

## Introduction

A woman enters the home where Jesus is dining and anoints him with oil worth thousands of dollars. Everyone is upset that she has wasted this oil, but Jesus surprises everyone with his response to her act.

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Mary had been mingling among the crowd. She wanted to be close to Jesus but there was no one approaching him. Simon and the disciples and her brother Lazarus seemed to have Jesus' full attention, and Mary did not sense that it was right for her to be among them now. Besides, she was happy for her brother, Lazarus, to be close to Jesus and to learn more from him.

But as Mary mingled, she heard disturbing whispers. "He is here, and Lazarus is here too." When Mary looked in their direction, they quickly stopped talking and turned away as if they did not want her to hear what they were saying. The men looked evil, and Mary sensed they were not there to learn but to cause harm. A few minutes later she heard more whispering, "he must die and the other one must die, too." And this time Mary grew alarmed, but just when she was about to go to Jesus to tell him these words she heard the voice of Jesus rise above the crowd. It was a sad voice and he said,

"I have been with you for these years and I have taught you many things about the kingdom of God. You have seen the power of the kingdom," and Jesus turned to Simon the leper, and all knew that he was referring to his healing. "You have seen that the power of the kingdom of God is greater than all sickness, greater than all spirits, greater than all sin, and greater even than death." Jesus turned to Lazarus, and shouts of praise went up for God's great work in raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus continued.

"But I tell you this, and you must understand, the kingdom of God is like a seed that God plants in the ground and there it remains until a day when new life comes, and it rises above the ground. Before the seed can give life, it must first be buried. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And then the women began serving the first dishes for the men to eat.

Mary stood for a while transfixed by his words. She thought on his words that the kingdom was like a seed that must first be buried before it could rise with new life, and she thought on the evil men in their presence who were there to do harm to Jesus and her brother, if only they had their chance. And then it all came to her at once. "Yes," she thought, "yes," and she left the great feast at Simon's house and hurried to her own home to retrieve something special.

When she arrived at her house, she entered her bedroom and located a treasure she had owned for many years. It was a gift from her father when she became a young woman. She had often thought about using it. But the treasure was so valuable and so precious she never felt it was the right time. It was an alabaster jar filled with perfume. The jar itself was valuable and taxed heavily when it was imported from the mysterious lands of the East. But the contents of the jar were even more

precious for it was pure nard – the exotic anointing oil and perfume made from a plant of the Far East. One drop of nard would emit a lovely fragrance and was worth the wages of a man working a full year. Mary picked up the nard and said, “Yes, this is why have been saving it,” and she walked back to the house of Simon the Leper, her heart filled with love and devotion.

When she entered, the servants were almost done washing the feet of the men and anointing them with drops of oil upon their heads. They were just about to wash Jesus’ feet when Mary gently said, “No, please, stop.” Everyone looked in her direction. Why was this woman giving instruction to a man? Why was this woman in this gathering of men? She was not bringing in a dish of food for the men to eat. Why was she speaking, and why did she not want the servants to wash the feet of Jesus?

Then Mary went to the place where Jesus reclined. She opened her precious alabaster jar and poured some on his head. The men could not believe how much she poured, and they gasped. Did she not know how expensive that was? Then she went to Jesus’ feet, and they could not believe what they were witnessing. Mary poured the rest of the bottle of pure nard upon Jesus’ feet, rubbed the oil into his feet, loosened her hair, and began to dry his feet with her long, beautiful hair.

The men were shocked. This was not appropriate behavior for a woman, but Mary did not care for she was honoring her Lord and preparing him for the suffering that lay ahead.

Jesus watched as Mary, dearest Mary, the one who had sat at his feet learning, the one who wept at his feet grieving, was the one who was now kneeling at his feet, worshipping. Jesus’ heart filled with joy and love as he saw this daughter of Abraham preparing him for the suffering that was ahead. He was about to reach down and bless her when some of the disciples sprang up and said,

“I’m sorry, but this is enough. It’s one thing to anoint Jesus with some of it, and I guess that is proper and good, but you could have sold the rest of this perfume for a high price and given the money to the poor.”

Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, stood up and said, “Brothers, you are right. If she had given the jar to me I would have sold it for the wages of an entire year. Think how much money that would have been. Think of how many poor people we could have helped.” And as Judas said these words he moved toward Mary and grabbed her arm, and then Jesus said,

“No, you stop, all of you. You do not understand. Leave her alone. Go back to your place Judas. All of you men, go back to your couches and eat. She has done a good deed to me. You always have the poor with you. Anytime you wish you can go to the poor and give them something, but you will not always have me.”

Jesus looked around at his men who were ashamed and confused. Then Jesus said to them, “Did you not hear what I said about the kingdom being like a seed that is buried? She has heard and understood, and when she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.”

Jesus reached down toward Mary, and she looked up from his feet. Tears were in her eyes as she heard Jesus speak of his death and burial. Though she did not fully understand, she more than anyone else knew that dark days lay ahead for him. Then Jesus said, “Truly I say to all of you, the

gospel of the kingdom of God will be preached in the whole world to all the nations and when it is, what Mary has done for me will be told to all.”

Mary got up and with joy in her heart walked to her sister Martha who embraced her with love. Martha said, “You have done a great thing, sister! Shall we now serve them the rest of the food before it gets cold?” And with a smile on her face, Mary followed Martha into the kitchen where they picked up the heavy dishes full of good food and together they joyfully served Jesus, his disciples, Simon the leper, and their brother Lazarus. The men ate in silence, but the perfume lingered long in the air, and the words of Jesus about his burial stirred the hearts of many who wondered why he had said such a thing, and what it all meant.

The next day, Jesus and his disciples awakened. Jesus looked upon his men. There was Peter, James, John, and Andrew, huddling and talking quietly. There was Philip who had followed him from his earliest days of ministry and Bartholomew, Matthew the tax collector, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, and Simon the zealot.

Then, with an ominous sound in his voice Jesus asked, “Where is Judas?” And one of the disciples said, “Lord, we do not know. As we were sleeping we could hear him groaning and muttering to himself. He was saying harsh words as if he were very angry. And then, he got up in the middle of the night.”

Just at that moment Judas walked back into the room and Peter said, “Judas, we were just talking about you. Where have you been?”

“None of your business,” Judas said and then he looked at Jesus and their eyes locked. “I . . . I . . . you just don’t need to know, Peter.” And then Judas looked away for he knew that Jesus knew where he had gone during the night and that he had met with those who were plotting to kill him, and that Judas had said, “I will betray him to you, soon, during one of these nights, when he is away from the crowds, I will lead you to him. What will you give me for this?” When they counted out 30 pieces of silver, he said, “This is not enough. This is the price to pay for a slave.”

“Exactly,” they said “for that is what we think of your Jesus. He is no better than a lowly slave, and if you don’t cooperate, you will see what we will do to you.”

“Alright, alright,” said Judas, “just wait, and I will lead you to him in secret.”

The conversation was playing in the mind of Judas and it seemed that Jesus could see it all and hear it all. Jesus looked upon Judas as if he were looking upon a venomous snake and then he said, “The time has now come. Rise up! Today, we go to Jerusalem.”