

FEAST AT BETHANY

Matthew 26:6–13

DAY OF THE FEAST: CHRONOLOGICAL PROBLEM

- John places the feast before the triumphal entry (12:1–8)—3 or 4 days earlier than Matthew (26:6–13) or Mark (14:3–9)
- it occurs either 6 days before Passover (John 12:1) or on Tuesday evening 2 days before Passover (Matt 26:2; Mark 14:1)
- John's chronology is preferred: the synoptic accounts are probably flashbacks using Mark's frequent sandwich technique—he inserts a story into the middle of another story to show how one interprets or balances the other
- Mark balances the hatred of the leaders (14:1–2) and the greedy betrayal of Judas (14:10–11) with the adoring love of Mary
 - it was a traditional meal concluding the Sabbath on Saturday evening, Nisan 10

MARY ANOINTS JESUS (MATTHEW 26:6–7)

- Jesus arrived in Bethany on Nisan 9 (John 12:1)—a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives 2 miles from Jerusalem
- Jesus and his disciples were staying with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; they all go to the feast at the home of Simon the Leper
 - since it was unlawful to eat with a leper, we assume Jesus had earlier healed Simon
 - there were at least 17 people at this feast—probably more
- Mary anointed Jesus with an alabaster jar of costly perfume imported from India—and the fragrance filled Simon's house
 - alabaster was white or yellow soft marble easily carved into jars, boxes, or statues and named after a town in Egypt
- Roman pound (12 ozs.) of pure nard was worth over 300 denarii (John 12:3; Mark 14:5)—nearly a year's wage for a day laborer
 - spikenard was used by the Jews and Romans to prepare the dead for burial
- Lazarus and his sisters may have been wealthy (cf. many came from Jerusalem to console Martha and Mary, John 11:18–19)
 - she crushed the narrow neck of the rose-bud shaped jar, pouring the perfume on his head and feet (Mark 14:3; John 12:3)

DISCIPLES CRITICIZE MARY (MATTHEW 26:8–9)

- Judas was the first to complain (John 12:4–5) and he was joined by some (Mark 14:4) of the disciples (Matt 26:8)
- yet burying the dead surpassed almsgiving, putting up strangers, and visiting the sick (*Tosephta Pe'a* 4:9; *BT Sukkah* 49b)

A GOOD DEED (MATTHEW 26:10)

- Jesus rebuked his disciples for criticizing Mary
 - doing nice things to make people feel loved and appreciated are good deeds—they satisfy emotional needs
- don't criticize the good works of others: they have a right to do what they want whenever they want for whomever they want

JUSTIFICATION OF THE GOOD DEED (MATTHEW 26:11)

- Jesus does not set aside their obligation to help the poor, as shown by his allusion to Deuteronomy 15:11 ("You shall freely open your hand...to your needy and poor") and the addition of "and whenever you wish, you can do them good" (Mark 14:7)
 - a balance must be maintained between feeding the poor and giving costly gifts to God

PREPARATION FOR BURIAL (MATTHEW 26:12)

- she anointed Jesus with spikenard to prepare him for burial because she understood he would die in two days (cf. Matt 26:2)
- people are usually anointed for burial *after* they are dead; perhaps she feared he would die as a criminal and not be anointed

A LASTING MEMORIAL (MATTHEW 26:13)

- as she honored him, so she shall be honored—all over the world during the Church Age, Tribulation, and Millennium
 - her good deed is included in three of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, and John)
- Jesus anticipated the worldwide spread of the gospel—the Great Commission (cf. Matt 24:14; 28:19–20)