

Anointed At Bethany

Matthew 26:6-13 Mark 14:3-9 Luke 22:1 John 11:55-12:11

Nearly a third of each Gospel is devoted to the last week of Jesus' life on earth. And, as the days of this last week pass, events are more and more carefully recorded.

During that last week, a woman John identifies as Mary, Lazarus sister, poured expensive perfume on Jesus as he was reclining at the table. Jesus said that this was in preparation for his burial.

Each of the Gospel writers' record events associated with the anointing at Bethany. Not all give the same detail. All of them record the Passover, the plot to kill Jesus, and Judas' betrayal. John even mentions that the chief priests wanted to kill Lazarus as well; because of his resurrection many believed on Jesus.

Matthew, Mark, and John record the anointing while eating a meal, but John writes that it was his feet, where Matthew and Mark say that his head was anointed. Matthew and Mark give the location of this event as Simon the Leper's house in Bethany. John does not mention Simon or Bethany; Luke does not mention this anointing at all, but he does mention the Passover and the plot in the time frame of the Bethany anointing.

Enough information is given from all the writers concerning this Passover to confirm that something had to be done

with Jesus. The chief priests could not continue to allow Jesus popularity among the people to continue. Every time they met him in public, he made them look bad. That had to stop.

Lets read John's account starting from 11:55.

⁵⁵When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. ⁵⁶They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?" ⁵⁷But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then 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.

⁴But 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 moneybag, 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. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

⁹Meanwhile 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. ¹⁰So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Luke records this about Judas in 22:3.

³Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. ⁴And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. ⁵They were delighted and agreed to give him money. ⁶He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

Matthew and Mark say that this was Simon the Leper's house in Bethany. I found something interesting in [The Victor Bible Background Commentary](#) that may relate as to why they would mention this detail.

"Both the Pharisees and the Essenes, the two first-century Jewish groups most concerned with purity, feared and were

utterly repelled by lepers. It is likely they were influential in establishing the rule that each Jewish city must establish some area outside it where lepers might live, so they would not defile the community. It is striking that the Temple Scroll, one of the manuscripts recovered with the Dead Sea Scrolls, indicates that lepers were isolated from others “east of the city” of Jerusalem. And it is there, just east of Jerusalem, that the town of Bethany lay!”

Isn't that interesting? Could it be that a leper named Simon, living in one of these areas near the town of Bethany, was healed by Jesus and was now able to return home to his family? The “religious” drew back from those in need for fear of ritual contamination. But Jesus chose to spend time with those who others considered unclean. Is it any wonder that he gained popularity over the “ceremonially clean”?

John mentions that those coming to the Passover were looking for Jesus, wondering if he would show up. During the Passover, Jerusalem would be packed. All the Holiday Inns, Marriott's, and Motel 6's would be full. People would find places to stay wherever they could. They would stay with friends or family or in surrounding villages or camp out in countryside.

Jesus mug shot was on the post office wall and the curious wondered if he would show up and risk being arrested. To the chief priests and Pharisees, Jesus was public enemy No.1.

You always have the curious group anytime you have a big event. If we could afford it, we could have a speaker or group come and pack this place. We could invite a controversial political figure, or a popular athlete, maybe one of the Olympic medallists and we would have plenty of the curious crowd show up.

But every Sunday, and with some groups Friday night, and even on Saturday, the most controversial figure in history is the topic of discussion. Where are the curious? What does it take to get their attention in America today?

It seems today that those who oppose Jesus have an easier time drawing the attention of the curious. The chief priests and the Pharisees represent that group in John's account. One of the Twelve, Judas Iscariot, decided to assist that group with Jesus arrest. His price was 30 pieces of silver. 30 pieces of silver equaled about 120 denari. A year's wages, the price Judas said the perfume could be sold for, equaled 300 denari. Judas didn't place much value on Jesus.

The pure nard was a fragrant oil prepared from the roots and stems of an aromatic herb from northern India. It was an expensive perfume, imported in sealed alabaster boxes or flasks which were opened only on special occasions.

So, here is the scene: Simon, a man possible healed by Jesus, opens his home to Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and the criminal Jesus and his band of outlaws. Anyone who knew that Jesus was in

Simon's home could have turned him in. Simon could have been in trouble as well as everyone else at the party. Apparently, it was worth the risk to host a dinner for Jesus and his friends.

Martha is serving. This is characteristic of Martha. In Luke 10 we find her opening up her home to Jesus and his disciples, and that she was the one who took the responsibility to make the preparations. Comparing Luke 10 with John 12, the atmosphere around this meal is quite different. Martha's attitude has changed. She is not the uptight, aggravated Martha of Luke 10.

Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. He was the one who, just a few weeks before this, had been dead for four days. Can you imagine what the media today would do with a story like that? Lazarus would have been on the 700 Club and on the PTL program. He probably would have already signed a contract to write of his experiences during the four days he was dead. He would be so pressed by the media, he probably wouldn't even have time to be at this supper. And, by the way, Lazarus' mug shot was on the post office wall right beside Jesus'.

At some point during the meal, after Martha had served and while Lazarus was fellowshiping with these outlaws, Mary breaks open a very fragrant and expensive perfume and anoints Jesus. Matthew and Mark say that she pours it on his head. John says the feet. Why not both? If it

was intended for his burial, as Jesus indicates, why not both?

There is some confusion between this anointing and Luke 7, where he mentions a woman who washed Jesus feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Some believe the woman in Luke's account is Mary Magdalene, a notorious prostitute, out of whom Jesus had cast seven demons.

This is not Mary Magdalene, but Mary of Bethany, a woman about whom there is no mention ever of anything out of line. Yet John makes clear that she had so understood the work of Jesus and the change he had made in her heart. Outwardly there was no blot on her record. Inwardly she came to be deeply appreciative of the richness and blessing he brought to her life.

Obviously thankful for the restoration of her brother Lazarus, but also thankful for the teaching she heard from him as she sat at his feet. This is what accounts for her extravagance here. She spared no expense, she cared nothing for the customs of the day, entering into a supper where women were usually not welcome, letting down her hair in public, an unthinkable act in that culture, and openly expressing her love for Jesus. But that's how love acts. That's what love does. It doesn't care about the cost.

Matthew records, ⁸When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?"

Mark records, ⁴Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume?"

So Judas wasn't the only one who protested what Mary did. But what Luke records about Judas is tragic. Satan entered Judas and he sold Jesus out.

As we think about the scene around Simon's table, and all that was going on with the preparation in Jerusalem for the Passover, the public order for the arrest of Jesus, the crowds wondering if he will show, think about the value that these groups or individuals had placed on Jesus.

Simon, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus placed a high value on Jesus represented by their hospitality, service, fellowship, and sacrifice.

Some of the disciples place a high value on Jesus, but others side with Judas when Mary's extravagance reveals the condition of their heart.

Every day, we are challenged by what is going on around us to place a value on this or that with our time, our money, our energy. What we value most with our resources will reveal who we are on the inside. God already knows who we are. The question is do we know who we are.

The curious, wondering if Jesus would show, didn't really know who they were. Some who shouted Hosanna when Jesus rode into town shouted crucify him just a few days later.

Some of the disciples, reclining at the table with Lazarus and Jesus, didn't know

who they were. They said that they were ready to die with Jesus, but as far as we can tell, John was the only one of the Twelve at the cross.

The chief priests and the Pharisees, who posted Jesus arrest, thought that they were okay by being ceremonially clean, but when Jesus exposed them publicly as counterfeits, they were delighted when Judas, Satan's agent, offered to help them dispose of Jesus.

We all have our alabaster boxes of some kind. The alabaster box represents what we value most. When the box is broken and the contents poured out, the motive behind the act will tell us, and those around us, who we are.

Mary apparently had nothing to gain by her act. She didn't have to do what she did to be accepted by Jesus. Though what she did was not considered appropriate by some who witnessed the act, Jesus saw the beauty of the act from a heart of faith and love.

Every day, we are challenged to consider our alabaster box. By the end of each day, we will have opened the box and poured the content on something or someone. So, as you start your day with time in the Word and prayer, lean on your window sill each morning and get a glimpse of God, then you will be ready to open your alabaster box.