

Teaching Points

Throughout our study of John's Gospel, we've taken special note of the way people respond to Jesus. His signs have been clear demonstrations of His power. They point us to the conclusion that Jesus must be more than a mere man. How do the people respond to this miracle-working holy man who makes such bold claims? Some people are threatened by Him and want Him dead. Others are curious. Some believe.

Tonight, we take a look at an extravagant act of costly, loving devotion shown to the Lord by Mary. Mary is one of Lazarus' sisters. Jesus has just recently raised Lazarus from the dead. Now they're all enjoying dinner together in Bethany. Imagine being at that party with Jesus and Lazarus at the table! Interestingly, the focus is not so much on Lazarus, but on the actions of Mary.

“Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus...”

(v.3). In the midst of the supper, Mary gave a remarkable gift to Jesus. It wasn't unusual to wash the feet of a guest, but it was unusual to do it during the meal itself, to use **very costly oil of spikenard** to do it, and to **wipe the feet with her hair**, using the hair as a kind of towel.

Mary's gift was remarkably *extreme*. She used a lot (**a pound**) of a **very costly oil of spikenard**. Spices and ointments were often used as an investment because they were small, portable, and could be easily sold. Judas believed this oil was worth 300 denarii (v.12), which was worth a year's wages for a workingman.

Mary's gift was remarkably *humble*. When a guest entered the home, usually the guest's feet were washed with water and the guest's head was anointed with a dab of oil or perfume. Here, Mary used this precious ointment and **anointed the feet of Jesus**. She considered her precious ointment only good enough for His feet. “To attend to the feet was the task of the lowliest slave. Thus, Mary's action denoted great humility as well as great devotion.” (Morris)

Mary's gift was remarkably *unselfconscious*. Not only did she give the gift of the expensive oil, she also **wiped His feet with her hair**. This means that she let down her hair in public, something a Jewish woman would rarely do.

Discussion Questions: What do you think about Mary's actions here? Too extravagant? Was this a waste? Was it “over-the-top”? What do you make of Mary's act of love and devotion? What would compel Mary to wipe the feet of Jesus with her hair?

Judas protested Mary's actions saying that this oil should have been sold and the proceeds “**given to the poor**” (v.5). But John lets us in on Judas' true motives (“**he was a thief**” (v.6) and Jesus defends Mary and explains what she did. He corrected Judas, saying, “**Let her alone**” because she did “**this for the day of My burial**” (v.7).

John 12:1-11

According to Jesus, Mary understood, at least to some degree, that Jesus would soon die. Instead of waiting to pour out this costly oil on Him after His death, she chose to do it while He was still alive. And Jesus honored her sacrificial and humble actions. Mary gave her most valued possession to Christ. Judas pilfered from the money box, but Mary “broke her box” in order that all might be given to Jesus. Judas, who complained about this action as if he cared for the poor, is the one who would “sell” Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. That’s approximately 120 denarii. Mary gave Jesus an offering worth two-and-a-half times that amount. Judas’ words are diabolical. He didn’t care about the poor. Mary’s actions are worshipful and commendable. She gave her gift willingly and in sincerity.

Discussion Questions: Like Mary, out of love for Jesus, we should give to Him everything, including our most valued possessions...which will most likely not include a year’s worth of spikenard! What does it mean for us to give to Jesus everything? What does that include? When we do that, will it be judged by some people as “too much” or “a waste”?

Thoughts: James Boice says, “It may be a comfortable home, a successful self-image, a bank account, a pension, a family, or a dozen other things. But whatever it is, the question holds. Could you (would you) give it for Jesus? Is there a way you could employ it to serve Him, or just to show your love for Him? Would you let your children leave the standard of life that you have created for them, and of which you are so proud, to go into Christian work, perhaps in a distant unrewarding place? Would you leave everything to go yourself, if God should so lead you? Would you be able to use your substance to send others?”

Prayer Focus

1. Take time to praise God for His Beloved Son Who is worthy of our everything. He is worthy of the praise of our lips, the devotion of our hearts, the things we possess, the family we love, and the entirety of our lives.
2. Ask God to help us understand how we can be faithful stewards of what He has given to us and how to honor Him with His good gifts. Ask Him to lead us in knowing how to make much of Christ with our lives.