

conjunction with the religious and political hierarchy, forcing him to sacrifice caution for temporary advantage and risk long-term failure. Notwithstanding Caiaphas' worries and the council's precautions, they were all forced to deal with Jesus *publicly at the feast*. These high councilors are an integral part of a higher plan of which they have no knowledge. Earlier, when they wanted to capture Jesus, He could not be touched. Now when they are unwilling to do it, because of personal considerations, He decided it against their will—and won. Further, despite the fact that they were forced to kill Jesus during the Passover, no one rioted. Literally everyone miscalculated Jesus' voluntary submission to death. This gauged just how seriously so many misunderstood the will of God, and how truly Jesus comprehended and obeyed it.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. On what day did the authorities assemble to plot Jesus' judicial murder?
2. Explain the various names used for the Jewish national feast: why do Mark and Luke call it "the Passover" and "the feast of Unleavened Bread"?
3. Is this plotting by the authorities the first of its kind, or had they done this before? If so, when?
4. List the Jewish national leaders that formed this consultation against Jesus. Explain the historic political or religious position of each group, showing their party's interest in silencing Jesus.
5. Where did this meeting occur? Who presided over the meeting?
6. Explain the authorities' fear of an uproar if Jesus were to be arrested during the feast.

SECTION 63

JESUS IS ANOINTED BY MARY OF BETHANY

(Parallels: Mark 14:3-9; John 11:55—12:8)

TEXT: 26:6-13

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7 there came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at

meat. 8 But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? 9 For this *ointment* might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. 10 But Jesus perceiving it said unto them. Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. 11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. 12 For in that she poured this ointment upon my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Simon is really a leper, a ceremonially unclean outcast from Jewish society, how could it also be true that he possessed this house in Bethany, in which these guests are free to visit? If he were no longer a leper, why call him that?
- b. If the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany occurred several days earlier, before the Messianic Entry (John 12:1, 12) why then does Matthew delay recounting the event until now? Did he not know when it took place? Or does he have some other reason for registering these facts now out of their normal chronological order?
- c. If you assume that Matthew correctly placed this section here for good and appropriate reasons, what is the relationship between it and this new context in which he inserts it?
- d. How did Mary manage to anoint Jesus' head and feet, if He was eating at a table?
- e. How would you feel, if a good friend of yours came up to you at a dinner party and poured an 11:5 ounce bottle of strong perfume on your head and feet? What would others say? How should you treat this person? What of your dignity? How do you think Jesus answered these questions?
- f. Why do you think Mary chose such expensive ointment for this use?
- g. Why do you think the disciples were so indignant as to considering the anointing of Jesus a *waste*? What does this reveal about them? Even though John pictures Judas as instigating these complaints because he was greedy (John 12:6), how do you account for the other disciples' joining in to reproach Mary? Do you think their principle could ever be justified?

- h. Jesus said, "You always have the poor with you." Is He saying, "There shall always be the haves and the have-nots? Does He resign Himself to this reality? Then, should we do nothing about the poor?"
- i. Do you think Judas would really have used the money from the sale of the perfume in the way he indicated it should? What makes you think so?
- j. If, as Jesus affirmed, Mary anointed His body beforehand for burying, would not the perfume get a bit old, before the crucifixion actually took place? If six days were to pass before the burial, then how could her anointing Him "for burial" have anything to do with it?
- k. What is there about Mary's act that makes it so significant that one can hardly preach the Gospel without mentioning her memorial/memorable deed? Why did Jesus approve of her act so heartily.
- l. Do you think Mary anointed Jesus for the motive He attributed to her, i.e. specifically "to prepare [Him] for burial"? How could she have known about His approaching death and decide to anoint His body? And how could He know her real reason, without her announcing it publicly?
- m. How is the example of Mary supposed to teach us practically? Are we to go around anointing others? Is her noble deed merely a source of joy to us or are we to be strangely warmed by her love for Jesus, and love Him because she did, or what?
- n. How has Jesus' prophecy about Mary's memorial been fulfilled? Are you personally helping to fulfill His prediction? If so, how? If not, why not?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Earlier, six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, the town where Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, lived. While there, they gave a dinner in His honor in the house of a man known as Simon "the leper." Martha waited at the table and Lazarus was one of those at the table with Jesus. As He was reclining at the table, Mary approached Him with a third-liter (about 12 oz.) alabaster flask of very expensive fragrant oil made of genuine nard. She broke open the jar and began pouring it over Jesus' head and anointing His feet. Then she wiped His feet with her hair. The fragrance of the

perfume filled the house. But there were some disciples, among whom Judas Iscariot (the one who was to betray Him), who, when they saw it, were indignant and grumbled to one another, "Why was this perfume wasted this way? Why, this ointment could have been sold for a fortune—more than a year's wages,—and donated to the poor!" and they sternly rebuked her. (Judas said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. Since he had charge of the common purse, he had the habit of pilfering the money put into it.)

But Jesus, noticing this, said to them, "You all let her alone! Why are you embarrassing the lady? For she has done a 'good work' to me. Judas, you let her observe it, anticipating the day of my burial. In fact, you will always have the poor people among you, and you can help them any time you want to. But I will not always be around for you to help. She has done what was in her power to do. By pouring this ointment on my body, she has anointed my body ahead of time for its burial. I can assure that what she has done will also be recounted in memory of her wherever in the whole world this Good News is preached!"

SUMMARY

In a historical flashback the Gospel traces elements that not unlikely helped to crystallize Judas' decision to betray Jesus: Jesus did not permit anyone to criticize Mary's anointing as something less than perfectly appropriate under the circumstances. Further, Jesus continued what Judas must have considered to be negative talk about His own death in the not-too-distant future. Not only did Jesus praise Mary and her manifest faith in His testimony to His death and rebuke Judas in the process, but He promised her deed eternal fame as widespread as the Gospel proclamation.

NOTES

THE SETTING

26:6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. Neither Matthew nor Mark affirm exactly when the Lord was in Bethany. Rather, each introduces this episode with a circumstantial principle that derives its temporal value from its connection with the main verb of the sentence, "a woman came up." Only John furnishes the precise chronological data: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus

came to Bethany" (John 12:1). Therefore, whereas Matthew and Mark had been discussing events "two days before the Passover" (26:3; Mark 14:1), we conclude that they inserted the anointing in Bethany out of its normal chronological order so as to achieve an extraordinary, logical—or should we say, psychological?—connection between the anointing and its consequences. This procedure cannot be charged with contradiction, because neither writer asserts that this event occurred in any time sequence other than that indicated by John. (In fact, even John utilized this same technique in reverse with reference to the same events. [See John 11:2 and 12:1ff.]) If the Passover came on Thursday night that year (see on 26:17; cf. John 19:14, 31; Mark 15:42), then "six days before the Passover," dates the anointing in Bethany one evening before the Triumphal Entry. (See Hendriksen, *John*, II, 171ff. for fuller discussion of the date.)

So, what could have motivated Matthew and Mark to edit their material by inserting this event out of strict chronological order? In the loving anointing by Mary what is the connection they saw which qualifies this section's place appropriately between Jesus' prediction of His death (26:2) and the Sanhedrin's plotting (26:3ff.) on the one hand, and Judas' pact with the rulers (26:14ff.) on the other?

1. Their reason cannot be solely the venom rankling in the breast of Judas that drove him to betray Jesus, if the rebuke he received during the anointing be thought to be the only cause. In fact, neither Matthew nor Mark make this connection. They do not even mention the traitor by name. Only by reading John do we learn that it was Judas who led the complaining and something about his motives. But not even John draws the conclusion that Judas left the supper more decided than ever to betray the Lord. This is simply a conclusion based on a comparison of the three Gospels, none of which verifies our suspicion, even if they do not contradict it.

What took place at Bethany that night may have triggered the betrayal scheme already maturing in Judas' mind. Perhaps Jesus' rebuke is less a factor than His frank talk of His burial. This defeatism finally convinced the greedy Judas that his dreams of political power and personal wealth were finished, unless some urgent solution were found. In harmony with their own understanding of Jesus' betrayal and its causes, Matthew and Mark rightly connect Judas' determination with what occurred at this supper, for, say they, Iscariot walked away from this event determined to go to the priests (26:14).

2. Matthew sketches a magnificent contrast between what two of Jesus' disciples did about the predictions of His coming death (26:2; Mark omits this detail.).
 - a. Mary believed Him and anointed Him while she could (26:6-13).
 - b. Judas believed Him serious about His dark future, and so decided to make his own position as disciple bring him money one way or another by betrayal (26:14-16).
 - (1) If Jesus defended Himself by miraculous power against the crisis that forced Him to declare His Kingdom, honor His loyal supporters, in the end He would enrich Judas.
 - (2) Or, if Jesus chose to die, in which case the hoped-for declaration of the Kingdom must forever die with Him, Judas would have at least the betrayal payment for his trouble.
 - c. This contrast is between real belief among quite opposite types of disciple, and how their distinctive moral differences caused each to react. Matthew's reader is gently led to reflect on the question: what do I personally think about Jesus of Nazareth?
3. Matthew and Mark create, thus, a stark contrast between Mary's open-hearted love and the burning hatred and base plotting of the priests and Judas.

Simon the leper: nothing more is known of him beyond this supper given Jesus in his house. Because of so many Simons in Israel—there were even two more Simons at this table: Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot!—he was distinguished by his former disease, rather than by occupation (“Simon the tanner” Acts 10:6), by his skin complexion (Acts 13:1, Symeon Niger is “Simon Black”), by his father's name (“Simon Bar-jonah” Matt. 16:17) or by his politics (“Simon the Zealot” Acts 1:13). To call him *Simon the leper* reveals an insider's view of small-town life in first-century Palestine that a more formal identification of the man could not have achieved. Had Simon the leper been healed by Jesus? If so, his name is the unembarrassing living memorial to God's grace to him. Of course, he may have been deceased, his spacious house being now borrowed for this meal.

It is striking that John omits all mention of Simon the leper, directing all attention to Mary, Martha and Lazarus, whereas Matthew and Mark do not consider their names essential to the story. One tentative hypothesis is that, because of the more commodious size of Simon's house, the banquet was set there, rather than in that of Lazarus. Naming Lazarus was important for John, since he intended to indicate

Jesus' greater interest for the festal crowds as well as document how Lazarus' resurrection fired Jesus' enemies' animosity (John 12:9-11).

This incident must not be confused with the anointing of Jesus by a sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). While both episodes are comprised of three identical elements, (1) the anointing by a woman at a meal in the house of a Simon, (2) the criticism of the woman by someone present, and (3) Jesus' defense of the woman, based on reading someone's thoughts, these incidents are not identical. (Cf. Foster, *The Final Week*, 25ff.) These motives conclusively distinguish them:

1. Luke's anointing occurred much earlier in Galilee during Jesus' ministry there; this anointing took place in Judea a few days before His death.
2. The Galilean Pharisee is a rude, ill-bred host, lacking the refinement to offer the usual amenities for his Guest's comfort, whereas everything at this supper sings of love for Jesus.
3. In Galilee the host launched no verbal attack, but merely judged the woman mentally, whereas Judas led other disciples in a verbalized criticism.
4. The bases of criticism varied: there, the propriety of Jesus' permitting a woman to touch Him; here, the propriety of a questionable use of needed funds.
5. In Galilee Jesus admonished the host; here, His disciples.
6. While the basic motive of both anointings is love, the Galilean woman did it in gratitude for forgiveness, but here Jesus underlines Mary's faith in His revelations: "for my burial."
7. In the Galilean anointing, the sins of the woman are made prominent and forgiven, but here Mary's character is only praised for its loving thoughtfulness and her grasp of Jesus' teaching, and made a universal example.

1. THE GENEROUS GIVING TO THE GODLY GUEST SPLENDID SELF-FORGETFULNESS

26:7 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at meat. Jesus revealed the Father to us as much by His table conversation as by His monumental mountain-top sermons. Many of the most profound things He ever taught were said while He was

eating with others. (Cf. John 2:1-11; Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 7:36-50; 14:1-24; Matt. 26:20-29; John 13-17; 21:12-23; Acts 1:4-8: "while He was eating with them.")

There came unto him a woman. But that this woman remained unidentified throughout the narrative of Matthew and Mark may indicate that the main point of this episode is not her friendship to Jesus which would express itself in a lavish love appropriate to this person, but the high importance of her purpose and the faith that prompted it. (See on 26:12.) That our author suppresses her name may also point to the early date of his writing:

1. To publish her name while she was still alive would expose this inhabitant of Bethany of Judah to the vindictiveness of those Jerusalem Jews who sought to repress the wildly spreading defections from Judaism to the movement of the Crucified One. John, writing after 70 A.D. could reveal her identity, because her enemies were defeated or dead.
2. Perhaps Matthew omits her name so as not to embarrass her, protecting her own modesty. Perhaps she was dead when John wrote, so naming her would cause no trouble to her.

The elegantly shaped *alabaster cruse* Mary brought was carved out of a translucent, usually whitish, fine-grained variety of gypsum stone. The use of such a vessel also points to its value, being the usual type of container for expensive aromatic oils (Pliny, *Natural History*, 13.3; 36.12; Herodotus 3.20.1). John (12:3) noted that this precious vase held one *litra* or 327.5 grams (about 11.5 oz.) of the costly essence. That Matthew called it *exceeding precious ointment* points to princely oriental luxury, a view externalized by the disciples' complaint.

Having an alabaster cruse does not mean she originally purchased this as one of several flasks of ointment to prepare her brother, Lazarus, for burial (John 11:17, 39). This supposition arises out of the disciples' complaint that, while the bottle retained its commercial value, she should have sold her possession. But its being merely a left-over contrasts with the spirit of initiative and creative preparation evident in her deed, and raises the question why it was not used on Lazarus originally. Did the sisters buy too much? It is simpler to admit that she simply spent the money for Jesus. Godet (*John*, II, 206f.) argues that Jesus' observations to the Pharisee in Galilee (Luke 7:44ff.) imply that the anointing of one's guest's head and washing his feet

were common services before a meal, and the omission of these amenities constituted a rude oversight. (Cf. Gen. 18:4; Judg. 19:21; I Sam. 25:41; Ps. 23:5; 92:10; 45:7? 141:5; John 13:5; I Tim. 5:10.) Hence, no one present would look askance as she began her task.

She poured it upon his head as he sat at meat. How harmonize this with John's affirmation that she anointed His feet (John 12:3)? Her doing both would not be difficult, if the guests were lying Roman-style on couches that radiate out from the central table. She simply approached Him, walking between the couches. Next she broke off the top (seal?) of the new long-necked vase to pour out its contents rapidly (Mark 14:3). Her original purpose was undoubtedly to anoint Jesus' head in the ordinary way. But observing that His feet were rough and travel-worn, she gladly poured the same perfume on them too as if her priceless essence were common water. To remove the excess, she used the only towel she had brought, her own hair. Since she came only to anoint His head, presumably she would have needed no towel. That it was against good breeding for a woman to present herself among men with her hair dishevelled does not testify against Mary's morals or argue for identification with the sinful woman of Luke 7:36ff.

1. Mary's hair may have been neatly bound up when she came in. Then, her need to dry Jesus' feet may have caused her to waive a minor scruple and undo her hair to meet the unforeseen need. It is perfectly in character with her carefully planned love offering to be only too glad to do this.
2. Her humility and irrepressible self-giving know no limit as she renders homage even to the least favored part of His body, drying *His feet with her hair*, her crown and glory. (Cf. I Cor. 11:15.) The generosity with which she poured so much perfume on His feet testified that no sacrifice was too costly. That she wiped them with her hair proved that no service was too demeaning for her. Any disciple worthy of the name must see that true adoration demands that we lay our honor at Jesus' feet in precisely the same way. Lenski (*John*, 840) preached: "The proper place for a disciple's head is at the Savior's feet." If John the Baptist considered himself unworthy to unloosen the sandals from Jesus' feet, why should not Mary react in a similar way?

2. THE GRACELESS GRUMBLING AT THE GOODNESS OF HER GIFT

26:8 **But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?** They not only saw it; they also smelled the concentrated perfume, for "the house was filled with fragrance" (John 12:3)! Among Mary's critics, the voice of Judas is raised against the useless *waste* (*apòleia*, "destruction, loss"). But were it Matthew's exclusive purpose to insert this episode in this place to indicate one of Judas' motives for betraying Jesus, then *why did not Matthew at least name Judas* in his account? Why does he inculcate his fellow *disciples*, when, according to John, Judas was the main agitator?

Here is important evidence of independent eye-witness. John, from his own vantage point at the table, noticed that Judas instigated these remarks, whereas Matthew and Peter (Mark) remembered that others added their assent. While both versions are correct, complementing each other, their own independent testimony is confirmed even by this problem.

Two important considerations justify Matthew's procedure:

1. *The disciples* meekly followed Judas' lead. Perhaps because he had shown the courage to speak frankly despite the festive occasion, he did it directly in Jesus' presence, apparently arguing from right-minded principles. Our author does not name Judas, because his point may be that even other disciples are blindly led into this mistaken criticism. So their shamefully unthinking reaction is at least as noteworthy as naming the perpetrator.
2. *The disciples* did not follow Jesus' lead! This rash, uncharitable criticism was expressed in the presence of Jesus who could have pronounced far more competent judgment in the case and corrected any misdeed in Mary's conduct with the infallible certainty of divine judgment. His acquiescence in itself should have been justification enough for them not to join Judas' attack.

Judas' grumbling had enough truth and logic in it to convince and enflame deep emotion in the other disciples, moving them to indignation at this apparently inexcusable waste. Their attitude was a groan (*embrimàomai*), arising out of their displeasure (Mark 14:5). Is it not worthy of note when the godly are shaken from their steadfastness by a rogue disciple masquerading as a defender of the weak?

But *the disciples* who lamented the extravagance must be distinguished as two groups whose motives differed as to sincerity, even if both could make use of the same argument:

1. Judas' anger, says John (12:6), was driven by his greed. His rage is not faked, because he was really mad about losing money. Only his public reason is hypocritical. He felt personally cheated by her senseless throwing away good money that could have passed into his own grasp.
2. The *indignation* of the others, however, was motivated by their sense of stewardship, perhaps also by their own forced frugality over the last years of traveling with Jesus. (Cf. 8:19; John 6:12.) Those who have learned to control their own spending, often cannot tolerate to see others practice what the former consider "extravagance," even for the most justifiable reasons.

To what purpose is this waste? In Mary's deed they could discern only a lavish expenditure typical of conscienceless prodigality, quite uncharacteristic of godly people responsible for every penny God entrusts to them. But is *whatever* anyone spends for JESUS really squandered or lost? Great faith, judged by the external manifestations it motivates, may seem a waste, something extra or calculable only in terms of loss. But in terms of true stewardship, the objecting of Judas, and others like him, is exposed for the diabolical hypocrisy it was: he considered 300 denarii too much to spend for Jesus' luxury, but was willing to accept just under half that amount for Jesus' life (30 pieces of silver equals 120 denarii!)

Charity: the plausible argument of a short-sighted utilitarianism

26:9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. The disciples could quickly estimate the commercial value of the perfume on the following bases: The size of the container was a Roman pound (26:7). The container was alabaster, not ceramic. The aroma was identified to be that of an exquisite, oil-base perfume, "nard perhaps?" Its aroma filled the house, indicating its strength (John 12:3). The rapid mental calculation of the group's business-minded treasurer, Judas, settled the price at 300 denarii (Mark 14:5; John 12:5). Figured at a denarius

a day, a common day-laborer would have to work almost a year to earn wages enough just to pay for this perfume! So, is not her expensive perfume unquestionably an unjustifiable luxury in contrast to the crying needs of the poor who have no daily bread?!

The value of this perfume may not indicate anything about the affluence or prominence of Lazarus' family, because it could be Mary's personal sacrifice of her personal funds or life-time savings. By whatever method she earned it, she would have had to save 20 denarii a year for 15 working years to amass this sum by herself. Even if she were independently wealthy, this was still a large sum for her to pour out in one gift.

This ointment . . . sold . . . given to the poor. Judas marshalled the other disciples to criticize what they could not stop. By implication these disciples treat Mary as if she never felt any compassion for the poor. Were not the entire apostolic group and Jesus dependent on others' generosity sufficiently to qualify as *poor* (8:20; 27:55f.; Luke 8:2f.)? Had her family never hosted these very men, meeting their needs? While they were accustomed to *practical* hospitality, they were shocked by her *impractical* extravagance. Nevertheless, as they took up Judas' insincere position, the disciples' understanding of the problem involves alternatives that are not mutually exclusive: either love the poor or anoint Jesus. As Jesus will imply in His answer, one can legitimately dedicate himself to His worship as well as labor sacrificially for the liberation of the needy.

John, however, redimensioned Judas' slashing remark: "He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief" (John 12:6). As treasurer of the Lord's group, he received all contributions and was responsible for disbursing cash for purchases and gifts to the poor. (Cf. John 13:28ff.) But he pilfered funds held in trust. Is Farrar (*Life*, 496) correct to conclude that Judas formed this argument to blind himself to the baseness of his ruling passion? While certainly a hypocritical pretext, did he present himself as a champion of the poor to conceal even from himself the glaring wrongness of his greed? Lenski (*Matthew*, 1008) eloquently sketched the treacherousness of Judas' insinuations:

He condemns not only Mary but Jesus himself. Judas implies that Jesus is robbing the poor; that he is lavishing upon himself what rightfully belongs to charity; that for his own glorification he allows a waste that is utterly wrong; that his example is harmful to others; and that Judas is the man who knows what is right, proper, charitable, and is not afraid to mention it!

This was the sort of leadership the unthinking disciples were following! Even if they were moved by sincere concern for the poor and intended to pass judgment only on Mary, they unwittingly swung behind an attack on the Lord Himself!

3. HIS GALLANT GRATITUDE FOR HER GLADDENING GRACIOUSNESS

26:10 **But Jesus perceiving it said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.** Because Judas' sweeping innuendo implicates Jesus too, the Lord cannot defend Himself without appearing to condone wastefulness by accepting it. But to the surprise of everybody, He brilliantly defended Mary, while fairly weighing the truth of the disciples' position and in full awareness of the poor people all about Him.

Why trouble ye the woman, as if what she has done could somehow be defined "sinful"? Embarrassed and stunned, Mary alone could not convincingly turn back the accusation of wastefulness. Jesus proceeds to show that *she has wrought a good work upon me*. Several reasons may have prompted this approach:

1. IT WAS USEFUL SERVICE TO THE POOR. The Lord gently reveals the disciples' gross misconception by explaining that she was using what was in her power to do *a good work upon me*. Jesus, the poor ex-carpenter from Nazareth, was now without permanent housing and living on the very contributions of which Judas was the common treasurer. (Cf. Luke 8:12.) Edersheim (*Life*, II,360) remarked compellingly:

That He, Who was ever of the poor and with them, Who for our sakes became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich, should have to plead for a last service of love to Himself, and for Mary, and as against a Judas, seems, indeed, the depth of self-abasement.

Hence He himself was one of the very poor to whom those of greater means should do good. This, says Jesus, *she has done*, fulfilling the very principle defended by the disciples. Because her purpose was to prepare His body for burial (26:12), then her goal and purpose must be judged useful, because specifically related to the exigencies of burial and its relative costs. For the actual

burial Nicodemus brought 100 times the weight of Mary's perfume (John 19:39). The women procured and brought even more spices (Luke 23:55f.; Mark 16:1). Thus, her supposed extravagance did not literally transcend the boundaries of strict economy or thrift, because burial costs were really that great. Could the disciples consistently criticize as bad stewardship what someone paid for a loved one's embalming, when they themselves would have expressed their love and loyalty to Him in a similar way? So, why should they condemn as useless waste her anticipation of Jesus' approaching burial? Because they simply did not believe it would ever happen. This single critical element of unbelief distinguishes the depth of her discipleship from theirs.

2. IT WAS UNSELFISH. In order to honor this poor Man, she had chosen to do without many luxuries which the money for this perfume would have purchased. Her deed was not merely a "good work" (*érgon agathòn*) in the classical Pharisean ethic, but a higher, "noble deed" (*érgon kaiòn*).

Lavishness is the proper expression of devotion and gratitude. No loving expenditure, however seemingly costly, is censured by our Lord, when it is motivated by unadulterated love for Him. True love does not calculate how little it can get by with, but wants to pour out its resources to the limit. How can we consider ourselves lovers of God and Christ, so long as we consider it perfectly respectable to donate to His cause the minimum amount possible before appearing miserly?

The true worth of a gift must be evaluated by its motivation hidden in the soul of the giver. As in Mary's case, only Jesus can discern this with unflinching precision. Ironically, Judas' avarice passed for prudent concern for the needy, while Mary's generous devotion was judged wasteful. We cannot now anoint His physical body, but we can pour out generous love on His Body, the Church, and care for His poor brethren (25:35ff.; Gal. 6:10).

3. IT WAS DEVOTION TO CHRIST. She knew that Jesus was no mere poor, itinerate rabbi, but the Christ of God! Can what is done for such a Person out of devotion to God ever be *anything but good work*?
4. IT WAS THE INTELLIGENT EXPRESSION OF A FAITH THAT PLANNED. (See on 26:12.) Prudence and common sense are also God's gifts to us, lest we neglect other duties to Him and His people by an extravagance at one point that impoverishes others

whom we are called to serve. While Mary's tender lavishness strikes a responsive chord in our hearts, it must not justify thoughtless excesses on our part that do not show the same intelligent foresight and planning she did. In fact, Jesus praised her intelligent faith in His predictions of His death and her determination to do what was in her power to act on them. It is a serious misreading of His words to see her gift as prompted by an unseeing emotion that reacted unthinkingly on this impulse alone.

5. **THE DECISION WAS RIGHTLY HERS ALONE.** Mary's was the privilege to dispose of her own property as she deemed right and proper under God, without answering to men. The disciples' criticism implied their right of judgment, as if the property were theirs to use in ways they deemed more practical and prudent. But Jesus does not back down, require Mary to undo her deed, or apologize. Rather, He defended her freedom to dispose of her own property in a manner consonant with her discipleship. By pointing to an appropriateness they had not seen heretofore, He informed their ignorance and defended her liberty.

Jesus' treatment of the disciples' scruple becomes a masterful demonstration of how to deal with opinions today. (Cf. Rom. 14:1—15:7; I Cor. 6-10.) Although they cited an unexceptionable Scriptural principle, neighborly love for the poor, they applied it in such a way as to contravene another principle, the right of private property (Acts 5:4; implied in Deut. 23:23). Further, the disciples had argued against her apparent violation of the rule of utility or expedience. (Cf. I Cor. 6:12; 10:23f.)

Therefore, the dichotomy between the useful and the beautiful can be a false dilemma, because a deed of loving adoration like Mary's can be both. How should we apply His dictum? Is extravagance ever right? The lavishness of Christian love is sanctioned not only by Jesus' express approval of Mary's generosity, but also by His own marvelous example, the fact to which her act pointed, "for my burial." Consider His own deliberate "waste of love" which He was about to pour out on Calvary:

1. He considered His death absolutely useful, directed to a practical end, but, at the same time, it was the expression of a love that must act lest its heart burst.
2. Similarly, there is extravagance in lavishing His love on us through His death, because not everyone for whom He died would even

appreciate it. He gave a sacrifice sufficient to save the race, fully knowing that few would accept it. His gift is extravagant because none of us could ever deserve it. What others might term "wasteful," in our gratitude we call "magnificence."

3. We may confidently transcend the considerations of our usual "produce":
 - a. By spending lavishly, even emotionally, on Jesus, completely overwhelmed by the lordly generosity of His love.
 - b. This means unstinting, unselfish liberality to others. By freely "squandering" our love on the unthankful, the undeserving and the unlovable, we imitate Jesus Himself.
 - c. The kind of self-sacrificing liberality here promoted is that unsparing big-heartedness that gives, even sometimes going beyond what could be considered strictly "necessary," and a prodigality that almost demands that it be restrained by those responsible to organize it. (Cf. Exod. 35:4f., 36:3-7; Acts 4:32-37; II Cor. 8:1-4; Phil. 4:10.)

TO EVERY DUTY ITS TIME AND PLACE

26:11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. Granted, this is addressed to the objecting disciples, but is there an allusion to the specific duty of the thieving Judas, who, as treasurer of the common fund, must disburse funds to the poor, but robbed them himself? Jesus' statement implies, "You can help them any time you want" (Mark 14:7). That Mary has given so generously to me now does not mean she cannot be kind also to the poor on other occasions. Particularly lavish generosity to special friends once in awhile and a consistent, thoughtful meeting of the needs of the poor are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

You have the poor always with you. How carefully and deliberately He avoids rejecting the disciples' principle. Rather, He supports them in believing it! His own deeply felt concern for both the spiritual and physical needs of the poor was above question. He had expressed it in formal lessons and in His own practice (5:7, 42; 6:2ff.; 19:21; Luke 6:20f., 30, 38; 21:1-4; John 13:29). It was a fundamental theme of His whole ministry (Luke 4:18; Matt. 11:5). His doctrine embodied all that God had said about His own love for the poor (Deut. 15:11 in context! Ps. 41:1; Prov. 14:20f., 31; 19:17; 29:7; Isa. 58:1-7; Jer. 22:16; Dan. 4:27; Amos 2:6f.; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4, 6). Jesus' attitude

encouraged people to believe that God is keenly interested in those who watch over the poor (25:34-40). His later New Testament doctrine is no less explicit (Acts 2:44f.; 4:32f.; 11:27-30; Rom. 12:8, 13, 16, 20; II Cor. 8:9; Gal. 2:10; 6:2, 10; Eph. 4:28; I Tim. 6:18; Heb. 6:10; 13:1ff.; James 1:27; 2:5, 15f.; 5:1ff.; I John 3:17f.; III John 5-8). His identification with the poor and concern for them should forever dispel any suspicion of neglect on His part.

Nonetheless, Jesus is an intensely practical realist, fully aware of all human differences that contribute to one's ability to obtain and retain wealth. He is no visionary that dreams of the day when every trace of poverty should be wiped from the earth. He is not guilty of that oversimplification that preaches a communistic economic equality. He knows that all men are not equal. He is perfectly aware of the inequalities of position and opportunity, the fluctuations of health, the many variables in intelligence, ability and personal aggressiveness. So, because He comprehended that these inequalities are often immutable ingredients of the human condition, with these words He committed the care of the poor to His own people. He knew by experience the happiness poor people feel from receiving needed help (Luke 8:1-3), and the even more special joy of Christians who share it in His name (Acts 20:35).

It has always been the spiritual descendants, not of Judas, but of Mary, who have truly cared for the poor. Where Jesus Christ is lovingly adored, truly believed and obeyed, the poor are best cared for. Really, nothing poured out in honor of Jesus can ever be called a waste. In fact, in a general sense, everything that truly promotes the progress of His Kingdom according to His criteria brings with it a deeper concern for the poor, a more practical interest in the Third-World peoples, a broader grasp of our common, interrelated human brotherhood.

It is against this background that one can understand Jesus' tenderly sad observation. *But me ye have not always* (cf. 9:15). While normally appropriate to avoid luxury for self so as to be able to assist the poor, Jesus pleads the extraordinariness of the present circumstances as justification for Mary's seeming wastefulness. Death makes extraordinary demands that set aside common everyday rules. The moment of His own death was fast approaching. If *anyone* were to prepare His body for burial while He was still able to appreciate the beauty and nobleness of such love, the time was now or never. *Me you have not always*: how completely understated! These disciples had only

a few days left to show their devotion to Jesus before this privilege would be gone forever. But they were blinded, precisely because they sincerely, however, wrongly believed they would have Him always. Unique opportunities to do good pass away, and must be taken when the situation presents itself, when the impulse, the time, the people and the circumstances are ours. The moment must be seized, lest that chance of a lifetime be mistaken for something that could be done anytime, and be forever and tragically lost. In fact, Mary's was the only anointing Jesus received. The other women brought their anointing spices to an empty tomb. The time to do this while Jesus could appreciate it came and went.

4. THE GLORY OF A GENUINE GRASP OF THE GIST OF THE GOSPEL

26:12 **For in that she poured this ointment upon my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.** Normally, *for burial* a great quantity of spices and ointments would be needed (II Chron. 16:14; John 19:39; Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1). Nicodemus alone brought 100 Roman pounds worth (= 32.74 kg or 71.9 lb.). Although Mary had literally anointed only Jesus' head and feet, He accepted her intention as if she had anointed His entire body.

The fact that Mary did not announce the motive behind her act has been interpreted by some as if she could not have intended such a solemn purpose. Consequently, skeptics assert either that Jesus gratuitously attributed this (false) motive to her, or else the Evangelists simply invented this pious, but false, attribution. How strangely inconsistent or wilfully blind are those critics who are so ready to confuse the anointing in Luke 7:36-50 with Mary's act as two contradictory accounts of the same event, but do not see that Jesus could discern Mary's true purpose just as clearly as He read the heart of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:39f.)!

Others, to avoid this irreverence, suggest alternate explanations:

1. Jesus spoke only of the "effect of the woman's act, not her conscious purpose. . . . She meant nothing but to show her love" (Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 309). This explanation is plausible, since the Semitic idiom often ignores Greek nuances and substitutes purpose for result. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, §391, 402(5); also Arndt-Gingrich, 378.)

2. Is it possible that Jesus magnanimously attributed to her a motive she did not dream, but would have embraced, had she thought of it? Is it not true that a goodly amount of our service given out of pure devotion to Christ possesses a value that goes beyond our comprehension?

Only clear testimony of Scripture can prove that Mary did not understand nor consciously intend her deed as Jesus declares it. Argument alone is incapable of establishing the contrary. Only her embarrassed demurring could do this. But the Gospel is silent, leaving only Jesus' unequivocal testimony standing. Apparently, Jesus simply read her thoughts, stated them and that settles it.

MARY BELIEVES ME!

In Mary the Lord has found at least one disciple who really understood Him. She had willingly let Him be the Teacher to say whatever He wanted to, even if it contradicted popular philosophy and traditions and even defied her own logic, desires and emotions. In short, her discipleship is real and profound. She believes unquestioningly that Jesus really means what He has been saying all along about His impending death. She could grasp the unmistakable conclusion that Jesus' predictions must mean that He would not defend Himself by supernatural means. So she perceived that He is going straight to the cross and that, when His bitter archenemies had Him under their power, she might never be able to approach to prepare His body properly for entombment. Therefore, she planned ahead ("she took beforehand," Mark 14:8 *proélabon murisai* means that she used foresight. Prematureness has nothing to do with it.) She bought the perfume and "kept it for the day of my burial" (John 12:7). Now, therefore, seeing the opportunity she ardently desired would come, she made her move decisively. No wonder Jesus thinks her noble act worthy of a Gospel memorial!

Mary, the model of faith that
comes by hearing the word of Christ

26:13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her. This is the only occasion

Jesus ever raised a monument to any specific human being. But it is not an eternal memorial to a bottle of perfume, but to a genuine faith that acts intelligently while the opportunity to serve God is ours. It would never occur to a Judas that, were Jesus to remain a dead Messiah nicely embalmed with Mary's ointments, *this gospel never would be preached in the whole world!* Jesus' prediction must be dismissed as the illogical vagaries of a dreamer, unless, despite His death and burial, He could rise again and infuse into His followers that courage to preach which only His triumph over death can give. It simply escaped Judas that, in the midst of all this morbid talk about suffering and death, Jesus uttered this stupendous prediction: *This gospel shall be preached in the whole world!* (Cf. 24:14; Mark 13:10.) Even if the betrayer actually heard it, in his unbelief, he discounted Jesus' certainty of victory. And yet, Jesus' declaration is not simply the prophet's foresight. It rings more like the proclamation of a Monarch. Unlike any earthly potentate, this King decrees her glory, while He Himself is under the death sentence. There is a bold irony that gives character to His words:

1. Christ's promise of immortal renown to Mary boldly reveals His own self-awareness, as He consciously stood in the shadow of His own cross. His bold prediction could never be automatically self-fulfilling without resurrection. But *this Man* was not just another human. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 224) taught:

His divine foreknowledge is demonstrated by the literal fulfillment of his prediction, and as the knowledge of this incident reaches forward into coming ages and spreads abroad still farther in the earth, the demonstration becomes continually more surprising.

2. He who presents Himself to Israel for consideration as Messiah is no local Christ, interested exclusively in the narrow concerns of one people. Despite His own self-limited mission "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24; 10:6, 23), He always looked beyond these horizons to the regions beyond. (See Special Study, "Gentiles," at the conclusion of this volume.)
3. What is to be preached in the whole world shall include her anointing Him for *burial*, and He dares call this *good news* (this gospel)? But "burial" includes the atoning death of matchless life, hence summarizes His sacrificial suffering for humanity.

4. If Mary realistically faced the fact of the cross, even more so does Jesus! He has freely walked to Jerusalem to face those who hate Him bitterly. His exhortation to the Apostles on their early mission, "Do not fear those who can kill the body, but cannot destroy the soul" (10:28), is not to be tested in the crucible of Jesus' own personal experience.
5. Whereas Judas and the others, so far from heralding this deed, would have strangled it aborning, Jesus considers this "absurdly wasteful act" so characteristic of the spirit of the true Christian that to proclaim His message demands its exemplification by reference to what Mary of Bethany did!

But in what sense(s) must Mary's noble act serve as a memorial of her, inciting to its imitation everyone who reflects on it? Perhaps the fact that Jesus did not specify how this is to work was intended to push us to ponder, lest we brush aside its less obvious, but essential significance. In every part of this story what is as obvious as the aroma of her perfume, is her love. But this is not expressly indicated as a model for us. We do not love Jesus just because Mary did. We love Him, alone because of what He means to us personally. Some of the same reasons that drew her to Him draw us too. So, what should her example mean to us?

1. **HER FAITH UNDERSTOOD.** By faith she was enabled to share in "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). By believing what He predicted, she actually grasped understandingly and shared sympathetically what He was going through. Hence, she points to that sympathy of mind whereby we "follow in His steps" (I Peter 2:20-25).
2. **HER FAITH IS A MODEL OF GREAT INITIATIVE DESPITE WEAKNESS.** Weak, feeble, really unavailing to avert the imminent tragedy of Jesus' death, this disciple did what she could. She showed great initiative by taking creative steps that were unthinkable even to Jesus' closest disciples who had deliberately blindfolded themselves to the reality of His impending death. Faith freed her from this prejudice, empowered her to take decisive steps to express her love while there was time, even if what she believed about Jesus' future was emotionally crushing. She simply dared to believe Him and took the initiative in harmony with what He said. Faith is *envisioning what the Lord says He intends to do in a given situation* and doing, in harmony with His Word, what lies in our feeble

power, even if our weak efforts seem unavailing. (Remember Luke 21:1-4!)

3. **HER FAITH WAS BOLD.** Her courage braved the potential criticism of others and risked rejection, even by Jesus Himself. After all, she probably did not discuss this move with Him to get His approval beforehand. Sometimes, as in her case, it is utterly impossible for us to defend the rightness of our actions to the satisfaction of everyone's doubts. Sometimes our good actions do *not* speak for themselves, because our true motive remains impossible to prove. Our only consolation lies in our confidence in His love and in believing that our Lord approved our endeavor to do His will. This bold discipleship is what it means to express our real commitments "before men" (10:32).
4. **HER FAITH WAS UNCALCULATING.** When she first began, her act was rejected as senseless waste and esteemed by no one present but Jesus. Who could have imagined the undying glory that would surround her uncomplicated, adoring act? Yet, without planning it, she did something simple that was destined to guarantee her immortal fame. This is but a live case that concretely illustrates the high estimate our Lord places on loving service, however humble. (See note on 25:35-40.)
5. **HER FAITH WAS CREATIVE.** Her detractors' rebuke revealed their own slavery to traditionally recognized forms and mechanisms of social redemption. Her grasp of Jesus' message and spirit permitted her to appreciate her own broad freedom of action. No express command or approved precedent guided her decision. She simply believed His death-predictions and invented an unheard-of, scandalizing way to externalize her loving devotion for Him and her faith in His revelations. *And He approved it.* Dare we act this way in relation to our worship offered the same Lord who promotes her example? Do we have this same freedom in our faith? (Cf. "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee," my Vol. III, 375ff.)

These considerations invite us to believe Him implicitly, love Him devotedly and do whatever we can while the opportunity is ours. May our faith drive us to passionate, generous self-giving, not caring how many know what we think about Jesus! In our feeble, fumbling efforts, we too shall not be able to do much for Jesus, but let it be said of our discipleship, "They did what they could!"

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who was Simon the leper? Where was his house? According to John, who else was present at his house?
2. When, exactly, was Jesus in Bethany for the event described here? Which Gospel writer positively dates this event chronologically? Where? On the basis of what facts can this date be known?
3. Name the woman who anointed Jesus' head and feet.
4. List the differences between this anointing and the one that is recorded by Luke 7:36-50.
5. Of what was the perfume container made? How does this detail add to the cost of the ointment? How much ointment did it hold, according to John?
6. What kind of ointment was used? On what basis could its value be estimated? According to John, how much was it worth? How much would it be worth today?
7. Describe the disciples' reaction to the anointing: what was their judgment and on what principle was it based?
8. According to John, who led in the criticism? Reconcile this with the other Gospel statements about who complained.
9. Show how Jesus used the disciples' own argument against them and, at the same time, defended the woman.
10. In what two ways was this anointing a "good work"?
11. What did Jesus mean by "You will not always have me"?
12. What motive did Jesus say was in the woman's mind when she anointed Him? In what sense was this anointing for that specific purpose?
13. Where else had Jesus spoken before of the world-wide proclamation of the Gospel? (book and chapter)

SECTION 64

JUDAS AGREES WITH JESUS' ENEMIES
TO BETRAY HIM

(Parallels: Mark 14:10, 11; Luke 22:3-6)

TEXT: 26:14-16

14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15 and said, What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that time he sought opportunity to deliver him *unto them*.