

Mary's Devotion  
John 12:2-8

October 2, 2016

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<sup>A</sup>Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-8

<sup>B</sup>John 11:2

<sup>C</sup>John 11:50, 53

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<sup>D</sup>Luke 7:36-50, 10:40

**A. The Story**

**1. (Prologue: John 11:1-2 NIV)**

a. Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. And it was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

**2. (Amalgam of Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, John 12:2-8 NIV)**

a. While Jesus was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Him.

b. Then Mary came to him with an alabaster jar of about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus' head and His feet and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

c. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected, "Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages (i.e., 300 denarii)." (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.) When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked.

d. Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

**B. The Advancing Menace**

**1. The Time of this Supper**

a. in the books of Matthew & Mark, this supper is recorded in a chapter in which it is noted that the Passover is two days away

b. here in John it is in a chapter that notes that Jesus came to Bethany six days before the Passover, and that later records the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday before Passover

c. there is, however, not real conflict between these records

(A) while the gospels are recorded in general chronological (historical) order, the details quite frequently are not

- (B) this is true of the Bible in general, that in the historical books
  - (1) such as those of Moses, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles
  - (2) events are recorded, and towns and cities are named, in anticipation of the actual happening or name being given
- (C) that appears to be the case here, where John now makes his last mention of Bethany, he inserts the record – at which he has already made reference in John 11:2 – of the deed by which Mary would be remembered in ages to come

## 2. The Woman Unnamed in Matthew & Mark

- a. has been raised as an objection by some
- b. but in the context of these verses, a reason for this omission becomes readily apparent
- c. Matthew & Mark were among the earliest of the NT books written, and certainly before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Titus in 70AD
  - (A) Jewish religious rulers were still powerful when they wrote
  - (B) their antagonism resulted in Paul's going in chains to Rome
- d. John, both by internal and external evidence seems to have been written as much as 50 years later: and certainly after 70AD
  - (A) by this time the Jewish rulers were powerless
  - (B) and the family of Bethany may have been now all dead
- e. The significance of this will be seen in a moment

## 3. The Rulers' Plot

John 11:55-57

- a. 55 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover, to purify themselves. 56 Therefore they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another, as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" 57 Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.
- b. these verses remind us of the situation at hand
  - (A) Caiaphas had pronounced his unwitting prophecy: "nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." (John 11:50)
  - (B) "So from that day on they planned together to kill Him." (John 11:53)
  - (C) and now the order has gone out: "Do not harbour this Jesus, he is to be treated as though he were a

fugitive – report to us where he is!” – then they would seize him

#### 4. Jesus' Hour Approaches

John 12:1, 9

- a. verse 1: **Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.**
- b. throughout Jesus' ministry, and particularly through its final year, there were times that the Jewish religious rulers threatened Jesus
  - (A) but they either backed off or He passed out of their midst
  - (B) and a few months ago He had gone to the small town of Ephraim with His disciples
  - (C) with the reason being given, that "His hour was not yet come"
- c. but now His hour approaches
  - (A) He is following God's time-table
  - (B) He returns to his friends in Bethany
    - (1) they do not report him
    - (2) and apparently He stays there over the next 4 days or so
  - (C) and people hear of it
- d. verse 9: **The great multitude therefore of the Jews learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.**
  - (A) some of these may have been those mentioned at the end of the previous chapter: the seeking, the curious
  - (B) it was under 2 miles – about 3+ kilometres – from Jerusalem to Bethany – something like a half-an-hour walk
  - (C) and they went, not only to see Jesus
  - (D) but this, the evidence of the seventh sign recorded in the book of John – the living, walking breathing Lazarus
  - (E) the man who had been raised from the dead by Jesus

#### 5. The Ruler's Hatred in Fear

John 12:10-11

- a. **10 But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus to death also; 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away, and were believing in Jesus.**
- b. before, it was one man who was to die that the nation survive; now it is two men: kill Jesus, the miracle-worker; kill Lazarus, the evidence of the miracle

- c. how one sin leads to another!
- d. how hatred, greed, ambition, power blind to right and wrong!
- e. having decided that Jesus must die, it now becomes a small thing to add Lazarus to their atrocity
- f. the Jews who went out to Bethany, saw Lazarus, went away believing in Jesus ... that this was indeed the Christ
- g. and the Jewish rulers were filled with hatred against both of them
- h. this then is the likeliest reason that Matthew & Mark did not record their names and location while the Jewish rulers were still in power: that Lazarus would not be slain – even Luke, when he records a previous meeting of Jesus with this family does not tell where they lived, but only “in a certain town”
- i. so let us turn from this mark of hatred to

## C. Mary’s Love Demonstrated

### 1. The Honour Supper

12:2

- a. Verse 2: *So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.*
- b. there were at least 15 men there: Jesus, Lazarus, the twelve disciples, and Simon, the owner of the house
  - (A) there was another such time, as recorded in Luke 7 when Jesus was in the house of one called Simon – but that Simon was a Pharisee – and the events were similar but at a different time and place
  - (B) this Simon had been a leper but was now healed – perhaps by this same Jesus – and his house was also in Bethany
  - (C) Lazarus is there, not as the host but a guest, reclining at the table as would be all the other men at the supper
- c. As on a that former occasion when Jesus visited this family of Bethany, Martha is serving tables – but this time she does not seem to be “*cumbered about much serving*” (Luke 10:40 AV)
- d. and Mary had some freedom to serve in her own way

### 2. Mary’s Memorable Gift

12:3

- a. Verse 3: *Mary therefore took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*
  - (A) this nard came from a plant grown in the Himalayan mountains between Nepal and Tibet
    - (1) after being compounded into an oil, it would have to be transported by camel all that distance by camel caravan

- (2) so it was very costly – so this pound (or pint: the word *litra* can be used of either weight or volume) of anointing-oil of what the Indians call *piçita* or spikenard was worth three hundred denarii – a working-man’s wages for a year
- (3) such a costly oil, stored in a small container, could be used as an investment and may have represented much of her savings
- (B) The other writers tell us that Mary took an “alabaster” – that is the same word as in the original language and is explained in as “an alabaster flask for ointment, a vessel with a rather long neck which was broken off when the contents were used;” <sup>–{2}</sup>.

  - (1) the name was used of the vessel and later of the material used
  - (2) it had a round globe and a very thin neck
  - (3) the perfume or anointing-oil– *muros* (our ‘myrrh’) was poured in while it was warm and flowed easily; then cool, and thicken
  - (4) the narrow neck would keep it from any evaporation, and only permit a drop to shake out at a time

- (C) but Mary’s anointing of this honoured guest would not be stinted to a drop or two, but the other writers tell us she broke the neck and poured it out: on His head, then on His feet
  - (1) Mary expended all of this costly perfume on her Lord
  - (2) the fragrance fill the house – rabbinic saying: “(The scent of ) good oil is diffused from the bed-chamber to the dining-hall while a good name is diffused from one end of the world to another.” (Ecc. R. VII.1.1) <sup>–{3}</sup>.
  - (3) by this we see Mary’s generosity in her devotion
- (D) on His head – that was the usual way for an honoured guest we learn from what Jesus said to the other Simon in Luke 7
  - (1) of all those present there it was Jesus who was the guest of honour to Mary
  - (2) it was He to whom she had listened
  - (3) it was to Him she gave her loving devotion
- (E) but also upon His feet
  - (1) and dried the excess with her hair
  - (2) to the oriental mind there was some impropriety – not quite proper – in woman taking down her hair in public
  - (3) but like David who was willing to dance in public before and to the glory of the Lord, to the shame of his princess wife
  - (4) and like Paul & his fellow-workers who were content fo be “fools for Christ’s sake”

(5) so Mary was willing to humble and abase herself, doing the task of the lowliest servant, to show her devotion to Jesus

b. This was Jesus approval: ["And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of in memory of her."](#) (Mark 14:9)

(A) this is why John could identify her by this act to his readers in the preceding chapter

(B) for by that act she has been made known to the church of all ages

(C) she is the shining example of true devotion to Jesus Christ

### 3. But Some Objected

12:4-6

a. [4 But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, \\*said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to poor people?" 6 Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.](#)

b. let us not linger on the sad spectacle of greedy Judas, except to note

(A) the sharp contrast between these two individuals at this supper of honour and celebration with Jesus

(B) and that Judas' thoughts were echoed by the other disciples

(C) those who exclaimed, "what a waste!"

c. but rather let us turn to

### 4. Jesus' Commendation

12:7-8

a. [7 Jesus therefore said, "Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial. 8 For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me."](#)

b. Verse 7 may be difficult to understand but it is a condensed reporting: "Let her be: it was not sold in order that she might keep it for the day of my burial, for which purpose it has now been used."

(A) Mary knew what she was doing

(B) She had listened to Jesus

(C) She knew that shortly Jesus would die

(D) His friends might not have access to the body of one executed by Rome

(E) this becomes apparent when you compare the other gospels

(1) ["For when she poured this perfume upon My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial."](#) (Matthew 26:12)

(2) ["She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial."](#) (Mark 14:8)

c. Mary did this while she still could

- (A) while Jesus was alive and her devotion shown personally
- (B) what a lesson is there for us in showing our love toward others

#### D. Conclusion

##### 1. Why This Waste?

- a. how many scoffers ask that question of one giving their life to Christ
- b. the 5 young men slain by the Auca in jungles of South America
- c. Amy Carmichael caring for orphan girls in India for 55 unbroken years

##### 2. Only One Life <sup>{4}</sup>.

Two little lines I heard one day,  
Travelling along life's busy way;  
Bringing conviction to my heart,  
And from my mind would not depart;  
Only one life, twill soon be past, Ma  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

- a. Mary had learned Jesus and had learned this truth, and may we, too, learn with her, and practise such love

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NLT	New Living Translation © 1996 Tyndale Charitable Trust
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 National Council of Churches of Christ
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
- Bruce – *The Gospel & Epistles of John*, by F. F. Bruce, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; 1983
- BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, MI:  
*John*, by Merrill C. Tenney
- LBBC -- *Layman’s Bible Book Commentary, Volume 18: John*, by James E. Carter; Broadman Press, Nashville, TE; 1984
- NICNT – *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*  
*The Gospel according to John*, by Leon Morris
- NTC – *New Testament Commentary*, by William Hendriksen; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI; 1954
- RWP – *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson
- TEC -- *The Gospel according to John*, by George Allen Turner & Julius R. Mantey, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; ca 1965

2. Bauer’s translation of Arndt & Gingrich’s Lexicon

3. From NICNT, *in loc*.

4. *Only One Life* – By C.T. Studd – British Cricketer & missionary to China, India & Africa