

**Series: Loving Jesus #1156**

**Title: Matthew 26.6-13; John 12.1-8**  
**Setting the Scene**

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Beginning today we are going to take a short break from our ongoing series, God and Abraham, so that we can prepare for the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Easter is the Sunday after next and I would like to take ten radio broadcasts and internet podcasts to help you prepare your heart and soul for Good Friday (Christ's death) and what is commonly called Easter Sunday (Christ's resurrection). Our focus will be on the lavish love that one of Christ's earliest followers had for Him. Using Scripture from three of the four Gospels, we will likewise learn to pour out our love for Christ.

We come to this portion of God's holy Word, because we want to prepare our minds, our hearts (that place where our affections live), and our emotions for the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we solemnly, and in the resurrection joyfully, remember on Resurrection Day weekend! That's still two weeks away, but we want to come to it *prepared*. We want to be ready. Jesus loves us. Do we love Him? I think of these words:

How marvelous! How wonderful!  
And my song shall ever be:  
How marvelous! How wonderful!  
Is my Savior's love for me!

Have you received Christ's love for you? Then will you rejoice with me? How marvelous! How wonderful! And *our* song shall ever be: How marvelous! How wonderful! Is *our* Savior's love for *us*! His love for you and me!

Let's turn in our Bibles to Matthew 26, verses 6-13. This is Matthew's Gospel chapter 26, verses 6-13.

**"<sup>6</sup> Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup> a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as [Jesus] reclined *at the table*. <sup>8</sup> But the disciples were indignant when they saw *this*, and said, 'Why this waste? <sup>9</sup> For this *perfume* might have been sold for a high price and *the money* given to the poor.' <sup>10</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. <sup>11</sup> For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. <sup>12</sup> For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.<sup>13</sup> Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.'"**

This is quite the scene. And there are a number of real characters in this true story. We have Simon the leper (he's the host of this party), then there is this woman (Matthew does not tell us her name) and she pours costly perfume over Jesus, and so of course Jesus is there. And that means along with Him are the disciples. And the place, the location, is Bethany.

I have read from Matthew and now I want to read from John. So, if you are following along in your Bible, turn all the way over to John chapter 12. That's John chapter 12. This event in the life of Jesus is also written about by Mark and I will quote Mark soon, but the reason I am reading from John 12 is because John fills in some of the details that Matthew leaves out, such as the name of the woman who worships Jesus by breaking this alabaster vial of very costly perfume. Her name is Mary, and listen to how John describes what goes on around this dinner table. This is fascinating.

I am reading John chapter 12, verses 1-8. **"Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining *at the table* with Him.**

**<sup>3</sup> Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.**

**<sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray [Jesus], said, <sup>5</sup> ‘Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?’ <sup>6</sup> Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. <sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said, ‘Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. <sup>8</sup> For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.’” That’s John chapter 12, verses 1-8.**

As you can likely tell, just from my reading, these two texts go together. And again, Mark will add something further as well. And what we’re going to do this week is to put all of the beauty of this scene into one painting and talk about this woman’s act of love for her Savior, that is I invite you to focus with me on Mary. Verse 3 of John 12, **“<sup>3</sup> Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”** Mary. So the “woman” in Matthew 26 is Mary. It’s crucial we know that.

And I’d love for you to circle her name in your Bible at John 12 when you have an opportunity to do so. I am going to say much about her, and in relation to her some of the other people in this story throughout the days ahead. And to begin with I want to make certain you know which Mary this is. Anytime we talk about “Mary” in the New Testament we have to clarify which Mary we’re talking about. For example, this Mary is the sister of Martha and Lazarus. This is not Mary, the mother of Jesus or Mary Magdalene, the woman who was demon possessed until Jesus delivered her by casting out the demons. Mary Magdalene is also the first person to see the risen Christ when He appeared to her after His resurrection.

Nor is this Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joseph and the wife of Clopas. Mary was a very popular name in Bible times, and so much like with names that are popular today, we have to pause and ask: which Mary is this? And again, she is Mary of Bethany, and famously the sister of Martha and Lazarus and a great friend to Jesus. Their family is prominent in John 12, as we shall see.

Now that we have correctly identified this Mary let’s do a little work on setting the scene and that means understanding the context (a favorite pursuit of mine in Bible study). John 12, verse 1 opens, **“Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.”** This sentence is principal to understanding what follows, because the sentence links John chapter 11 – without exaggeration, a monumental chapter in the Word of God (chapter 11) – to our chapter 12.

For example notice this is six days before the Passover. So this is Saturday night (as the Jewish Sabbath comes to an end) and that is six days before Friday, the day in which Jesus will die on the Cross. The timing here is important. And look who else is at Bethany where they gather.

It is Lazarus and John tells us here directly, **“Lazarus...whom Jesus had raised from the dead.”** Do not gloss over this. In this scene at Bethany, living and breathing, is a man who was once dead! In fact, John 11 tells us Lazarus had been deceased for four days! This man is dead and long buried. But John 11 verses 43-44 reads as follows:

**“<sup>43</sup> ... [Jesus] cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth.’ <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’”** So that’s John 11 and when we come to John 12 this resurrected dead man Lazarus is reclining at the table with Jesus in Lazarus’ home village of Bethany. This is why we must understand the context so that we can bridge chapters 11 and 12 of John to one another.

And, still building the context for you, you can also circle **“Bethany”** in your Bible. In case you did not know this, that’s a very special place for our Lord. You can locate Bethany on a map of Israel today. It’s on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, which is just 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) east of the city of Jerusalem. In the gospels we read of Jesus continually visiting there, and finding respite with His friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus where they live.

Just so you get a feel for how close Bethany is to Jerusalem, such that Jesus could spend his day in Jerusalem but then retreat to Bethany overnight, listen to Mark's Gospel chapter 11, verses 1, 11 and 12. This is Mark 11.

**“As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives... (verses 11 and 12)... Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.<sup>12</sup> On the next day, when they had left Bethany...”** As Mark says, Jesus regularly commuted between Jerusalem and Bethany. And there He finds food and fellowship and much needed rest in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (the brother and his two sisters).

Pastor and Bible commentator Arthur W. Pink writes, “What makes Bethany so attractive is that [Jesus] seemed to find in the little company there a resting-place in His toilsome path...[Bethany] was one oasis in the desert, one little spot where He...could retire from the hatred and antagonism of His enemies. There was one sheltered nook where He could find those who...were truly attracted to Him.” I *love* that. The importance of Bethany for Jesus.

In John 12 we've talked about the setting and we have met Mary. Join us tomorrow for more on Mary's love for Jesus here on God Is!

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