



John 12:1-8
Devotion or Destruction?

NKJ John 12:1 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.

2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

3 Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

4 Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said,

5 "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"

6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

7 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.

8 "For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

Just a few moments ago a biblical prophecy was fulfilled. Although you aren't going to hear it reported in the news it happened just as Jesus said it would. I'll tell you exactly what the prophecy was in just a moment.

With the mention of the Passover in these verses, John is once again letting us know that we are a few short days from the crucifixion week. Here we read of Christ's last visit to Bethany and a feast that took place there. The record of what happened at that feast is also in Matthew and Mark, but not Luke – the anointing by an immoral woman in Luke takes place much earlier in Christ's ministry while he was still walking in Galilee and it happens in the house of a Pharisee not Simon the Leper, or more appropriately, ex-Leper.

The "they" of verse 2 who held the supper is not defined, but given the context I would imagine it was a considerable portion of the village who wished to thank Christ for raising Lazarus and it was very appropriate that it be hosted in the home of a man he'd cured of Leprosy.

Incidentally, here was Lazarus at the feast, if someone doesn't believe in the Miracles of Christ they have to allege that the presence of Lazarus at the feast was some sort of mass-hallucination. Now just hold the feast was quite bold, you remember that the Pharisees were kicking people who believed in Jesus out of the synagogue, and the Chief Priests had commanded that anyone who knew where Jesus was had to report it. And yet they were unafraid, these were people who loved Him and would not deny Him. With one conspicuous example, these people had chosen Christ over the world.

Now it's important to remember that at this time in history people reclined at the table on couches, they didn't sit in chairs, and there they are when Mary displays an act of profound sacrifice and devotion. It's wonderful to me how the sisters are once again true to character; it's at someone else's

house, but you can't stop Martha from serving, and you can't keep Mary away from the feet of Her master. The devotion of both of these women to Christ is touching, but sadly the apostles were only prepared to accept the service of Martha at this point. Mary's devotion clearly embarrasses and irritates them. Why was that? Well, let's set Judas aside for a moment. The other Apostles are irritated because Mary has clearly believed something they haven't.

She believed Christ's words when He said he was going up to die. I also sometimes, sometimes wonder if in her conversations with Lazarus, he'd told his family about what he had learned in heaven so she knew that they were on the eve of the most wonderful and terrible event in all of history.

But you didn't have to get the word straight from Heaven to know that Jesus was about to go to the cross, as they were going up to Jerusalem, Jesus had said point-blank to the Apostles in Mark 10:33-34 ***"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."***

But their attitude apparently hadn't changed since the last time Peter had said "This shall not happen to you" – they'd learned not to contradict the Master openly, but they just couldn't believe it.

Mary, who had spent so much time at Christ's feet knew Her master never lied and was never wrong. So she knew this may be the last time she will be able to show her devotion, so she gets an Alabaster jar containing a pound of pure Nard an incredible costly perfume from India. Judas, who was obviously the kind of man who was constantly putting a price tag on everything – I'm sure he would have won the ancient version of *The Price is Right* every time – assesses the value of the oil at 300 Denarii or around \$15,000 in our own money. Incidentally, think about that if you ever think we are spending too much on ministry. Well she breaks that open and anoints Jesus with the full pound, Now John focuses on the anointing of His Feet and the Matthew and Mark on His Head, and I think Calvin has it right when he says she anointed Him from His head down to His feet. And then she cleans his feet with her own hair all the while weeping, for what he Master will soon endure. She remembers all too well what it is like to have a loved one die.

The fragrance of the perfume fills the whole house, that's more than just a technical detail, we are being shown the way love and devotion to Christ has a sweet smell all of its own and one that can't help but affect others.

Instead of being moved though, the Apostles are irritated at this lavish display. Probably not in a small measure because they knew *they* wouldn't go that far, and it stung them. How un-self-conscious this woman was, we on the other hand are so worried about how others will react if we do something over-the-top for Jesus. "What will people say if they find out I'm a Jesus Freak?"

It would have been embarrassing! Here she is weeping and touching his feet and his head, her a lady of quality is doing the work of the lowest slaves in wiping Christ's feet, she even unbinds her hair in public which no self-respecting Jewish woman would do.

Judas isn't just embarrassed he's disgusted. He loves money, and here is something worth more money than he's seen in the last three years, and it's just poured away. From his perspective it was like using a Rolls Royce as one of the Crush Cars at a Monster Truck Rally. But he can't come out and say, what a waste, I deserved that money, and you wasted it for what! So instead he cloaks it in Pious language. It

should have been given to the poor. Nods all around. Yes, yes, the poor. How often in history has the relief of the poor been used as an excuse for men to get rich. I once saw a table of how much it costs for some charitable institutions to give away a dollar. In some cases 70 cents on every dollar goes to “administration”.

Jesus rebuked him though – “For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.” There Christ is actually quoting Deut 15:11 “For the poor will never cease from the land” and the context there is the command to do good for them. You will always have those opportunities to minister to their needs, and indeed you should, but the time to show your devotion to me while I am here bodily with you is running out, and Mary realized that. What she has done was beautiful, so beautiful in fact that Christ makes a striking prophecy –

Mark 14:9 “Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” THAT was the prophecy I mentioned was just fulfilled before you.

Now, don’t overlook the effects of Christ’s rebuke on Judas. Think of it from his perspective. Here he was, one of the twelve, being sensible giving excellent advice, and Jesus rebukes him? Jesus sides with a silly, wasteful, hysterical woman, when he was just pointing out how the ministry could have been better served? Three years of following this man around, listening to sermon after sermon, sleeping in the open, going without, because he’d been banking that someday the payoff would come. When Jesus became king, he’d need a treasurer and who had kept the bag during the hard days? Yup, Jesus would remember his pal Judas on that day. Then that open rebuke, the siding of Christ with a woman over him, \$15,000 bucks poured out on feet and then just more about death, and funerals. That’s how you treat me? Well we’ll just see about that. I know some people who’ll appreciate me advice. Who *will* listen to me and pay. It’s no coincidence that the next thing Mark records after this incident is:

Mark 14:10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them.

Oh the sinfulness of the human heart. But how many times this scenario has been repeated in Christian history, our own spitefulness is such that we will tear down a fruitful ministry over a disagreement, a rebuke, a disappointment. It happened to Paul, Calvin, Edwards, the list goes on and on.

Well one woman chooses Christ over the world, and shows her devotion, and a man who had been with Christ for three years chooses the world over Him and in doing so chooses destruction.

2 Applications –

First, ***Christians Learn Here from Mary, both from her absolute devotion to Christ, but also her position before Him*** - Mary is always at the feet of Jesus. Are YOU? How do you do that?

Through Study of the Bible – sitting at the feet meant literally to learn directly from that person. And the Bible, all of it, is literally His Word. Do you study it? Do you really study it? If the answer to that question is no, then you aren’t sitting at his feet like Mary.

Think whenever you are reading or watching or listening to something, am I sitting at the feet of Christ right now? You will never learn from Him if you are not sitting at His feet.

So many say, "I have no time to study, there is no time to study, I must always be working for Christ." Well I want to suggest to you that often Christ's disciples are so eager to be working for Him that they don't listen to what He is saying. Had Peter heard what Jesus had been saying he wouldn't have pulled out that sword in garden and started swinging. Which, while it was done for Christ, was clearly not what Christ wanted. These days you frequently encounter people who've just been converted who haven't spent any time at Christ's feet and they are out doing great works, telling the church how it needs to change, evangelizing people when they have little or no understanding of the faith they are trying to hand on and as result they often say of theology and doctrine "oh, that's not important, just get out there and work for Jesus." I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to say that kind of person, "***Don't just do something, sit there!***" Sit at Christ's feet first, if you want to do the Master's work, first you must hear the master's voice!

Second, All of you know before you walk out that door which choice you have made – Mary's in a life of devotion to Christ, or Judas' choice of the world leading to eternal destruction.

Want to do brief diagnostic that will help you to understand where your heart really is on this matter. A man came to you with a suitcase saying I have a million dollars in cash, I'll give it to you if you never again read the bible, or pray, or go to church.

Oh, I wouldn't do that, you say, well what if he responded - ***I thought you'd say that, that's why I brought an Armored Car with 99 more briefcases just like this one.***

Is there an amount where you'd say yes? If so, there really isn't a difference between you and Judas. You're just more expensive.

Mark 8:36 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

37 "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

The sad thing is, the Devil doesn't generally need to offer \$100 Million in cash to get us to stop reading the bible, or going to church. He got Judas to betray Christ for the equivalent of 120 Denari. He can often get children raised in the church for *nothing*.

Here we see that Mary was willing to do what the Rich young ruler was not, she was willing to part with her riches in order to follow Christ, Don't put the cart before the horse here, it wasn't you give up to be a follower, if you are a follower you will be willing to give up

So what of you, which path will you follow? Will you choose devotion to Christ and eternal life, or will you choose devotion to the fleeting things of this world and an eternity in hell? Judas made his choice, he loved money and in the end was willing even to sell Christ.

Truly as Paul warned Timothy - ***1 Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.***

You cannot choose both, Mark 6:24 " No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Kids, when I say you too will have to make that decision between devotion to Christ, and devotion to the world, I'm not just talking to the adults, I'm talking to you.

I will warn you of this as well, follow the world and you will come to despise devotion, and mock the worship of God. I can't tell you how many children who have turned from the faith come to despise the devotion of their parents. They can't stand their parents church, or their worship, or the way they live their lives for Christ, and if their parents are open about their evangelism... Oh yuck. They see it as a terrible waste. It's nice to help the poor and do moderately good works Mom and Dad, but all of the embarrassing gospel stuff.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world.

17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.