

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Mary Anoints Christ John 12:1-11**

We will officially begin construction on our new auditorium very shortly. This ongoing construction project will take approximately a year to complete. When it is completed, we will be corporately worshipping in a facility that will greatly expand our ministry potential. Will we reach that potential? It will depend upon whether we are truly devoted to Christ or simply representing ourselves as truly devoted to Christ.

How can we know? There are a number of different ways to do this, but there is probably no better way of truly measuring our devotion to Christ than in the way we manage our material resources.

Those who choose to use their material resources to serve Christ are devoted to Him, and those who choose to use their material resources to serve themselves are not devoted to Him. What did Christ tell His disciples in **Matthew 6:21**? "**For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**"

I believe that this truth will come alive for us in the passage that we will be examining this weekend?

Let me read for you **John 12:1-8**. "**Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. (2) So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. (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. (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. (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.’"**

This incident that is recorded for us here in this passage represents another major division in the Gospel of John. We are now moving from conflict to crisis. So, what is the first incident that is described for us in this particular section of the Gospel of John?

**John 12:1-11** describes a dinner that took place in Bethany at the home of a man known as Simon the leper. We know that it was at the home of Simon the leper because **Matthew 26:6-13** and **Mark 14:3-9** tells us that it was. So, how many people were at his home for dinner. There were at least 17. There was Jesus and His disciples, Lazarus, Mary and Martha, and finally Simon. And during the course of this dinner with these many guests, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, did something that obviously caught the attention of everyone at the meal. Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with a costly perfume.

My hope for this message is that God will use it to help us see whether or not we are truly devoted to Christ or simply masquerading as a devoted follower of Christ. My hope for this message is that God will use it to help us to see the truth about ourselves either leading to a prayer of thanksgiving for the grace that He has ministered in our lives, or a prayer of confession acknowledging our self-deception and desire to change our ways. So, how will I be breaking up this particular story? I will

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be breaking this story of Christ's anointing by Mary into four different parts. The first part is Christ's anointing performed (John 12:1-3).

Let us begin by looking at **John 12:1. "Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead."** Notice the first two words, "**Jesus therefore.**" The "**therefore**" that links this incident to the preceding narrative is important. At the end of the preceding narrative John had told his readers that the chief priests and the Pharisees, or in other words, the Sanhedrin had given orders that anyone in Jerusalem who knew where Jesus was should tell them so that they could arrest Him. And where was Jesus at the time when this order was given? He apparently was safely tucked away in a town named Ephraim 12 miles away, based on **John 11:54.**

So, how will Jesus, who is now safely tucked away in Ephraim, respond to this growing threat in Jerusalem? **John 12:1** tells us "**Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany.**" In other words, Jesus, in light of this growing threat outlined for us in the last verse of **John 11**, chose to come with His disciples to the hometown of Lazarus, which was only two miles away from Jerusalem.

Jesus had not come into this world to play it safe, but rather He came into this world to die at the proper time for our sins, and it seems very clear, based on Christ's response in **John 12:1**, that the proper time was quickly approaching. When did Jesus arrive in Bethany? He arrived six days before the Passover.

So, what is the next thing we see happening after He and His disciples arrived? We see Christ and His disciples enjoying a dinner at the home of Simon the leper.

Let me read for you **John 12:2. "So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him."** There are a couple of details mentioned here that are interesting.

First of all, John mentions to us that Martha was the one who took the responsibility for serving dinner. That was what Martha loved to do. From what the Scriptures tell us about her, she was in her element. She was a guest in Simon the leper's house, but she was in charge and it appears from this text that she absolutely had no problem with this at all.

Good for Martha! In the past she had not always been so much at peace with this kind of arrangement. Remember the other dinner for Jesus that Luke records in **Luke 10:38-42**? Remember how her sister Mary had drifted off and Martha had said, "**Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me?**" But Jesus had said, "**Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.**"

What an embarrassing time for Martha. But at this dinner things were different. Even though it appears that Martha once again bore the lion's share of the work, she appears at peace. What had happened? She apparently learned her lesson. Martha was now focused simply on one thing and that was Christ and rendering service to Him rather than focusing on things of lesser importance.

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This meal prepared in the house of Simon the leper and served by Martha, I imagine, was a great success. Good friends, good food and, of course, I would have to believe, good conversation. How could it not been good conversation when you consider the dinner guests?

This leads us to another interesting detail about this dinner that is mentioned in **John 12:2**. Let us once again read the verse. **"So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him."** What a great person to have at your dinner party to stimulate conversation.

Can you imagine having Lazarus at your dinner table along with Simon the leper, or better-said Simon the ex-leper? The conversation might have gone something like this. Simon speaking might have said, "What a wonderful day when Jesus healed me of my leprosy. I saw the scales fall off my hands. I saw my fingers grow back in place! What an extraordinary day!" And of course, at that point, Lazarus could have found it very difficult to contain himself and he might very well have said, "Simon that was nothing! I mean, that must have been great, but let me tell you what it was like for me. Hey, I died! I was gone four days. I went to Paradise. I saw all the biggies — Abraham, Moses, David. But what was even more amazing than all of this was when I heard the voice of Jesus, the Resurrection and Life, calling me forth from the tomb, beckoning me to come to Him and stand before Him as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Now that was an extraordinary day."

This dinner party certainly had to be something very special and certainly we know that this dinner party was extremely special for Mary, which brings us to **John 12:3**.

Let read this verse for you. **"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."**

Anointing was a way to honor a special guest (Psalms 23:5). We see this in **Psalms 23:5** when the Psalmist, speaking of how the Lord cares for him said, **"Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows."** Of course, the traditional way in the east at this time for a guest to be honored in this way was with olive oil. But this is not the case here.

We are told that Mary anointed the feet of Christ with a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard. So, what exactly is nard? Nard is an oil extract from the root of the nard plant, which is grown in India. This is what Mary used to anoint Christ's feet, not with a watered down solution but rather in its pure form.

Hopefully we can now see why a pound of this perfume would be so expensive. Judas estimated the cost of the perfume in John 12:4 to be about 300 denarii, or in other words about a year's salary for a typical Jewish worker. If Judas was even close in estimating the worth of the perfume, I believe, that it is very clear to all of us how financially costly it was for Mary personally to anoint Jesus in this way.

So now let me ask you this question. Was this a good use of Mary's financial resources? Let us, first of all, seek to answer this question from the standpoint of Judas. This brings us to the second part of this story, the anointing of Christ challenged (John 12:4-6).

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Let us now read **John 12:4-6**. **"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."**

Was Judas happy with what just happened? Absolutely not! He was very unhappy. And he expressed his displeasure. What did he say in **John 11:4** **"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to poor people."** Unfortunately, this statement by Judas resonated with some of Christ's other disciples who joined him in scolding Mary according to **Matthew 26:8-9** and **Mark 14:4-5**. And why were Judas and some of Christ's other disciples scolding her.

Judas and the other disciples believed that it would have been better for Mary to have sold the costly perfume and given the proceeds to the poor (Matthew 26:8-9; Mark 14:4-5). Certainly this thought is very understandable in light of the many biblical injunctions about providing for the needs of the poor, and therefore we cannot be too hard on them as a group, but we can be very hard on Judas. Why?

Though the other disciples may have been sincere in their misgivings about Mary using her very costly perfume to anoint Jesus rather than selling it and giving it to the poor, it is clear that Judas was not sincere in the way he responded to Mary. He was motivated by something else.

Though the other disciples may have been motivated to say what they said out of a genuine concern for the poor, Judas was solely motivated by personal gain (John 12:6). How do we know this? Let me read for you the words of the apostle in **John 12:6**. **"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."** Judas was a thief.

So here was this wonderful dinner party that suddenly had deteriorated into a public roasting of Mary by Judas and certain other of Christ's disciples. Why had they chosen to do this? They had chosen to do this because they viewed the action of Mary in anointing Christ with this costly perfume wasteful. But what did Christ think? This leads us to the third part of the story, the anointing of Christ accepted (John 12:7-8).

Let me read for you **John 12:7**. **"Jesus therefore said, 'Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial.'" Though this is an excellent translation of the Greek text by the NAS Bible, I believe the NIV translation is clearer. Let me read the same verse, but this time let me read it from the NIV translation. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial."** Who intended that this very costly perfume be saved for the day of Christ's burial? I believe that it was God who intended Mary's perfume to be saved for the day of Christ's burial.

Though Mary viewed the anointing of Christ as a way for her to lovingly honor their special guest, Christ viewed her action as serving a greater purpose (John 12:7 NIV). So, what was this greater purpose?

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The greater purpose for this perfume, that Mary had used to honor her guest, was somehow, in the mind of Christ, connected to the day of His burial. So, in what way was this perfume somehow connected to the day of His burial?

In the culture of the day, it was not thought inappropriate to spend lavish sums of money on perfume to prepare a body for burial so that the smell of decay might be stifled. Somehow it would appear that Christ had this thought in mind as He addresses His disciples. But there is one little problem. He was not yet dead. So, how can we explain this?

It would seem that Jesus saw Mary's act of anointing as prefiguring the preparation of His body for burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus in John 19:38-42.

The disciples of Christ had chosen to scold Mary because they felt that she should have sold the perfume and given the proceeds to the poor. Judas had chosen to scold Mary because, in truth, he saw her use of the perfume as not serving his own personal thieving interests. Obviously no one understood the true meaning of Mary's action other than Christ Himself. But clearly in the eyes of Christ, her loving action was significant. So Christ makes one last attempt to put this all in perspective for all the dinner guests.

Let me now read for you **John 12:8**. **"For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me."** Christ's statement in John 12:8 should not be understood as an excuse to be stingy toward the poor, but rather as a commendation of Mary's action in light of His imminent death.

After Christ makes this final remark it appears that the dinner party ended. But though it ended, it certainly did not end the inevitable unfolding of events that would shortly lead to Christ's death.

This brings us to the fourth part of the story, the aftermath of the anointing (John 12:9-11). Jesus had just explained to His disciples at this dinner party how Mary's anointing of His feet in a very real way had pointed to the preparation of His body for burial. Did Christ view His death as imminent? Absolutely. And there is nothing in the aftermath of this anointing that would indicate otherwise.

Let me read for you what happened after the party broke up. Let me read for you **John 12:9-11**. **"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. (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."**

This dinner party described in **John 12:1-8** obviously was very special. It was a dinner party that was characterized by good friends, good food, and great conversation. And it was in this setting that Mary could not think of any better use for the costly perfume she had been saving than anointing Christ's body. It was unfortunate that the disciples, particularly Judas, took exception to her loving act, but it provides us the opportunity to evaluate a very important question.

Let me ask you this question. What constitutes true wealth? Is true wealth material in nature or is true wealth spiritual in nature? The Bible teaches us that true wealth is spiritual in nature (Matthew 6:19-21).

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**"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; (21) for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."**

Now, let me ask you a question. How did Judas view true wealth? Judas viewed wealth in terms of earthly treasure; or in other words, he looked at the things of this world in terms of how they might serve him.

Mary was quite different. Mary viewed wealth in terms of heavenly treasure; or in other words, she looked at the things of this world in terms of how they might serve Christ.

Why? Why did Mary look at the things of this world in one way and Judas in a totally different way? The answer is simple. Mary was truly devoted to Christ and Judas was not.

What about ourselves? Are we more like Mary or we more like Judas when it comes to our material resources? The answer to this question is very important, because it will not only tell us a whole lot about whether or not we will reach our full ministry potential in this life, but it will also tell us a whole lot about whether or not we can expect treasure in heaven as well.

A missionary named Jim Elliot explained this very well when he said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."