

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

John 12:1-19

Warm-up Question: What is the most valuable gift that you have ever received from someone?

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. 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. 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, but you will not always have me." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹ for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him (John 12:1-11).

The apostle John now devotes eight chapters of his book to the last six days before the crucifixion. He considers these last few days so important because of the things that Jesus taught and did in that short timeframe. At the end of John chapter eleven, we find Jesus going to the city of Ephraim, where He stays with His disciples until six days before Passover. At the beginning of chapter twelve, Christ comes back to Bethany, no doubt checking on Lazarus, Martha and Mary. He was aware of the danger that was gathering for Him at Jerusalem, but perhaps He also knew of the danger that was gathering for Lazarus as well. We are told that the chief priests had made plans to kill Lazarus because of the testimony of Christ's power in raising him from the dead (John 12:10). Maybe you have also encountered spiritual opposition due to your testimony of Christ's power in changing your life from being dead in your sins and trespasses, to now being fully alive to God

(Ephesians 2:1 and 5). The Enemy will always seek to silence a testimony of God's power to change lives. The Lord Jesus is a good example to us of visiting His friends and being concerned for their well-being. I'm sure there was great joy in that household when Jesus knocked on the door. Can you imagine how wonderful it would be to have Jesus be a visitor at your home?

During this time preceding the Passover, Jesus was invited to the home of Simon the Leper for a meal. If we only read John's account we could presume that it was at Martha's house, but if we want to harmonize with the other gospels, we are given more details. Matthew (26:6-13) and Mark (14:1-11) both record it as being at the home of Simon the Leper. Luke mentions another time earlier on in Jesus' ministry when a woman anointed the Lord. This is thought to be a separate incident and should not be confused with the anointing by Mary, the sister of Lazarus (Luke 7:36-50). John tells us that a dinner was given in Jesus' honor and that Lazarus was also reclining at the table. He mentions that Martha was serving the household by waiting on Simon's guests. We can presume that Jesus had healed Simon of his leprosy, because he was obviously no longer a leper. There were strict laws for a person who had leprosy, one of which was that they could not live among others in community (Numbers 5:1-3) and had to shout, "unclean, unclean," cover the lower part of their face, wear torn clothes and ring a bell to anyone that was coming near them (Leviticus 13:45). The Book of Leviticus also says that a leper was to live alone (Leviticus 13:46). We are not told that Simon had been healed but it seems likely due to the many guests at his table with Jesus being the guest of honor.

What would it be like to be a leper in Israel? Has there ever been a time in your life where you felt ostracized by others?

The guests were reclining around a table called a Triclinium. This was a U-shaped table usually just a foot or two off the floor. It was composed of three long tables with the open part of the U being available towards

the servants so that the food could easily be brought to the table without disturbing or moving the guests. The guests were all reclining around the table on soft mattresses leaning on their elbows, leaving their other hand free to be able to reach onto the low table to get the food. Often the head of the next person alongside would be touching the chest of the person next to them (John 13:25), with the feet behind, leaving a short gap between the wall and the couches. It was this gap that now allowed Mary, the sister of Lazarus, to come behind and close to Jesus' feet with her precious treasure. She brought with her a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume. This was unadulterated and unmixed with any other cheaper balsam. This nard is an extract from an aromatic Nepalese plant, *Nardostachys jatamansi*, and was usually sealed in a jar to keep it fresh and smelling strong for when the moment was right for it to be used. Matthew tells us (26:7), that the pure nard was sealed in an alabaster jar. We do not know how Judas calculated the cost of the perfume, but he figured that the price would have amounted to a year's wages. Literally it says 300 denarii, with a denarius being a day's wage, hence a number of translations calling it a year's wages for a normal laboring man. Mark adds that she broke open the jar and poured it on the head of Jesus (Mark 14:3). I'm sure a hush fell on the guests as Mary broke the seal of the Alabaster jar.



Both Matthew and Mark record that the very expensive perfume was poured on Jesus' head. John tells us that Mary poured it on the Lord's feet. Matthew and Mark do not mention that it was Mary who did this. It is possible that because they wrote their gospels closer to the actual happening that they wanted to protect Mary's name. John wrote his gospel nearer the end of the century, many estimates put it at AD 96, so it could be that John had no need to protect names from any retaliation by the religious leadership. What a beautiful act of devotion that Mary bestowed on Jesus—she brought her

treasure that she had saved and broke it open, pouring it on Jesus' head and then going to His feet and pouring out the rest of the pungent perfume. It is possible that Mary had heard of the other incident when a sinful woman had anointed Jesus while He was having supper in the house of a Pharisee. It could be that Mary desired to worship and thank the Lord in the same way (Luke 7:36-39).

Mary then did something that no self-respecting Jewish woman ever did, she unclipped her hair from being tied up and allowed it all to hang loose and proceeded to wipe the perfume all over His feet with her long hair. Not a sound was heard in the room, I am sure, as they all watched this act of pure devotion to the Lord. When she lowered down her hair, Mary broke some cultural norms, which more than likely brought a gasp to the lips of some in the room. She was touching the feet of the honored guest at this meal, and not only that, she was wiping His feet with her hair, the crown and glory of a woman (1 Corinthians 11:15)—throwing all public dignity aside. Mary's heart was full of love and thankfulness to the Lord for what He had done, not only for Lazarus, but for the time Christ had given to the three of them, gently teaching them all about the love of the Father. Love and thankfulness welled up with a desire to do something in return—to love in return, to give Him something in response to His love.

Here we see the power of agape love (self-sacrificial love) that God has bestowed on us. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). When we truly see the depth of love that the Father has bestowed on us, we become lovers of God and lovers of those He loves. We are able to even love our enemies when we see how God loves us—it creates in us a heart of love in response.

Imagine that you were a guest at this dinner, how do you think some of the guests would have reacted to Mary's act of devotion? What would have been your thoughts or reaction?

Here we find the only statement that Judas had ever said that was recorded in scripture; "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages" (verse 5). We should not think that Judas had a heart for the poor, for John finds out later that Judas had been stealing from the moneybag, as he was the one that was the keeper of the bag. Whenever he had a personal need he dipped his hand into

the common purse of the disciples. What was in Judas' heart came out at that moment. His disapproval of Mary was displayed before them all, for he saw that he had lost an opportunity to make some money. A year's wages had slipped from his grasp.

Do you think that Judas' habit of helping himself to the common funds could have led to his betrayal of Jesus? Discuss how one sin can lead to another.

It seems that it is no coincidence that both Matthew and Mark tell us that right after this loss of revenue Judas goes to the religious elite and asks for money to betray Christ into their hands (Matthew 26:14; Mark 14:10). We must be careful to uproot sin from the core of our beings, for what is inside will come out in what we say and do. Jesus put it this way:

The good man brings good things out of the good **stored up in his heart**, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil **stored up in his heart**. For out of the **overflow of his heart his mouth speaks** (Luke 6:45).

The Lord added to the rebuke of Judas by saying that Mary had saved this perfume for the day of His burial. It is very possible that Jesus had told Mary, Martha and Lazarus that His plan was to die at the hands of the religious elite and the Romans, and that He would be buried, but after three days He would rise again. The normal burial was to wash the body and anoint with perfumed oil, the very thing that Mary was now bestowing on the Lord. We don't know if Mary was consciously anointing Christ for His burial, or whether she was moved by the Spirit ahead of time to do this—the crucifixion and Passover being just two days away (Matthew 26:2, Mark 14:1). Perhaps she was aware that this might be the last opportunity to be with Jesus.

I remember a time when I had just become a Christian. It was at a Christian camp in Virginia where I was sovereignly led of God. For the first time in my life I heard of the love of God and what Christ had done to redeem me and make me clean in His sight. When I understood the gospel, I responded to the invitation and had a powerful encounter with the Spirit as I gave my life fully to Christ. Finally I had found everything my empty heart was longing for. My thirst for God had brought me to a number of countries in search of which religion was the truth. The moment I responded I became aware that my heart was free and clean before God...the guilt of

my sin-stained life was completely lifted off of me. I didn't even know that I was carrying a heavy burden of sin, but boy, I sure knew when it was lifted from me. Jesus lifted it off of me and I became fully alive like I had never been up to that point. The next day I heard a young sister in the Lord, one who had encouraged me in my faith, had received a prophetic word that she was going to Israel and someone had contributed a small amount of money to be the first to help her purchase her airplane ticket. Inside myself, like Mary, I was aware of a particular treasure that I had brought with me on my trip from England to the States. Nine months earlier I had been in India and bought a keepsake souvenir of my trip, a silver elephant inlaid with semi precious rubies. It was not cheap. It cost me a few hundred English pounds in India. Now the thought came to me that I should give it to the young lady in the hope that she could sell it for the ticket to travel and be used of the Lord in Israel. It felt so good to part with my little Indian treasure and devote it to the Lord's work. Nothing we ever put into His hands is ever wasted. I found out later that she went to Israel with the money she got for selling the silver elephant, and she was a big encouragement for me to also go to Israel. If I had never given away my treasure perhaps I would have missed the opportunity to go to Israel myself, and I would have missed out on much spiritual treasure of insight and knowledge that I later gained by living in that country for a year and a half. The Bible says cast your bread upon the waters and after many days it shall return to you. Paula Sue, if you ever read this—thanks!

Can you think of a time when you were blessed after giving to someone else?

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

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!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!" 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." 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. 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. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” (John 12:12-19).

John seems to be careful about being clear as to the timing of this entry into Jerusalem. In John 12:1, he writes that Christ returned to Bethany six days before the Passover. He states categorically that the momentous entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey was the next day (John 12:12). Mark 11:11 tells us that this next day event happened in late afternoon early evening:

¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but **since it was already late**, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve (Mark 11:11).

It also seems significant that John writes that the last Passover supper of Jesus with His disciples was held the day before the main Passover held in Jerusalem: It was just before the Passover Feast (John 13:1). In helping us to understand the time frame, John MacArthur, in his book, *The Murder of Jesus*, talks about the fact that over a quarter of a million lambs had to be sacrificed on a typical Passover in Jesus’ day. He mentions that the Passover lambs had to be sacrificed in just a two-hour time frame:

“The Jews of Jesus’ day had two different methods of reckoning the calendar, however, and this helped alleviate the problem. The Pharisees, as well as the Jews from Galilee and the northern districts of Israel, counted their days from sunrise to sunrise. But the Sadducees, and people from Jerusalem and the surrounding districts, calculated days from sundown to sundown. That meant 14 Nisan for a Galilean fell on Thursday, while 14 Nisan for the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell on Friday. (That twist in the chronology explains why Jesus and His disciples—all Galileans, except for Judas—ate the Passover meal on Thursday evening in the Upper Room, yet John 18:28 records that the Jewish leaders—all residents of Jerusalem—had not yet celebrated Passover on the following day when Jesus was taken to His trial in the Praetorium. It also explains why John 19:14 indicates that Jesus’ trial and crucifixion took place on the day of Preparation for the Passover.”)¹

What am I getting at? The Passover lamb was to be brought into the house of those preparing for Passover

four days before the lamb was to be sacrificed:

...on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁴If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight (Exodus 12:3-6).

The lamb was to be examined for four days before the Passover sacrifice. The Lord fulfilled this Passover lamb requirement in detail by entering into Jerusalem four days ahead of the Passover so that He could be inspected for four days ahead of the 14th day of Nisan.

Imagine what it was like for each Israelite family to have a lamb bounding about the house for four days. The children would take turns to feed the little lamb and clean up after him too, and more than likely became very attached to the lamb. After four days of close inspection and bonding with the family, it must have broken the hearts of the family to then take that little lamb, and shed his blood on the evening of the 14 Nisan as a substitute for each of them. God would only accept a lamb without blemish and without spot. A lamb closely examined as to its perfection. The Lord Jesus fulfilled this description in every way. He is our Passover lamb.

There was also a prophecy in Daniel, that from the declaration to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Messiah (Messiah means Anointed One), there would be sixty-nine weeks of years or 173,880 days.

²⁵ “Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem **until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes**, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble (Daniel 9:25).

More clever people than myself have sat down and have estimated that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey at exactly 173,880 days after the commandment was given to rebuild Jerusalem, completely fulfilling the

¹ John MacArthur, *The Murder of Jesus*, Nelson Books, Nashville, TN. Pages 26-27.

above prophecy.² The very day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey was exactly the day that was foretold by the prophet Daniel. I'm sure that there were clever people among the ruling elite, the High Priest, Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Scribes, who were very aware of this prophetic event, and maybe the normal everyday people in the street as well.

Jesus was not tired that day as He left Bethany. He was a young, fit, 33 year old male who had been walking all over Israel for the past three years at least. When he sat on the donkey He knew the scripture that had to be fulfilled even if His disciples were not aware of it until afterwards (John 12:16).

⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

The King of Israel came not riding on a white horse of conquest, but on a humble beast of burden, just as the

scripture foretold. We are told that there was a great crowd that came for the Feast but left the city and welcomed Him as He descended down the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem. There were those who tried to quiet down the disciple's emotions as He rode, saying, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:39-40). So great was the amount of people who welcomed the Messiah that the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after Him" (John 12:19). There will always be those who will be annoyed at seeing pure worship and devotion towards the Lord such as we see in Mary and those welcoming Him as He entered Jerusalem. As we conclude our study today, let me leave you with this question; how will you express your worship and devotion to Christ?

Prayer: Father, please help us to always have a heart to worship as Mary, laying down our personal treasures for your glory. May we receive Your Son and be ready for Him when He comes to us. Amen

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² <http://www.aboutbibleprophecy.com/weeks.htm>