

Jesus anointed

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[0:01] Good morning to you. I apologise that Wendy is not here, because a few people might be asking, nothing serious at all.! Our son-in-law has got his first opportunity to be preaching at a church they go to, and since Wendy will be going with me to Park Hill and probably hear this again, I thought that would be a good thing not to miss.

So I thought I'd just make you aware of that. Right, John 12. This is a lovely passage. Jesus is anointed, but what an unusual setting.

And the mood has changed. Just trying to get you to remember what we've been going through in the last weeks.

How long was Jesus' public ministry? Somewhere around three years. Many signs and wonders. A motley group of disciples, often brought to the edge of not knowing what to do, but then Jesus would have performed some miracle or another, and they would have been astounded at his glory. But what has recently happened? It was another miracle, wasn't it? Lazarus being raised from the dead. But what was the reaction of the Jewish leaders? It was the last straw.

[1:30] It was the last straw. He was becoming so popular, and it was clear that they wanted to have him killed. So that's the context to this story. We are quite close to Passover and the time when Jesus will go into Jerusalem.

Now, I just quickly mention that we did quickly slip in a reading from Mark 14, because there are some other things said about a similar passage. I will just say, I can't categorically say that Matthew and Mark are exactly the same occasion, but there are an awful lot of details similar.

But some that are a little different. John says, as we read, that this was six days before Passover. Sorry, the text has got a bit jumbled there.

Unknown house. Mary is named, and it is the feet that are anointed. Matthew, I won't turn to it, but you can at your leisure, doesn't say exactly when, but it is the house of Simon the leper.

It is just a woman, not named as Mary. And in that story, actually, it is the head that is anointed of Jesus.

[2:48] Mark says it was two days before Passover, also the house of Simon the leper, a woman and the head anointed. Now, I don't think we need to get too muddled with the differences.

This pint or so of perfume may have started on the feet. There is no reason it could not have been used elsewhere. But I'm not going to categorically say it's all the same event, but if not, it was very close.

One was six days before Passover, the other two days. And there is, I don't know why that has got a bit skewed up, but Luke, it's better up there, is it?

No, it has got a bit skewed up. Yeah, Luke also has a similar thing, but this is probably a very different occasion. For one thing, it's very clearly in the house of a Pharisee.

That wasn't Simon the leper. It talks about a sinful woman who had come and anointed Jesus' feet. And there is this link, I think Phil mentioned something along these lines a little earlier, linked to a parable about two people who owed money.

[3:57] And the theme coming out of that was, you know, whoever has been forgiven little loves little. And this woman was pouring out her heart to Jesus.

It's a different occasion, but possibly could have been the same woman. It's not completely clear. So I draw your attention, first of all, to Jesus' heavy heart.

And I wonder, and I think you'll probably agree with me by the end, I wonder if most of the disciples really had got this. I said that they'd often been brought into a rather impossible situation, and Jesus had usually found some way out of it.

And so even this threat, I wonder if most of the disciples really got this. Jesus had just raised Lazarus. The chief priest, this is some of a reminder of what Phil was telling us last time, called the Meeting of the Sanhedrin.

If you don't know, that's the ruling Jewish council, a group of about 70. And the gist of this is, if we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. We don't want that, do we?

[5:09] They didn't want it. Everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come, and they'll take away our temple to disrupt all our routine and our nation. So that was the ruling Jewish people.

So from that day on, they plotted to take his life, and therefore, a big change for Jesus. He's no longer moving about publicly.

And then we hear he comes to Bethany, where some friends, close friends are, only two miles from Jerusalem, where he will soon be going.

Something of a final journey. And we hear, in what we've read, that a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha was serving, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

So I wonder, just before we go to the next slide, can you picture this? It wouldn't have been many days ago that Lazarus had been raised from the dead.

[6:21] And this was a meal in Jesus' honour. Quite a few of the disciples sitting around. Can you imagine being there, talking to Lazarus?

I think someone would have probably asked, what was it like being dead? I haven't really seen many of those before, that you might ask. Quite an occasion.

Quite an occasion. Martha serving. Lazarus among those reclining at the table. We move on. I hope you've got this idea that Jesus' heart was probably very heavy.

He knew, in terms of his Father's will, he knew that this wasn't going away, and that he was being rejected by this world, but it was very much part of the overall plan of what had to be.

So we read here that then Mary, in this group, I can't tell you how many there were, but there were some of the disciples, and Mary and some others there. She took about a pint of this pure nard, an expensive perfume.

[7:27] She poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of perfume. What were everyone else doing?

Probably started by just chatting normally, but then suddenly I think this perfume would have been quite strong, and it would have been very noticeable. If you don't know anything about nard, it was an oil-like perfume extracted from the root and spike of the nard plant grown in India.

Judas is very quick to tell us that it was worth a lot of money, probably what someone could earn in a year. It's actually cheaper now.

You can obtain these things on Amazon, and I think a pint, if you do a quick bit of mass, something like 600 pounds, you could probably get some, and sense some of its smell.

And I just draw attention to aspects of the Mary we meet here, how she loved Jesus very deeply.

And not just here is she sitting at his feet and pouring oil and perfume on his feet, but she often sat at the Lord's feet listening.

[8:58] That was a posture she frequently had. I'd like to turn to Luke 10. This is an earlier time with Mary. Luke 10 and verse 38.

It's also a time when Jesus was at the home of Martha and Mary. Jesus and his disciples were on, as they were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

She came to him and asked, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me. Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed, or indeed only one.

Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her. Now, I read that probably as an earlier occasion, and very much the time when Martha at that time was complaining about not

having support in the kitchen or whatever.

[10:21] But just notice, Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. We will come back to that as we're thinking of some of the things we're learning from this, looking at this.

So let's move on. And after her brother, Lazarus, had died, you can go back and look in chapter 11, and Martha was the first one who went out to see Jesus, but soon Mary did.

She's not a person of lots of words, but she wept. I think she told Jesus, if you had been here, this wouldn't have happened. But she saw Jesus and wept in front of him.

And such was the relationship that Jesus saw Mary weeping at the time when Lazarus had died, and he was deeply moved and wept himself.

That shortest verse in the Bible, Jesus wept. That happens around here. I don't know why I'm getting a little bit of overwriting thing.

[11:30] So she would have been aware that the Pharisees now wanted to arrest Jesus. She knew that Jesus' heart was heavy and that this may be the last time she would see him.

That's probably, you know, if she was expecting to see him next week or next month, I don't think she'd have pretty got this pint of nard out. She was aware this could be the last time she would see him.

Not at all usual in that culture for a woman to sit at the feet, usually when there is a rabbi and people learning. I'm afraid in that culture it was pretty much only the men.

I think part of that is that the women were not educated. They were never, that's at least part of it.

The men were the dominant people. So the woman was not really allowed to be there, but Jesus was very close to Jesus and sat at his feet.

The other thing about the cultural things that we might not be aware of, in those times, a woman's hair was considered part of her glory and in public, it was always kept up or covered, never, never let down, let alone used to wipe the feet with oil.

[12:50] And we see in this room of, I don't know, 10 or 12 people, whatever it was, maybe more, she lets down her hair and wipes the nard on Jesus' feet.

A costly gift. I say possibly, from the things I've read around this, possibly her dowry, and if you don't know what that is, in those days, it was very much, if the woman was to be married, she would, she and her family would bring some money to the deal so that it would, it would help whoever takes her on to keep everything.

Possibly her dowry she was giving away in this. She uses her hair as a rag. No concern on how she looked to others.

And this perfume smell filled the house. So you can picture this emotionally charged atmosphere and others looking on.

But then some thought wasteful. And in John, we hear about Judas. Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?

[14:13] It was worth a year's wages. Now, on the surface of that, could be a reasonable question. But we do get this extra commentary from John that he did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief and as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

So what a contrast there is between Mary and Judas. One fully devoted to Jesus and the other one only really caring about the money.

And very soon, immediately after this, if you look to Matthew 26, very soon after this, Judas is off to make his deal to get a few extra coins to betray Jesus to the Jews.

Matthew tells us just to broaden the scope, not just Judas, but the disciples in general objected. they ask the same question, but perhaps with a more genuine motive.

And Jesus responds, and go back to John, chapter 12 and verse 7, leave her alone. Strong defense. Mary wasn't going to stand up and defend herself.

[15:41] Jesus responds, leave her alone. Not in John, but I think it's important that from similar passages in Matthew and Mark, she has done a beautiful thing to me.

You will not always have the poor among you. You will, sorry, you will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me. Jesus knew he was going to die.

The Old Testament scripture, probably in mind, with the thought of the poor, Deuteronomy 15, there will always be poor people in the land, therefore I command you to be open-handed towards your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

That was a pretty given principle in the way the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, worked. So, some thought wasteful, people.

But then, what other details do we have here? Jesus is being anointed by Mary for burial. John says, the oil was intended for the day of his burial.

[16:57] Matthew and Mark, pretty much the same, that the oil was preparing his body for burial. Now, in our culture, we don't really deal with dead bodies like that, do we?

The undertaker will take them, they usually go in a fridge somewhere until a funeral, and then they are either burned or buried. Certainly not much problem with smell of decay in the way we manage things.

In Jewish tradition, the body was laid in the tomb, wrapped in cloth and spices, oils, for example, some of these things.

Myrrh was also included. And if you didn't know, that's a fairly typical tomb in those days, a family tomb probably. And a year later or so, the family would return.

The flesh would have all decayed, the smell, hopefully, all long gone. And they would collect the bones, put them in a small box and keep it in the back of the tomb. That was the kind of routine.

[18:01] So the shadow of Jesus' death makes a deed like Mary's strangely appropriate. And it comes from this love and expresses her understanding about Jesus and what he must do.

in less than a week, Jesus will be mistreated, put on trial and crucified.

But I wonder if you thought of this, that very likely the smell of this perfume, this nard, would have probably lasted. I don't think they had such good showers every day available.

I'm sure they would have done their best. But there would have been something here lingering.

Jesus would have remembered several days ago as he's facing increasing agony.

He would have remembered this event. And we had this lovely thing that was in the second reading. truly I tell you wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world what she has done what she has done will also be told in memory of her.

[19:21] And she has done a beautiful thing to me. So that's thinking about the anointing for burial idea.

But I can't help but think whilst we're just on the theme of anointing Jesus that Jesus actually is the anointed one. And just a slightly broader view of where anointing is sometimes used in the Bible. In the Old Testament kings and priests and prophets were anointed outwardly with oil often on the head particularly for kings to symbolize a more profound spiritual reality that God's presence was with them.

So that was a common thing in the Old Testament and in the New Testament Jesus reveals himself as our anointed king priest and prophet and Messiah literally does mean the anointed one.

Jesus declares in Luke 4 at the launch of his ministry the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind to set the oppressed free the year of the Lord's favour.

[20:44] So also Jesus is the anointed one but this is passed on to believers and 1 John reminds us that part of the teaching of following Jesus is that spirit of Jesus the Holy Spirit is given to us so we also receive an anointing not quite the same measure I'm sure we have so much more baggage and sin that clouds the way but it is expressed in the sharing of the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

So humanly Jesus' popularity and his claim to be God was too much for the Jews and they sought his death. But remember some of these details Passover was soon to happen and in God's sovereignty the death of Jesus was part of the plan.

1 Corinthians 5 reminds us for Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed there's a few other details but let us keep the festival not with the maliciousness and whatever of the previous way of

doing things but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth but Christ is spoken about as a Passover lamb and if you don't know anything about Passover just to give you a couple of lines every year the Jewish family would have already chosen their lamb now so close to it they would have already in the home the lamb would be in the house I think chosen the best lamb they've got soon it would be sacrificed and the blood smeared on the doorposts and this was a reminder that when God's judgment came on the firstborn in Egypt that the angel of death saw the blood saw this obedience from the Hebrews and would pass over the Hebrews and God's judgment against all sinners just to bring it right up to date it's still very certain and it is coming only by trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus who bore our sins in his sinless body will this judgment pass over us what can it that's the only way so Mary understood that Jesus had to die do you

I think I've seen a number of people who perhaps they just meander around churches they like the teaching of how you live behaving well moral codes but when they really get this idea that the key person Jesus had to die big questions what you know takes a bit of swallowing but Jesus Mary understood that Jesus had to die do you and as we touched on this a little earlier not sure what most of the disciples thought they had seen Jesus overcome all kinds of things and I think I'm sure some of them would have thought he was going to get out of this one somehow and then there is this theme of aroma or smell that I just want to come to before we wind up we had that verse didn't we verse 3 and the house was filled with a fragrance of perfume and you know your

Old Testament and the sacrifices that were often made burning things burning incense here's one example burning an offering a soothing aroma to the Lord so this idea of a sacrifice presenting a smell an aroma that was pleasing is frequently there but there is this verse in 2 Corinthians that says we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing to the one we are an aroma that brings death and to the other an aroma that brings life that makes you think a bit doesn't it it's nice to just being a pleasing aroma but this is an aroma that will can bring life but it can also people turn away from it they can it can bring death and I wonder if you thought of yourself in this way as an aroma to God and I ask you the question carefully do you smell good do you smell good and I think you know exactly what I mean we talked about this indwelling of the spirit of

[25:47] God that is given to us and as we learn to love like Mary loved and live devotedly do we smell good so I come to lessons as we draw to a close lessons to learn from Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening and learning does that sound rather easy I don't know about you but I think sitting still not saying very much and listening to a master we're always so busy we don't make a lot of time so many many distractions but Mary loved to sit at his feet and to listen and learn how do you work that out yes I suppose this is something to do with your time of prayer it is also to do with we don't have Jesus speaking to us directly but we do have his word listening and learning sitting at the feet of Jesus well there's something there isn't there and she didn't worry much about what others thought

I'm sure in a measure it's not a bad idea to have a little bit of awareness that people see you but in this final moment final meeting with Jesus before he would be way away from her she didn't care what anyone else thought in this room she just wanted to give this act of devotion she hadn't just blow dried her hair for dinner and she gives us this example of loving Jesus without limits there was something very costly she was doing and she wasn't worried about looking cool at the end of it she gave everything she loved deeply and she frequently wept and I think we learn from Mary to understand and I hope with a broken heart that Jesus had to die no other sacrifice can take away our sin and then there is the lesson from Paul that we are to

God the aroma of Christ and this curious thing it takes a little bit of puzzling over to some an aroma that brings death and to others an aroma that brings life can people see in your life can people see in my life a deep deep love for Jesus if they see that if they see that humility if they see that love but that turns them away I can't do anything about that but that's where it starts but let it not be a hypocritical life that says in one breath we follow Jesus and doesn't really and let that be the reason that people are turned off let it not be that and I bring a verse from some of song of songs just to finish with an unusual book mainly about the love between a man and a woman but it is often taken as a picture of the love of

