

HEARTS IN OPPOSITION

Matthew 26:6-16

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper,
7 a woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very costly perfume,
 and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.
8 But when the disciples saw this, they were indignant, saying,
 “Why this waste? **9** For this perfume might have been sold for a high price
 and the money given to the poor.” **10** But Jesus, aware of this, said to them,
 “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good work to Me.
11 For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.
12 For when she poured this perfume on My body,
 she did it to prepare Me for burial. **13** Truly I say to you,
 wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world,
 what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”
14 Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests
15 and said, “What are you willing to give me to deliver Him to you?”
 And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.
16 And from then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.
 (Matthew 26:6–16, 2022 LSB)

THE SETTING

Matthew, Mark, and John include these two narratives. Matthew and Mark place them thematically to contrast Mary’s love for Jesus and Judas’ willingness to betray Him. John places it chronologically on the evening before Jesus entered Jerusalem on the first day of the week, in the triumphant entry.

I’ve already given you the broad outline of our passage. Mary anoints Jesus, and Judas agrees to betray Him. I believe Matthew wants us to contrast the two. This morning we will work through the two events, consider how they differ, and then bring it home to you and me today.

MARY ANOINTS JESUS

Matthew 26:6-13

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper,

7 a woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.

(Matthew 26:6–7, 2022 LSB)

First of all, why do I keep calling this woman ‘Mary’? It’s because John identifies her in his Gospel:

1 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

2 So they made Him a supper there, and **Martha** was serving;

and **Lazarus** was one of those reclining at the table with Him.

3 **Mary** then took a litra [about 12 ounces] of perfume of very costly pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

(John 12:1–3, 2022 LSB)

There are several ‘Marys’ in the Gospels. John wants us to recognize *this* Mary as the sister of Martha and Lazarus, whom He had just raised from the dead not long before, in John 11.

Mary comes to Jesus with an **alabaster jar**. Alabaster is a soft, fine-grained mineral that is easily carved. It is delicate and expensive but was often used for statuary, carvings, ornaments, and, as we see here, containers for perfumes and ointments. It contained about 12 ounces, or a Roman *litra*, of pure **nard**. **Spikenard** is an aromatic oil from a plant that grows in the Himalayas. All the Gospels say that the oil, or perfume, was very costly; Mark and John value it at 300 denarii, about one year’s earnings.

Mary poured out the perfume on Jesus. Matthew and Mark say she poured it on His **head**, and John says she poured it on His **feet**. Jesus Himself says that she poured it out on His **body** (Matthew 26:12). While it certainly was a lot of perfume to pour out at one time, she didn’t drench His head but poured it on Him from head to toe. These aren’t contradictions in the text; Matthew doesn’t say she *only* poured it on His head; John doesn’t say she *only* poured it on His feet. There are just differences in the way each writer tells the story.

THE COMPLAINT

8 But when the disciples saw this, they were indignant, saying,
 “Why this waste? **9** “For this perfume might have been sold for a high price
 and the money given to the poor.”
(Matthew 26:8–9, 2022 LSB)

Again, John provides a little clearer understanding of what is happening.

4 But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was going to betray Him,
 said, **5** “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii
 and given to the poor?”
(John 12:4–5, 2022 LSB)

Judas began the complaint, but the other disciples quickly picked it up as their own.

May I quickly point out a couple of things? First of all, do you see that Judas had done such a good job disguising himself as a true disciple that the others were happy to follow his lead? Virtually every time Judas is mentioned in the Gospels, it is either as the one who betrayed Jesus or when he is in the act of betrayal. The Gospel writers all wanted us to know who he was from the outset. Perhaps that’s because he fooled them for such a long time. And second, the fact that a large group has a complaint doesn’t make it legitimate. A lie is a lie even when the majority believe it. In fact, the more people who believe a lie, the more damaging it is.

We can’t put all the blame on Judas, though. Matthew makes it clear that *all* of the disciples were indignant – morally offended by Mary’s actions. Now, they were not shouting at her or shaking their fists. But they were shaking their heads and pursing their lips and muttering to themselves.

If you don’t mind me pointing out the obvious, *Matthew* – the writer of this Gospel – was one of those self-righteous, morally offended men. He is not writing as an objective observer, but as a participant.

Why did Judas begin this complaint? John writes,

6 Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor,
 but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box,
 he used to take from what was put into it.
(John 12:6, 2022 LSB)

Judas was unhappy because he measured everything by its potential value to him. He was one of

those "men of depraved mind" that Paul warned Timothy about, "who suppose that godliness is a means of gain." (First Timothy 6:5).

As Jesus traveled, people would give Him money, probably for His own needs and also for the poor. Jesus put Judas in charge of the money box. He did this knowing that Judas was a devil (John 6:70). He knew every time Judas stole from the money box. There is no hint in the Gospels that He ever rebuked Judas for it, or that Judas was ever caught. The disciples probably didn't realize it until Judas was out of the picture, and someone else took responsibility for it.

God saves His people by delivering them from the power, presence, and penalty of their sin. He judges the wicked by giving them over to the power, presence, and penalty of their sin.

JESUS RESPONDS

10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them,

"Why do you bother the woman?

For she has done a good work to Me.

11 For you always have the poor with you;

but you do not always have Me.

12 For when she poured this perfume on My body,

she did it to prepare Me for burial.

13 Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world,

what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

(Matthew 26:10–13, 2022 LSB)

Mary was bothered by their criticism; perhaps she felt embarrassment or shame, discomfort, or a burden of guilt for "wasting" the perfume or had second thoughts about her actions.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Hey guys, leave her alone; she meant well, after all."

No, Jesus calls her action a good work, which could also be taken as fitting, appropriate, or even beautiful. She did a good work, an appropriate work, a beautiful work. In other words, it was exactly the right thing to do at that moment. The poor will always be there, but Jesus will not always be there. There was actually very little time remaining to do an act of service for Jesus.

Jesus explains *why* Mary poured the perfume on Him: "For when she poured this perfume on My body, *she did it to prepare Me for burial.*"

Years ago we knew a couple who were going to be missionaries in Turkey. They invited us to their home one night. When we arrived, they greeted us in Turkish and continued to speak Turkish for fifteen or twenty minutes. They gestured for us to take off our shoes, then sat us down. Then Dane – the husband – came to us with a bottle of bright yellow liquid. He motioned to us to hold out our hands and then poured a little into our hands. It turned out to be a lemon-scented cologne. It's a cultural practice in Turkey to greet your guests with this cologne. The alcohol makes it cool on your skin – it feels good on a hot day – and it smells very nice and perhaps helps to freshen the room when sweaty people are in it. But they just poured out a teaspoon or so, which still seemed like a lot.

Mary poured out 12 ounces of very expensive perfume. You know, I can't remember the last time I poured 12 ounces of perfume on someone. It's not something we do today. But it wasn't something done in biblical times, either. It was a hugely expensive quantity of perfume, equal to a year's earnings. No one did that merely to greet a guest or make them feel comfortable. Mary knew from Jesus' own teachings, and no doubt by a prompting of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus would die very, very soon. She decided that rather than waiting for Him to die, she would anoint Him for burial right then and there. Her gift to Jesus was not driven by her emotions but by her faith, conviction, and love. Putting it differently, this act was not an expression of her emotions but an act of service.

Her gift was so remarkable that Jesus said that she would be memorialized in the Gospel, and she was. Matthew, Mark, and John all mention her.

TRANSITION That's the story of Mary anointing Jesus. Let's look at the next three verses.

JUDAS BETRAYS JESUS

Matthew 26:14-16

14 Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests
15 and said, "What are you willing to give me to deliver Him to you?"
 And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.
16 And from then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.
 (Matthew 26:14–16, 2022 LSB)

The Gospels don't present Judas as a genuine disciple who, for unknown reasons, became disillusioned. As I said earlier, every time Judas is mentioned in Scripture, he is either identified as the betrayer of Jesus or is in the process of betraying Him. The apostles were very careful and deliberate in this. Perhaps they didn't want anyone to make the mistake *they* made when they

assumed that Judas was a genuine follower of Christ.

Still, it's a shocking thing for one of Jesus' twelve disciples to take the lead in betraying Him. Judas had been with Jesus for the better part of three years. He was not an enemy or a casual bystander. He had heard everything Jesus taught. He had seen countless miracles and healings. He had eaten the bread and fish that Jesus multiplied. He was in the boat when Jesus calmed the storm. But nothing that Jesus said or did convinced him. The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back was Jesus *praising* Mary for *wasting* 300 denarii worth of costly perfume. Judas was "morally offended" that she did not sell the perfume and give the money to Jesus. That is, Judas was angry that he would not have the opportunity to steal from the proceeds.

So Judas made the first move toward the chief priests. There are various theories about why Judas did this, most of which are trying to rescue his reputation. The truth was that Judas was motivated by money. "How much are you willing to give me to deliver Him to you?" They weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.

Thirty pieces of silver is mentioned twice in the Old Testament. In Exodus 21:32, it is the minimum value of an adult slave. We read this in Zechariah 11:12-13 it is the value the Israelites place upon Yahweh Himself:

12 And I said to them [the people of Israel], "If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!"

So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages.

13 Then Yahweh said to me,

"Throw it to the potter, that 'valuable' price at which I was valued by them."

So I took the thirty shekels of silver

and threw them to the potter in the house of Yahweh. (**Zechariah 11:12-13, 2022 LSB**)

That was what the chief priests were willing to pay. The price of a slave. The price at which they valued Yahweh. Both of these are fulfilled when the chief priests offered Judas Iscariot 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus to them. All he needed was a good opportunity, which would come the next evening.

BRINGING IT HOME

We see that Mary was devoted to Jesus, but Judas was only devoted to himself.

We see that Mary's love for Jesus was deep and humbling, while Judas was faithless, apathetic, and greedy.

We see that Mary's tender heart was bothered by the possibility that she had misjudged the moment and done the wrong thing. Judas, on the other hand, felt nothing when bargaining for Jesus' very life.

Love for Jesus Christ is the very heart of discipleship. Love for self is the very opposite of discipleship.

I think every Christian can relate to Mary. We've all had moments – perhaps many moments – when we would have given anything for the Lord. He has touched our hearts with His glory and kindness and expanded our minds and thoughts with His glory.

But we all have some Judas in us as well. In times of disappointment or disillusionment, of exhaustion or weariness, in pain and suffering, we all can, and at times have, traded our faith for something infinitely less substantial but momentarily more comforting.

Praise God, every Christian is headed in the direction of Mary and away from Judas. The Father will finish His good work in us. Jesus will never cast us away. The Spirit will never leave us *Ichabod*, without glory.

As we see in Mary, we can be uncertain and doubtful about even our best and most faithful acts of service. As we see in the disciples, we can be completely and dreadfully wrong about important things. The reminder this morning is that our hope is not in ourselves but in the Savior.

I'll ask you, *was* Jesus only your Savior in the past, or is He your Savior today? You see, if Jesus only *was* your Savior in the past, you should be very afraid of your eternal future. But if Jesus *was* your Savior yesterday, and *is* your Savior today, and *remains* your Savior tomorrow, then you have no reason to fear.

