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Anointing, Last Supper (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Jesus is the target of a plot by the Jewish religious authorities to kill him before the Passover season. During the same time, a woman anoints Jesus with costly perfume, an act of love and devotion that some criticized as wastefulness. Jesus defends her, predicting that her gesture will be remembered wherever the Gospel is preached, in contrast to Judas, who would betray him for money. This passage deals with cultural norms surrounding gender, hospitality, and wealth, as well as Christian themes of sacrifice, stewardship, and care for the poor.

Transcript

Okay, let's turn to Matthew 26. There's two passages in the Synoptic Gospels that we'll be looking at today. There are two stories we want to cover, and one is best covered in Matthew, I think, and the other in Luke.

So we'll look at Matthew's account for the first part of the material, and we'll look at Luke for the second part. I'll tell you what chapter in Luke when we get there, and we won't be turning there immediately. All right? So, Matthew 26.

Let's begin at the first verse. This is, of course, at the close of the Olivet Discourse. It says, Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these things, that he said to his disciples, You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.

Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill him. But they said, Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people. So, a couple of days before the Passover, there was a concentrated plot made, although there had been perhaps less organized plots we have read about before.

We've read about the Herodians and the Pharisees joining together, and chief priests on other occasions plotting to kill Jesus. What we read up here must be something more of a determined effort to see to it that their plot was carried out during the Passover season. In other words, they were setting a deadline for themselves.

They wanted to do it while he was there at the Passover and not let him get away. There had, as I say, been other less specific plots in his life where they really wanted to kill him, but they had not perhaps set a deadline for themselves. And what seems to be the case here is they're getting more desperate.

He's been putting them to shame in open debate in the temple, and his continuing is simply becoming a matter of greater embarrassment for them. And also, of course, the fact that he had openly written into Jerusalem on a donkey, allowing himself to be proclaimed the Messiah by those who waved the palm branches before him, suggested a turn of events in his own procedure. Whereas in the years prior to this, where they had opposed him, they had seen him as just a teacher wandering around gathering popular support.

He was now arguably making a bid for political power. Of course, that's not really what he was doing, but that's what they perhaps interpreted him as doing. And so that week was a crisis week for his enemies, because it looked as if he might be willing to use this Passover festival to gather tremendous popular support and to make his move against Rome.

And while most Jews would, of course, support him in such an enterprise, the chief priests and the Sadducees, who were collaborators with Rome and had a pretty cushy job under the Roman authority and found Rome fairly cooperative with them, they were not eager to see any Messiah, Jesus or anyone else, drive out the Romans or attempt to do so, since they already had it pretty comfortably. So if they feared that Jesus might be planning to do that during this week, it would explain why we read again of a more concentrated attempt on their part to plot to kill him during the season of the Passover. And we read later on in verse 14 that Judas went to the chief priests and they made a contract with him to deliver Jesus over to them, which made their job a lot easier, since Jesus was at this time moving about in a fair degree of secrecy.

The fact that there was a certain amount of secrecy is seen in the story of how he gave instructions to Peter and John to go and find the room where he would eat the Passover. It would appear there was a certain amount of secrecy as far as his whereabouts then. Now, we can see in verse 5 that what they needed to do was to get Jesus secretly.

They could tell that the people popularly supported Jesus. Now, this might be the main thing that was different about their plot at this point. Previously, they had even taken up stones in a public place and thought they might be able to stone him, but he got away with it.

Other times, they sent soldiers to arrest him in the very temple while he was teaching, but those soldiers came back empty-handed. And probably the fact that they had attempted, with the series of questions about paying tribute to Caesar and the other confrontations that they brought against him, to try to nail him publicly. And since they

had failed so miserably in those, and every time they confronted Jesus, instead of making Jesus look bad in front of the crowds, Jesus made them look bad in front of the crowds, they now realized that any attempt to take him in the presence of a crowd was going to be difficult, if not impossible.

And so they, at this point, had given up on any plan of taking him publicly, lest there be an outcry and an uproar among the people, verse 5 says here. And that is why they needed someone like Judas to inform against Jesus as to his whereabouts when he wasn't in the crowds. That was something they didn't know.

Now, the story we're about to read in verses 6 through 13 took place in some kind of company. The disciples were present, and several of his friends in Bethany. It does not appear that Jesus is secretive as to his whereabouts in verses 6 through 13, but then we're not sure, we can't be sure, whether this story occurs in the chronological sequence that Matthew places it in.

In fact, John takes the story of Jesus being anointed for burial by Mary of Bethany, and places it before the triumphal entry. In John chapter 12, we have this story, in verses 1 through 8, John 12, 1 through 8, tells the story of Jesus being anointed for burial, which we're about to read in Matthew, but John, in his gospel, places it six days before Passover, and also just prior to the triumphal entry. So that it was, if John's chronology is to be trusted, and it's possible that it should be, we did not study it at that position in our treatment of the gospel, but it's possible that John is the one to follow in this case, because Mark and Matthew tell the story at this point, possibly arranging it chronologically, not chronologically, but topically.

Now the reason I say that this might be a topical arrangement in Matthew and Mark, is that the story of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, apparently is the incident where Judas really took offense, and decided to betray Jesus. And the next thing we read in both Matthew and Mark, after their treatment of this story, is that Judas goes out to the chief priest and betrays Jesus. Now, it would be easy to see, for example, in Matthew 26, that verse 14 follows logically, and maybe chronologically, upon verse 5. Verses 1 through 5 say that the chief priests and those people were assembled to take Jesus by trickery, privately.

And in verse 14, they find somebody among the apostles who wants to cooperate with them, and they give him money for it. And so it is probable, I believe probable, that it's this time that we read of here, two days before Passover, according to verse 2, that Judas actually went and made his move. But he may have made his decision to do this four days earlier, when Jesus was anointed at Bethany.

And that is how John tells it, that it was six days before Passover, when this anointing took place. But Matthew and Mark, both of them wanting to focus attention on why Judas went to the chief priest, positioned this story, which was really the crux of it, just prior to

telling of Judas going there, even though the story had occurred four days earlier than the place recorded. It would be a topical arrangement, in which case, that would argue for John's chronology being preferred.

Now, you might say, well, why would Judas be particularly upset at this story? And the answer is, of course, that Jesus rebuked him in front of all the disciples on this occasion, and Satan at that time filled Judas' heart to betray Jesus. Anyway, all we can say is there are some problems in determining the actual timing of this story. It's recorded only in Matthew, Mark, and John.

And Matthew and Mark both place it in this place chronologically that we come to. John places it prior to the triumphal entry four days earlier, and we'll just have to remain somewhat uncertain as to when the story actually occurred. Although, as I say, there may be reasons for preferring John's chronology, and seeing Matthew and Mark placing it at this point for topical reasons.

In any case, verse 6 says, And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when his disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor. But when Jesus was aware of it, he said to them, Why do you trouble this woman? For she has done a good work for me.

For you have the poor with you always, but me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on my body, she did it for my burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her.

Now, this account in Matthew and also in Mark does not identify the woman who did this anointing. In fact, John, whose desire appears to be to fill in missing details from the other gospels, tells us several things about this story that Matthew does not tell us. We're going to stick with Matthew's account, but we're going to look over at John chapter 12 for a few minutes and see what kinds of details are supplied that are left out of the synoptic gospels on this story.

In John chapter 12, we'll go ahead and read from verse 1. Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had been dead, whom he had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper, and Martha served. But Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with him.

Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray him, said, Why was this fragrant oil not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? This he said not because

he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box, and he used to take what was put in it.

Then Jesus said, Let her alone. She has kept this for the day of my burial. For the poor you have with you always, but me you do not always have, or you don't have always.

Now, what we learn from this, and it's interesting that Matthew and Mark give certain details, and John gives certain details, all the details complement each other, but there's very little overlapping. For example, Matthew and Mark both tell us that he was in the house of somebody named Simon the leper. John doesn't tell us that, but he tells us who some of the guests at the feast were.

Martha was serving, Mary was there, and Lazarus was there, and no doubt Simon the leper, whoever he may have been, was there as well. Matthew and Mark don't tell us who was serving, and they don't tell us who broke the bottle and poured it over Jesus' head, but John gives us that information. Now, when you combine the narratives, we get this larger picture.

Jesus apparently had more than one household in Bethany that was willing to show hospitality to him. We have encountered Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus previously. They have been mentioned not only in John's gospel previously, in connection with the death of Lazarus and his raising from the dead in John chapter 11, but even before that, the synoptics have made reference to them.

In Luke chapter 10, I believe it is, there is a story of Martha again serving a meal while Jesus was present in her house, it would appear, and Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet listening. That's in, of course, Luke 10, verses 38 through 42. And we are told there in Luke 10, 38, that it was in Martha's house.

Not this anointing, but the previous time we encountered Martha serving Jesus and the disciples a meal, when Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet listening and Martha complained, but Jesus defended Mary then as he did on this occasion. It was Martha's house. And now we read that this story occurred in the house of someone named Simon the leper.

And yet Martha is serving. This has led to much speculation as to who Simon the leper may have been. Simon the leper, we presume, was not continuing to be a leper.

He was apparently somebody who had been healed of leprosy, almost certainly by Jesus, although we have no record of that occurrence. It's almost inconceivable, I would say it is inconceivable, that Jesus and his disciples would eat in the home of an unhealed leper, presuming the leper was present. Although we don't read anywhere of Jesus healing this man, we do read of Jesus healing other lepers, and we have no reason to doubt that Simon the leper was somebody that Jesus had healed and had obviously become a disciple of his.

Now, who was Simon the leper beyond that? Why was Martha serving in Simon the leper's house? Some have thought that Simon the leper may have been the father of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, which would explain why they were all in the same house. It would also make it possible for Luke to refer to that house on the previous occasion as Martha's house, since she lived there with her father, Simon the leper, if that's who he was. And some have thought that to be the case.

Others have felt that Simon the leper might have been the husband of Martha, so that the house was Simon and Martha's house. And that would explain again why she was serving, as she was, in Simon the leper's house. She was his wife, and she was the mistress of the house.

And it would also explain why on a previous occasion, she was serving in her own house that was no doubt the same house if she was married to Simon the leper. These are only conjectures, and we don't know what is the truth of the matter. It's also, of course, possible that Simon the leper was just a friend of the family, and that he, like Mary and Martha and Lazarus, had a home in Bethany, and that they took turns hosting Jesus and the disciples.

And on this occasion, Simon had the privilege of being the host. But if Simon were, let's say, unmarried or had no daughters or whatever, Martha might well have volunteered to serve. We know that she was kind of obsessed with serving from a previous story that we read about.

She was bothered by many things. Her entire attention was taken up with serving. She was a very hospitable woman.

Although she sometimes complained about it, she nonetheless liked to cook. And so she may have just volunteered to cook in this home, and it may be that there was no blood relation at all or marital relations between the family that included Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and the family of Simon the leper. We don't know much.

Actually, the fact that the host of this household was named Simon, and that an anointing of Jesus took place in this household, has led modern critics, who, of course, are always trying to rearrange things in the Bible, to identify this story with the same kind of thing, sort of, that happened in Luke chapter 7. Now, Luke does not include the story of this anointing. Luke's the only gospel that doesn't mention this particular story we're considering. But, in an earlier part of Luke, he tells of a time when Jesus was in the house of someone named Simon, who was a Pharisee.

And a sinful woman, who is not identified by name, came in and wept and washed Jesus' feet with her hair, with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. Now, radical critics have seen just enough parallels here to say, well, what we have is one story that developed in two different traditions. Luke remembers the story as taking place in the house of a

Pharisee, and a sinful woman washed his feet with her tears, whereas the other gospels have the story modified.

The woman in question is Mary. The house is Simon, another Simon, a leper, and an anointing took place with oil. By the way, Matthew mentions only that she anointed Jesus' head with oil, but John's gospel, which we just read, mentions that she anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, John 12, 3. Now, it's that similarity, the anointing of Jesus' feet, that is thought to maybe connect the stories of John 12 and Luke 7, but there's certainly no reason for this.

The stories are so different from each other in so many ways. Simon, by the way, was not an uncommon name at all. Jesus had two disciples in his company who were both named Simon, and also Judas, we're told, was the son of Simon.

That's what we're told in Matthew 12. No, it's not Matthew's version. Let me see, maybe Mark's the one who says it.

Somewhere along here, Judas is mentioned that he is the son of Simon. His father's name is Simon. Let me see if it's in Mark's parallel, which is in Mark 14.

No, it's not there. It must be in John. If I look more carefully, I just don't want to go searching.

What is it? Thank you. It mentions that Judas is the son of Simon. So there's a lot of Simons.

Simon was just another form of the name Simeon, which was one of the names of one of Jacob's twelve sons and one of the names of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore, it would be a very common Jewish name. And the fact that there would be a Pharisee named Simon, and Jesus would be in his house on some occasion, and another guy, a healed leper, in another part of the country, really, because the Pharisee named Simon was in Galilee.

Simon the leper was in Judea. The name was common enough to make it insignificant, really, that both men had the same name. Everything else about the story is different.

The woman in Bethany was a good friend of Jesus. The woman in the house of the Pharisee was a notorious, sinful woman of Galilee. The Simon in Galilee was a Pharisee.

The Simon in Bethany was almost certainly not a Pharisee, but a disciple. And there was a conflict in both stories, but in the case of Simon the Pharisee and the sinful man in his house, the conflict was between Jesus and his host. Whereas in the story we're reading now, the conflict is between Jesus and his disciples.

Furthermore, the anointing of Jesus' feet that took place in both stories is with different

substance. In the story in Luke 7, in the house of Simon the Pharisee, his feet are anointed with the tears of the woman. Whereas in Bethany, it's with oil.

Very costly perfume, actually. And so the stories are so different in so many details, as well as the fact that they're very different in time frame, that I think it's rather absurd for the critics to try to say it's all one story that got modified in the retelling and so forth. But we do have this much, that Martha was serving again.

Mary, once again, is silent. In fact, there's three times in the Gospels that Mary is mentioned, as I mentioned before, once when she was sitting at Jesus' feet, once when Lazarus died, and once in this story. And the only recorded words of Mary in any place are simply her complaint, Lord, if you were here, my brother would not have died, in John 11.

Apart from that, we have no recorded words from Mary, which makes us think that she might have been a fairly quiet woman. Her sister appears to have been outspoken. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened very possibly more closely or with more perception than even the disciples did.

Because Jesus said that this woman anointed him for his burial, which if she self-consciously did it for that reason, would mean that she had come to realize what the disciples even had not yet come to realize, that Jesus was going to soon die. Some have thought that Mary did not consciously anoint Jesus for burial, that she just anointed him to show her affection for him. And Jesus saw this as an apt occasion to make the point to the disciples that he was soon going to die and say, well, you know, dead bodies are anointed before they're buried, and this is the only anointing I'm going to get.

Actually, Jesus' body never did receive the traditional anointing after his death because his body was taken off the cross hastily and temporarily interred so that they might be done with it before the Passover came. He was crucified on Friday afternoon, actually Friday morning, but he gave up the ghost about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Sundown would have been around 6, and at sundown Friday would be the Passover as well as Sabbath.

And so they didn't want to break Sabbath, so they didn't take the time to anoint Jesus' body in the traditional manner. They just wrapped him up hastily, put him in the grave, and after the Sabbath was over, certain ladies came to the tomb hoping to anoint him properly, not knowing that he had already now risen from the dead. But because Jesus rose from the dead and because he was hastily buried, he never did receive the traditional anointing in oil and perfumes and so forth, which is what they did for the bodies normally when they buried them.

And yet he did receive his anointing on this occasion, and he interpreted her action that way. Now, I suppose it could be debated forever without ever coming to a conclusion as

to whether Mary knew that this is what she was doing or whether she was just doing something which was a lavish display of love upon Jesus. But I'm inclined to think Mary did understand what she was doing.

All that we have been told about her would suggest that she was a very attentive listener to what Jesus said and a very sensitive woman, probably a very intuitive woman. Also, she lived close enough to Jerusalem, only two miles away, to be even more familiar than the disciples were with what kind of hubbub was going on around that city with reference to Jesus and to be quite aware that the plots against his life were thickening and that they were becoming more intensive. And she had probably caught it on the edge of remark once in a while from Jesus that he was intending to surrender to die.

He had made comments publicly, some of them in veiled terms. Long earlier he said, Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up, which, of course, was a very veiled reference to his own death and resurrection. But he also talked about being three days and three nights in the heart of the earth as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a whale back in Matthew 12.

Of course, Mary would not have been present for that. But we see from those recorded statements of Jesus that predictions of his death, albeit in symbolic or veiled terms, may have been fairly frequent in Jesus' teaching ministry. And we don't know what kinds of things Jesus was talking about in the home of Mary and Martha in Luke chapter 10 where Mary sat intently listening while Martha was not paying attention and the disciples, they were probably paying attention, but they didn't pay very good attention most of the time when Jesus talked about these things.

They never quite caught it. She may well have caught it. She may well have understood.

In fact, she may have even had it by revelation. We know that way back in Jesus' infancy, when his parents brought him to the temple, old Simeon took the child in his arms and predicted that this child would be for the rise and fall of many in Israel and a sign that would be spoken against by many and that even a sword would pierce the heart of Mary, which was no doubt a reference to Mary's emotions, Mary the mother of Jesus, that is, at the time of his crucifixion. Simeon seemed to, at that early time, get a revelation from God by the Holy Spirit that Jesus would suffer and die.

Mary of Bethany might also have received similar. We don't know how she knew, but it doesn't seem impossible that she could have because Jesus had spoken openly on some occasions. I'm going to die.

I'm going to be delivered up. I'm going to be crucified. And having said that as many times as he did, it's not so surprising that Mary might have caught his meaning as it is surprising that the disciples didn't.

But Mary seemed to be more perceptive, more willing to listen and contemplate what Jesus said, and I think that she caught his meaning before anybody else did. And she wanted to make sure that she, before his death, did something to honor him and to show how greatly she loved him and admired him. And so she brought this spikenard, as it's called in some of the versions, which is just a very expensive oil, a perfumed oil.

Now let's look at the Matthew 26 version in verse 6. When Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman, we know that to be Mary, from John 12, 3, came to him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil. The actual cost of the oil was estimated by an accountant in the room, Judas, the treasurer, who is used to working with figures. He didn't, of course, have the exact figure, but he estimated the worth of the contents at 300 denarii.

A denarius was what the average laborer earned in a day's labor. 12 hours of labor would earn the average laborer a denarius. So it was a day's wage.

300 denarii would be something like a year's wages for the average worker. Now, as far as purchasing power goes, of course, it's irrelevant how much that translates into in dollars. Someone has said that 300 denarii today would translate into 52 dollars, or something like that.

That's not very much money. But the purchasing power, in order to get a feel for the actual worth in that economy, we'd have to see that this is really how much the average laborer made in a year. And in our society, for example, minimum wage, I think, not minimum wage, but the average wage of people who are middle class is, I think, placed somewhere between 20 and 30,000 dollars, with 30,000 being not uncommon to be a yearly wage for people who are still considered to be middle class.

You have to get fairly above 30,000 dollars to be considered anything above middle class. So even if we take the low end of that and say this was low middle class laborer's wage for a year, this perfume would have been, in purchasing power and values, comparable to perhaps as much as 20,000 dollars today. It was extremely rare, we're told, very precious and very expensive.

Now you can imagine a greedy guy like Judas, who loved to take from the bag what was in it for his own use, he snuck stuff for himself, John tells us. Of course, the disciples didn't know that at the time, they became aware of it later. The prospect of having 20,000 dollars put into the treasury from which Judas could pilfer, since he apparently had to give no account to anybody but himself as to what was in there and what went out, that would be quite a prospect.

And the sight of all this costly perfume dripping all over the floor, where it could never be recovered, must have been very galling to him. And, of course, he knew he was going to betray Jesus, too. At least he had that in his heart, I think.

And that being so, he probably figured, well, whatever is in the bag, when Jesus goes, hey, I'm the treasurer, I'll just abscond with it. So the loss of a potential year's wages from what could have been in the bag, to be wasted in this manner, really bugged Judas. Now Mark just says that some who were present objected.

Matthew tells us the disciples objected, in verse 8. But John tells us that Judas was the one who objected. And I think what we have to understand is that Judas was the one who raised the outcry first. And the other disciples joined him and said, hey, yeah, that's right, what a waste this is.

Now Judas professed to be righteously indignant. Of course, John tells us he was greedy, he wanted to steal the money for himself, and he couldn't stand to see that money go to waste when it could have gone into his pocket. But, of course, that's not the basis of his professed objection.

He gives more of a pious reason for objecting. This could have been sold and given to the poor, as if he cared for the poor. And John tells us that Judas didn't care about the poor.

He was the only poor that he cared about. But he couldn't get Jesus or the disciples or anyone else to object unless he suggested some pious reason for objecting to this, what he considered to be a waste. It's a good question.

The cost of the perfume, does that suggest anything about the affluence of the family, of Mary and Martha and Lazarus? There are many who have suggested that this was a wealthy family. There's not much to go on in the scriptures about this. I have a feeling that that commonly stated thing, and it's commonly stated by preachers and commentary, that this was probably a fairly wealthy family.

I think they base it entirely on probably that fact, the value of the perfume. That not everybody would have perfume in the house that was worth so much money. Now, that could be a good argument, and maybe they were a wealthy family.

We don't know. They had a house. Exactly what their status was in terms of affluence, we don't know.

But I would say this, that even if they were just a middle-class family or not a very rich family, Mary might have possessed such valuable perfume either from scrimping and saving all of her life. I mean, this could have been her life savings in the bottle or in the box. Just whenever there's a little extra money putting it aside.

Or it's possible that she had had an inheritance. If she and her sister and brother had lost their parents at some time previously, she may have put aside whatever she got by way of inheritance in the form of this perfume. It might have been one of the easier ways to store the value of something.

Sort of like getting gold bullion today or something like that, you know, or rare coins or something. We don't know. We really just don't have enough information to know whether this perfume came easily to the family, whether they were very wealthy and that this was a minor sacrifice, therefore, or whether Mary had saved up all her life or gotten an inheritance or whatever.

But I think it's fair to say that Jesus saw this as a fairly costly gesture on her part. And he said it was in fact costly enough to warrant the story being told wherever the gospel was preached of this act on her part of consecration. But we can't answer that question with certainty.

It is no doubt one of the data, probably the principal data for the assumption by many that this was a wealthy family. Okay. Verse 9 says, well, I should point out also that John tells us, as we saw a moment ago, that the fragrant oil, once broken over Jesus, it was anointed onto his head here, and John, it says, on his feet.

So she anointed his head and feet, and John tells us that the aroma of the oil filled the house, which hearing John tell it, of course, no doubt was a very graphic memory that he had of it being present, that the aroma filled the house. Now, I don't know to what degree this would be difficult to endure in that culture. In our own time, women that wear too much perfume are rather hard to be around, at least close to, in my judgment.

Now, I suppose their husbands don't think so. Whenever I'm in a public place and a woman with too much perfume comes on and sits anywhere nearby with her husband, I feel so sorry for her husband. In fact, I feel sorry for me because I have to be so near it.

And much more so for her husband. But I think, well, gosh, it seems like if he didn't like it, he'd say something about it to her. But, you know, it's possible that different people, I can't represent myself as having the tastes of all people, but it seems to me that to have this aroma of perfume, this pungent odor, fill the whole house where they're eating, to me it would sort of spoil my meal, to tell you the truth.

And I think there's a lot of people who may feel that way. Now, maybe in those days, you know, people thought entirely differently about such things. I mean, it's a totally different culture.

In any case, Jesus must have been pretty oily after this was done to him. I mean, if that were me, I'd be saying, quick, fill the bathtub, you know, and get some soap. But I'm sure that it made Jesus not all that comfortable with this pungent aroma now adhering to his body and oil dripping all over his clothes and everything like that, as well as his hair.

Of course, in the Middle East, oily hair, the dry look is not in there. It was customary to pour olive oil on the head of an honored guest when they came into your home. So to pour perfumed oil on his head might not have been that much of a problem.

The whole scene, obviously it's hard to judge how Jesus would have been tempted to react. Hard to judge that by our own cultural reactions. I would hate it to have oil poured all over my hair and my clothes and my skin, especially if it was strongly perfumed and the odor filled the whole house.

I'd be miserable. Perhaps in that society that didn't make them miserable, but I just can't say. But if Jesus found it difficult to tolerate, he didn't let on.

He defended her action because he saw behind her act of what looked to be a prodigality, of wastefulness, it looked like an act of extravagance on her part. He saw that she did this because she loved him. Now, she apparently drew criticism from all the disciples.

She may well have anticipated this might happen. We have to assume, I think, that she premeditated this act. She saw, perhaps, that Jesus in her house this last week would possibly provide the last opportunity she would ever have to show her affection to him in this way and to pour out this perfume on him.

She must have planned it out and she must have certainly wondered what everyone would think. If she did, she may have anticipated the kind of criticism that she got, but that didn't prevent her from going through with it. She always did what she felt would please Jesus, even if it didn't please others around.

In the previous story where she and Martha had Jesus in their home, Mary's approach to things went against the customs of the time. She sat at Jesus' feet rather than going into the kitchen to serve. Now, I'm sure that that was very uncustomary.

For one thing, the rabbis taught that women are not worthy objects of teaching, that to teach women the law was unnecessary and worthless. They didn't think women were smart enough to understand it and it didn't matter anyway they were under their husbands' authority, so only the men needed to be taught the law. That was the rabbinic teaching.

And, in fact, the disciples themselves were shocked to find Jesus teaching a woman at the well in Samaria. They were surprised that he talked to a woman. And, therefore, culturally, it must have been strange when Mary, opting out of kitchen duties, came and sat at Jesus' feet and sat among the men to be taught by Jesus on that previous occasion.

Yet, Jesus made no complaint. In fact, he defended her when she was criticized for it. He had to defend her against her own sister.

Here, he now has to defend her actions, which are, again, very uncustomary and misunderstood by everyone. He has to defend her against his own disciples. One thing I would point out here is that Judah's criticism of her would appear to be very much based

on principles of good stewardship.

What she had done was extravagant. She could have put a few drops on Jesus and gotten, you know, had essentially the same effect and she could have sold the rest and given to the poor. To give to the poor would seemingly be a better use for the money than to just make Jesus all oily and smelly.

After all, that would be over the next time he cleaned himself and it would have no lasting effect. Whereas helping the poor would help a wider number of people. And many of us, in deciding how we spend the money that is our stewardship to dispense, have to consider these very kinds of things.

You know, well, what's the best use of it? Is it better to build a big cathedral to honor God or is it better to go out and spend our money on the poor? In most cases, Judas, his counsel probably would be the best counsel. There's a lot of things that Christians do with their money that are indeed wasteful. And according to scriptural principles would be much better used if it was given to the poor.

But on this occasion, it was a once in history event. Jesus was going to die. And Jesus felt it was appropriate for her to lavish this expensive gift upon him to anoint him for his burial.

It might seem strange for Jesus not to join in the criticism. Since he was concerned about the poor, he told the rich young ruler to sell all he had and give to the poor and come be a disciple. He told the disciples in Luke chapter 12 to sell what they had and give alms so that they might have treasures in heaven.

Jesus did show an interest in giving to the poor on other occasions. But here he just kind of waves off the suggestion that this money should be given to the poor with the statement, well, there will always be poor people. You can give to them whenever you want, Judas.

It's kind of an irony, no doubt, because he knew that Judas had no interest in giving to the poor. And he said, you know, you'll always have the poor with you. I'm going to be gone soon.

But the poor will still be around for a long time. You can give them any time you want to. And of course, there must have been a bit of a sting in that remark since Judas wasn't really interested in giving to the poor at all.

And Jesus was saying, if you really are concerned about the poor, then you've got plenty of opportunities to do that. But this is the only opportunity this one will ever have or anyone will ever have in all of history to anoint me for burial because I'm only going to die once. And she did a good thing.

She did a good thing and you shouldn't criticize her. Now, while, as I say, Judas' suggestion may be, in general, a good standard for decent stewardship and responsible stewardship, it's clear that he was wrong to criticize her for her stewardship, that she did something that he thought was extravagant and unreasonable and irresponsible. And he could think of a lot of things the money should have been used for instead, but that was none of his business.

And Jesus said, don't criticize her. And we might remember this story when we look at other people and the way they spend their money, whether it's projects, you know, Christian projects they spend it on or whether it's, you know, just the way they exercise their stewardship. It's not for us to criticize.

We need to look to ourselves and make sure that we're doing the right thing. But many times, God might even approve of something very different that somebody else is doing with their resources than what we would do. And Jesus might be inclined to defend them like he did this woman.

He defended the woman because she knew something the disciples didn't know. And so did Jesus. And therefore, the woman was more on the same wavelength with Jesus than the disciples themselves were.

And that is why Jesus stood up for her in this situation. Now, verse 13, Jesus said, Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, that which this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her. I don't know if this is actually a command of Jesus that every time you preach the gospel you should tell this story of what this woman did.

I don't think that's necessarily the case. If so, then there's an awful lot of evangelistic preaching that violates this. He doesn't state it in the form of a command but more in the form of a prediction.

This woman's act will be remembered perpetually wherever the gospel in its entirety is told. Now, the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Mark, and the gospel of John do tell this story. And no doubt, wherever the gospel is preached and gets a foothold, these gospels are read, these gospels are given as source documents for the life of Christ.

And sure enough, wherever this happens, this story is remembered for her. It could have been forgotten. Many other acts of kindness, perhaps, that have been done to Jesus throughout his ministry have been left unrecorded.

And yet this one has been preserved in her favor. Now, there's a contrast between verse 13 and what follows, I think. Because it says in verse 14, Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests.

You know, Judas Iscariot, the first time we read anything about him is in the lists of the

apostles. The lists of the apostles are found in Matthew 10. They're also found in Luke 6, I think.

And also in Acts chapter 1. And Mark, I forget what chapter in Mark. It might be Mark chapter 3, but maybe later. In any case, as soon as you read his name at the beginning of his recorded career in the gospels, when the list of apostles is given, his name appears last.

And it says, And Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. That is to say that even before the story of the betrayal of Judas, Judas' betrayal of Jesus, is told in the gospels, they tell us from the moment he's introduced that he's the one who betrayed Jesus. And there's a bit of a contrast, perhaps intended here, between Mary, who is remembered, wherever the gospels preach, Mary is remembered for her act of love and her act of giving of herself and of her substance for Jesus if it's in this manner, and Judas, who is also remembered.

There's a memorial about Judas that follows the preaching of the gospel everywhere it's preached also, but of a totally different kind. Mary gave herself up for the Lord and her possessions. Judas gave the Lord up for himself and for possessions, for money.

The woman surrendered 300 denarii to sacrifice to Jesus. Judas sacrificed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, as we read here. One of the 12, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priest and said, what are you willing to give me if I deliver him to you? And they counted out to him 30 pieces of silver.

So from that time, he sought opportunity to betray him. So Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, and this is set immediately in the context of this woman surrendering 300 denarii for Jesus. And these two memorials basically are universally remembered along with the gospel.

Mary and Judas. And there's such a contrast in the way that they're remembered. A couple of things about this.

We're told in one of the gospels, I think it's in John's gospel, let me see here. No, it's not in John's gospel, but one of them, let me see if it's in Mark here. Well, it must be in Luke who doesn't tell this story, but in Luke chapter 22, it tells us that Satan entered Judas' heart about this time to betray Jesus.

In Luke 22, verse 3, it says, Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve, so he went his way and conferred with the chief priest and captains how he might betray him to them. And they were glad and agreed to give him money. Then he promised and sought opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of the multitude.

Now, notice Luke, just before telling of Judas' betrayal,

