

BREAKING THE ALABASTER BOX

John 12:1-11

Introduction:

- 1. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He returned to the area east of the Jordan.**
- 2. He came back to Bethany just six days before the Passover.**
 - a. From here He will make His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.**
 - b. This will launch the final week of His life and ministry on earth.**
- 3. Jesus' friends made a feast for Him in Bethany.**
 - a. Martha was in charge of the serving.**
 - b. Mary and Lazarus were also guests.**
 - c. Mary anointed Jesus' feet during this feast.**
 - d. The feast was held in the home of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3).**
- 4. Who was Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9)?**
 - a. We know little about him; but likely he had been healed by Jesus.**
 - b. He is not the same as Simon the Pharisee who invited Jesus into his home, but did not show Him the common courtesy a host showed to a guest (Luke 7:36-50).**
 - c. Jesus was anointed by a woman at that time also, but she was a sinful woman, not the devoted disciple, Mary.**
 - d. The earlier anointing had occurred in Galilee, but this happened in Bethany of Judea.**
 - e. Mary of Bethany is not the same as the unnamed sinful woman of Luke 7, nor the same as Mary Magdalene out of whom Jesus cast seven demons (Luke 8:2).**

Discussion:

- I. DURING SUPPER, MARY ANOINTED THE FEET OF JESUS (v. 3).**
 - A. People reclined on low couches around a horseshoe shaped table; therefore their feet were easily accessible.**
 - B. Mary brought a pound of a very costly ointment.**
 - 1. Spikenard came from an aromatic plant grown in eastern India at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains.**
 - 2. A sweet smelling oil was refined from the plant.**
 - 3. It was imported into Israel at great cost.**

4. The value of a pound was three hundred denarii.
 - a. A denarius was a day's wages for a working man.
 - b. Thus the oil cost the income of a man for a year.

C. Matthew and Mark tell us the oil was in an alabaster flask.

1. Alabaster was a beautiful, fragile mineral.
2. It was highly prized as a container for perfume.
3. Mary "broke the flask and poured it on His head" (Mark 14:3).
4. Apparently, it spilled from Jesus' head to His feet.
5. Mary used her long, flowing hair to wipe His feet.

D. Mary's act was a generous and extravagant act of love for the Lord.

1. Perhaps Martha and Lazarus had planned this with Mary?
2. Mary was the ideal one to give the gift because of her devotion to the Lord (Luke 10:38-42).
3. Not only love but gratitude for the raising of Lazarus must have prompted this gift.

II. THE DISCIPLES CRITICIZED MARY FOR WHAT SHE HAD DONE (vv. 4-6).

A. Judas was the instigator of the criticism, but the other disciples joined in (Matt. 26:8,9; Mark 14:4,5).

B. They argued, "Why wasn't this ointment sold and the money given to the poor?"

1. Judas had no interest in the poor.
2. He kept the moneybag for the apostles.
3. He wanted the money put in his care so he could steal it.

III. JESUS DEFENDED MARY'S EXTRAVAGANT ACT OF LOVE (vv. 7,8).

A. Jesus said: "She has done this for the day of My burial."

1. When Jesus died, Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare His body for burial (John 19:39).
2. Perhaps Mary understood more than the others that Jesus was going to die soon?
3. How much better to give flowers when one is alive than wait until he is dead?
4. How much better to praise a person while he is living than to say nice things about him at his funeral?

- B. Jesus also said: “The poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”**
- 1. Despite efforts to eliminate poverty, there will always be poor people.**
 - 2. Wars, earthquakes, famines, depressions and disease can take away our health and our wealth.**
 - 3. Jesus will judge us on how we have responded to the hungry, sick and needy (Matt. 25: 34-40).**
 - 3. However, there are some acts that can only be done at a certain time.**
- C. Mary’s extravagant act of love and devotion is a memorial to her:**
- “Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this Gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her” (Mark 14:9).**

IV. A GREAT MANY JEWS CAME TO BETHANY TO SEE JESUS (vv. 9-11).

- A. John commonly used “Jews” to refer to the leaders of Israel who were opposed to Christ.**
- B. They were there, not to learn, but out of curiosity.**
- 1. They also wanted to see Lazarus who had been raised by Jesus.**
 - 2. They planned to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus since many believed on Jesus because of Lazarus.**
 - 3. How hard-hearted these leaders were that a great miracle had been worked before their very eyes, yet they rejected the Lord!**

Conclusion:

- 1. We live in an age of materialism and selfishness.**
- 2. Those who are able to do the most to help others often give the least.**
 - a. Many of our national leaders have great wealth and large incomes.**
 - b. Their tax forms often reveal they give only minute contributions to churches and charities.**
 - c. Many Christians give only a pittance to the Lord after they have extravagantly spent money on themselves.**
- 3. If we are extravagant in giving to the Lord’s work, it will pay rich dividends (Matt. 6:19-21; Luke 12:15, 21; 2 Cor. 9:6,7).**

