some holy rollers, some Bible thumpers or people who don't share your faith at all? Would you invite pregnant single moms or just people who are married? Would you invite the LGBTQ+ community? Would you invite drunkards and drug addicts? Would you invite drama queens and those who constantly throw pity parties? Would you invite people who are known to be thieves? Backstabbers? Gossips? Fake people? Hypocrites? Would you invite those hate you and want to kill you?

And why would we all those people, especially those who hate us or betray us, who steal from us, want to harm us? We have good reason not to invite many of those people just to protect ourselves. But let's be honest. We are most likely to invite the people who enjoy our company and we enjoy theirs, the people we get along with. Our guest lists show us that we find it hard to spend time in a meal loving every sort of people on this earth. We give our time and attention to certain people, but not all. We play favorites. We give our time at a dinner party to those we deem worthy of our time and company.

Looking at the guest list of this one dinner party of Jesus, we get a good idea of who he would invite. He doesn't just eat with friends, with those he shares common interests with, those who can support his ministry. Yes, he eats with friends, but he also eats with enemies. He eats with those who know next to nothing about him, about God, or his faith, and those who are experts in these matters. He eats with those who have a criminal record and those who look squeaky clean. He eats with the fake people and the genuine ones. He eats with sinners of all shades and varieties, no matter how uncomfortable we would feel doing so.

In his final steps, Jesus attends a dinner party with every kind of people to have perfect relationships with them because we do not have perfect relationships with everyone. He had this dinner party to be the perfect Savior who comes for all people – no favorites, no discriminations. He is not only willing to die for them but actually will and did.

Mary got this, got this from listening to Jesus. Jesus had been openly teaching his followers that he would be betrayed over the Jewish religious leaders, killed, and then rise from the dead. The dinner guests smelled Jesus' impending death as the fragrance of the expensive perfume filled the house they were eating at while Mary anointed his feet. Jesus made this clear to all the dinner guests when he said, "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial." (verse 7) Jesus took these final steps to this dinner party and then to the cross to pay for all our sins of inhospitality, of all our discrimination, of not wanting to dine with certain people, of thinking that people are not worth our time and energy.

Because Jesus lived out these perfect relationships with every kind of people we can imagine, we know that he lived the righteous life meant for us. Being forgiven through his death the cross, we now get to follow in Jesus' steps and come together for meals with all sorts of different people. No matter who we are, no matter what we look like, no matter our sins of the past, no matter our sins of the future, no matter if we have been thieves or hypocrites, Jesus is for us all. He brings us together. He connects us, unites us together through him. Our churches, our gatherings, are meant to be a living, breathing example of how Jesus pulls us together just like his guest list at the dinner parties he attended.

Seeing with whom Jesus had a dinner celebration during his final steps to the cross being the Savior of all people, who will you invite to eat with you? At the next potluck or at Easter breakfast, who will you go and sit with? Who will you invite?

Jesus ate with them all. He did this to be perfect in all his relationships for us. Cleansed by his perfect life, we strive to look at people the way Jesus did and make them a part of our guest lists at our dinner celebrations, most importantly, at the dinner celebration of the Lamb, our Savior. Amen.