

Exegesis

Vs. 7 – Jesus responds quickly and forcefully, "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this." The phrase "Let her alone" is easy enough to understand as it's an apparent defense of Mary. The Lord refused to allow the virtue of Mary's act to be questioned by unsavory types. Furthermore, considering this phrase is in the second-person singular form, we know Jesus directly addressed only *one* person when he said this: Judas.¹ Jesus was the embodiment of meekness (cf. 2 Cor. 10:1), but he was not afraid to correct his disciples in public should they require it (cf. Mar. 8:31-33; Lu. 9:49-48). But sadly, Judas bristled at this correction. In fact, we know from other accounts (cf. Mat. 26:14-16; Mar. 14:10-11) this rebuke will be the very thing that spurs Judas to treachery. A man's temper can become highly volatile if left unchecked (cf. Prov. 12:1; 29:22; Ja. 1:19-20).

The phrase "against the day of my burying hath she kept this" is hard to fully comprehend. Jesus' words seem to imply Mary saved the spikenard specifically for the burial preparations following his death. Did she know, prophetically, that Jesus would soon be executed? This seems unlikely. Nowhere else in Scripture is it implied that Mary had the gift of prophecy, nor are we told that her act was under the direction of the Holy Spirit, as is often the case when it comes to prophecy (cf. Lu. 1:41; 2:25-27). Perhaps, Jesus revealed Mary's original intent when she purchased the ointment? As in, anticipating that Jesus might pass away someday, she had thought ahead and was prepared for that eventuality. But these theories ignore the context in which the anointing took place. Directly tying Mary's act to Lazarus' resurrection (cf. 12:1) shows us, at the very least, that her actions were naturally fueled by feelings of appreciation for what Jesus had done rather than being supernaturally inspired. Also, these interpretations do not consider the fact that Jesus' imminent demise would be a surprise to *everyone*; Mary included. The only person who wasn't surprised was Jesus. Ultimately, it is impossible to say what Mary's original intentions were.² All we have is Jesus' words which focus on the act itself and not her personal agenda.

So then, how should we understand the phrase "against the day of my burying hath she kept this"? Jesus' words provided additional meaning to Mary's act hitherto unknown.³ Just as a villainous Caiaphas will be the unwitting tool in God's plan (cf. 11:49-52), a virtuous Mary will

¹ Kruse (2017), p. 304.

² Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 209.

³ Köstenberger (2008), p. 364.

be the unconscious servant of a Father preparing his Son for death.⁴ Later, Mary could say her worship meant more to Jesus than even she knew at the time. And, in retrospect, she could say that her anointing foreshadowed the later one provided by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (cf. 19:38-42). Hence, not only would a woman be the first to witness the empty tomb (cf. 20:1), but a woman would also be the first to anoint the body of Jesus for his burial. It is truly remarkable how many times the gospels highlight the pivotal role that women played in Jesus' life.

Vs. 8 – Jesus further justifies Mary's actions by saying, "For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always." This response is similar to that of Lu. 10:41-42, where Jesus tells Martha that she is worried about too "many things" when she should really only be worried about "one thing"—i.e., learning at his feet, like her sister Mary. However necessary Martha's "preparations" may have been at the time, they weren't as important as taking the opportunity to listen as the Lord taught. After all, there is always work to be done, but Jesus wouldn't always be in Martha's home.

Likewise, though he had ulterior motives, Judas was correct that the spikenard could be sold and given to the poor. Those proceeds could do quite a lot of good (cf. vs. 6). But even a sum of that magnitude would eventually be depleted. Just as there are always "poor in the land" (cf. Deut. 15:11), there will always be an opportunity to give.⁵ In fact, a person could spend a lifetime serving the less fortunate and see no end to their service. Whereas with Jesus, his earthly ministry was rapidly coming to its culmination. The window for almsgiving was always open. But the window for worshipping Jesus in bodily form was closing. And this did not only apply to believers like Mary but also to nonbelievers like Judas. Just as he invited Martha to stop working and worship, Jesus invited his betrayer to take this opportunity before it slipped through his fingers.

Thus, the poor ought to have taken precedence at any other moment in history. But this was the one exception. The Son of God would only be sacrificed once. His preparations *were the priority* because it was through the cross that the poor of every age would be made truly rich (cf. Mat. 5:3). A drop of Jesus' blood would atone for humanity's sin. How much spikenard would need to be sold to achieve that?

Vs. 9 – John now pulls our attention back to give us a broader context for this scene. He tells us, "Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead." Word that

⁴ Carson (1991), p. 430.

⁵ Keener (2012), 2:865.

Jesus was once again in Bethany spread. Since Jerusalem had swelled its standard capacity many times (*see notes 11:55-57*), one can imagine throngs of people crowding around Lazarus, Mary, and Martha's home. Wherever Jesus went, he always attracted a crowd. But this time, the people not only came to see the Lord, but they also came to see *Lazarus*. Jesus Christ was still the main attraction, but the man "raised from the dead" was also a wonder to behold. Doubtless, the people had heard about the miracle. Jesus had been the only the thing they could talk about (cf. 11:56). So, once they had heard the Lord was only two miles from Jerusalem,⁶ they had to see the living and breathing proof that Jesus could do the miraculous.⁷

Vs. 10-11 – "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus." The attention around Lazarus is understandable. Most people would be interested to see a man who had been resurrected from the dead. But the Sanhedrin wasn't "most people." And now that they had set their sights on killing Jesus (cf. 11:45-53), an innocent man, what was one more murder? If Jesus had to go, so did those things that testified about Christ's power (in this case Lazarus) have to go. How easily a heart rushes to shed blood when it has already made it a habit of doing so.

John tells us they were quick to put Lazarus on their hit list because "many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus." A not-dead Lazarus was such a powerfully persuasive tool that "many" Jews became believers. The phrase "went away" implies these Jews who believed in Jesus went *against* the Sanhedrin's instructions (cf. 11:57). Carson explains, "the expressions ["went away" and "believed"] assume a self-conscious conversion, a move away from the religion practiced by the authorities and a move toward genuine trust in Jesus."⁸ Consequently, the ruling class of Israel saw their influence over the people waning.

Furthermore, imagine how embarrassing this must've been for the Sadducees, the majority party within the Sanhedrin (*see notes vs. 47-48*).⁹ Their view on the resurrection was that it was nonexistent (cf. Mar. 12:18-27).¹⁰ And yet, here was Lazarus; he was a walking/talking/living example that their views on the resurrection were incorrect. He was "a standing condemnation of their doctrine."¹¹ And what would a person be compelled to do

⁶ *CBS Holy Land Illustrated Bible*, (Nashville, TN; Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), p.1515.

⁷ Contra. Morris (1995), p. 517, who says these were "Jesus' enemies rather than to those who were disposed to be friendly toward him." Nothing in the context suggests that their intention were nefarious. They simply wanted to see Jesus and Lazarus out of curiosity.

⁸ Carson (1991), p. 431.

⁹ Kruse (2017), p. 306.

¹⁰ Köstenberger (2008), p. 365.

¹¹ Morris (1995), p. 517.

when they were brought face-to-face with irrefutable proof that the very thing they had defined their entire existence around was *wrong*? They could change their worldview or purge the evidence. The Sadducees chose the latter.

Readers of John's account would undoubtedly see the implications of this plot to kill Lazarus and Jesus. Those who bare the marks of the Lord will be hated by nonbelievers. So hated, in fact, that their own lives will be in jeopardy. If haters of Jesus did not hesitate to kill him, they would not hesitate to kill those who follow Jesus (cf. 15:18-25). This is why the disciples fled after their Teacher was captured and remained hidden; they thought they were next (cf. 20:19).¹² Christians must not only be prepared to live for Jesus, but we must also be prepared to die for him (cf. 12:25).¹³

¹² Thompson (2015), p. 262.

¹³ Keener (2012), 2:865.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 32

Text: John 12:7-11

Hopefully, you've experienced someone standing up for you. To know that a loved one or friend has your back is of great comfort. And sometimes, the most loving thing a person can do is to come to our defense. Such is the case with Jesus coming to Mary's aid as Judas viciously attacks her act of worship. The Lord will not allow unsavory types to question the virtue of this woman's actions. And so, Jesus puts Judas in his place. The Lord reminds his betrayer that his time on earth is closing. Mary has done the thing most needed at that moment. But Judas was too consumed with his own self-interests to see it.

What's more, like Mary, Lazarus will also become a target. Not liking that he was a walking/talking/living example of Jesus' miraculous work, the Sanhedrin will plan to kill him. If Jesus had to go, so did those things that testified of his power (i.e., Lazarus) have to go. Those who bare the marks of Jesus will be hated by nonbelievers. As such, Christians must not only be prepared to live for Jesus, but we must also be prepared to die for Jesus (cf. Jhn. 12:25)

Pastor's manuscript can be found [here](#):