

March 22, 2026

John 12:1-8

As you read the Bible, you'll notice the *contrasts* between the different people in the true stories. Cain and Abel, David and Saul, Namaan and Gehazi, Nicodemus and the Sinful woman of last week- all powerful contrasts meant to make you think. Today, we see another big contrast- Mary and Judas Iscariot. Judas was a respected member of Jesus' disciples. He was in charge of the money, which means that he was considered a trustworthy, dependable, smart, honest man- and perhaps at one point he was. He was one that Jesus sent to cast out demons and preach the Gospel and convert people to faith- and we have every indication that demons fled at his command and that people believed in Jesus because of his preaching. Judas Iscariot was respectable, dignified, and spiritually rotten to the core. Mary wasn't any of those things. She was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and we don't have a ton of details about her from the Gospels, but we have a few. Jesus came to Mary and Martha's house, and while Martha was so concerned about making sure everything was just right for Jesus, Mary simply sat at Jesus' feet and *listened*. When Martha scolds Jesus, Jesus tells Martha, "No, Mary is right. She has chosen the right thing- to listen to my teaching. That's what I desire most." So, from the little we know about Mary, we can say two things: She is a devout believer in Jesus, and she doesn't really care what anyone other than Jesus thinks. And today, she does something rather shocking, and if you would have asked her, "Mary, what were you thinking? Why on earth would you do this?" She would say, **Jesus is Worthy**. That's the theme for today, and we'll explore **1. What Mary Gave (And What Judas Couldn't), and 2. Why She Could (And Why We Can Too)**.

1. What Mary Gave. Again, this is just after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and we assume that this meal is given in honor of Jesus. Martha is serving because... of course she is. She's the busybee. And Mary comes into the room and approaches Jesus- something that would have been already very culturally taboo. Secondly, she breaks open an alabaster jar filled with pure spikenard. The substance that is being referred to comes from a plant that was found only in the Himalayan mountains India, Nepal, and China, and was considered one of the most costly, precious substances that money could buy. In a time and place where smelling good was a luxury, this was a big deal. This was undoubtedly the most expensive thing Mary had in her possession. It's probably not something that she would have gone out to buy, but perhaps a family heirloom. We can't prove this, but here's something to think about: They didn't have State Farm Insurance policies back in this time. Many people would likely have something very precious and expensive in case there's a famine or untimely death of a male member of the household (like Lazarus)- this way the family didn't have to worry about starving. So, what exactly was Mary pouring onto Jesus' head- so abundantly that it must have flowed down to his feet? The most expensive, precious thing that she owned, possibly her own life insurance policy, and she pours it all onto Jesus.

If that weren't shocking enough, we see her wash Jesus' feet with her own hair. Understand- washing someone's feet was considered the lowliest, most demeaning job in the ancient world. In

fact, there were laws put in place that prohibited masters from demanding their servants from washing their feet. It was too humiliating. And Jesus' feet were likely pretty disgusting- walking for miles in the dusty, dirty roads of Judea in summer heat. But she does so, not with a towel, but *with her hair*. Hair to ancient Jewish women was a precious, intimate thing. Their hair was so important that Jewish women wouldn't even show their hair in public- loose hair meant loose women- that's how they thought. But Mary doesn't care. She doesn't care how important her hair is or how people would consider this gesture. She doesn't care what anyone thinks about her- which is good because everyone there would have been deeply shocked, even offended by this. So- what did Mary give to Jesus? *Everything*. Her wealth, her honor, her dignity, her rights, her identity, her everything- she gave everything to Jesus.

Contrast that to Judas- "The *Money!* That could have been sold for three hundred denarii (a year's wages)! That's so wasteful! Too much just to anoint Jesus- you could have used any oil to do that! This nard could have gone for so much money in the market- and we could have given it to the poor! Think of the poor! Think of all the children that won't eat tonight because she was so thoughtless! What a waste!" *What's his problem?* Is it really that he cares so much about the poor? No- he was filled with *greed*. When he saw that pure spikenard, he saw shekels. But when Mary saw the nard, she saw an opportunity to worship Jesus. Judas' first question before doing anything was, "What's in it for me?" That's what greed truly is! In his heart of hearts- he believed a very common lie: "God owes *me*. Everyone owes *me*." So he justified taking a little bit for himself from the collections given by people *to Jesus*. He stole offerings from the Son of God! How could he do something like that? He justified it- "I do so much for him. I put in so much work. I've sacrificed so much already. They owe me. God owes me." And he hid his greed behind a thinly veiled veneer of charity. Greed is one thing, but hiding greed behind a thin veneer of charity is a special kind of dark hypocrisy- and Judas has fallen into it because in his heart of hearts he believes that God owes him. Everyone owes him. And when you believe that, you can justify just about anything- even stealing from the Son of God, even betraying him for thirty pieces of silver. But in Mary's heart of hearts, she is convinced of this: "God owns everything, and he owns *me*." He doesn't owe me anything. I owe him everything. And that's what she gave. But how could she do that?

2. How She Could (And How We Can Too). Please understand: Mary did understand that Jesus is truly God, and God owns all things, and is worthy of all things- but that's not *why* Mary did this. Mary isn't just doing this because she likes Jesus and wants to do something nice for him. She's *confessing*. I'll explain what I mean- when we say the Apostle's or Nicene Creed, I'll usually say that we are "confessing" our faith. "Confess" can mean to confess one's sin, but more often we mean that to boldly, solemnly, and joyfully declare what we know to be true. And that is exactly what Mary is doing here- not with her voice, but with her hair. Jesus says that Mary is anointing him for burial. It was common for people to anoint the bodies of their dead loved ones with oil, spices, and fragrances to hide the smell of decay. It was a way to honor them. Here, Mary is saying something powerful: "I know who you really are. You are not simply a man from

Nazareth, but the Son of God from Heaven- and you proved it beyond a doubt when you called my brother from the grave. I know why you had to come here. I know that you are going to die, and I know that you are going to die *for me*. And I know that because of your death, I, like my brother Lazarus, am going to rise again in perfect glory and beauty- because you are going to take up my sins, my guilt in my place.” What could she possibly do for him that could pay him back? What gift could even come close to the value of his infinitely precious life and blood? What Mary understood is what we just sang, “*Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small! Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*” Mary, unlike Jesus’ actual disciples, understands that Jesus is the lamb of God who came to die for the sins of the whole world, and his death will be an offering to God that will gain for her eternal life. She understands that even though God owes her nothing, he is giving *everything* so he can have *her*. And as she comes to know *who* Jesus is, what he has come to do, how much he is going to give to her, and therefore, how valuable she must be if he is willing to pay this kind of price, she realizes: “What is *spikenard*, what is my *reputation*, what are my *rights*? Those are *nothing* compared to who he is, what he is giving for me, and who I am to him.” That’s why she can give so much.

And that’s why we can, too. If you were to ask me, “Pastor, how much money do I *need* to give? How many Sundays do I *need* to be at church? How much time do I *need* to spend in God’s Word, with God’s people, serving God’s Church? I will never answer that question. It’s the wrong question! Because that question assumes a limit. It assumes that there is an amount that will be “enough.” But if Jesus really is who he says he is, and if he really shed his infinitely valuable blood and gave his infinitely valuable life just to buy you from the clutches of Hell, and that makes you infinitely valuable to him, there will never be an amount that will be “enough” to truly pay him back. If you are looking for a limit- “as long as I do this and give that, eventually I’ll fill my quota and I won’t owe God anymore- maybe he’ll even owe me a good, comfortable life!” Yeah right! If you were truly trying to earn anything from him, you could never sacrifice enough. If you were trying to pay him back, there’s nothing you could give or do that would be enough! Don’t think of it that way! God doesn’t just want your money or your presence in a pew! He wants *you*! He wants all of you! God is worthy of *everything*. We owe him *everything*. He gave us *everything*. We are *everything to him*! So we instead ask, “What has he done for me? What has he given me? What has he declared about me?” And when you are filled with joy, whatever you give, whatever you spend, whatever you do will be a beautiful gift of love, but probably way more than what others who don’t understand the Gospel would expect. Maybe that’s a good answer- how much should you give? Enough that your friends would think you’re crazy. How often should you be here? Enough to shock your non-Christian, or even Christian friends.

And we see that in the church today. There are currently young men who I know across the country who actively experience sexual attraction to men. And they would not lose any social

status, in fact, they may even gain it, if they were to give into these desires and live them out. And they have chosen not to. They have decided to live a life of celibacy rather than break God's Law, not out of fear, but because Jesus is so good, Jesus has declared them his children, bought them from darkness, and the freedom and joy Jesus has in store for them is infinitely greater than anything they can find in this world. There are students here, whose parents actively insult and have threatened to disown him because he has converted to Christianity, and he considers the sacrifice of his parents' approval a worthy one because he has the approval of his True Father in Heaven, earned for him by the infinitely precious blood of Jesus. And as I look into these pews, I see many sacrifices. Many generous gifts. Many hours of labor- many of which go unnoticed. Hear this. Whatever you do, whenever you give something lavishly, shockingly generous as a testimony, a confession of how great Jesus is to you, it is always seen and joyously celebrated by your Savior. It is *never* a waste. Because Jesus is worthy. Worthy of *everything*. Amen.