

Finding Your Place in the Larger Story

The Larger Story—part 3

John 12; April 18, 2021

John 12 is a look at different kinds of people. Some are lost in their smaller story. Some are fighting God's Larger Story. Some are seeking a Larger Story. Some have found the Larger Story and the glory of the Lord shines through them.

DAY 1: One locked on the Larger Story. Another lost in his smaller story.

John 12:1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ 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.

1. Mary is one of three siblings who loved Jesus.
2. Use your imagination to “see” the beauty of what is taking place.
3. People back then “reclined” at table when they ate. The table was about a foot off the floor, and people first sat down, and then leaned themselves up on one elbow, their legs and feet pointed slightly away from the table and behind the person eating next to them.
4. Mary had made a habit of sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His teaching. She understood His mission and upcoming sacrificial death. Instead of waiting for the “funeral” to anoint His body, she gave Him a very rare, precious and costly gift.
5. What reasons can you think of that would prompt Mary to give so lavish and wondrous a gift?

John 12:4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ “Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.” ⁶ 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.

6. Human nature has the capacity to criticize even the most wonderful gift or action while at the same time coming across as if their criticism is given for noble reasons.
7. What strikes you about Judas?

John 12:7 “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, ^p but you will not always have me.” ¹

8. What was Jesus' “take” on the situation?

¹ [*The New International Version*](#). (2011). (Jn 12:1–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

DAY 2: “Fairweather fans” of the Larger Story: Passover pilgrims

John 12:12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” ^u “Blessed is the king of Israel!”

1. This is what we refer to as Palm Sunday. Jews from all over the world came to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. The people had heard stories about Jesus’ miracles and teaching.
2. It’s been said that “everybody loves a winner.” As long as Jesus was feeding thousands, healing people and performing miracles a lot of people wanted to get on that bandwagon.
3. But at the end of the week the crowd would be screaming, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

John 12:14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: ¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

4. The significance of this event is the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy from Zechariah 9:9

John 12:16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

John 12:17 Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸ Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him.

5. People are only interested in Jesus if they believe He can make their lower story better. “If You can heal my cancer, I’ll believe. If You can turn my marriage around I’ll follow Jesus. If You can keep us from filing bankruptcy, we’ll follow You.”

John 12:19 So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” ²

6. The Pharisees saw no chance of Jesus improving their smaller stories of career and prestige. Instead Jesus appeared to be a threat to both.

7. Jesus was not coming to make people’s smaller stories better. There was something far more important. It was lifting people eye’s to see the wonder of God and to join His Larger Story.

8. A “fan” sticks around as long as “the going’s good.” But a “follower” is a disciple who follows Jesus no matter how his smaller story is going?

9. Are you more of a fan or more of a follower? What strikes you about that?

² [*The New International Version*](#). (2011). (Jn 12:12–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

DAY 3: Seekers of the Larger Story: gentile visitors (12:20-36)

John 12:20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.

²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

1. If you asked to meet someone and talk with them, you’d discover more about them. But Jesus’ answer to the request to meet Him is answered in a very different way!

John 12:23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

2. Jesus is saying, “The greatest thing you can know about Me is what I am going to do. Keep your eyes on the cross! You will learn more about Me in my death than you will in a conversation.”

3. Next, Jesus is dealing with the horrors of His near future.

John 12:27 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’?”

4. Here’s one option. “Get Me outta here! Find another way! This can’t be the way this has to play out!” Is this option how Jesus will respond as He faces his coming torture and horror?

John 12:27b No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!”

5. What was more important to Him? How does that strike you?

John 12:28b Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

6. This is the third time that God spoke audibly to Jesus, the other two times being at His baptism and the transfiguration. Remember, God is His *Father*. What do you imagine when through the Father’s mind and heart when He heard Jesus’ prayer in verse 28?

John 12:34 The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”

7. These folks are grappling with the meaning of the who Jesus is and the cross.

8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 4: Deniers of the Larger Story; unbelievers

*John 12:37 Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they **still would not** believe in him.³⁸ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: “Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*

1. No matter how much evidence is put in front of some people they still won't believe.

a. Why do you think that is?

b. What do you think is the long-term effect in someone's heart when they continue to refuse to believe, no matter the evidence?

2. What lengths would a loving God go to in an effort to shake them out of their stubborn pride? Here is the surprising answer!

John 12:39 For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.”⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.³

3. The shocking answer is He lets their heart become harder! Why? The more a heart hardens the more the effects of a hard heart surface. In short, the misery that a hard heart produces becomes more apparent! We call that “hitting bottom.” Perhaps then, and only then, will someone finally repent. (The apostle Paul may be the poster child for this truth).

John 12:44 Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.⁴⁵ The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

4. Ultimately, our choices are to either live in the light or live in darkness. (See Rom. 1:16-32).

John 12:47 “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.⁴⁸ There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.⁴⁹ For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken.⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”⁴

5. One theologian said, “Either we will meet Jesus as Savior now in this life or we will meet Jesus as Judge after this life.”

6. What strikes you from today's devotional?

³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jn 12:37–41). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jn 12:42–50). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

DAY 5: A Larger Story parable: the lesson of the seed

1. When we assume that our smaller story IS our story, we will ultimately miss badly on all that is most important. It is only when our smaller story lines up with God's Larger Story will we find the life, meaning, purpose, and joy God wants to give us.

2. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a paradox. It is truth spoken to a world driven by lies—about God, human beings, joy, relationships—well, just about everything that actually brings *real life* to people.

3. Here are some of the more prominent lies.

a. “God may exist, but He is only relevant to your daily life when you have exhausted every other resource at your disposal.”

b. “What’s true for you is true for you, and what’s true for me is what’s true for me.”

c. “Live for #1. No one else will live for your well-being more than you.”

d. “Your fulfillment is at the top of the list of priorities.”

e. “If someone doesn’t agree with you, they hate you.”

f. “Staying in a marriage is OK, as long as you still feel the feelings of love.”

g. “Freedom is the ability to do whatever you want as long as you don’t hurt someone.”

h. “When in doubt about a decision, always follow your heart.”

John 12:23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

3. What Jesus teaches here is completely antithetical to the way the world thinks.

a. For a seed to bear fruit it must be buried in the soil, away from the sun. Only then will it bring forth life and a harvest. It is death to “self” that bring life to people.

b. Whoever ***loves their life***, meaning, whoever puts themselves and their pursuits, interests, desires, etc. first will not bring about the meaning and joy God wants to give us.

c. Whoever ***hates their life***, meaning, whoever sees the proud “self” as my greatest culprit, and living for self as a bad idea will, paradoxically, find the fulfillment they inwardly desire!

d. The life of serving Jesus is the way to ultimate honor.

e. Following Jesus leads to ultimate joy.

4 What strikes you from today’s devotional?