

Mary's Service of Love

Read John 12.1-8

I / INTRODUCTION: SOME SIGNIFICANCES OF THIS CHAPTER

1 / **Chapter 12** brings us to a significant point in our survey/study of this Gospel. Some Bible teachers divide John into three distinct sections:

1. **ch 1.1-18** / PROLOGUE
2. **chs 1.19-11.57** / WITNESS [wherein John chronicles numerous eye-witnesses to Jesus' Deity and God-ness]
3. **chs 12.1-21.25** / PASSION

2 / So this chapter will not only begin the final section of John's Gospel, but it also contains some of the most personal details of our Lord's private and personal interactions with His disciples during that last week of His life and ministry here among us. NOTE: John records no more public addresses by Jesus, though He did deliver some. **See especially Matthew 21-25.** There are no more public miracles or works of ministry that John records here, though there were some.

3 / John devotes these six chapters [**chapters 12-17**] to Jesus' personal encounters and conversations with those who were closest to Him. **Chapters 18-20** are John's eye-witness accounts [see **chs 19.35 & 21.24**] of Jesus' arrests, mock hearings, sentencing, crucifixion, and resurrection. **chapter 21** is an especially tender account of Jesus' meeting some of His disciples at the Sea of Galilee where He recalls Peter back into service after Peter had denied three times he even knew Him. "**Simon, son of John, do you love Me...?**"

4 / **LOVE.** Before we go any farther, and before we get into our specific text for this lesson, I just want to key you into one of John's most-often used theme-threads he has woven into this narrative from the very beginning: **LOVE.** Just in this summary of the last chapters of John, we have seen how the theme of **LOVE** keeps entering into John's accounts. Keep that in mind because when we get to our text for this lesson, we will be emphasizing **LOVE** as Mary's primary motivation for this gift and act of **LOVE** she will bestow on her Lord – who, of course, loved her first.

II / JESUS' TIMELINE & ITINERARY

1 / So, as we have said, this chapter 12 will chronicle the last week of Jesus' life and ministry. **Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.** This was the last Passover, the one when He Himself would become the sacrificial Lamb of God [**ch 1.29 & 36; 1 Corinthians 5.7**].

2 / And since Lazarus is prominently mentioned, and that Jesus had raised him from the dead, this miracle also enters into the theme of the narrative. So, the question is: how long had it been between the events of **chapters 11 & 12?**

3 / So let's do a brief itinerary connecting these two events:

1. **ch 10.22: At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter.** This Feast is what is now called Hanukkah. It was a celebration of when the Jews had reclaimed and re-dedicated their Temple after it had been overtaken and desecrated by the Syrians. This Dedication took place in 164 BC on the 25th of Chislev, which is our December. That's why the Jews' Hanukkah celebration overlaps with our Christmas holiday.
2. **ch 10.40:** Jesus retreated from Jerusalem to a more secluded rural place across the Jordan called Bethabara [or Bethany] **see ch 1.28.**
3. **ch 11.1-3:** Jesus was notified of Lazarus' sickness while He was still there in that place of retreat. And it was probably shortly after the winter Feast of Dedication.
4. **ch 11.54:** Since Bethany was only two miles from Jerusalem, and there was so much animosity and hostility against Him in Jerusalem, He retreated again after raising Lazarus from the dead. We know that this was another location either across the Jordan or very near Jordan, because

when He returns to Jerusalem here in chapter 12, He comes through Jericho [see **Matthew 20.29-34; Mark 14.46-52; Luke 18.31-19.10**]. All of these events occurred on His way to Jerusalem for this last Passover week.

The point of all these timelines and itineraries is simply to say: there were =/- three months between the raising of Lazarus from the dead and Jesus' return to Jerusalem for this last Passover during which He will be crucified. During much of this time, Lazarus has been a living, breathing, and speaking testimony to the Deity of Christ. Many others are believing in Jesus. This poses a serious threat to the religious, cultural, and social control and influence over the people; and it only intensifies their determination to kill Him and rid Him from their 'turf.' We'll see that here in just a few minutes...

III / HOW MANY 'ANOINTINGS' OF JESUS WERE THERE?

1 / This is another subject that will help you to at least understand the significance of Mary's anointing of Jesus that we will consider in this lesson. We know that there are at least two anointings that are recorded in the Gospels – and maybe three. So let's distinguish them:

1. **Luke 7.36-50:** This was an entirely separate event from the Mary's anointing in our lesson text. This one probably occurred in Jerusalem, or at least close by Jerusalem. The host's name was Simon, but Simon was one of the most common names in Israel. There are several Simons who are named in the New Testament. This Simon was a Pharisee. The woman is unnamed, but she was also well-known among the community as a **sinner**, that is, a woman of ill-repute. She anointed Jesus' feet as an act of repentance over her sins ... and as an act of faith that Jesus is the Savior from her sins and would forgive her. He did / see **37, 39, 47-50**.
2. **John 12.1-8:** I'm placing this one second in sequence because the textual words do. This occasion is very similar to the next one I'll relate, but I do believe they are separate because of other differences in the descriptions of the events. We'll say more about this anointing by Mary here shortly, but just note for now this one occurred **Six days before the Passover...**
3. **Matthew 26.6-13 & Mark 14.3-9:** These two accounts are parallel tellings of the same occasion. This anointing took place when **It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread / Matt 26.2 & Mk 14.1**. This anointing was also in Bethany, but **while He was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper...** Another Simon, but a different one than in **Luke 7**. Since Simon was hosting a supper for Jesus in his home, and lepers were not allowed to have any social interaction in their society, it stands to reason that he had been healed by Jesus and was a follower. The woman is unnamed, but it is not beyond belief that the same Mary performed both anointings. They were, in all likelihood, close friends and neighbors with Simon in the same village, and were invited as guests and fellow lovers of Jesus to come and participate.

2 / **But the significant time-stamp that both Matthew and Mark record is that 'it was now two days before the Passover,' and John specifically records that the one that was hosted in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus was 'six days before the Passover...'** That's why I believe they are two separate suppers and anointings.

3 / Although I do also realize that it is entirely possible that John records only that Jesus came into Bethany six days before the Passover, and that the supper could have been hosted for Him four days later in the home of Simon the leper – but Simon could also have asked Martha and Mary to come to his home and serve the supper for him since he may have lived alone. So I'm just offering my best understanding of the events.

4 / Able scholars, historians, and commentators believe that these two events here are the same.

5 / Now, let's learn some lessons from our lesson text: **John 12.1-11...**

IV / vv 1-2 / 'SO THEY GAVE A DINNER FOR HIM THERE'

Jesus' great love for us – and His many mercies toward us – call for us to love Him and serve Him in return.

1 / One of the most-often repeated testimonies in **ch 11** is Jesus' great love for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

- v 3 – **He whom you love is ill**
- v 5 – **Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus**
- v 36 – **“See how He loved him”**

2 / Giving hospitality to friends was one of the common customs of that day, especially to those who were visiting in your village from other places. REMEMBER: Jesus had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. He did not live in Jerusalem and had no home there. So when He [and all the other pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the feast days] arrived, they were hosted in the homes of others. During the three years of His public ministry, Jesus often stayed with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus and had developed this close friendship and relationship with them.

3 / BUT this was not just providing lodging for Jesus. **So they gave a dinner for Him there.** They hosted a large, formal dinner in His honor and invited other guests to come and join them. They wanted to do this to express their love and appreciation to Jesus for all the grace, mercies, and kindnesses He had given to them!

4 / So step back and look at that scene!

1. **Jesus therefore came to Bethany...** Jesus had made a return visit, and they were welcoming Him!
2. **where Lazarus was...** This is saying so much more than just “Lazarus lived in Bethany” or “Bethany was Lazarus’s hometown.” It is saying, *“Lazarus was there! You know, the one who just a few weeks ago had been dead for four days! When Jesus makes this one last return visit, ‘Lazarus was there!’ Lazarus’s ‘being there’ was a living, breathing, speaking, visible, vocal testimony to the love of Christ for him and Jesus’ ministry of grace to him and his sisters. ‘There he was!’”*
3. **whom Jesus had raised from the dead...** Lazarus’s ‘being there’ was because this Jesus who had come to be their guest is the One who had made it so!
4. **So they gave a dinner for Him there.** This was their heartfelt expression of love and gift of gratitude to Jesus for every blessing they were enjoying.
5. **Martha served...** Every time we see Martha she is serving. This was her gift, personality, and temperament.
6. **and Lazarus was one of those reclining with Him at the table...** There he was, not only enjoying this occasion with them, but being himself an object of great joy as they enjoyed having him back with them – alive and in their company!

5 / Now, I have highlighted every one of these details that John writes into this narrative to give you some feel or sense of what Mary was seeing. How her heart must have been just bursting with joy and happiness ... and gratitude to Jesus for making this scene possible!

6 / And I want each one of us to do the same thing. Look at your life, at your circumstances, at the abundant blessings God has showered on each of us. Yes, I know – each of our lives is burdened with our respective sorrows, afflictions, sadnesses, adversities. But, in spite of all that, and in all that, we are still blessed abundantly and beyond measure and certainly more than we deserve with ‘every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ!’ **So take stock and inventory right now of how good God has been to you and how much He has loved you ... and still does!**

7 / **Like Martha [and Mary], every service we give to Jesus is our expression of love and gratitude for the love with which He first loved us! / see 1 John 4.9-10.**

V / v 3 / ‘THE HOUSE WAS FILLED WITH THE FRAGRANCE OF THE PERFUME’

No extravagance is too expensive – no sacrifice is too great – no service is too much – when Jesus has done so much for us!

1 / **Mary’s gift and act was personally costly.** *It was costly in terms of what she had paid for it.* [Judas Iscariot, the ‘thief’ who betrayed Jesus made the statement that it could have been ‘sold for three hundred denarii’ which would have been equivalent to the annual wage of the average hired hand.] *And*

it was costly in terms of personal sacrifice because in all likelihood, she had bought this burial ointment ahead as 'pre-arrangements' for her own burial. But she wants to pour it out on Jesus instead!

2 / **Mary's gift was generously given.** She didn't just measure it out or dribble it out to be sure she didn't give too much. NO! She poured it out on Jesus' feet in such quantity that it dripped to the floor. It was in such quantity that she used her own hair to wipe away the excess. And if you compare this act with the Mark 14 anointing, she very well may have anointed Jesus' head also.

3 / **The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.** This burial lotion/ointment Mary poured on Jesus was what we would call 'essential oils.' It was not just cologne, or perfume, or scented water. It was the purest distillation of the fragrance of the plants. And you know how strong, potent, and even overpowering those fragrances can be. The effect of this anointing was that, not only the apartment or upper room they were in, but even the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

4 / You need to know that whatever service you are giving to Christ with your life, however insignificant it may seem sometimes, however hidden or obscure it may appear to you – you are filling that part of your world and other people's lives with the fragrance of your service. No one person can do everything that needs to be done in the service of Christ, but when you do whatever you do, you will fill that person's life or those people's lives with the fragrance of the love of Christ.

VI / vv 4-6 / 'WHY WAS THE OINTMENT WASTED LIKE THAT?'

Those who do not love Christ and live to keep everything they have for themselves won't understand and will criticize you ... anything you do that is more than what they want to give or do will be too much.

1 / The statement quoted above in the heading isn't in this narrative. But it is in the similar **Mark 14.4** story. That is the gist of the complaint, though. *"Jesus is not worth or worthy of this generosity. You're going overboard. This is too much. It could have been given for more useful purposes."*

2 / The chief complainer is Judas Iscariot, the one who will betray Jesus over to His enemies in just a few days. And what he is really complaining about is that, if it had been sold and the proceeds given to Jesus and His disciples to distribute to the poor, he could have embezzled it – which is what he was doing already.

VII / vv 7-8 / 'LEAVE HER ALONE!'

You can be sure that Jesus receives and commends every gift of love and service you give Him.

And if He is pleased with you, no one else's objections will stand. Jesus will overrule them all!

1 / Jesus lights into Judas here [and also some other of His disciples in the **Matthew 26.8 & Mark 14.5** narratives, where it says, **"And they scolded her."**]

2 / Here are Jesus' rebuking responses to them [combining both here and in the similar narratives...]

- **"Leave her alone!"** Jesus sees and knows your heart and your motives. He will receive your love and loving service ... of whatever kind you give.
- **"So that she may keep it for the day of my burial..."** or **"...she has anointed my body beforehand for burial [Mark 14.8].** It remains unknown to us whether Mary was more sensitive to Jesus' impending death and burial than the disciples. But whether she did or didn't, Jesus knew, and He accepted her gift and service as such. **And WE, too, can know that whenever and however we minister to those who are His 'body,' we are ministering that same service to HIM! / see Matthew 25.31-40.**
- **"She has done a beautiful thing to me..." [Mark 14.6].** Jesus can transform even the lowliest, most humble, most menial, or even the 'messiest' service we give Him into a 'beautiful' thing to Him!
- **"She has done what she could..." [Mark 14.8].** Do what you can do. Do what Jesus gives you opportunity and ability to do. And do it with love – and because of His love for you!

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO GIVE? WHAT ARE YOU GIVING? DO WHAT YOU CAN DO!