

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

Key Verse: “*Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.*”
—**Matthew 26:13**

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 26:1-13

before his betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus and the apostles stopped in the town of Bethany. It was there, on a prior visit, that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. (John 11:1-44) Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, arranged a supper for Jesus to honor him and to show their appreciation to him. (John 12:1-8) While Jesus was reclined at the table, Mary came into the room with “an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious.” She unsealed the box and poured some of the perfume on Jesus’ head. (Mark 14:3) Mary then “anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.”—John 12:3

Mary’s liberal use of this “very precious” perfume showed the deep respect and reverence she had for the Master. She must have realized that Jesus, who had raised her brother Lazarus from the dead, was the Messiah, God’s only begotten Son. Jesus, too, was surely refreshed by what Mary had done.

We believe these actions of Mary were in fulfillment of a prophecy which reads: “While the king sitteth at his

table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.” (Song of Sol. 1:12) Jesus would have been greatly encouraged that evening as he saw the fulfillment of this prophecy concerning him.

However, Judas Iscariot complained, saying, “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief.” (John 12:4-6) “Pence” is a translation of the Greek word *denarius*, and is elsewhere rendered in the New Testament as “penny.” It was an average day’s wage given to common laborers. (Matt. 20:2) Since no money was earned on Sabbath or other holy days, three hundred pence was the equivalent of the average wage for an entire year!

Jesus responded to Judas’ harsh criticism of what Mary had done, saying: “Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.” (Matt. 26:10-12) He then spoke the words of our Key Verse, in which he said Mary’s loving actions would be told in the future as a “memorial of her.”

We believe Jesus spoke these words of praise not merely to honor Mary alone, but also to inspire and encourage all of God’s people in the spirit of loving sacrifice. Similarly, we should desire to develop such a character which delights in service on behalf of the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren, even if it be at great personal cost to us.

If Mary had waited another week before anointing Jesus with the perfume, it would have been too late. How much better it was that she did not delay in showing her appreciation to Jesus while he was still alive. Let us likewise not delay in opening our alabaster boxes of love, sympathy, kindness, gentleness, patience, assistance, and encouragement upon one another. At the end of our earthly life, may it be said of us as it was of Mary, “She hath done what she could.”—Mark 14:8 ■