

## **“Mary Anoints Jesus for His Burial”**

*\*Context of Events* – 11:55-57 – v.55 – The context of the passage is the preparation for the Jewish Passover. These very same things happened every year in Jerusalem and among the Jews who were spread throughout the region/empire. Passover was one of the three festivals/feasts that Jews were required to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to attend/celebrate. The other two were Pentecost and Tabernacles/booths. This was the typical pilgrimage made in preparation for Passover which included the need for those traveling to arrive in time for ritual purification.

In many ways this was like so many earlier Passovers – the city was filling up with worshippers during the week leading up to the feast/festival. They came to remember and celebrate the great work of God when He called His people out of Egypt with powerful miracles culminating in the death of the firstborn of every household which had not painted the blood taken from the Passover Lamb above the doors of their homes.

v.56 - However, this Passover was different. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and the believing witnesses to that final sign miracle had been spreading the news. As a result many of the pilgrims had been told of the miracle and came to the festival hoping to see Jesus. Nonetheless it is likely that many, if not most, were not 100% sure who He really was but based in 12:9, 12-15, 17-19 there was some suspicion that He was Messiah – the coming King.

Along with that hope, came the question, “Will he come?” No doubt the question was prompted by the growing hostility within the Jewish leadership toward Jesus and the sense that Jesus faced real danger if He appeared publically.

v.57 – All of the concerns regarding danger/threat were justified, as seen in John’s note about the “chief priests and Pharisees” network of “spies” and their plan to arrest Him if He came. Of course this is tied to the events of John 11:7-16, 45-54 – as well as other places in John’s gospel.

**What is the actual message of John from this passage? John’s message and our application is about worship or the love we have for Jesus and how we value Him (Piper “value”). That is clear from the contrasting responses to Jesus at this meal and declared in the editorial comments of John (cf. 12:1-8, 9-11).**

*\*The Scene Shifts to the Meal Prepared for Jesus* – 12:1-2

1. Six days before the Passover Jesus arrived in Bethany – This means that once again Jesus moved into danger (cf. 11:53-54). That means that, as He said earlier when He set out for Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus was “walking in the light” of the Father’s will (cf. 11:7-16). Jesus was now moving to the cross. His hour – the hour of His glory – had come (cf. 12:23). There is a subtext of Jesus submitting to the Father’s sovereign will - *not* fatalistically giving into defeat (cf. 14:30-31).

2. John ties these events into the miraculous sign of Jesus when He raised Lazarus from the dead (cf. 12:1b). This explicitly connects the events of this meal (which likely took place after sundown on the Sabbath) and all of the events of the next day – Palm Sunday - to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This does two things –

- It makes John 12 transitional in John’s narrative between the “book of signs” through the sign miracle of the raising of Lazarus (John 1-11) and the “book of glory” or Jesus’ “upper room discourse” (John 13-17).

- It seems that John is indicating that this is a special, planned meal, put on by Martha, Lazarus and Mary, in Jesus’ honor – as a demonstration of profound gratitude and deep love. This seems intentional by the structure of the passage. John – vs. 2-3 - introduces Martha, Lazarus and Mary in such a way as to emphasize their specific place in his telling of the story. **Martha was serving and Lazarus was among Jesus and His disciples reclining at the table.**

*\*Mary Anoints Jesus as a Declaration of His Supreme Beauty and Value and Her Deep Love for Him – 12:3-8* – This is the heart of the text. In it John sets up a contrast between Mary’s sweet worship of Jesus – as John Piper said – “the worth of Jesus” as seen by “the love of his followers” (Mary) or “...the value of His perfections” as seen by the “intensity of (Mary’s) our affections.” This is placed in direct contrast with Judas’ response – Judas who for 3 years listened to His teaching and was witness to His life and His miraculous works – who heard and saw exactly what Mary did and more in John 11 – he did not see or understand the worth of Jesus or the value of His perfections.

1. Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with a little more 11.5 ounces of pure perfumed ointment. This ointment was very expensive. If Judas was not exaggerating it was worth about 300 which was a worker’s average daily wage. To put this in perspective – minimum wage in Reno is about \$8.75 per hour and in California it is between \$13 and \$14. For an 8 hour day in Reno that is about \$21,000 or a 12 hour day \$31,500. For an 8 hour day in California it is \$32,400 and 12 hour day about \$48,600. Either way it was about a year’s wages – where it came from we are not told.

- Mary knelt at Jesus’ feet and poured out nearly 12 ounces of supremely valuable perfumed ointment in an act of love which matched Jesus’ worth – an act of worship filled with an intensity of affections which matched the supreme value of Jesus. **Why?!** Because just a short time before she fell at His feet weeping in confusion and despair – “Lord! If you had been here my brother would not have died.” Jesus had declared to her sister – “your brother will live again” and “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall live even though he dies and he who lives and believes in me will never die.” None of that gave any substantial hope until Jesus led her and Martha to the tomb and standing before the tomb declared – “I told you if you believed you would see glory.” He then did the unthinkable, the impossible – He spoke and called her dead brother out of the tomb right before her eyes!! ***She saw such glory that now she love Him, she valued Him supremely not simply for what He did but for who He is!!***

- However, to add to the beauty of her act of worship and the intensity of her affections – we get a deeper sense of Jesus’ supreme value to Mary when John says that she wiped His feet with her hair.

Craig Keener wrote that this act reinforced the image of humble servitude and noted that Paul wrote that a woman’s glory was her hair (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:7). Because in His glory Jesus was supremely valuable to and loved beyond all else by Mary – not only did she pour tens of thousands of dollars of ointment on His feet in an extravagant and selfless expression of love for Him - ***Her glory served only to wipe His feet!!***

In addition – it may have violated Jewish custom for Mary to uncover her head and unbind her hair. According A. Kostenberger, it may have been understood as wholly inappropriate and would’ve raised many eyebrows. ***Worship that reflects a depth of love and intensity of affections, which match the worth and supreme value of Jesus, is wholly self-forgetting!!***

- Notice that John makes a point to say the aroma of the perfume “filled the room.” Without a single drop of such perfumed ointment – a love for Jesus and a worship (which reflects an intensity of emotions) which matches His supreme beauty and value will fill this room with its aroma and ***it will be sweet and absolutely transforming.***

**However and more importantly,** the sweet aroma of such worship has the power to rise to heaven and to enter the presence of God in a declaration of His glory and our love which will cause the angels to look on in wonder!! ***Indeed – that is the worship which will fill heaven in that day when stand before Him and join together with the redeemed of every nation and in the presence of the angels, in self-forgetting love declaring His glory (cf. Revelation 4-5)!!***

2. Judas rebuked Mary’s act of worship as irresponsible and frivolous – cf. 12:4-6. John makes two comments which help us to know how he wants us to see Judas’ objection.

- 12:4 - Judas was introduced by John as one of Jesus’ disciples and as His betrayer. It means that for the entire course of Jesus’ ministry Judas sat at His feet and heard everything the others heard Him teach, saw the very same character of life the others saw and witnessed all of the miracles the other disciples witnessed. And certainly he heard what Jesus said to Martha and Mary and he, like Mary and Martha, saw Jesus, by the power of His voice, call Lazarus – dead for 4 days – out of the tomb alive!!

- 12:6 – John didn’t know until later, but Judas – the keeper of the money – skimmed from the treasury. He loved money more than Jesus and didn’t care about the pour. He wanted to steal the money that Mary poured on Jesus’ feet.

- 12:5 – Judas’ objection to Mary’s ***act of profound worship*** and his rebuke of it as frivolous and uncaring, was not genuine and it was a ruse to cover his greed with the appearance of care

for the poor. However, don't make the mistake of thinking this is all about the money for Judas. Money was a symptom of the root which led to betrayal.

Judas saw the very same things with his eyes that Mary saw but he was blind to the beauty of Jesus' glory. *Jesus was a means to an end for Judas, whereas for Mary He had become her treasure, her soul's greatest delight.* So in an act of love for Jesus that matched His supreme worth – Mary poured out tens of thousands of dollars in selfless and self-forgetting worship on Jesus' feet and used her hair – her glory – to wipe His feet. On the other hand, to Judas, Jesus was worth 30 pieces of silver – he would sell Jesus, betray Him for 1 tenth of what Mary poured on His feet!! *Why?!* Because he was dead in his own sin and blind to Jesus' glory!!

*\*Jesus Rebuked Judas and Gave Depth of Meaning to Mary's Act of Worship – 12:7-8 – Jesus told Judas to leave Mary alone and follows with a 3 part statements which clarify what was actually taking place.*

1. 12:7 - **Jesus said that Mary was anointing Him for His burial.** It is unclear and not agreed upon as to all of the implications of this statement. However, it is clear that Jesus attached Mary's act of worship and, by that, the raising of Lazarus and the declaration that He is Himself "the resurrection and the life" to His own death and resurrection. *I believe Mary had no idea that Jesus would be crucified less than a week later, that she was preparing His body for burial. She did not know that her joy would be turned to sadness and the intensity of her love would be replaced by a grief of equal intensity.*

We can know what Mary did not know and we see a power and glory in Jesus' declaration in John 11:25-26 that Mary could not see. We understand that His glory, the glory "signified" in the raising of Lazarus, is fully on display in the cross, resurrection and ascension. We can better understand and even experience the supreme beauty and worth of Jesus in a way that Mary could not. For the post ascension believer, by the Spirit, Jesus is in us and we are in Him – we know and experience the transformation of Jesus in us and we experience the truth that Jesus is our life!! There is an assurance of hope we can enjoy and a depth of love we can experience that "fills" us "with all the fullness of God" (cf. Ephesians 3:14-21). Our worship must become a giving of our very lives in worship of Jesus - arrive at the place the Apostle Paul was in Philippians 1:21; 3:7ff, 20-21 (cf. Galatians 2:20; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1 Peter 1:18ff etc).

2. 12:8 - **True ministry is born of worship.** Jesus put devotion to Him ahead of ministry to the poor – ahead of all ministry. He teaches that ministry of any kind finds its roots and depth in a love Him that matches His worth and affections for Him that reflect His supreme value to the worshipper and which result in selfless, extravagant and self-forgetting worship! If we move away from that foundation – we will compromise Jesus. We will see true, extravagant and intensely affectionate worship as frivolous. We will serve Him for what He brings to us and if the price is right we will sell Him for a few pieces of silver – which may look like social

acceptance, cultural favor, ease of life, etc. And we will turn from Him when it costs us too much to love Him.

**Note:** In 12:9-11 we are told that many of the pilgrims coming to the feast had come eager to see Jesus and Lazarus – whom He had raised from the dead. These pilgrims are put in contrast with the chief priests (and the Pharisees) who planned to kill both Jesus and Lazarus who served as irrefutable declaration of Jesus' glory. It seems likely that many, if not most, of those eager to see Jesus had not come to the place of John 20:30-31. In fact many would come to the end of the week and shout "Crucify" with the mob – because after all there was no power and glory in a beaten and helpless prophet!! *There were also those who believed Jesus' claims but they did not love Him or have affections for Him that matched His worth. Rather they valued their station in life and culture, the praise of man – more than they valued Jesus* (cf. 12:42-43).

Certainly - we can "know" all that we need to "know" in order for our love and worship to reflect Jesus' supreme value. So there are some of us who have and do enter into selfless, self-giving/dying to self/counting it all loss, self-forgetting intensely loving worship and the room is filled with the sweet aroma – an aroma that rises to the presence of God.

There are perhaps others among us who are like Judas – for Jesus is a means to an end or an object of study – who are incredibly self-serving and self-conscious in their "relationship" with Jesus. They will soon fall away and, at some level, they will betray Jesus.

Perhaps there are others who truly believe and are just not in that place of deep and compelling love – pre-occupied with life and can't seem to enter into that Mary type of worship (nobody stays there all of the time). *For those of us who may be there, sometimes the knowing and in faith doing, precede the being. Make the decision to "look into His glory" regularly* (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18) – *to pursue Him with all of your being for the surpassing greatness of knowing Him. By faith - give yourself fully to Him and He will unveil Himself to you* (cf. John 14:21, 23).