

## An Example of Worship: The Anointing of Jesus

Matt Redman writes,

“The great thing about writing worship songs is that you can plagiarize the Bible and, instead of getting sued, you actually get encouraged!”

The best way I have found to worship is to go to Scripture and use it to bring us closer to God in worship.

One of the greatest examples of worship is that of the woman who anointed Jesus with the vial of costly perfume.

1. Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover,  
came to Bethany where Lazarus was,  
whom Jesus had raised from the dead.
2. So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving;  
but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.
3. Mary therefore  
took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard,  
and anointed the feet of Jesus,  
and wiped His feet with her hair,  
and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

### Context:

Surrounding Jesus was much controversy and discussion.

A remarkable miracle had just been performed:

Jesus raised up a man who had been dead four days.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead many of the Jews believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

JOHN WRITES,

Many therefore of the Jews,  
who had come to Mary and beheld what he had done,  
believed in Him.

But some of them went away to the Pharisees,  
and told them the things which Jesus had done.

## JOHN 11:45-46

- SOME BELIEVE IN JESUS
- SOME INFORM ON JESUS

The public ministry of Jesus was a three-year moment of truth for the religious leaders of the first-century Israel. The Word of God, who had been promised for centuries, now stood before them in flesh and blood, truth incarnate. They denied the truth, disputed the truth, marginalized the truth, and even tried to silence the truth; but Jesus will not be set aside or put off. He leaves no compromising middle way. Each individual must decide what to do with Him. Deny or submit? Reject or believe? Embrace Him and experience freedom or kill Him and preserve the illusion of power?

After Jesus exercised power over death, many religious leaders began to break ranks and believe in the Son of God. Therefore, the custodians of religious power in Jerusalem could no longer put off the question of Jesus.

## I. **Worship Exemplified**

### 1. **JESUS ATTENDS A CELEBRATION SUPPER**

There is a bit of complication here due to the many facts that John leaves out. The other gospel writers add some things to the story. (Possibly two events) In parallel accounts of this in the Synoptic Gospels tell us that a Pharisee named Simon hosted a supper in honor of Jesus.

(Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50).

JESUS ATTENDS A DINNER.

The place is Bethany, the city of Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

The time is six days before Passover – Saturday.

Those mentioned attending the dinner with Jesus were Lazarus, Martha, Mary, and His disciples. Other accounts include the actual place being the house of

Simon the Leper (Presumably Jesus healed his leprosy). He could have been one of the Jewish leaders who believed in Jesus, but still feared the wrath of the Jews who were after Jesus.

Mary was described as a devout, godly follower of Christ, but could have been a notorious woman of questionable morals before encountering Jesus. Afterwards she became a particularly notable woman after believing in Him. Luke stressed the sinfulness of her former life, while telling the story of her unrestrained worship of Jesus in the presence of a legalist.

Swindoll writes,

If the four accounts describe the same event, the banquet took place in the home of a Pharisee named Simon, who would not have been welcome in the temple because of his leprosy – or, more likely because of Jesus, leprosy that had been healed.

## 2. JESUS IS ANOINTED BY MARY.

### 3. Mary therefore

took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard,  
and anointed the feet of Jesus,  
and wiped His feet with her hair,  
and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Mary at some point broke open her alabaster jar of expensive perfume and anointed Jesus' head.

Then she was moved with enormous gratitude for grace, or overtaken by grief for the ordeal Jesus was about to suffer.

Jesus had announced His coming crucifixion.

John recorded Jesus' words,

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to take it up again..." (John 10:11, 17-18).

Mary knelt over His feet, broke the alabaster jar, and emptied the perfume on Jesus' feet in a lavish gesture of worship.  
 She drenched His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.  
 The fragrance of her spontaneous devotion filled the room.

Cultural norms broken:

She was expected to serve.  
 Touching feet was said to be degrading  
 Taking her hair down in public was undignified  
 The perfume she collected was a treasure – dowry  
 Emptied it on Jesus.

Rejected by Simon – Does Jesus know the kind of woman she is?  
 Rejected by Judas – Appalled by the waste of valuable perfume.  
 No doubt that many others were in shock.

## II. Worship Explained

took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard,  
 and anointed the feet of Jesus,

### 1. Worship is Costly

Perfume

Nard - spikenard

Valued at 300 denarii– 1 denarii is a day's wages – one years wages

Poured out on Jesus feet.

When David wanted to make a sacrifice the man offered to donate the animals to him and he said "I will not give to the Lord that which cost me nothing."  
 A true sacrifice is costly. "It's a sacrifice."

Our offerings represent our life energy and time.  
 Giving is worship in which we simply return that which is already His.

Malachi the prophet addressed the nation of Israel's reluctance to bring their tithe to the storehouse by calling them robbers of God. "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the Lord of hosts. "All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts. Mal. 3:8-12

Parallel to the cost of worship in giving and giving praise.  
We can never out-give God. Worship brings us to God and everything else fades.

## **2. Worship is an expression of love**

*and wiped His feet with her hair,*

Hair – wiped Jesus feet - she had no dignity left  
– her crown and glory

Borrowing from Luke's account where Jesus was at the house of Simon Pharisee and a woman broke into the banquet in front of everyone and began to weep over Jesus. (Perhaps a different occasion – much earlier in Jesus' ministry than the one at Mary's house.)

Luke 7:36-50

Simon was subtly rebuked by Jesus for his lack of courtesy as he was condemning Jesus for his poor taste in allowing 'a sinful woman' to do anything for him. Jesus told him a parable of two debtors.

The one who is forgiven much loves much.

Why was the woman there? Because she loved Jesus. She loved Him and knew that He loved and would forgive her. His love had melted her heart. Everything she did was her way of showing Jesus that she loved Him.

William Barclay writes,

“Love does not stop nicely to calculate the less or more; love does not stop to work out how little it can respectably give. With a kind of divine extravagance, love gives everything it has and never counts the cost. Calculation is never any part of love.”<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Worship is focused.**

4. Therefore Jesus said, “Let her alone so that she may keep it for the day of My burial.

#### **JUDAS REBUKES MARY’S EXTRAVAGANT ACT OF DEVOTION.**

5. But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said,
6. “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to poor people?”
7. Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.
8. Therefore Jesus said, “Let her alone so that she may keep it for the day of My burial.
9. For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

#### **Mary didn’t care about Judas or anyone else.**

Mary’s worship was focused on Christ, especially on the coming crucifixion.

When someone realizes that they are a great sinner and have been forgiven by Jesus’ death on the cross, a great burden is lifted and their heart is filled with worship. What is worship but the song of a sinner who has tasted forgiveness.

Matthew’s gospel adds,

---

<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1988), n.p.

“For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her” (Matt. 26:12-13).

Mary’s offering of tears, humility and wealth, spoke of Jesus’ coming sacrifice.

We worship Jesus for His loving, selfless and effective sacrifice.  
His death purchased out of death and gave us eternal life.

When God the Father saw Jesus on the cross He was satisfied,  
and we were justified.

The focus of worship is our relationship with God through Christ’s righteousness.

#### **4. Worship makes things different.**

Jesus gave her act of worship a profound theological purpose.  
Just as the fragrance filled the air so the fragrance of worship fills our hearts.

Vance Havner writes in a article entitled, *What Peace We Often Forfeit!*

“O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” The Psalmist reproves us for rising up early and sitting up late with our worries when God, the Night Watchman of the Universe, is on duty and never sleeps. Could we but believe that He ever keeps watch above His own, that nothing escapes His notice, that all things work together for our good we would not be insomniacs and nervous wrecks that we are, living from pill to pill, sedative to sedative, trying to conquer needless pain and find departed peace. Some pains are necessary and some grief profitable, but, for much of both, there is balm in Gilead and we have not because we ask not.”

Worship makes things different because when we come into His presence we see things differently, we are comforted, we trade our anxieties for peace. We move from trouble to prayer to deliverance to praise.

### III. Worship Applied

**David praises God in the midst of great trials:**

<sup>1</sup>I will bless the Lord at all times,  
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

David adds,

<sup>4</sup>I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. <sup>6</sup>This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles...

<sup>19</sup>Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Ps 34:1,4,6, & 19)

How extreme should our worship be?

How extreme was Jesus' sacrifice? And God's blessings towards us?