

# Welcome To

Malvern Bible Chapel



# **Costly Worship**

## **Introduction to Spring Preaching Series**

**John 12:1-11**

**Robert L. Watt  
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# Costly Worship

## John 12:1-11 (NKJV)

- 12** Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. <sup>3</sup> Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.
- <sup>4</sup> But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, who would betray Him, said, <sup>5</sup> "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" <sup>6</sup> This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

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## John 12:1-11 (NKJV) (cont.)

<sup>7</sup> But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. <sup>8</sup> For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

<sup>9</sup> Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, <sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

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## Introduction:

- It has been on my heart for some time now to speak on the subject of costly worship, using the example of Mary's worship of our Lord Jesus Christ using a pound of valuable oil of spikenard.
- Mary is mentioned by name only in John's account (our text today), but the account is also mentioned by Matthew and Mark.
- Another similar anointing is recounted by Luke, but this is done by another sinful woman and not Mary (see the chart in the handout).

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- Two weeks ago on Palm Sunday, it was mentioned that the events of the first Palm Sunday came immediately after the events that we will be looking at today.
- They describe a beautiful time that Jesus spent with his special friends that He often stayed with when in Bethany, just two miles from Jerusalem.
- Whether this was Martha's home now (Lk. 10:38) and Simon was her father, or whether they were all visiting in another home of Simon (evidently a former leper cured by Jesus) isn't clear. What is clear is that Mary, Martha and Lazarus are siblings.
- The worship of Mary, the work of Martha, and the witness of Lazarus are all needed and must be in balance.

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- Earlier Lazarus had died and had been raised from the dead by Jesus (recorded only by John in the previous chapter 11).
- This provoked the Pharisees to try to kill Lazarus (also only recorded in Jn. 12:10-11).
- I find it fascinating that only John records these facts about Lazarus and certain details of the worship scene in our text.
- A generation after the other gospel writers wrote their accounts, John felt obligated to include these important facts so that those in his day, as well as us today, would have a complete picture of these events.
- I for one am very glad that he did!

# Costly Worship

## Body of Lesson:

- To begin with, what is worship? The short answer, from the Bible at least, is much different from what is popularly called “worship” today. I am indebted to A. P. Gibbs and his book entitled *Worship* for a number of the thoughts shared throughout this message.
- Like the words “love” and “grace”, “worship” is hard to define and is better experienced! One person has said that “Worship is the occupation of the heart, not with its needs, or even its blessings, but with God Himself.”
- It could well be pronounced “worthship” since worship ascribes worth to the One who alone is worthy, as we see in Revelation 4 and 5.



# Costly Worship

- To distinguish between words, **prayer** is the occupation of the soul with its needs; **praise** is the occupation of the soul with its blessings; and **worship** is the occupation of the soul with God Himself.
- The Greek word used in the NT for “worship” is “*proskuneo*” which means to do reverence, pay homage by prostration; to pay Divine homage, to worship, and adore. Worship involves a costly presentation to God.
- Salvation is something received by us as a free gift from God. Worship is something presented by us to God as a willing acknowledgement of our deep appreciation of what He is and all He has done.
- Worship in essence is giving back to God.

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There are many examples of worship in Scripture involving costly gifts to God. Here are two:

1. At the birth of Jesus (at the Christmas season): By the Wise Men (see Matt. 2:1-12). They presented three gifts when they came to worship the newborn King of the Jews:
  - Gold (speaking of His office as King)
  - Frankincense (speaking of His office as Priest)
  - Myrrh (speaking of His office as Prophet)
2. At the death of Jesus (at the Easter season): By Mary of Bethany (our text today, which we will primarily consider). She presented one gift when she came to worship her Lord:
  - Oil of spikenard

# Costly Worship



# Costly Worship

## **Song of Solomon 1:12**

While the king is at his table my oil of **spikenard** send forth its fragrance.

## **Song of Solomon 4:13**

Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits; camphor, with **spikenard**.

## **John 12:3**

Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of **spikenard**, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

*Spikenard*



# Costly Worship

First of all, let us look at what Mary did not come to do as part of her worship:

- Listen to a sermon.
- Make a request.
- Meet fellow believers.
- Be refreshed by Him.
- Meet the host.
- Do the popular thing.
- Withhold her best.

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Instead Mary's gift as part of her worship was:

- Poured out fully, freely and joyously at the feet of Jesus (v.3), where she always is found.
- Costly (v.3). 300 denarii was a year's salary for a laborer.
- Reserved for a special purpose (v.7). Other women came too late with their burial spices (fragrant oils, Mark 16:1).
- Used to anoint the body of Jesus before his death (she didn't even use this for her brother Lazarus when he died)!  
Don't wait to give your tribute (eulogy) to someone after they are dead—do them a good deed while they are alive!
- Accompanied by an attitude of utter self-abnegation (v.3). She wiped His feet with her hair—her glory as a woman. Worship is not about us—it is all about Him!

# Costly Worship

- Filled the whole house with the fragrance of the oil (v.3). The fragrance stayed with them as they slept that night, and after they left the house the next day (Palm Sunday) for the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

When they returned again that night the fragrance was still there, as it was on the garments that eventually were stripped off by the soldier who won the lottery for them on Good Friday.

When the crown of thorns was placed on His head, His hair still had the lingering fragrance of that anointing oil. When His body died on the cross bearing our sins, it was already anointed for His burial.

This was truly the gift that kept on giving! It certainly was not a waste as she was wrongfully accused of giving.

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- Let's look at Mary's gift of the oil of spikenard in more detail and see what makes it so expensive.
- This is not something we use commonly today, but it is something that as a pharmacist I am truly fascinated by.
- The oil comes from the root (rhizome or underground stem) of the spikenard plant. It is expensive because:
  - (1) it comes from a very difficult place to obtain it (the Himalayan Mountains of northern India, Nepal and China),
  - (2) the plant only has a very small [1-3%] amount of the essential oil that can be made into the perfume, and
  - (3) a very special and difficult manufacturing process is required to extract the essential oil from the plant.



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Spikenard Plant

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- The plant is carefully dug up to preserve and dry the rhizome, which is then transported by caravan to the Middle East for processing (about 3,000 miles, or twice the distance from Philadelphia to the Rocky Mountains!).
- The processing involves crushing the dried rhizomes, soaking them in a solvent (usually water) for sufficient time, and then distilling the mixture using gentle heat.
- This separates the essential oil from the plant material using a special distillation apparatus first developed by the Arabs (an alembic still, similar to a modern retort).
- The essential oil must then be stored in an air-tight container to prevent evaporation and to keep the oil from turning rancid.

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Like a root out of dry ground, He has no form or comeliness...(Isaiah 53:2)

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**Model of an Arab Alembic Still**

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- These containers, before the invention of blown-glass bottles with closures, were generally made by carving out expensive alabaster rocks (similar to marble) into flasks of various sizes.
- Quality alabaster came from Egypt or Italy, and masters of the trade produced very expensive containers.
- Once filled and sealed, the neck of the flask had to be broken to get out the perfume.
- Alabaster is also called gypsum, and various softer grades can be made into drywall today.

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Alabaster Flasks

# Costly Worship



Alabaster Flask

# Costly Worship

- It takes a large amount (50 pounds or 1 huge sack) of the dried rhizomes raw material, in order to produce sufficient essential oil to fill a flask that contains 1 pound of the pure oil of spikenard like Mary used.
- Back calculating from the value of 300 denarii (1 year minimum salary at about \$10/hr), I value Mary's gift at about \$24,000 (much more for most people). That would calculate to be a price of \$300-500 per teaspoonful!
- Add to that the cost of the alabaster container and you have an idea of why this was called "a very costly oil" (v.3)!
- To paraphrase Hallmark, Mary cared enough to give the very best in the worship of her Lord!
- She exhibited costly worship!



# Costly Worship

## Application:

1. Like Mary, are you worshipping generously to the Lord?
2. Like Martha, are you working diligently for the Lord?
3. Like Lazarus, are you witnessing boldly about the Lord?