

# WORD OF TRUTH

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## SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD

*“And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. 4 And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. 6 And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. 7 For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. 8 She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. 9 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her” (Mark 14:3-9).*

It seems most evangelical commentators believe, as I do, that the accounts in Matthew, Mark and John are the same, and that the woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany was Mary, sister of Lazarus. There was a somewhat similar incident recorded in Luke 7:36 when Jesus was dining with a Pharisee whose name was also Simon (a very common name in those times, as John or Bill is today in our culture). An unnamed woman came in with an alabaster box of ointment and washed His feet with her tears, putting on the ointment, and drying His feet with her hair.

**There the similarity ends.** This woman in Luke was a repentant sinner. (Some do think she was Mary Magdalene). Because Jesus allowed her to *touch* Him, Simon the Pharisee protested much. Jesus gave an illustration about forgiveness. He told the woman her sins were *forgiven*, and riled up the Jews. The Luke incident is much *earlier* in the ministry of Christ. It was *not* said to be in Bethany, while Luke does record Him visiting there *later* in Luke 10:38, where He found Martha serving, and Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet, which is so characteristic of these two women. Let us examine three main points about this *second woman* who anointed Jesus.

## THE MAGNITUDE OF HER DEED

This was the last time in his earthly life that Jesus visited Bethany. Remember that Lazarus lived there with his sisters, Mary and Martha. This is where the mighty miracle was wrought by Jesus of raising Lazarus from the dead; a man who had been dead four days! Remember Jesus had told Martha (and us), *“I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believeth thou this?” (John 11:25, 26)* Believeth **thou** this reader? I ask **you** this question. A question we will explore another time soon, D.V., along with the story of Lazarus.

This time Jesus was having dinner at the house of Simon, the leper, whom He had healed (see Mark 14:3; Matthew 26:6). No, scripture *doesn’t expressly say* that Christ healed him, but two things are evident. **First**, a leper under the Mosaic law was not allowed to mingle with clean

society, much less dine with them, unless healed. **Second**, leprosy was an almost **incurable** disease, meaning that **only God** could heal it. Evidently Simon *was* healed, or Jesus and other guests *would not* be there. **Third**, since *only* God could heal it, and Jesus Christ *is God* in the flesh, obviously He healed him. Simon was called “the leper” to distinguish him from other Simons, because it was a very common Hebrew name. This was similar to Matthew (Levi), still being called a tax collector, though he was *no longer that*, but a *disciple* of our Lord.

As they sat at dinner, a woman came with an alabaster box of ointment, very expensive spikenard, and she broke the box and poured it over His head.

Albert Barnes remarks: “Alabaster is a species of marble, distinguished for being light, and of a beautiful white colour, almost transparent. It was much used by the ancients for the purpose of preserving various kinds of ointment in”. (1)

This alabaster box, or cruse, was very beautiful, and the cruse itself rather costly. The ointment inside was not medicinal, but rather *a perfume*, pure nard from the orient, with a very pleasant odor. We are told she brake the box. Albert Barnes takes that to mean she “broke the seal”, otherwise she couldn’t have poured it easily, and some would then in reality have been wasted.(2) I do not know if he is correct or not, but either way, she cared very little how costly the perfume was, she *willingly* gave it for Christ.

John’s account again shows us these two women, Martha and Mary, right in character, Martha serving, and Mary worshipping. “*There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.*” (John 12:2, 3)

John’s account tells us several additional things. Jesus had come into Bethany six days *before* the Passover, yet Matthew and Mark speak of this incident being *two days before* the Passover. A discrepancy has been imagined. The answer is that more than likely Jesus abode there in Bethany for the difference of four days with his friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary. These were the *closest* friends He had on earth, besides His disciples, and He *enjoyed* being with them. John tells us that these three, along with some of the disciples, and perhaps others, were there at Simon the leper’s house for the dinner. Martha was serving, Lazarus was at the table (the recipient of the miracle of being raised from among the dead), and Mary was preoccupied with *worship* of her Lord.

So here at this table we have a **healed leper**, a man who had been **raised from the dead**, and two others that were loved by Jesus, hence **all were sinners saved by His grace!** What a sight, as Jesus Christ was about to go to be crucified in Jerusalem (which was about two miles away), and bring final fulfillment to 333 Old Testament prophesies concerning Himself!

But meanwhile, Mary anointed Him (for John 12:3 tells us it **was** Mary who took the pound of spikenard and anointed Jesus). Matthew and Mark tell us of her anointing **His head**, while John tells us she anointed also **His feet** and wiped them with her hair. It was easy to do **both**, because at the table in those times, one did not sit in a chair, but rather reclined on couches. The four gospels **do not contradict** each other, but **compliment** each other. John expounds on the incident by telling us that “*and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment*” (John 12:3b).

We are told that some were filled with indignation and complained and said “*Why was this waste of the ointment made?*” (*Mark 14:4*) Matthew says the complainers were “*the disciples*”. Mark says “*some had indignation among themselves*”, but John, who was no doubt there, shows Judas Iscariot as the **instigator**. He who was about to betray Christ was the one who had the money bag, and often cheated and stole from it. He started the complaints, pretending to be concerned about the poor. They all understood the value of this spikenard- a pound (twelve ounces in present US weight), could be sold for 300 pence (denarii’s), or about **one year’s wages** for the **average** working man of **that century**. Compared to today in America, that would possibly be \$25,000 to \$30,000. Of course wages were lower then in that part of the world, as they still are today. Even if today’s value is *only* equivalent to \$10,000 to \$15,000, it is still a *considerable* sum. My point is; the alabaster box and spikenard was very valuable by any standard.

## **THE FAITH OF HER DEED**

When the murmuring began, our Lord spoke up immediately. He said “*Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me*” (*Mark 14:6*). Christ was ready to take the side of one who was intent on worshipping Him. Worship was the very thing that stirred the devil here. Sure, the ointment was costly, but Mary, so often at His feet to worship Him, wanted to honor him with **all she had**. Did she perceive that He was about to give His life for sinners? I believe so, because John tells us that Jesus said “*Let her alone; against the day of my burying she hath kept this*” (*John 12:7*). It appears she had more spiritual perception than anyone in the room. She **knew** it would be the last time to do Him good. It was a deed of faith, and **remember** who it is that gives the **gift** of faith. “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast*” (*Ephesians 2:8, 9*)

Mary and Martha both had faith, but manifested it in different ways. Martha *served*, Mary *worshipped*. Martha gets commendation as well. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Arthur W. Pink said:

“And Martha *served*”—This is most blessed. This was her characteristic method of showing her affection. On a former occasion the Lord had gently reproved her for being “cumbered with much serving,” and because she was anxious and troubled about many things. But she did not peevishly leave off serving altogether. No; she still served: served not the less attentively, but **more wisely**. Love is unselfish. We are not to feast on our own blessings in the midst of a groaning creation, rather are we to be channels of blessing to those around: John 7:38, 39. But mark here that Martha’s service is connected with the Lord: “*They made him a supper and Martha served.*” This alone is true service. We must not seek to imitate others, still less, work for the sake of building up a reputation for zeal. It must be done to, and for, Christ: “*always abounding in the work of the Lord*”. (*1 Corinthians 15:58*).

"And Martha served": no longer outside the presence of Christ, as on a former occasion—note her "serve alone" in Luke 10:40. "In Martha’s ‘serving’ now we do not find her being ‘cumbered’, but something that is acceptable, as in the joy of resurrection, the new life, unto Him who has given it. *Service is in its true place when we have first received all from Him, and the joy of it as begotten by Himself sweetly ministers to Him*" (second paragraph quoted by Pink is from Malachi Taylor). (3) (Emphasis mine-cmw)

Mary's anointing of Jesus' body was an act of faith. God gives faith - honors faith. Mary was seeing the moment of the cross **and beyond**. Remember both had been at Lazarus' tomb. Both agreed, and both said to Jesus "***If you had been here my brother would not have died.***" (***John 11:21; John 11:32***). Mary and Martha **saw** that miracle power. Simon **saw** that miracle power. Lazarus who had been dead, yet was now alive **saw** that miracle power. Some had called the anointing "**waste**", but that done in faith for Christ and in the faith of Christ is **never** waste. To the unregenerate, and unspiritual it would **seem** to be "waste".

Judas, the thief and traitor, had pretended to be concerned about the poor, but Jesus, who *really does care* about the poor, said "***For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me you have not always***"( ***Mark 14:7***).

## **THE HONOR OF HER DEED**

The commendations of Jesus Christ in scripture to mere mortals are **remarkable**. This is because any good work He receives from us is because we have received His free grace in the first place! **All of grace, all praise to Him! We are nothing without Him!**

What an honor to have the Lord Christ commend you! The changed heart, (which He changed!) draws His praise. In our text in Mark, He tells all who are there (and us through the Gospels), regarding the woman who anointed Him, "***She hath done what she could.***" He says that wherever the gospel is preached, this will be remembered as a memorial to her. **Wherever--** India, China, Japan, England, the Philippines, the United States--- **wherever and whenever** this gospel shall be preached, what she has done shall be **remembered** as a memorial; ***she hath done what she could!*** Jesus, no mere teacher, **but God Himself** declares it and **it is so!** What He commends is commended still. What He curses is cursed still, now and for always!

Now in 2010 A.D., two millenniums later, we are right **at this very moment** having a **memorial service!** We are remembering a poor, trembling sinner; a creature of flesh and blood like ourselves, **because He told us we would.** What is done for Him **in true faith**, which He alone gives to His children, is never wasted! ***She hath done what she could!*** How marvelous are His ways! May He inspire us, and enable us to do what we can! **We can only do that by His marvelous grace!**

## **NOTES**

(1) Albert Barnes, ***Notes on Matthew and Mark***; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI; 1964 edition, page 276.

(2) Ibid, page 381.

(3) ***Exposition of the Gospel of John***, Arthur W. Pink; First appearance in book form, 1945 by I.C Herendeen, Swengel, PA; quote from 1970 edition, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI; Vol. two, page 234.

Serious students should acquire a harmony of the gospels such as **A.T Robertson's** (in print), or **Stevens and Burton's** (out of print). ***Life of Christ in Stereo*** is excellent, and available used, or on CD-ROM. <http://www.ministryserver.com/bible/lectures/5002.htm> .