

# Exalting Jesus Christ

## "She has kept this for the day of My burial"

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. If you knew you had only one more week to live, how would you spend your time?
  - A. What things of great importance would you take care of in the few days that remained?
    1. Beginning with this lesson we're going to examine that portion of the gospel of John which focuses on the Lord's last week.
    2. And in the upcoming lessons we'll see how Jesus prioritizes His time in those final days leading up to the cross.
    3. What we will discover is that He spends most of His days with those who are most dear to Him – His closest friends and disciples.
  - B. In fact, Jesus dramatically alters the nature of His ministry.
    1. His ministry will change from a public outreach to a private one.
      - a. He moves from seeking the multitudes to spending quality time with His disciples.

2. His ministry also shifts from an emphasis on miracles to one that concentrates on a quiet, intimate conversation with His twelve apostles.
    - a. In fact, the raising of Lazarus is the last miracle until His own Resurrection.
  3. And finally, His ministry will no longer involve extensive travels throughout Palestine, but will result in Him returning to Jerusalem neighboring Bethany and staying there.
    - a. He's no longer out evangelizing.
    - b. Rather, Jesus is preparing to leave this world, and wants to ensure that His disciples are prepared for His departure.
- II. So, let's continue our series of studies through John called "Glorifying Jesus Christ."
- A. And as we do, let's turn to the twelfth chapter of John and take a closer look at the first of three major events recorded there.
1. It's here that the story of an amazing act of love is told.
  2. It's the story of Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who anoints the Lord from His head to His feet with a costly oil.
  3. Although she will be criticized for such an extravagant waste, the Lord will explain to His disciples that *"She has kept this for the day of My burial."*

**BODY:**

- I. In the gospels of Matthew and Mark we find a similar story of an unnamed woman anointing Jesus.
  - A. In those passages we're told the event took place in Bethany in the house of a man called Simon, who was formerly a leper.
    1. Most believe Simon was one of the lepers the Lord had healed during His personal ministry.
  - B. However, virtually every commentator agrees that the stories in Matthew chapter 26 and Mark chapter 14 are the same event recorded in John chapter 12 – with only slight variations.
    1. For example, in Matthew and Mark the woman who anointed Jesus was not named.
      - a. But in John's gospel we learn that the woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus.
    2. In Matthew and Mark's account, the woman poured the fragrant oil on the head of Jesus.
      - a. In John's account she poured it out on the feet of Jesus.
      - b. In reality, she did all three.
  - C. So, since Matthew and Mark's account of this story are important, hold your place in John chapter twelve as we take a moment to read these other accounts as well.

1. **Matthew 26:6-13** – *And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. 8 But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor." 10 But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. 11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. 12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. 13 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."*
  
2. **Mark 14:3-9** – *And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. 4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply. 6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me."*

*7 For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. 8 She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 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."*

- II. As we turn back to John chapter 12, we find it's just days before the Passover, and Jesus had returned to Bethany where Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha lived.
  - A. And, sometime after He returned, we find Jesus relaxing around a dinner table with His disciples and with Lazarus, while MARTHA – in typical fashion – is busy serving them.
    - 1. However, MARY was busy preparing to serve the Lord in another way.
      - a. **John 12:3** – *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.*
    - 2. But not everyone present was moved by Mary's great act of love and devotion.
      - a. **John 12:4-6** – *But 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.*

3. However, Jesus understood what Mary was doing.
  - a. **John 12:7-8** – *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."*
- B. Although this extravagant act of love was shocking to some, Jesus understood what Mary was doing and why she was doing it.
  1. You see, a respectable Jewish women would never let their hair down in public, let alone touch a man.
  2. But Mary wasn't concerned about conventional tradition at this moment – she had come to worship Jesus, sensing that His days were numbered.
- C. Obviously, this wonderful story of Mary anointing Jesus in this manner brings out a number of important contrasts
  1. It's here that we see the sharp contrasts between the insight and deep, loving devotion of Mary, and the indifference and selfish, self-centered response of the disciples.

- II. When we take into account all three versions of this story, we find some interesting facts that make this event even more meaningful.
- A. First, the "*alabaster flask*" mentioned in Matthew and Mark's account refers to a vial made of white, semi-transparent stone which was used as a container for precious perfumes and ointments.
1. This particular flask was full of "*very costly perfume of spikenard.*"
  2. This was a highly perfumed ointment used for:
    - a. Cosmetic use for hot climates...
    - b. For anointing the dead for burial...
    - c. And during the ritual of anointing kings. In fact, it was considered a wonderful gift for a king because of its immense value.
- B. The word "*spikenard*" refers to a very expensive oil that came from a plant found growing only in the Himalayan Mountains at altitudes between 10,000 to 16,000 feet.
1. It was not only hard to get, it was outrageously expensive.
  2. According to John and Mark's account, the amount of oil Mary poured out on Jesus was worth about 300 denarii.
  3. Since the daily wage of the average working man was only one denarii, that means the oil Mary poured on the Jesus was worth an entire year's wages!

4. Just imagine taking something that is equivalent to your own annual salary and giving it all in this manner without any hesitation.
- C. We also read in Mark's account that *"she broke the vial."*
1. Most likely this refers to the small neck of the vial which Mary would have broken so she could pour out the contents freely.
  2. Noted theologian C.B.E. Cranfield wrote: "The breaking of the flask was perhaps an expression of the whole-heartedness of her devotion. Having served its purpose, it would never be used again."
  3. Then, as we mentioned earlier, Matthew and Mark tells us she then poured it over the Lord's head; while John adds that she anointed the Lord's feet *"and wiped His feet with her hair."*
- III. Mary's actions not only demonstrated her deep love and devotion for the Savior, but also demonstrated her keen insight into His true identity and purpose.
- A. Jesus made this clear by His own interpretation of her actions.
1. **Matthew 26:10-12** – *"For she has done a good work for Me... 12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial."*
  2. **Mark 14:8** – *"She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial."*
  3. **John 12:7** – *". . .she has kept this for the day of My burial."*



4. But it wasn't JUST for the day of His burial that Mary performed this amazing act of love – she did it because she also understood who and what Jesus really was.
- B. There are actually three kinds of persons who were anointed with oil in Biblical times – and perhaps this gives us some insight as to how Mary may have seen Jesus.
1. Perhaps Mary saw Jesus as the King of kings, because such an extravagant use of this kind of oil was lavished on kings on the day of their coronation.
    - a. Anointing Jesus with oil at this time was very appropriate in view of the fact that on the next day He would proclaim Himself a King by His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
  2. Perhaps Mary also saw Jesus as a Royal Priest – the High Priest of her soul – because in Biblical times all priests were anointed with oil on the day of their appointment.
    - a. Anointing Jesus at this time would also be most appropriate because Jesus is a most unique High Priest who was about to offer Himself and His own blood to atone for the sins of the world.
  3. And perhaps Mary also recognized Jesus as a prophet – perhaps the one and only spokesman for God the Father, and the one who revealed the Father's will to all who would hear Him.

- a. Anointing Jesus with oil on this occasion as a prophet was also most appropriate since Jesus is, in fact, the one through whom God spoke in these last days.
- C. But, there should be no doubt that Mary saw Jesus as the Savior, the Son of God, who must die.
- 1. Everyone knew that Jesus was a hunted man.
    - a. In fact, we read: **John 11:57** – *Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.*
  - 2. No doubt Mary realized the fate that awaited Jesus.
    - a. While the Lord's own disciples were unable to grasp this fact, Mary understood.
    - b. Therefore, she did this as an act of faith and devotion – perhaps even understanding the reason for His death.
- D. However, the Lord's disciples were clearly disturbed by what Mary did.
- 1. **Matthew 26:8-9** – *But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor."*
  - 2. **Mark 14:4-5** – *But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.*

3. However, John focuses on the objections of Judas Iscariot – who was apparently the most vocal of the group.
  - a. **John 12:4-6** – *But 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.*
  - b. Judas is not only exposed for being the money-hungry man who would betray Jesus for just thirty pieces of silver – the price one would pay to buy an injured slave – but also exposed for the thieving hypocrite that he was.

IV. Clearly, this wonderful story is a story of sharp contrasts. In fact, when we take a closer look at the events in this story we find three major contrasts between this devout woman and the Lord's own disciples.

- A. First, Mary turned all her attention to caring for Jesus.
  1. And in doing so, she was acknowledging that she understood the truth about the person and work Jesus Christ.
    - a. She had absolutely no doubts that Jesus is truly the Son of God, nor did she have any doubts that He was about to voluntarily give up His own life.

2. However, Judas and the other disciples turned the issue away from Jesus and His immediate needs, and hypocritically focused their attention on the needs of the poor – when, as we will see, they weren't concerned about the poor at all.
- B. Second, Mary was motivated by devotion and was willing to make her own great sacrifice to honor the Savior.
1. This precious oil of spikenard was so rare and so expensive that it was generally a once-in-a-lifetime purchase.
    - a. Once Mary broke open the alabaster flask of oil and poured it out on the head, beard and feet of Jesus, that extravagant gift of love would be gone forever.
  2. However, Judas and the disciples were not motivated by sacrifice, they were by greed and jealousy.
- C. And third, as Mary poured out this precious oil on Jesus it seems all her thoughts were occupied with Him.
1. Although the text doesn't tell us what she was thinking at the time, we can be relatively certain that her heart was filled with deep love mixed with a sense of great sadness.
    - a. She seemed to know that the Lord's days were numbered, and His death was imminent.
  2. The disciples, on the other hand, were all filled with evil thoughts of jealousy, resentment, and perhaps even bitterness.

- a. That's why they were so vocal in their criticism of her.
- b. The Greek word used by Mark for "*criticized her sharply*" is the same word used to describe the snorting of a horse.
- c. You can almost hear them: (Snort) "What a waste! Don't you realize how many you could have helped by selling that oil and giving the money to the poor?"
- d. These men didn't just criticize her, they showed utter contempt for what she was doing.

V. I think this story helps to illustrate something every devout Christian faces when we try to show our enthusiasm for spiritual things.

A. We see this all the time in the media, and in countless television programs, and you've probably also seen it at work or at school.

1. Faithful and devout Christians are seen as religious fanatics – as mindless religious zealots who blindly follow some myth called Jesus of Nazareth.

2. Why? The reason is because our devotion and commitment to Jesus Christ stands in sharp contrast to the unbelief, lack of commitment, and hardened hearts of unbelievers.

a. A solid, unyielding faith is terribly convicting.

(1). It shows that we place our relationship with God and with Jesus Christ first in our lives above any other relationship.

- (2). It also shows that we do our best to live by the moral and ethical standards found in the Bible and in the life of Jesus Himself.
- b. Therefore, our beliefs and our actions – or the way we live our lives – becomes a means by which the beliefs and actions of others are exposed as wrong, immoral and unethical.
  - c. The way we live our lives is like a light shining in a dark place – exposing the things done in darkness – and brings out the criticism, mockery and sometimes even hatred of those lacking what we have.
3. But this shouldn't come as a surprise to us. In fact, we should expect it.
- a. Peter warned Christians: **1 Peter 4:1-5** – *Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. 4 In regard to these, they think it*

*strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.*

b. And the apostle Paul told Timothy: **2 Timothy 3:12** – . . . *and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

4. When we take a stand for Christ in such a way that we manifest the sweet aroma of His person and His work, we becomes a threat to Satan’s kingdom.
5. And as soon as we do, rest assured that we will become the immediate target of Satan’s attack – and sadly that attack may come from those we love most, and even – as in the case of Mary – from other disciples of the Lord.

VI. However, this story wouldn't be complete without understanding the Lord's rebuke of His disciples.

A. Let's look one more time at what the Lord said in response to the criticism of Mary.

1. **Mark 14:6-9** – *But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. 7 For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. 8 She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 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."*

2. **John 12:7-8** – *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."*
- B. There are several things revealed here.
1. First, Jesus said, *"Let her alone."*
    - a. This was a sharp rebuke. In the Greek it's an aorist imperative which means it's a command that conveys a sense of urgency.
    - b. It's another way of saying, "Leave her alone RIGHT NOW!"
  2. Then the Lord said, *"Why do you bother her?"*
    - a. The Lord clearly challenged the motives of His disciples for their sarcastic rebuke of Mary. Jesus immediately saw below the surface of their reactions.
    - b. They weren't concerned for the poor. They were motivated by their own jealousy and greed – and in the case of Judas, his own hidden agenda.
      - (1). The disciples were thinking three hundred denarii could have supplied their needs for a long time.



- (2). Judas, on the other hand, was thinking three hundred denarii would be a nice pay raise.
3. Then Jesus declared the nature of her actions, "*She has done a good deed to Me,*" and explained why her actions were good – she was doing this to express her love and devotion in anticipation of His imminent death.
4. Finally, Jesus addresses their hypocritical concern over the poor, "*For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always.*"
  - a. The "*Me*" at the end of verse 7 is emphatic. "*But Me* (Me, Jesus, the Christ... Me, the Son of God...) *you do not always have.*"
    - (1). Jesus was trying to make them see that what was about to happen made Him truly unique.
    - (2). He was the unique Son of God who was about to die for the sins of the world, then be raised from the dead three days later, and ascend into heaven to sit at the right hand of God, reigning as King over His spiritual kingdom, leaving His disciples to proclaim the Gospel message.
    - (3). Jesus was speaking of His death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven.

- b. But there is something else Jesus was trying to make His disciples see – namely, saving men's souls is far more important than feeding their stomachs.
  - (1). This doesn't mean Jesus was uncompassionate about social injustice or about the plight of the poor.
  - (2). It simply means that the greatest thing we can do for those in the world – especially the poor – is to bring them the soul saving message of the gospel.
    - (a). Filling the stomachs of those who are physically hungry with food will only solve their hunger temporarily.
    - (b). But filling the souls of those who are spiritually starving with the saving message of the gospel will solve their hunger for all eternity.
- c. Do we have a responsibility to help those in need?

Absolutely!

- (1). James, the Lord's brother wrote: **James 2:15-17** – *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*

(2). Paul wrote: **Galatians 6:10** – *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

- d. We need to reach out to the needs of others. But, if we don't do our best to lead them to Christ – if we don't make a serious attempt to save their souls – we have neglected their greatest need.

VII. Finally, Jesus rewarded Mary for what she did.

- A. She obviously didn't expect to receive any special treatment or recognition – but she got it anyway.
  - 1. Jesus said: **Matthew 26:13** – *"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."*
  - 2. And that's what we have just done here this morning – we've told her story as a memorial to her deep love and sacrificial devotion to Jesus.
  - 3. And her story will forever encourage others who truly love the Lord to follow her example of giving our all to honor Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

**CONCLUSION:**

- I. There are two very important lessons that come out of this passage.
  - A. First, we can be like the disciples.
    1. We can be close to Jesus physically by being involved in religious activity and works, and still be far, far away from the Lord spiritually.
      - a. We can be in the church, but lost.
      - b. We can be in the Word, but indifferent and unreceptive to its message.
      - c. We can subconsciously – or perhaps even consciously – trust in "things" to bring us happiness and security; such as money, position, praise, power, or success.
    2. When we're like the disciples on this occasion, we will always act in selfish, unloving ways toward the Lord, and toward others whom we perceive as a threat to our needs and wants.
  - B. Or, we can be like Mary.
    1. We can have the mindset that nothing is too good for the Lord, and that He deserves everything we have.
      - a. Our service to the Lord, and our involvement in the Lord's church, will be from the purest motives, and ultimately to bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ and not to ourselves.

- b. We won't be stingy with our time, nor will we be stingy with our money.
  - c. We will give the Lord the very best we have to give – no matter what the cost, and no matter the personal sacrifice.
- C. It's my prayer that each of us will examine our own hearts in light of this wonderful story – and that we all become like Mary.
- 1. You can start today by giving the Lord your heart and your life – just as she did.
    - a. Understand that Jesus died for you to free you from your sin.
    - b. Then, do what all disciples of the Lord did – come to Him in faith, repenting of your sins, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of all your past sins.
    - c. Then from that moment on, live a sacrificial life in which every day is a living tribute to your Lord and Savior.
  - 2. And, if you realize you've somehow lost sight of what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, and you want to renew and restore that relationship with the Lord, then come back to Him, confessing your past failures, and allow the blood of Christ to once again cleanse you from all your past sins.
  - 3. Whatever your need may be, we encourage you to come to Christ now.