

MARY OF BETHANY: A PORTRAIT OF A TRUE WORSHIPPER

JOHN 12:3

*Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard,
and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.
The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.* ^{ESV}

INTRODUCTION

A. THE SETTING

This moment sits *after* **John 11** and *in* **John 12:1-8**.

a. In **John 11**, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

b. In **John 12:1-8**, Lazarus and his family and friends and Jesus and His disciples are all gathered in the house of a man called Simon for a special dinner prepared by Lazarus' sister Martha, in honor of Jesus.

c. It was during this dinner that **John 12:3** happened – “[Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.](#)”

B. THE CHARACTERS

1. Jesus is there.

We see Him in **John 12:2** sitting (reclining) at the meal table.

2. Mary is there.

a. “*Mary*” is a common name in the Gospels; such as “*Mary the mother of Jesus*” and “*Mary Magdalene*”.

So, to avoid confusion, **John 11** tells us that this is “**Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus**”.

b. An important thing we need to know about *this “Mary”* is that she is known for being *found at the feet of Jesus*.

i. We find Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus during His visit to Bethany.

Luke 10:38-39 – ...it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word.

NKJV

ii. We find Mary falling at the feet of Jesus when He came to be with Lazarus’ sisters after Lazarus had died.

John 11:32 – ...when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

iii. Now, we find Mary again at the feet of Jesus here in **John 12:3**.

C. THE SCENE

- 1.** Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with an expensive perfume and wiped His feet with her hair.
- 2.** Mary expressed her love and adoration to Jesus at this moment. This was her act of worship towards Jesus.

D. MARY IS A PORTRAIT OF A TRUE WORSHIPPER.

- 1.** She expresses deep love and the heart of real worship for Jesus.
- 2.** In fact, she is associated with *worshipping Jesus* – this is what she is known for – this is her reputation.

See how **John 11:1-2** introduces her before **John 12:3** –

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair,** whose brother Lazarus was ill.

3. Mary is a portrait of a true worshipper, and this moment between *Mary and Jesus* provides a beautiful example and practical lesson on the topic of *Real Worship*.

A PORTRAIT OF A TRUE WORSHIPPER

A. FIRST, worship starts with **BROKENNESS**.

1. Mary anointed Jesus' feet with perfume that was kept in an "alabaster flask" (Mark 14:3).

a. *Alabaster* is a hard stone resembling white marble.

b. Ointment, oils and perfumes used to be put in vessels made of alabaster *to keep them pure and unspoiled*.

2. Mark 14:3 tells us, "Mary *broke* the flask".

a. *Before* Mary poured the oil – *before* she anointed Jesus – *before* she wiped Jesus' feet with her hair – **THERE WAS A BREAKING**.

b. This is where it begins – IF the alabaster flask didn't break open, THEN this story would have moved from **John 12:2** to **verse 9** – WITHOUT verses 3-8 – WITHOUT this beautiful scene of Mary's act of worshipping Jesus.

3. Brokenness is an **ESSENTIAL PART** of real, pure worship.

a. The *breaking of the flask* illustrates *brokenness* needed in our act of worship for Jesus.

i. The *flask* was just the container; the *treasure* was the perfume in it.

ii. In the same way, **2 Corinthians 4:7** tells us that we are “jars of clay” that contain “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”.

iii. In brokenness, the treasure is displayed, and sweet fragrance is diffused.

b. David the Psalmist wrote this:

Psalm 51:17 – The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite (crushed) heart — these, O God, You will not despise. ^{NKJV}

4. “Brokenness” is the RIGHT ATTITUDE in pure worship.

a. Brokenness is *God-centered*, not man-centered.

The broken worshipper is more concerned about what God thinks about him than what others do.

b. Brokenness is *humble*, not proud.

i. Humility is the proper estimation of one's self, and it shows up in how we relate to God, especially in worship.

ii. NOTE – In order for Mary to anoint Jesus and wipe His feet with her hair she would've *had to bow and kneel before Him* (Jesus was reclining at the table) – this is the posture of humility.

iii. What is your posture in worship?

B. SECOND, worship is of GREAT VALUE.

1. “Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard...”

The word “cheap” CANNOT be applied to what Mary did for Jesus.

2. “Nard” – NKJV, “Spikenard”

a. “Spikenard” is a fragrant oil – perfume. It was an oil extracted from the root of a plant grown in India.

b. “...made from *pure nard*” – *this ointment was true, genuine spikenard.*

3. “Expensive” – NKJV, “very costly”

a. This is an understatement!

- b.** We see in **12:5** that this oil could have been sold for “*three hundred denarii*” – this is the sum of *one year’s wage*.
- c.** This oil was most likely her *dowry* – a gift reserved exclusively for her future husband.
- 4.** Mary’s act of worship exemplifies ***extravagant worship***.
- a.** *Extravagant* means “going beyond usual bounds; unrestrained”.
- b.** Mary expressed the same heart as King David – “I will not offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” (1 Chronicles 21:24).
- 5. Worship is “worth-ship”.**
- a.** The quality of worship we bring to God should be the kind He is worthy of.
- b.** God is worth more than just our cheap leftovers – leftover *time*; leftover *talents*; leftover *treasures*. (This was the message of the Prophet Malachi.)
- c.** God is worthy of all our best – our best **love and gratitude and adoration**.
- d.** A good question to ask is, “Is the quality of worship I’m bringing today worthy of our God of infinite worth?”

C. THIRD, worship is ACTIVE.

1. Mary “**anointed**” and “**wiped**” Jesus’ feet with her hair.
2. These words are **verbs – action words**.
3. Our worship of God should never be described as **passive**. It should be **active**.
4. Our worship of God should never be described as both **emotionless** and **motionless** –

For example, imagine an emotionless and expressionless “*Super Bowl*” or “*World Series*” or “*Olympics*” or “*World Cup*”.

5. Instead, the expressions of David the Psalmist should apply to us –

Psalm 103:1 – Bless the LORD, O my soul; and **all that is within me**, bless His holy name!

6. In the Bible, when God’s people worshipped Him, it was full of emotion and expression –

- Abraham *building* an altar
- The priests *offering their sacrifices*
- David *singing*
- Daniel *praying*
- Peter’s mother-in-law *serving*
- Paul *suffering with a joyful attitude*
- Mary *anointing* Jesus with fragrant perfume

7. Real worship cannot be manufactured.

a. *Manufactured* worship leads to either **emotionalism** or **lifeless routines** – my *rote* becomes a *rut*, then my *rut* becomes *rot*.

b. *Manipulation* produces **carnal worship**.

8. True and heart-felt expressions in worship are the fruit of knowing and experiencing God (even in the hard and difficult times of life).

9. It's impossible to remain **passive** in God's presence – real worship will always be **active**.

10. *In real worship, we intention-ally and pro-actively make much of God with our time, talents, and treasure in our local/home churches and in the world.*

D. FOURTH, worship fills God's presence with a pleasing FRAGRANCE.

1. John the Eyewitness tells us, “the house was **filled with the fragrance of the perfume**”.

2. This means the presence of Jesus was filled with a fragrant aroma.

a. Mary poured out a “**pound**” aromatic perfume and spent it on Jesus.

This was a Roman pound, equivalent to 11-1/2-ounces or 327 grams.

- b.** You can be sure that this much perfume filled up the *whole house* with its pleasing scent – and it was around for a *long time*.
- 3.** This reminds us of the Old Testament animal offerings being consumed and transformed into “a sweet aroma to the LORD”. // God enjoys and delights in the “BBQ of worship”.
- 4.** Later in the New Testament, **Hebrews 13:15** comments, “By Him let us continually offer the **sacrifice of praise** to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

E. FIFTH, in worship, we take on the **SAME FRAGRANCE** of the person we are worshipping.

1. Mary “**wiped His feet with her hair**” and this means she took on the smell of the same perfume that she spent on Jesus.

a. This was *sacred transfer*.

b. Being with Jesus, Mary walked away *smelling like Jesus – resembling Jesus*.

2. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 2:14-15** – “Thanks be to God who ... through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ ...”

a. Do you know people like this? Whenever you're with them, you want to know and love Jesus more.

b. The reality of this sacred transfer is seen in us, NOT just in *how we sing our songs*, BUT in *how we live our lives*.

Romans 12:1 – So, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. **This is truly the way to worship him.** ^{NLT}

F. SIXTH, in worship, WE GIVE GOD GLORY.

1. John tells us, “[Mary] wiped His feet with **her hair**”.

2. In **1 Corinthians 11:15**, the Apostle Paul tells us that a woman's hair is her **glory**.

3. By laying down her hair at Jesus's feet, Mary gave Him “**glory**”.

a. In New Testament times, a woman would keep her hair bound-up, and would only let it down for her husband. This was one of the things a husband looked forward to on their wedding day – *his wife would unbind her hair just for him*.

b. Jesus is worthy of this – by laying down her hair at Jesus's feet, Mary gave Him “**glory**”.

Psalm 115:1 – Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory...

G. SEVENTH, the **OBJECT** of our worship must be **JESUS**.

1. Matthew 26:7 and **Mark 14:3** tell us that Mary anointed the “head” of Jesus.

2. John 12:3 tells us that she anointed the “feet” of Jesus.

3. CONCLUSION – From *head to toes*, the object of Mary’s worship was all **Jesus**.

4. APPLICATION:

a. First, “*I*” am not the object of worship.

i. The chief end of worship is NOT what it will do for “*me*” –

- “Will it profit *me* with stuff?”
- “Will it promote *my* status?”
- “Will it persuade others of *my* significance?”

ii. “*I*” am not worthy of receiving worship, and “*I*” should not presume to be “**I AM**” (God).

b. Second, *God* alone should be the object of our worship. – *This fact is repeated again and again in the Bible.*

When God is NOT the object of our worship, it becomes *empty and fake* – it is reduced to *hypocrisy*.

aa. Matthew 15:7-9 – Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” NKJV

bb. A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) – “Christians don’t tell lies, they just go to church and sing them.”

c. God wants more than just *good form* – He wants *all of our hearts*.

(This is the repeated message of the Old Testament Prophets of Israel and Judah.)

d. GOD is the only one worthy of worship, and HE must be the only object of our worship. *Is He the object of your worship?*

H. EIGHTH, God REMEMBERS our worship.

1. Mark 14:9 – Truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, **what she has done will be told in memory of her.**

a. This is an amazing promise that tells us about the worth of the act Mary did for Jesus.

b. Attached to *The Gospel Story* is *this story* –

i. The *Redeeming and Renewing plan* of God through Christ, the *Incarnation* of Christ, the *Sinless life* of Christ, the *Atoning, Wrath-satisfying, and Sacrificial death* of Christ, the *Literal and Historic Resurrection* of Christ, the *Ascension* of Christ, the *Return* of Christ...

ii. Attached to all *that is this – this story*.

iii. For 2,000 years, the Church has been talking about Mary's act, and we're still doing it TODAY.

c. This is how precious Mary's act was to God. It's worth remembering.

2. See that Mary is NOT remembered for *preaching* or *performing miracles* – she is remembered for *worshipping Jesus*.

a. Real worship is greatly valued and esteemed by God – it is something worth remembering.

b. This reminds me of **Malachi 3:16** – Then those who feared the Lord talked often one to another; and the Lord listened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who revered *and* worshipfully feared the Lord and who thought on His name. ^{AMP}

c. Like Mary of Bethany, let's be authentic God-worshippers.

i. This starts when you believe in Jesus and receive Him as your Savior today.

ii. In **John 4:23-24**, Jesus said, “..the hour ... now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for **the Father is seeking such to worship Him**. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” NKJV