

April 19, 2015  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 12:1-11.

1. Explain how the anointing John described is different from the one Luke described.
2. Did Mary know what she was doing?
3. Why didn't the other disciples suspect that Judas was a thief?
4. Why did the authorities want to kill Lazarus?
5. Does this story give us a hint about how sinful people might treat Christians today?

### **JESUS' FRIENDS SHARE IN HIS SUFFERING**

#### **John 12:1-11**

About a year before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and, therefore, about a year before the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus drew a line in the sand for all His would-be followers. He said, *"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels"* (Luke 9:23-26).

Human nature is not favorably inclined toward discomfort. Had there been any political movers and shakers present to hear this statement, they would have definitely corrected Jesus. Surely the disciples who believed at this point that Jesus was going to lead a popular uprising that would carry Him to the throne of Israel would have recoiled at such an unpopular position. Why did Jesus choose to be so negative? Why the strictness, the legalism, the moralism?

Modern Christendom in America has learned how to be a follower of Jesus while at the same time maintaining acceptability, even popularity, with the world. Obviously, Jesus never learned how to do that. This is quite an amazing accomplishment for modern Christians in light of the fact that *Satan is the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the lives of all unbelievers, and therefore, the entire world system is under his power* (Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19).

The whole idea that people who pattern their lives after the teaching of the perfect Son of God can somehow be popular with God's archenemy doesn't make sense. We will study in a few weeks Jesus' promise that *"if the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (John 15:18-19). So has Jesus chosen us out of the world, separated us from those who are controlled by Satan's philosophy, or has He not? If He has, why are we so intent on being loved by the system that killed God the Son our Savior?

In the story before us now, we have a vivid illustration of what happens when God has interrupted our lives and pulled us out of normal living to be instruments for His glory. Like Mary, followers of Christ tend to say and do things that make us unpopular. It's not because we seek to be unpopular with the majority of people; but because we love Jesus, we will be unpopular with the world. Like Lazarus, when our lives boldly demonstrate the power and grace of God, people will try to get away from the light of truth. People who live in the darkness of sin and enjoy the darkness of sin really do not enjoy having people around whose lives radiate the light of truth.

The world's response to us causes a certain amount of discomfort. This is what the apostles Paul and Peter referred to as

*filling up and sharing in the sufferings of Christ (Col. 1:24; 1 Pet. 4:13).* On the one hand, we will discover that if we make the joy, happiness, and pleasure of creatures our goal in life, people who live in Satan's realm and serve him will be okay with us. On the other hand, if we make the glory of God our focus and seek to make Him and His truth look good and right by our righteous works, the people who live in Satan's realm will cause us to suffer. Sometimes the suffering is extreme and painful as when Christ's followers are executed or dismissed from their jobs, their homes, their families or their villages. Always we suffer when the truth of God's Word is breached, ignored, rejected, or dismissed in favor of human wisdom. Always we suffer when the human creature is exalted and pandered at the expense of embracing God and His Word. Mary experienced this. Lazarus experienced it. Do we?

### **Mary Suffered for Showing Kindness to Jesus (vv.1-8).**

This follower of Jesus did a memorable act of kindness (vv.1-3). However, at the outset of looking at this wonderful story, we need to understand which anointing this was. Discernment is necessary because all four writers of the Gospels tell a story about a woman anointing Jesus. The story we read here in John's account appears to be the very same story Matthew recorded (26:6-13) and Mark recorded (14:3-9).

At the same time, this story from John is not the same story Luke recorded (7:36-50). The situation Luke told about probably took place in the early spring of 28. This anointing (recorded in John) took place within a week of Passover in the month Nisan (our April) in the year 30. Luke wrote about an event that occurred in the home of a Pharisee named Simon. John told about an anointing in the home of a leper named Simon (see also Matt. 26:6). Obviously, Simon the leper had been cured of leprosy since he lived in town and associated with people. It is very easy for us to assume that Jesus had healed the man. At the same time, it is difficult for us to imagine a Pharisee going to Jesus to be healed.

In Luke's story, the woman who anointed Jesus was a sinful woman with a reputation in town which does not fit at all with what we know about Mary. In that account, the sinful woman wept, which implies confession of sin, and Jesus forgave her (Luke 7:50). That doesn't sound like Mary at all. By this time in history, she had already made it plain that she trusted Jesus. Also, there is no mention of Mary kissing Jesus' feet like the sinful woman did. Maybe the most obvious difference is that the point of conflict at the Pharisee's house was not the waste of ointment but the sinfulness of the woman.

Now, getting back to what John wrote, it is important for us to understand Mary's kind deed. Notice that it was the beginning of the last week before Jesus was crucified. John identified the time as *six days before the Passover (v.1a)*. Probably on Friday evening just before Sabbath began (sometime before 6:00 pm) Jesus arrived in Bethany. He had come from Ephraim, a village somewhere out in the countryside. At this point in John's account, all teaching and activity is leading to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for sin. That most critical sacrifice of all eternity would be on Passover which would begin Thursday evening.

Jesus had returned to friends in Bethany. *Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead (v.1b)*. A few weeks earlier, Jesus had performed what many considered to be the miracle of miracles when He raised Lazarus. That miracle also pointed beyond Christ's own death to His triumphal rising from the grave. He was at a dinner held in His honor at the house of a leper. John wrote that *they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table (v.2)*. The dinner was in honor of Jesus. It was not at Mary's and Martha's home but at the home of this man Simon, who we presume Jesus had healed from the dreaded leprosy (Matt. 26:6). It had to be on Saturday evening after the Sabbath had ended at 6:00 pm. Again we find Martha serving and Mary worshiping Jesus.

Mary worshiped Jesus by anointing Him with costly perfume. *Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (v.3)*. Mary's action was bound to create a stir. It was not so much her adoration of Jesus that attracted attention as the cost she paid to adore Him. The

text reveals that Mary poured a pound of ointment made from pure nard on Jesus' body. More accurately, the amount would translate into about eleven ounces.

This ointment had been extracted from the root and spike of the nard plant in India. This was rare and expensive stuff. No one bought this stuff off the shelf at Walmart. It was genuine or pure nard. According to Matthew's and Mark's account, this ointment was in an alabaster flask, which was very expensive itself. Mary would have been required to break the top of the flask off to pour out the ointment (Mark 14:3). The value of the ointment was at least 300 denarii (v.4). This means that, not including the price of the flask, the ointment was worth 300 day's wages for a common laborer. According to nationwide statistics, the average laborer makes over \$26,000 per year. That computes to \$500 per week for 52 weeks of work. That would be \$100 per day if the laborer works five days per week. Comparatively then, Mary's ointment was worth \$30,000 in today's wages.

Mary poured \$30,000 worth of ointment on Jesus' head (Matt. 26:7) and on His feet (John 12:3) which might symbolize His whole body. Then she let down her hair and wiped Jesus' feet. A simple surface reading of the story has to impress us that something out of the norm took place here. Mary intentionally made a shocking sacrifice. Mary intentionally did something in reference to future circumstances. Mary expressed genuine worship of Jesus from Nazareth which demonstrated her belief that He was divine. But here is an important consideration. Was her worship of Jesus calculated from human wisdom and emotion or was this driven by God's sovereign hand?

One follower of Jesus, in particular, was offended by Mary's action (vv.4-8). The story reveals that her action stirred negative responses (vv.4-6). It would have been impossible for anyone not to notice. The house would have reeked with the smell of expensive perfume. This very proper and godly woman letting down her hair in the presence of men and then wiping Jesus' feet would have shocked the devout Jews. Surely everyone would have been astonished at this incredible public display of sacrifice. From Matthew's and Mark's account, it appears that all of the disciples questioned the appropriateness of this sacrifice (Matthew 26:8-9; Mark 14:4).

But in John's account, it is obvious that Judas in particular was incensed. *But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"* (vv.4-5). We dare not miss the specific identification of Judas. He was one of Jesus' disciples. Oh! That means that Jesus chose the man to join the close followers. Why did Jesus chose such a loser? Jesus knew all along that Judas did not have faith. Furthermore, Jesus knew that Judas was chosen for judgment (son of destruction, 17:12). He was Iscariot—not the other disciple named Judas who was also known as Thaddeus (John 14:22). This Judas was about to betray Jesus. Judas had fooled all the other disciples, but not Jesus.

This evil Judas claimed to have concerns for the poor. It is interesting that there is no evidence in all of Scripture that Judas ever reached out to the poor or needy. He really didn't care about the poor but said what he said because it sounded right and sounded religious. Okay, it is true that God really is about caring for the less fortunate. There are people who are in difficult circumstances not of their own making—like widows and orphans. God expects His people to insist on justice for those who cannot care for themselves. He stated as much in His law several times. For example, God required, *You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit* (Exodus 23:6). He required, *You shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God* (Leviticus 19:10). This is God's plan even though it is in His hand to make people poor or rich. Hannah observed, *The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts* (1 Samuel 2:7). That is why Jesus often condemned the Pharisees for being unjust to widows (Mark 12:40).

God expects His people to be concerned for the poor. But to honor the poor above Christ reveals a low view of Christ. Judas revealed his lack of honor and respect for Jesus by rebuking Mary in his heart. That might be true, but normal people never honor the poor above Christ, do they? Judas revealed what is typical of even most religious people in the world. The unregenerate heart talks glibly and verbosely about helping the poor while, at the same time, withholding from the poor the most wonderful news that there is hope for eternal

life in Jesus alone. Remember that Jesus proved that He was the promised Messiah/Savior by quoting the prophets' promises about His work with the poor. His response to John's question whether He was indeed Messiah: "*Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them*" (Matthew 11:4-5).

Jesus never taught that caring for the poor is comprised of making sure they receive free money. Rather, in the foregoing example, we discover that right alongside the divine work of healing the sick, Jesus put preaching the gospel to the poor. It seems obvious in our world that the great hope for every society is a plan to end material poverty. Conversely, the great hope in God's plan is to end spiritual poverty.

Since that is not going to happen, humans will continue to put more emphasis on wiping out material need than on exalting Jesus Christ as Lord and King. Many religious folks consider their work against poverty to be their ticket into heaven. They are wrong because that is to exalt concern for the poor above the finished work of Christ. Mother Teresa demonstrated this kind of confusion when she said, "What we are all trying to do by our work, by serving the people, is to come closer to God. If in coming face to face with God we accept Him in our lives, then we are **converting**. We become a better Hindu, a better Muslim, a better Catholic, a better whatever we are, and then by **being better** we come closer and closer to Him. If we accept Him fully in our lives, then that is **conversion**. What approach would I use? For me, naturally, it would be a Catholic one, for you it may be Hindu, for someone else, Buddhist, according to one's conscience. **What God is in your mind you must accept.**" (Desmond Doig, "Mother Teresa: Her People and Her Work," William Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., Glasgow, 1976, page 136, as quoted by Constance Cumbey, in "A Planned Deception: The Staging of a New Age Messiah," Pointe Publishers, East Detroit, Michigan, ISBN 0-935897-00-3, page 108).

Judas had that kind of low view of Christ. His response revealed his heart. *He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it* (v.6). The eternal word of God

reveals that Judas was a hypocrite. He didn't rebuke Mary because he was truly concerned for the poor. In fact, he was a thief. Given the opportunity, he would rob from the poor. Surely he was able in his conscience to justify helping himself to the ministry funds. Judas was so good at being a religious fraud that the other disciples who were exposed to Jesus' teaching every day and who at the same time lived with this hypocrite every day never saw reality.

Mary's action drew praise from God the Son. He pointed out that she did a good thing. *Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial"* (v.7). Mary expressed genuine, heartfelt love for and worship of Jesus. There is no doubt that she believed He was the promised Messiah. But there is always some question about peoples' understanding of who and what Messiah would be. More than that, Jesus pointed out that she had done something that even she did not understand. Mary prefigured Jesus' body being anointed as they put it in the tomb about six days later. Her situation was similar to Caiaphas stating that it was better for one man to die for the nation. He was exactly right. That was God's plan. But Caiaphas certainly wasn't thinking about God's plan.

So Mary did what Jesus described as a beautiful deed. "*But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me"* (Matthew 26:10). Unknown to her, it was also a prophetic deed. Jesus pointed out that "*in pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial*" (Matthew 26:13). It was a deed for which we should commemorate Mary. Jesus said, "*Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her*" (Matthew 26:13).

Maybe the most telling thing about Mary's deed of worship is that it uncovered hypocrisy. Jesus said to all the disciples, "*The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me*" (v.8). He meant that there will always be an opportunity for us to care for the poor. As long as there is the principle of sin, there will be poor people. But while we care for the poor, our first object of worship has to be Jesus Christ. When we are related rightly to Him first, we will care for the needy as we should. In fact, only when we are worshiping Jesus sincerely will we be able to discern who are needy.

Here at the end of this section is a good place for us to consider a very practical principle regarding caring for the poor. In the American culture, we who work pay about 50% of our income in taxes of one form or another. A very large percentage of that money, both on the federal level and state level, goes to provide all manner of services to the less fortunate. So here is the issue. On one hand, we who love and trust Jesus Christ already contribute a good portion of our resources to helping the poor. However, what is our attitude about that? Do we begrudge helping the sick, the disabled, the widows, the orphans, and those who cannot work. We should not. At the same time, we are painfully aware that much of our donation to these programs is taken fraudulently. Therefore, with one hand we give money to help the poor knowing that it is not well managed. On the other hand, we give even more out of our resources to needs of our choice, with the sincere desire to help alleviate need. All the time, we must never errantly conclude that our good deeds of helping the poor will allow us to bypass the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to forgive our sins and gain eternal life for us.

### **Lazarus Faced the Possibility of Death Again (vv.9-11).**

This follower of Jesus attracted a lot of attention. We read in verse nine that a large crowd wanted to see Jesus. *When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came (v.9a)*. Why? What was the attraction? No doubt there were many curiosity seekers. Everyone wanted to see the man who had been raised from the dead, and everyone wanted to see the man who raised him.

But at the same time, we like to think there were some people who were wholly convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was who He said He was. Remember that the reason for the miracles was so that people would believe in Jesus. *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31)*. Our desire in studying through this account by John of all these miracles is that many will believe and gain eternal life.

But more specifically, the people in the crowd wanted to see the evidence of Jesus' power. They came *not only on account of him but*

*also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead (v.9b)*. Had Jesus not raised others from the dead? Why didn't people flock around to see Jairus' daughter? Why not the widow's son? The raising of Lazarus was important for a couple of reasons. Lazarus was an adult man, maybe a man of some standing in the community. But even more important was that Lazarus lived two miles outside Jerusalem, died for four days, and lived again two miles outside Jerusalem. By that he attracted attention that caused much fear for the religious leaders.

Therefore, Jesus' enemies planned to extinguish the light of truth (vv.10-11). The most important religious leaders planned murder—again. *So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well (v.10)*. We see the proof of this problem throughout history. Wicked people, though religious, do not allow anything to keep them from having their way. History is replete with examples of false religionists persecuting, even executing those who insist on telling the truth.

The hypocrites had to get rid of Lazarus because he represented irrepressible truth even if he never said anything. They made plans to put him to death, . . . *because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus (v.11)*. The religious leaders feared losing their position if too many people believed Jesus. Therefore, the truth had to be extinguished. And so religionists still attempt to extinguish truth. But where were these crowds when Jesus was crucified? Why didn't the crowds rise up in protest and force the Sanhedrin into silence? Maybe they didn't believe that Jesus was God the Son in the flesh who came to pay the sacrifice for their sins.

You and I should represent Christ like this. The more accurately we represent God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the more likely it will be that people, even religious people, will try to silence us. Darkness hates light and seeks to dispel it. But we have good news: *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5)*. The light of our testimony about Jesus must continue to shine. *"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will*

*shine on you.” Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:11-16).*

As the light of truth shines through us, we can expect some negative reactions. Rather than fearing and running, we should count it a privilege to be numbered with people like Mary, Lazarus, eleven apostles, Paul, and even the prophets of old.