

Belief is more often pictured in John's Gospel than defined, using word pictures and personal accounts. Four such pictures, looking at belief from various angles, appear in the present passage as Jesus makes His final trip to Jerusalem.

**I. *The devout belief of Mary***

This scene is probably the same as that reported in Matthew 26 and Mark 14, in which Jesus is being honored with a meal in the home of Simon the leper and during which an unnamed woman, whom John identifies as Mary, anoints Jesus with expensive ointment. Her actions caused quite a stir among those attending, but three particular aspects of her actions were especially costly, showing the depth of her devotion to Jesus.

1. *Material loss*: The ointment which Mary used could have been sold for the equivalent of a year's wages for a common working man. Jesus had revealed Himself to Mary, declaring Himself to be the Resurrection and the Life, and raising Lazarus from the dead. Mary now honored Jesus with her possessions, not just a token gift but a shocking expenditure. Are we so convinced of the person of Jesus, are we so devoted to Him, that we would pour out our possessions to Him?
2. *Personal humility*: If the three Gospel accounts record the same event, then Mary anointed both the head and feet of Jesus, the first act being recorded by Matthew and Mark to highlight the honor given to Jesus, the second being reported by John to emphasize Mary's humbling of herself before Jesus. Anointing the head was an honor such as given to the high priests and kings. Caring for another's feet was a lowly task, seldom delegated to another person. But Mary lowered herself to the lowest of positions and anointed the feet of Jesus and even wiped his feet with her hair. To what extent do we humble ourselves before Jesus and for the sake of Jesus?
3. *Social discredit*: Mary's humble devotion to Jesus did not draw praise but criticism, discrediting her socially. The disciples were indignant at her actions, considering them a waste. Is our devotion to Jesus such that we are willing to risk being discredited in the eyes of those around us? Are we more interested in pleasing men or Jesus?

Solid belief in the person and work of Jesus leads to a devotion that is willing to pay the price of material loss, personal humility and social discredit. Jesus is worthy of that.

**II. *The critical unbelief of Judas (providing a contrast to Mary)***

1. *Interest in personal material gain*: Unlike Mary, Judas was more interested in getting than giving, he was a thief. This opposite trait helps us analyze our own attitude: Are we more interested in getting from Jesus or giving to Him?
2. *Interest in self and the praise of men*: Judas was proud, more interested in himself, than in others. He had made sure he was well accepted, being put in charge of the money bag, and couched his nefarious rebuke in noble terms of giving to the poor.

Though we cannot be certain whether Jesus knew of Judas's thieving, it is none-the-less striking that Jesus did not address that, but instead pointed to the priority of devotion to Him. There is much good which we can do, but devotion to Jesus is more important.

**III. *The shallow belief of the crowds***

Word spread of Jesus's presence and crowds gathered to Him from among the visitors to Jerusalem, the local residents and especially those who had seen the raising of Lazarus. Some among the crowd believed (*cf. John 11:45; 12:11*) while still others acclaimed Jesus. But what can we observe about the nature of this "belief"?

1. *Curiosity drew some to Jesus*. Though not bad, it does not mean that there is true saving faith.
2. *Signs motivated some to believe in Jesus*. Again this is not bad (*cf. John 14:11*), but believing in Jesus as a miracle-worker is not the same as saving faith.
3. *Some correctly professed truths about Jesus*. Their praises were true (John 12:13), but like the disciples who did not understand their own actions till later (v 16), the people probably did not know the full significance of what they were saying.
4. *Few demonstrated long-lasting belief*. Within the week the crowds, at the instigation of the chief priests and elders, would be shouting to crucify Jesus (*cf. Matthew 27:20, 22, 25*). At Pentecost Peter would charge Jews of Jerusalem with putting Jesus to death. Their belief was superficial, not unlike that in the parable of the soils.

The possibility of shallow or superficial belief should move us to assure ourselves that we are not deceiving ourselves about our faith and that we are becoming firmly rooted and established in our faith.

**IV. *The hostile unbelief of Jewish leadership***

1. *Their unbelief was characterized by animosity rather than curiosity*. Those who love darkness, hate the light and will become hostile to it.
2. *Their unbelief was not swayed but rather irritated by words and actions fulfilling prophecy*.
3. *Their unbelief was hardened by signs*. Instead of believing because of Lazarus, they wanted to remove the evidence of Jesus's person by killing Lazarus, too. This illustrates Romans 1:18, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. Works of God are no guarantee to change the hearts of men, but may harden them further.

Amidst the breadth of response to Jesus, the devotion of Mary stands out as praise-worthy and as a pattern for us. We would not wish to be pictured with the others. Jesus is worthy of all the devotion shown to Him by Mary. He deserves the same from us.