

John 12:1-8

1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (NRSV).

It is getting close to the end. Passover is approaching. The stage is set for the death of Jesus. When we follow John and study the details, we get a feeling for the slow fall of the events that unfold. During times of stress and trauma, time gets distorted and seems to go too fast in slow motion. We have seen him weeping as his friends were in sorrow as they mourned the death of Lazarus. Now Mary cries again. This time it is Jesus that is about to die. Mary is moved by love and gratitude and pours expensive perfume on his feet.

We have seen the plot to kill Jesus develop and strengthen. Now we see the anointing in Bethany occurring within two days of Passover. This is expensive perfume worth a year's wages. It is safe to say in today's economy this is several thousand dollars. This is the most expensive thing she could have had. Mary's actions are not casual or impulsive. She is expressing deep emotions of love and devotion. She is anointing him for burial. The Jewish burial custom included anointing the body with perfume. Perfume was important in that culture as it was a symbol of wealth and honor. Pouring it out is not just a physical act; it reveals the intensity of the moment. The perfume is an offering of her heart and a declaration of Jesus' worth.

Mary's love is freely given but not everyone understood her actions. Contrasting the selfless devotion of Mary is the selfish criticism of Judas. His objection – this should have been sold and the money given to poor – appears to be a proper and legitimate objection because Jesus taught them to sell stuff and give the proceeds to the poor. Mary didn't buy it to turn around and sell it. Mary's act was a sacrifice of love and devotion. Judas' response was one of self-interest and hypocrisy. Jesus' response defends Mary's action. Jesus knows what is going on. He has exchanged his life for Lazarus. Mary is caught up in all of the emotion due to the realism of the events. Her brother was saved by Jesus but now Jesus has to die. Jesus is going to die for all of us.

The plot changes from agitation to paranoia. Now they are seeking to arrest Jesus and are actively engaged in a plot to kill him. Meanwhile Jesus is cool, he's hanging out with friends, and Mary does a beautiful thing. She has anointed Jesus before burial and her story lives on today just like Jesus said it would.

Now it is only six days before Passover. Jesus is in Bethany at the home of Lazarus. It is at dinner and Martha is busy serving. Mary is overwhelmed with emotion and anoints the feet of Jesus. The tears of Mary are real. Her position is one of sacrificing to buy the expensive. This shows us her obvious great love for the Lord. She shed real

tears, not just streaks down her cheeks, but falling from her face and landing on the feet of Jesus. Wiping his tears with her hair is a portrayal of a woman that is overcome with emotion. This is not a romantic or seductive action; this is an emotional action of love and reverence. She is too emotional to go get a towel. That would break up the intensity of the moment. So in a moment of emotion and passion she uses her hair.

How do we show our love for Jesus? Do we offer the best of ourselves? Mary's example is one of extravagant love to the one who gave everything for us. We don't have to pour out expensive perfume but we do have time, talent, and resources. We have minds to study the word, hearts to fill with love, and souls for the spirit. Jesus is more than a teacher, or Messiah, he is the Son of God. Our Savior is worthy of our devotion. Like Mary, offer your very best to the Lord. Examine your own life. What do you offer to Jesus? How do you offer your love to the Lord? What are you holding back? Judas reminds us of the consequences of greed. Jesus deserves genuine love that sees him for who he truly is and responds to accordingly.