

Jesus is the Christ (from John's gospel) # 40 (Matters of Life & Death # 6)

John 12¹⁻¹¹

When our priorities are confronted

The extravagant anointing of Jesus by Mary



(Explanation)

Plans are now **in place** to **put Jesus to death**;

- Caiaphas the high priest has declared:

It is better that one man should die for the people,
not that the whole nation should perish.

- he means it as desperate measure to get rid of Jesus to protect power of Council
- but at same time it is profoundly prophetic
of substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus for all His people.

Chapter 12 – it is now ...

Six days before the Passover

So < 1 week now till day when Jesus will deliver Himself up into their hands to be crucified;

- He comes to place of danger – Jerusalem – stops on outskirts in **Bethany**:
 - town where He just raised corpse of Lazarus from dead;
 - as evidence of veracity of His claim: I AM the resurrection & the life;
- now enjoying a meal with his close friends: Lazarus, Martha, Mary;
- // passage in **Mark** tells us it was in house of Simon (a leper);
 - not surprising to us : Jesus is friends w outcasts / defiled / lepers;
- Jesus reclining at table w Simon the leper / Lazarus;
 - Martha serving them - as she delighted to do;
- our attention is drawn to Mary:

(3) **Mary** therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard,
and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.
The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

(The extravagance on the part of Mary)

The expensive ointment

Made from **pure nard**:

- plant: Nardostachys Jatamansi
 - grows in Himalayas (India, Nepal) at altitude of 3000-5000m;
 - here is Himalayas at 3000m – 4000m - 5000m;
 - grows like this - to 1m tall;
 - underground stems are collected – look like this;
 - crushed / steam distilled in equipment like this;
 - ⇒ intensely aromatic amber-coloured oil – distinct woody / musty aroma.

Today you can **buy cheap copy** on **ebay**:

Nard Anointing Oil from Jerusalem – inc postage:

\$17 / 60ml

⇒ for quantity Mary had (Roman pound): \$100.

- if want something a bit more genuine:

- from **Aroma-Zen**: Nard of the Himalayas

12.85 euros = \$21 /5ml

⇒ for quantity here (Roman pound) - \$1400. [X]

In NT times travel to/from Himalayas not as easy as today;

- Judas tells us pound of Nard could have been sold for **300 denarii**;

- other disciples said: > 300 denarii;

- denarius was a day's wage for a labourer;

- 300 denarii = year's wage for labourer;

- in today's terms – ave (precise median) labourer salary in AU = \$52,000

- which would put it about on par w this:

- most expensive perfume from most famous perfume brand in world:

- *Chanel No5 – Grand Extrait*;

- 4th most expensive perfume in world today;

- 3 more expensive ones come in bottles made of gold & diamond;

- so in terms of actual perfume this is top of the ladder stuff. [X]

Point is: Mary's pound of expensive ointment was **extravagant** – extravagantly extravagant.

(3) **Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus ...**

(The anointing of Jesus' feet)

Mark tells us : the expensive ointment was in an **alabaster flask**:

- probably something like this;

- would be sealed w wax to preserve precious / expensive ointment;

- not an ointment used on daily basis – or even series of special occasions;

- sealed for something vv special (maybe marriage dowry / funeral).

We know this is v special all-or-nothing ointment because **Mark** tells us how it was opened:

- **Mary broke the flask** – like this – breaking off neck was way it was opened;

- then she poured it over Jesus' feet – something like this:

- in fact **Mark** records that she poured it over His head;

- so presumably she poured it over both His head & feet;

- then she wiped His feet w her hair. [X]

This was not only an extravagant gift;

- it was also an **extravagant act**;

- not the done thing to pour oil on the feet;

- on the head maybe – to anoint king / priest;

- not the done thing for woman to touch feet of man except her husband;

- not the done thing for woman to let down hair except in presence of husband.

Mary was **mindful of one thing** – one thing only;

- Jesus!
- expressing her devotion / devotedness / love for Him;
- social customs / etiquette / politeness cannot stand in her way – must go;
- all sacrificed in name of devotion / love.

In fact, could we call it worship?

Does she recognise that Jesus truly is the Messiah?

- and that Messiah is no less than God Himself – the v essence of God?

It was her sister Martha who uttered that amazing declaration of faith:

11(27) “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Mary is more one to express her love / understanding / faith in action than in words;

Do you think : she is saying same things as her sister?

that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.

Maybe she is – maybe Jesus tells us she is saying even more than that;

- but we’re getting ahead of ourselves – Jesus’ words come later;
- let’s take the text as it comes:

(3) Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.

The house was **filled with the fragrance of the perfume.**

(The house filled with the fragrance)

Anointing w ointment / wiping w hair - would no doubt be soothing;

- but our attention is drawn to fragrance / aroma.

I think it’s probably fair to say :

- **aroma** of perfume is meant to **convey** something – but also to **elicit response**;
= why it is used today – why it was used then;
- only other refs to **nard** in Scriptures are from Song of Solomon:
- v special depths / heights of love;
- perfume = something of a **statement of the relationship** w one for whom it is used;
- something which either looks for – or knows ∃ some reciprocity in relationship;
- response of delight;
- Mary is conveying something of what she believes / what she hopes / who she trusts in what she does;
- Jesus does respond – but again we need to wait a little while before we get there.

It is **response of others** that we are told about 1st:

- perfume was for Jesus – but everyone was affected;
The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.
- I get a sense of this – because my Doctor told me: to get tinea out of my toenails:
- few times/week I told to soak feet in footbath w few drops of Tea Tree oil;
- a few drops of aromatic oil – spreads aroma thru whole house;
- everyone knows about it;
- v much same w perfume – a few dabs or quick spray is all you use.

But here see **pound** (Roman pound) (11.5oz, 330g) – huge quantity poured out all at once;

- no wonder we read : **The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume**
- infused all air in house;
- transformed whole atmosphere;
- overpowering in its aroma for everyone in the whole house;
- confronting everyone in the house.

This act of extravagance / extravagant extravagance is confronting everyone in the house.

- like it is **calling for response** – gets a response ...

The exception taken by Judas

(4) **Judas Iscariot**, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said,

(5) *"Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?"*

Wouldn't we have **said the same?**

- I know I would;
- amount of perfume my wonderful wife gets from me proves it;

If it was there - I'd have been thinking *What a waste!*

- I'd be thinking of all better things : could've been done w that sort of money;
- but maybe we not want to admit that;
- we don't want to be likened to Judas the betrayer;
- we'd be in there w Mary;

But would we?

- let's be honest.

Take a look at Mark's acct:

Mark 14(3) a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

(4) **There were some** who said to themselves indignantly,

"Why was the ointment wasted like that?"

(5) *For this ointment could have been sold for > 300 denarii & given to poor."*
And they scolded her.

- sounds like Judas was not only one taking exception to Mary's extravagance:
 - there were some who said: *What a waste!*
- may not have been game to say it out loud – text says: said to themselves;
- maybe we not game to say it out loud – but we'd say it to ourselves;
- they felt pretty strongly about it too – said to themselves indignantly
"Why was the ointment wasted like that?"
- scolded her.

Now take a look at Matthew's // account:

Matt 26(7) a woman came up to him w an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table.

(8) And when **the disciples saw it**, they were indignant, saying,

"Why this waste?"

- sounds like it was actually all the disciples who took exception to extravagance;
- maybe that helps us admit that we probably in there too.

(The waste)

Would we be thinking of **years & years of savings** – maybe life-savings?

- guys: imagine that you saved up \$50,000 to buy car of your dreams:
 - wife blows it all on bottle of perfume – which she then gives away;
- ladies: imagine you saved up \$50,000 in cash for that home renovation:
 - husband invites important guest for dinner;
 - run out of wood for barbie - throws all cash into fire to get it really going;
 - ⇒ great BBQ steak for guest / nice warm fire for him at same time.

You get the **magnitude** of what seems such a waste.

Or as Judas helpfully puts it ...

The lost opportunity

(5) *"Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?"*

Remember : it was not only Judas who said this – seems : all disciples said much the same.

Think of how many **orphans** in Bangladesh / Myanmar you could feed for \$50,000;

- think of the investment you could make in missionary work;
- think of the boost to church planting you could make w \$50,000;
- surely ∃ far better ways to spend \$50,000 than to pour it out on someone's feet;
- even if it is Jesus' feet;
- it's still feet – it's not like it's going to have any great lasting effect on his feet;
- most of it is going to end up on ground anyway – total waste.

If you must do it – a **spoonful** will have precisely same effect – at fraction of cost;

- so if you think about it instead of acting so impulsively;
- you can show your love to Jesus + also love for poor;
 - Jesus is anointed + 1000 orphans don't go to bed w empty bellies;
- sounds bit like a no-brainer from this angle.

Now on Judas's part ∃ **another angle** to the story ...

The hypocrisy

(6) **He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.**

This gives us real reason behind Judas taking exception to extravagance:

- gives insight into **state of his heart**;
- not merely an opportunistic thief – overcome by temptation in the moment;
- rather a calculating thief – seeking to set things up in way:
 - give himself more & more opportunity to line own pockets;
 - heart is hardened against Jesus – while pretending to learn from Him;
- sadly **hypocritical** to the core.

Jesus responds:

(7) Jesus said, *"Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial.*

(8) *The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me."*

The exoneration on the part of Jesus

Not only directed to Judas – acct by Mark / Matthew indicates: Jesus said this to all disciples
Mark 14(6) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her?
*She has done a **beautiful** thing to Me.* "

- acc to Jesus the extravagance is entirely legitimate / appropriate – **even beautiful!**

But Jesus, **What about the lost opportunity** / what about the poor / what about orphans?
Didn't You look at that rich young ruler, love him, say to him:

*"You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor,
 and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* – Mark 10(21)

Haven't You been teaching us all along by prayer / precept / practice
 to look out for the poor / care for the poor / give to poor?

Jesus's words can sound a bit cool / **callous**:

(8) "*The **poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me.***"

- obviously Jesus not hardening His heart against poor – or teaching His disciples to;
 - but He is acknowledging ...

The perennial problem of the poor

Poverty is **not** a problem that will be **solved**;

- but it is an opportunity for us to continue in ongoing way to **live out our priorities**;
 - Jesus is saying: *You're right - the poor are a priority
 – but not the only priority – not the #1 priority.*

Jesus' main point is: these are **exceptional circumstances**;

- right now *I am with you* – hint is *I won't be w you for much longer*;
 - *as you know: the Jewish authorities are determined to kill Me*;
 - *people been wondering whether / not I'm coming to Jerusalem for Passover*;
 - *I'm coming – I'm here – I may not be here much longer.*

(The anticipation of Jesus' burial)

Notice carefully what else Jesus says:

(7) "*Leave her alone, so that she may **keep it for the day of My burial.***"

What does He mean? - *that she may keep it for the day of My burial.*

- can't mean keeping the perfume for my burial – all poured out – gone;
 - could mean keeping the expression of devotion / love she has for Him;
 - the extravagance – which Jesus said is beautiful;
 - it won't be taken away from her;

Could it be: Jesus is saying ∃ deeper purpose in this than even Mary realises?

- this is a fitting preparation for where I am going;
 - I am going away – I will die – I will be buried;
 - this act of anointing will become symbolic of what you see Me do.

There is another possibility (I present it just as a possibility)

- in your Bible ∃ probably note in margin saying – could also be translated as:

(7) "*Leave her alone, she **intended to keep it for the day of My burial.***"

- *it* here would be the perfume;

Could it be : it was her **intention** to keep this expensive ointment for **My burial**?

Could it be : she saw : the day was drawing near?

Could it be : she saw : the time was coming – Jesus would not be here?

Could it be : she saw not only what Martha saw & professed:

*I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,
who is coming into the world;*

- but also: *I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,
who is going out of the world ?*

Whether or not Mary understood what was about to happen to Jesus;

- that is not the point;

- Jesus knew: He had come to die for His people;

- point is: Mary was **devoted to Him** /loved Him for who He was - *Christ, Son of God*

- she could not help but express that in most extravagant way she knew how.

(The proclamation throughout the world)

Mark tells us how Jesus **wraps it up**:

14(9) *"And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world
what she has done will be told in memory of her."*

- and so it is to this day.

So this sharpens the need for us in our ...

Application

As we've already seen - extravagant anointing of Jesus by Mary **confronts our priorities**:

- our natural tendency is to think "*what a waste!*"

- or at least – a smaller amount would have sufficed – win/win for everyone;

- but Jesus says what she did was beautiful!

This is **full-frontal confrontation** of our **personal priorities** in life.

(Committing extravagance)

Will we **commit to Jesus extravagantly**?

What will we give as expression of really appreciating who He is?

- God in the flesh;

What will we give as expression of having really appreciated what He given for us?

- given Himself to death;

What will we give as expression of having really appreciated what He given to us?

- eternal life;

Will we give our equivalent of our alabaster flask of precious ointment for Him?

Will we give our life / livelihood for His sake?

(Being worshippers)

No gift / no offering is **too extravagant**;

- He is worth it!

- committing extravagance is IN in the worship / worth-ship of Jesus;

- worship is all of life;

- worshippers is that we are – it is our life!

2nd application : comes out of our text:

- if you're extravagant in worship;
 ⇒ **expect to be criticised** even by fellow Christians – even well-meaning ones;
- corollary from our text:
 ⇒ Be v careful how we go about ...

Critiquing extravagance

Other Christians may spend huge amounts of money / time / talents / resources
 for what they see as worship;

maybe things which we see as a bit ancillary to way we worship;

- but God sees not as man sees;
- man looks on outward appearance - what a waste!
- God looks on heart – heart of worship – beautiful!

(Being willing to learn)

Jesus' own chosen disciples **could learn a thing or two** from Mary – I hope they did;

- judging by their writings – I think they did;
- maybe we could learn a thing or two
 - from excesses / extravagances we see in worship around us.

3rd application is ...

Curtailing extravagance

Our problem is not only that we fail to follow example of Mary in her extravagance

- but: we tend to be extravagant **re wrong things** / in wrong way / for wrong reasons.

Extravagance is commonplace in our affluent society – I'm not immune – neither are you;

- extravagant lifestyles;
- extravagant expenses;
- extravagant indulgences;
- extravagant entertainments;
- extravagance in any other area of our life
 – **compromises** / **competes** w extravagance in worship of God.

(Being wise stewards)

Call is to be **wise stewards** of all God has entrusted to us;

- everything we have is on loan – His investment in us as His blood-bought people.

Can we thank God for confronting our priorities – as He has done here today in His word?

Pray

Sing When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died,
 My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride ...

Lord's Supper – The death of Christ my God