

which shows that privilege position is no substitute for faith and obedience. Even though Jesus knew Judas' heart, He was willing to bear with him, desiring to recall him. But Judas, like the Jewish opponents, resisted God's grace.

Jesus statement that you will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me, must be understood in its context both within Judaism and salvation history. On one level Jesus is simply reminding Judas and the others of priorities as understood within Judaism. He is alluding to scripture that there will always be poor people in the land and perhaps also to the notion that acts of kindness, such as burial, are higher than works of charity, which would include giving alms to the poor. This view is based, in part, on the fact that kindness can be shown to the living and the dead (through funerals and burials), whereas charity can only be shown to the living. So the fact that Jesus is about to die justifies Mary's actions. But on another level, the identity of Jesus also justifies this action. In the Synoptics even the burying of one's father is put second to responding to Jesus and the call of the kingdom. So this anointing also makes sense given who Jesus is and the awesome events unfolding in salvation history.

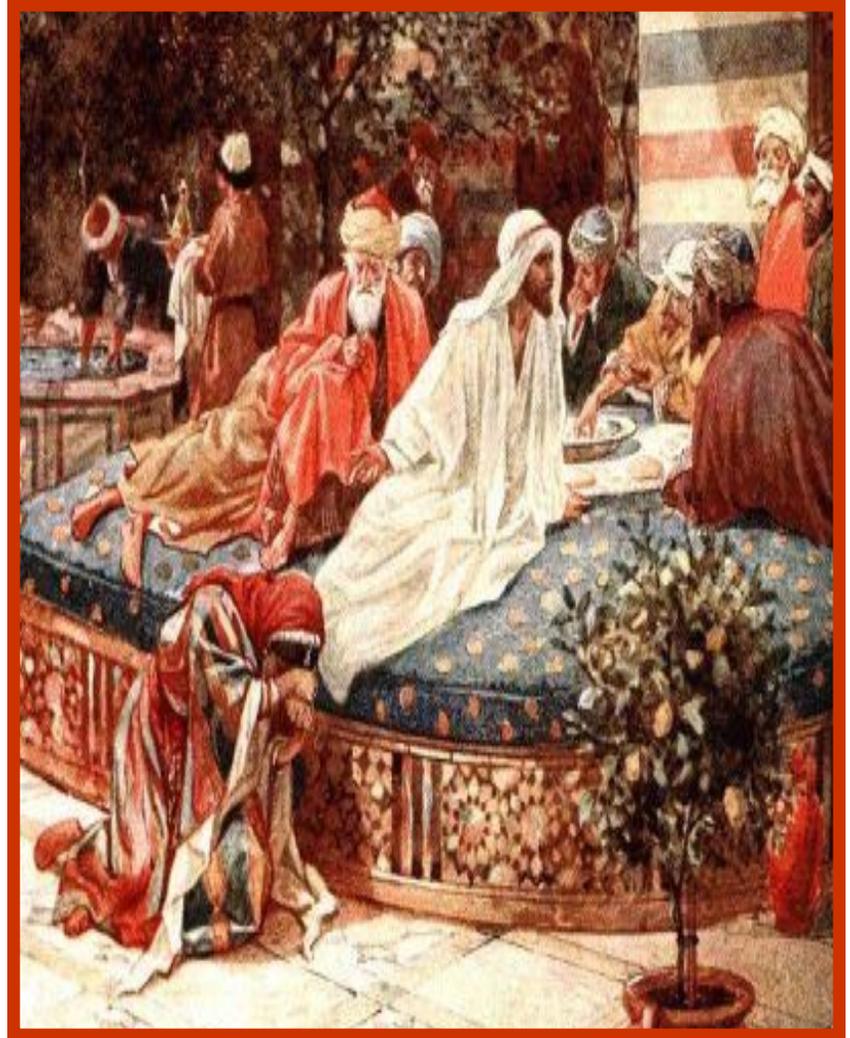
Care for the poor is a sacred duty because it is the concern of God's own heart. Those who share in his life will share in his concern for the poor and will act appropriately as he guides. This diversion of funds from the poor for the sake of Jesus' burial implies that there are times for such exceptional use of funds. But it also implies that the funds would usually go to the poor and that this is the proper thing to do. John's suggesting that Judas did not care about the poor has implied in passing that Christians should care.

The readings conclude with a description of a large crowd seeking out Jesus there at the party, attracted also by Lazarus' presence. Many Jews were putting their faith in Jesus because of Lazarus, so he was included in the authorities most-wanted list. Obviously, Jesus' popularity is rising once again. Lazarus was a living sign of Jesus' identity and life-giver, victor over death. The crowd's faith in Jesus makes prominent the authorities' rejection of Jesus. It also points up the weakness of the authorities' control at this point. Things were getting out of hand for them because their control was slipping. In not going directly to the chief priests, the crowd was defying the Sanhedrin and protecting two fugitives rather than one. But this slip in their control is in fact quite true to the circumstances, for the whole effort of the Sanhedrin is quite futile. They seek to kill Lazarus, but if Jesus raised him once why could he not do it again? Their great weapon of control is useless against the Lord of life and his followers. The statement many of the Jews were going over to Jesus in Greek is simply many were going. This simply put means that many Jews left their former Jewish allegiance and way of life to become disciples. Jesus' alternative community continues to grow as people shift their allegiance from the Jewish authorities to him.

\*(excerpted from: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com))

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## ***Jesus Is Anointed at Bethany***



***Let her alone:  
against the day of My burying hath she kept the oil...  
You will always have the poor among you,  
but you will not always have Me...***

## Jesus Is Anointed at Bethany

\*This is a story of love and of deep friendship. It is almost time for Passover, and people are going to Jerusalem to prepare for the feast by undergoing ritual purification. They are standing in the temple, speculating whether or not Jesus will come to the feast, aware that the chief priests and Pharisees are seeking his arrest. Again we see the interested crowd and the antagonistic authorities. But Jesus has already departed from the temple and will not be standing where they are standing as they ask such questions. He will come up to this feast, but he will not be coming to the temple. Rather, the one true sacrifice is about to take place in the temple of his body.

This description of Jesus' danger adds a dramatic touch to the fact that he returns to Bethany again. He is back with Lazarus and his sisters in a relatively private setting. There is a party in his honor six days before the Passover, probably on Saturday night after the conclusion of Sabbath. It is not said in the Gospel where the party takes place, but from the account in Matthew and Mark, it would seem to be at the house of Simon the leper. Lazarus is also an honored guest, while Martha helps with the serving, true to the picture of her elsewhere.

As noted in Luke, the picture of Mary is also true; that is, she is a devoted disciple who ignores the taboos of her society in her commitment to Jesus. Sitting at his feet as a disciple was not the place for a woman, but she is commended by Jesus. Now she acts in an even more scandalous manner in anointing Jesus' feet with extremely expensive perfume and then wiping them with her hair.

Both aspects of her actions--the extravagance and the method--were disturbing. The pure nard she uses was imported from northern India. Judas says, no doubt correctly, that it was worth a year's wages. The text literally reads "three hundred denarii." Since a denarius was a day's pay for a day laborer, taking into account feast days and Sabbaths when one would not work, a rough equivalent of the cost of the pure nard would be something over \$10,000.00, or, the gross pay for someone working at minimum wage for a year. No wonder the disciples, Judas in particular, respond with dismay at such a waste.

In the accounts in Matthew and Mark, she anoints Jesus' head, while in John it is his feet. Obviously, it could have been both, and with twelve ounces to work with she could have anointed his whole body. Indeed, since Jesus interprets this as an anointing for his burial, it seems she may have anointed more than his head and feet, as Matthew and Mark suggest.

The other part of her action that would have been quite disturbing was the wiping of his feet with her hair. Jewish women did not let down their hair in public. This is an expression of devotion that would have come across as extremely improper and even somewhat erotic, as indeed it would in most cultures. There is

no indication of why Mary did this act. The most obvious possibility was her sheer gratitude for what Jesus had done for her brother and the revelation it brought to her of Jesus' identity, power, authority and grace. John's focus on her anointing Jesus' feet points to Mary's great humility. As she has come to realize a bit more of the one who has been a friend to her and her brother and sister, her faith deepens and she recognizes her unworthiness. The humility of her act prepares us to be all the more scandalized when Jesus himself washes his disciples' feet.

Whatever Mary's intentions and reason for her action, Jesus sees it in reference to his coming death. Jesus sees cryptic significance in another person's actions instead of making his more usual cryptic explanation of his own activity. There is no reason to think Mary knew the full importance of what she was doing, any more than Caiaphas knew what he was saying when he said that one person should die rather than a whole nation. The people around Jesus are being caught up in the climax of all of salvation history. They are acting for their own reasons, yet they are players in a drama that they do not understand, doing and saying things with significance beyond their imaginings. Mary in her devotion unconsciously provides for the honor of the dead. Judas in his selfishness unconsciously brings about the death itself.

Judas' shock at the waste of such costly ointment makes us more aware of Mary's extravagance. Judas is simply expressing what others were also thinking. Being the treasurer of the group, it would not have surprised anyone to hear him express this concern. So, at the time, Judas' remarks would not have stood out as unusual. But with hindsight John knows there was more motivating him. If Caiaphas and Mary reveal more about Jesus in their actions than they realize, Judas is revealing something deeper about himself. John says Judas used to steal from the common fund. It is doubtful that this was known at the time, for if it was, Judas would have been relieved of his duties, at the least. But such embezzlement reveals a heart in love with self and in love with money, neither of which have a place in the life of a disciple. But beyond even this, the deepest sin, of course was Judas' betrayal of the Lord. Every time John mentions Judas he refers to his betrayal. Judas may have thought he was acting for God's glory, as did also the opponents of Jesus, but he, like them, was in fact alienated from God. God's glory will indeed be manifest, but not as Judas thinks.

Judas' heart is thus fundamentally different from the heart of Mary as she lavishes her love and respect upon Jesus. John's Gospel provides a great many examples of the difference between faith and unbelief through descriptions of true disciples on the one hand, and, on the other hand, both would-be disciples and Jesus' opponents. But here we have the contrast between a true disciple, Mary, and one of the Twelve,