

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

JESUS SAVES

JESUS THE SAVIOR

The Savior Anointed for Burial

Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, John 12:1-9

This lesson is the first in a three-month study of events surrounding the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Today, we will see how Mary of Bethany's act of worship was a sweet aroma to her Savior while to Judas Iscariot that same fragrance registered as a stench in his heart.

Our focal passage of the anointing comes from Matthew's gospel; however, it is also told in **Mark 14:3-9** and **John 12:1-11**. Bible commentator Matthew Henry suggests that there may have been two separate meals in Bethany where Mary anointed Jesus on two separate occasions. Personally, I believe Matthew, Mark and John recorded the same event with different details.

There is a different anointing recorded in **Luke 7:36-50**. Both anointings occurred in the house of a man named Simon. – however, one Simon was a leper – one was a Pharisee. The unnamed woman in Luke's story is not Mary of Bethany. It appears Jesus was in Galilee when He was anointed by a 'sinful' woman indicating she was a prostitute; Mary of Bethany was not a prostitute. There is a contrast in this story of two people – a woman of ill-repute who came to Jesus knowing her need of forgiveness and an upstanding Pharisee who was also a sinner but failed to recognize it. When Jesus spoke to the woman in Luke's account, He assured her of forgiveness of her sins. To Mary of Bethany, He promised worldwide honor for her act of worship.

Mary prepares Jesus for His coming death and burial.

Read Matthew 26:6-7 (ESV) ⁶ Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table.

Undoubtedly, Simon was no longer a leper since it would have been impossible for him to live among people as a leper. The Law demanded that lepers live alone. It is very possible Simon was healed of his leprosy by Jesus. But, scripture does not say.

To associate with Jesus at this time in His ministry would have been risky. Jesus was being sought out by the Sanhedrin. The people were ordered to report His whereabouts. The folks attending this get-together could be accused of breaking the law and committing a crime. In John's account we are told that Lazarus who was recently restored to life after being dead four days was at the dinner table with Jesus.

John also adds the detail that Martha was serving the meal and identifies her sister, Mary, as the one who performed the anointing. Mary of Bethany is mentioned by name three times in the scripture and each time, she is at the feet of Jesus. If you are at the point in your life where you do not know which way to turn, STOP and sit down at the feet of Jesus! And while you are sitting with the Savior – listen to Him – not the radio, not the television, not the phone – listen to Jesus and let your heart say as the young Samuel did – speak, Lord, for your servant hears.

In Oriental fashion the men would have been reclining at a low table leaning on small couches or pillows with their feet extending behind them. This would place Mary behind the diners. Instead of as in a learner's position that she took previously at the feet of Jesus, Mary took a slave's position. The washing of feet was reserved for the lowest of servants; however, as Mary knelt at Jesus' feet, she did not care what anyone thought.

When we combine the Gospel records, we learn that Mary anointed both His head and His feet, and wiped His feet with her hair. A woman's hair is her glory. (*1 Cor. 11:15*). The use of her hair pictures Mary as surrendering her glory to the Lord.

Previously, when Mary's sister, Martha, had asked Jesus to send Mary to the kitchen, Jesus had told Martha concerning Mary sitting at His feet learning in *Luke 10:42 (ESV)* ⁴² *but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.* Mary chose what was better - she learned about Jesus from listening and from events in her own life. Mary had witnessed Jesus' power over death when He raised her brother from the dead.

Mary opened an alabaster box. These boxes were made from a stone found near Alabastron in Egypt. In order to open the box, Mark reports that Mary broke the alabaster vessel. To give our devotion to Jesus, we may have to break something, possibly our own stubborn will. She broke the box to free the fragrant nard or spikenard, a costly perfumed oil. The Bible Dictionary says they imported this fragrance from the Himalayas in India. The perfumed oil was about 12 ounces – the amount of a can of soda. The oil was broken and spilled and lavished on Jesus. She gave over her own self to the worship. She was not worrying about what others thought. She didn't care what she would look like later with oily hair. All she cared about was Jesus and the fragrance of her worship filled the room. *2 Corinthians 2:14-15 (ESV)* ¹⁴ *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.* ¹⁵ *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,*

Jesus praises Mary's extravagant gift of love.

Read Matthew 26:8-13 (ESV) ⁸ *And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste?"* ⁹ *For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor."* ¹⁰ *But Jesus, aware of this,*

said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

Matthew tells us that the disciples were indignant over the extravagance. John reveals that Judas started it all. **John 12:4-5 (ESV)** ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” At that time, they did not realize that Judas was there only for himself. He was one of them. Bryan Rhoden, a Bible instructor in Tupelo, Mississippi, describes what happened as being the ‘Judas Effect’. Then, Rhoden describes what the ‘Judas Effect’ might look like in our day.

“It could be an unbeliever (who looks, talks, and acts like a believer) who suggests a course of action so he can directly benefit from it... **It might be the idea that our ministries are more important than worship.** Maybe, it is the person who has incredible knowledge of Christ, who has experience in Christian ministry, yet he is constantly criticizing others... Have we been swayed to believe that our compassionate ministries are acceptable in spite of our lack of worship?... Or worse, could it be that we are the ones who start the complaints? Maybe we are the ones who feign compassion in order to be noticed. Maybe we minister only to reap some benefit for our pride. Perhaps our negativity is the contagion in our churches. Could it be that *we* are the ones responsible for the Judas Effect?”

How Mary got the ointment or why she had it, we don’t know. It could be an indication that Mary’s family was well-off but not necessarily. Possibly, it was her only valuable possession. It does not matter that the box was alabaster and the ointment was spikenard. Jesus was just as touched by a widow who threw a few cents into the collection plate. What touches the heart of Jesus is our devotion and our love given freely without reservation. Jesus wants hearts to acknowledge Him in everything - wherever we are.

Jesus said, *In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.* On several occasions Jesus had spoken of His death to His followers. Judas chose to be the one who would betray Jesus. The other disciples denied or refused to see the day approaching when Jesus as Messiah would be crucified for the sins of the world until after He rose from the dead. But Mary who had sat intently listening at the feet of Jesus and really heard what Jesus said must have gained special insight regarding the mission and message of Jesus. There is no indication that Mary of Bethany was among the women who brought spices to the burial of Jesus. She anointed Him while He was still living. The devotion of Mary must have brought a special smile to the face of Jesus and encouraged the Savior's heart as He faced the demands of Passion Week and the lonely road to the Cross.

Judas plans the betrayal of Jesus with 30 pieces of silver.

Read Matthew 26:14-16 (ESV) ¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

David Legge speaks of how betraying someone is not the same as being their enemy. The essence of betrayal, even to death, is that you show affection towards the person you are betraying. Betrayal comes from the hand of a ‘friend’. Judas was one of the twelve disciples that followed Jesus for three and a half years. Consider the privileges this man had. He heard with His own ears the words of Christ. Judas was present for the Sermon on the Mount. He listened to the parables and their interpretations. He witnessed the miracles – even the raising of the dead. He was there when Jesus walked on the water. Judas was there for it all, and yet he never truly believed. That’s staggering. He knew Christ intimately, but he did not know Christ by faith. He knew Christ personally, but he never accepted Christ as Savior.

It was prophesied by Zechariah that the Messiah – the Shepherd would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. There is a strange episode in the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah’s life that sets the prophecy in motion. (**Zechariah 11:4–14**). God commanded Zechariah to play the role of the true Shepherd. He became a type of the Messiah at the time when the Messiah would minister on earth. God told Zechariah to shepherd and care for a flock “doomed to slaughter”. God used this to illustrate the prophetic judgment that would come against Israel for crucifying Christ. In this 6th century B.C. prophecy, we also see a picture of the betrayal of the Messiah.

There is a portion of the prophecy that specifically applies to Judas. When Zechariah asked for his wages, they paid him the price of a slave, 30 pieces of silver foretelling when Judas would demand of the chief priests to be paid for his betrayal of Jesus. The price the chief priests paid links to the prophetic words in **Zechariah 11:12 (ESV)** ¹² Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages **thirty pieces of silver**. Zechariah was so disgusted with his wages that he went to the temple and threw the money to the potter who was working there, perhaps supplying vessels for the priests. We know that Judas eventually threw his 30 silver coins back at the religious leaders and they used the money to purchase a potter’s field.

The murderous leaders counted out “30 pieces of silver” to pay Judas without seeming to recall the prophecy of Zechariah regarding the betrayal of the Shepherd of Israel. With all their boasted knowledge of the Scriptures, they forged ahead to fulfill prophecy in a bargain with the son of perdition.

In Mary and Judas as so often found in scripture, we see the contrast of two individuals in their response to Jesus. Judas' life is a warning to those who pretend to serve Christ but whose hearts are far from God. He is also a warning to those who waste their opportunities and their lives. "Why this waste?" asked Judas when he saw that expensive ointment poured out on Jesus. Yet Judas wasted his opportunities, his life, and his soul! Mary, on the other hand, gave Jesus her heart and saved her soul!