

Mary Anoints Jesus or How to Show Christian Love!

Have you ever been in love? I mean really in love... you know the kind of love that makes you do things you would not normally do for the beloved. For example, the people who usually go to bed early, stay up late for the beloved. People who like to stay at home are willing to go out with the beloved. People who are usually very frugal with their money are willing to spend extravagantly on the beloved! In our scripture today Mary shows us how to show Christian love for the one who has saved us and loves us.

In the 12th chapter of John the gospel writer tells of the end of Jesus' public ministry. Our particular scripture gives the account of Mary's anointing of Jesus, which sets the stage for Jesus' coming sacrifice, his death on the cross for the sins of the world.

John tells us it was six days before the Passover. Jesus went back from Ephraim (where he went after raising Lazarus) to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, and attended a dinner in His honor. Mark tells us in his gospel that the place of the dinner was Simon the Leper's home. The dinner must have been a joyous occasion with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus there. The relationship of this family to Simon is not given, but it must have been close since Martha served.

Mary came in with a jar of pure nard, fragrant oil prepared from the roots and stems of an aromatic herb from northern India. It was an expensive perfume,

imported in sealed alabaster boxes or flasks which were opened only on special occasions. Mary's lavish gift, a whole a pint, expressed her love and thanks to Jesus for Himself (the Savior and King, the Messiah, the Son of God), and for His restoring Lazarus to life. The scripture says that the house was filled with the fragrance.

Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples objected to this lavish waste of the expensive oil. He said it could have been sold and that money from the sale of the perfume should have been given to the poor. According to Mark the other disciples picked up his criticism and criticized her also her for her waste of valuable resources. *Isn't it interesting how easily and quickly evil comments spreads, and even leaders can be carried along by Satan's tools.* John tells us the value of the perfume was a year's wages. The amount that an average laborer would earn in a day was one denarius, and the perfume was worth 300 denarii. One commentator said it was worth a "lifetime of savings."

Often anointing was something festive, like when a king is anointed and crowned, or when the friends of the bride anoint her for her wedding. Another time of anointment was at the time of death. Jesus said that this case the anointing was in anticipation of His burial. Living by God's Word, Jesus knew that as the suffering Servant, He must endure pain, die, and be buried.

So Jesus immediately defended Mary's act of love and devotion. "You will always have the poor among you" is not a divine endorsement of poverty or an encouragement to do nothing about poverty. Instead, Jesus was saying that the causes of poverty are many and people will always have occasions to help the poor. But the opportunity to show love to Jesus on earth was limited. You will not always have Me, that is, here on earth.¹

But why does Mary love Jesus so much? Why is she willing to humble herself before him? Why is she willing to spend the family saving on Jesus?

We must go back to the time we first meet Mary, Martha and Lazarus. The occasion is an afternoon when Jesus and his 12 disciples drop in unexpected. Martha is busy with the preparation for the meal, Lazarus is the host and entertaining the guests and Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet listening to everything that he has to teach. We discover during that meeting that Martha does not cooking and serving by her and finally out of frustration tells Jesus that he should make Mary help. But Jesus, the one who was not concerned about what they would eat, said that Mary was okay and that listening to his teaching was the most important thing at that time. We don't know it at that point, but the things that Mary learned at that time would make Mary and Martha disciples of Christ. So, part of the purpose of Mary's anointing Jesus was the acknowledgement that she had made

¹Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:316

him king of her life and that she loved him and was willing to do whatever he asked, and was willing to give him what he desired.

But you still might ask, why would she use the family heirloom to anoint Jesus? We learn from their second recorded encounter that Mary and Martha owed their livelihood to Jesus. They had been left alone, two women without a protector when their brother Lazarus had died. Jesus came to them and restored Lazarus back to life. They could have been destitute. They could have been reduced to begging or prostitution...but with the restoration of their brother, life was good and secure again. I think that Mary's anointing Jesus was an acknowledgement of how grateful she was to Jesus for raising Lazarus! There was nothing too good for the one that had blessed them with such a miracle!

Mary gets a great deal of credit in the scripture for her generosity and extravagant display of love for Jesus, but without the support of her brother and sister, this gift would not have been possible. But did you also notice the love gift of Martha. I can imagine that Martha now served at the dinner, not out of obligation, but out of love for Jesus! The whining and complaining was a thing of the past, now she served an even bigger gathering than 15, and did not ask Mary or Lazarus for help. She now had love and joy for Jesus and made him her Savior and King. She too had experienced a change in her life, a change in her attitude!

What about us? Has Jesus become your Lord and Savior? Have you anointed Him King of your life and given him control of your soul, your will, your activities, your resources? Remember there will be people in your life that will ask you why you give so much time and money to the church! They will think you are a fool for such extravagance! However, when you are in love with Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, you will be able to take the criticism and keep on going.

There is a book that you may have read called *The Five Love Languages*. It tells that we need to know the person we love and what they appreciate. Some of us respond to gifts, quality time, physical touch, praise, and/or service. God wants all of that from us. God wants our gifts of time, talents and resources; God wants our time for fellowship, prayer and meditation; God wants our worships and songs; God wants our praise. God wants us to love what God loves, especially by serving and caring for the poor among us.

Are you in love with Jesus? How do you show it?