



lêtheia

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP




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the gospel of

JOHN

ΕΝ ΑΡΧΗ ΗΝ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΚΑΙ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΗΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ
 ΘΕΟΝ ΚΑΙ Ο ΤΗΝ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΟΣ ΗΝ ΕΝ ΑΡΧΗ ΠΡΟΣ
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John 11:53–57, 53So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. 54Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the region near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples. 55Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem from the country prior to the Passover, in order to purify themselves. 56So they were looking for Jesus, and saying to one another as they stood in the temple area, “What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?” 57Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might arrest Him.

Last week we left the Jewish Ruling Council called the Sanhedrin actively plotting the permanent elimination of Jesus. While it was mostly due to their jealousy of Jesus, there was also legitimate concern that a man like Him, Who was beyond their influence, and Who was gaining in popularity by leaps and bounds, could be a direct threat to their power, prestige, and position.

First, He might become a better option for Rome as the mediator between the Empire and the people, thereby replacing them. Even more likely, is that He would be a lightning rod for unrest, destabilization, and even revolt.

Rebellion against Rome would bring swift and overwhelming action by Rome and then, not only would the Jewish leaders lose their place, they could lose their lives and their nation as well. That's exactly what did happen roughly 40 years after these events.



In 70 A.D., Rome crushed a Jewish rebellion, sacked Jerusalem, and destroyed the Great Temple. In the aftermath, the Romans marched 97,000 newly enslaved Jews, carrying the treasure of both their nation and their Temple, all the way to Rome. Once there, the Jewish treasure and the Jewish slave labor were used to build the Colosseum.



Well, that was still 40 years in the future for the people in our story... Because of the Jewish leadership's intense resolve, Jesus made Himself scarce. It was necessary. You see, even with Lazarus' return to the land of the living, there weren't enough of Jesus' supporters, in and around Jerusalem to keep Him safe at that point. If the Sanhedrin had been able to apprehend Jesus within a day or two of the Sign in Bethany, they wouldn't have met with insurmountable opposition. That would soon change though, as news spread about Jesus' raising of Lazarus and the huge crowds of people full of Messianic expectation flooding Jerusalem for the upcoming Passover.



Jesus was biding His time in what is now Al Taybeh a Palestinian village in the West Bank that is Christian.

This is the Church of St George ruins dating to the mid 300's A.D., commemorating Jesus' short self-imposed exile there. The town was known as Ephraim then, but as Ophrah, or sometimes Ephron, in the Old Testament. It is about 12 miles north-northeast of Jerusalem with a whole lotta nothing, even today, in between.



Rich and powerful people will do anything to maintain their lifestyle as rich and powerful people. We get that, I think... right? Here's what we don't typically get... it's all relative. You are far richer and far more powerful and have far more servants than the High Priest Caiaphas could have imagined. Tiberius, the absolute ruler of the entire Roman Empire could not, on a whim,

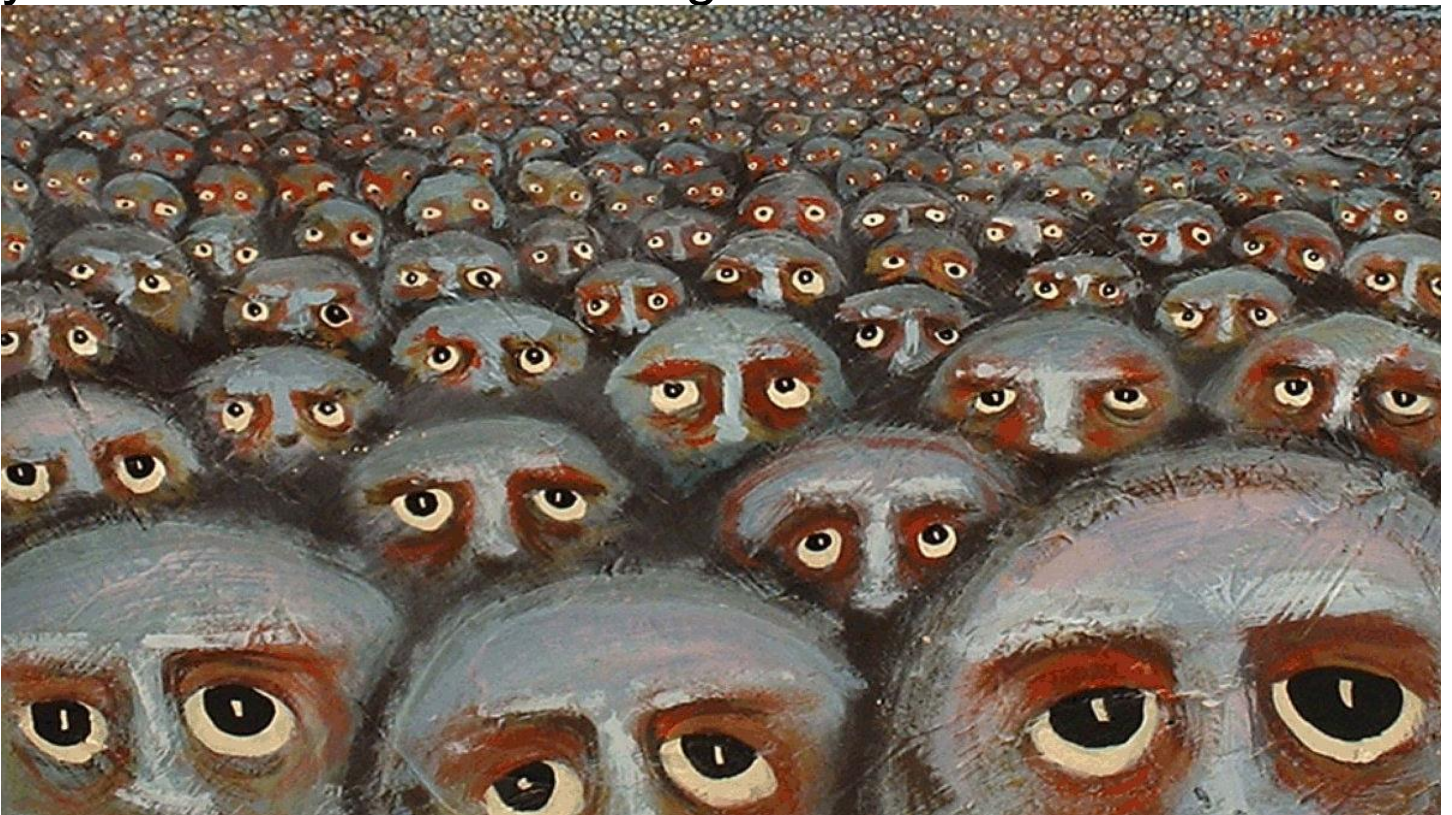
decide to have a new pair of shoes. Speak his wish to his assistant Alexa, and have the shoes delivered to his doorstep from 2,000 miles away the next day.



You say okay, but I object to the servant thing? Really? How many people were involved in creating the shoes, making the shoes, advertising the shoes, boxing the shoes, shipping the shoes, delivering the shoes, creating the infrastructure for it all to be possible... I mean seriously, just how many thousands of people served your whim to have new shoes delivered to your home? Go to the Wendy's drive-thru, or the Blue Cow car wash, or sit down at Mackenzie River and watch all the people serving you. Well, that doesn't count – you say – I'm paying them. Okay, what's your point?

Labor, even the horrifically despicable slave labor has never been free.

My point, besides trying to get you to examine your preconceived ideas, is that all people behave like the rich and powerful when their way of life is threatened. It's just easier to notice in those we view as more privileged than us. Look at the insanity of the last two years and tell me I'm wrong.



In those days, one's wealth and position were far more precarious than it is for us now. That's not to say that any one of us couldn't lose everything we have in an instant, it's just that we have laws and other mediating

factors to limit such calamities. They didn't. There were constant power struggles, back-door deals, and every form of corruption imaginable.

They were all, from the emperor himself, to the Governor, to the High Priest, to the orderly tending to courtyard lights, paranoid people, and believe me, they were paranoid for a reason. Tiberius was almost certainly murdered by his successor Caligula; Pilate was recalled in disgrace to report to Caligula about his failure – I'm sure than worked out just fine. Caiaphas was fired as High Priest in 36 A.D., and I don't know about the light boy. Maybe he lived long enough to see his nation, his city and his Temple laid waste.

Paranoid?

All of that to say that the Jewish power-elites would not allow threats to their lifestyle – Jesus was a massive threat.

Now, before I go on, recognize that people reject Jesus today for the same reason. Jesus poses a major threat to a person's lifestyle. Let's take it a step further, Christians refuse to fully follow, and to be completely available, to Christ because He is a threat to their...



What was occupying the attention of the Sanhedrin was getting rid of Jesus before it was too late and now they were faced with another major religious festival. Passover complicated things for them. On the one hand it might provide them with an opportunity to locate Jesus, but on the other, it was the festival that had the greatest potential to explode into open rebellion against their oppressor Rome. Remember, it was literally a celebration of God delivering their ancestors from their oppressor Egypt.

The leaders needed the festival to go smoothly because the one thing that they could not afford was to lose control of the reasonably efficient operation of

Temple worship, of city commerce, and of the national status quo with Rome. It was necessary to handle the Jesus problem quickly and carefully, but also quietly if possible. The last thing they needed was for Jesus to make a grand entrance during the Passover.

Verse 55 gives us a timestamp. It was actually close to this time of year, just before April, traditionally in the year 33 A.D. That's basically, 1,990 years ago. Jewish people from all over the region, from as far away as modern-day Spain, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Italy, were travelling to Jerusalem, to attend the all-important Passover Festival.



The city was filling up with pilgrims arriving early to go through various legalistic rituals to purify themselves so that they could fully participate. The Jewish people of the time were always looking for the Messiah, but never more so than during the Passover. Jesus was the best candidate for the position that year and so the people were all buzzing about Him and eagerly hoping to see Him.

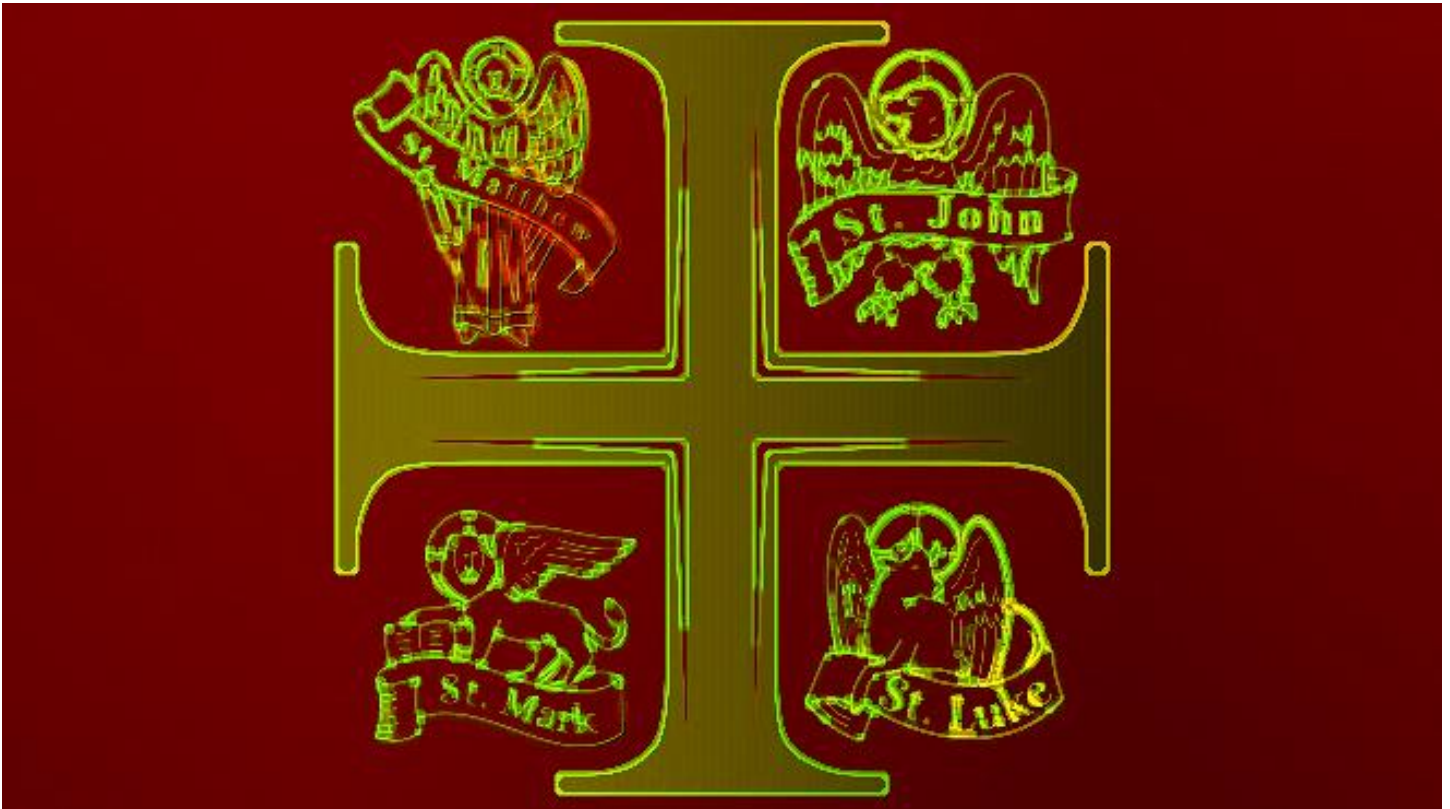
They were hearing stories about His ministry, I'm sure far more interesting to them was His miracles, than His teaching, but none so compelling as the raising of Lazarus four days dead. They were also well aware of the total rejection of Jesus by their religious leaders and their nefarious desire to arrest Jesus on sight.

Would Jesus show up? That's what everyone wanted to know.



John 12:1-8, 1Therefore, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2So they made Him a dinner there, and Martha was serving; and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. 3Mary then took a pound of very expensive 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. 4But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, the one who intended to betray Him, said, 5“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the proceeds given to poor people?” 6Now he said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he

kept the money box, he used to steal from what was put into it. 7Therefore Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. 8For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.”



The anointing of Jesus is recorded in all four Gospels, which is a rarity, and therefore, significant. Unlike the other incidents shared by all four, this one is quite different in each telling. So much so, that many people see two or three separate events. That’s unlikely for several reasons, not the least of which is that each author, inspired by the Holy Spirit, used historical events to teach theological insights. None of them were writing a biography or an historical accounting.

I often use actual incidents from my life to make theological points. In the past, I have taken a single incident and used it many different times to make many different points. My telling of it, while still giving you accurate information, is selective. So much so that you may not realize that it was the same incident at all. I tell the parts relevant to my point and leave out what is unnecessary and especially what would be distracting. It doesn't make the telling false, it makes it incomplete.

You might say a failure to tell the whole truth makes it false, but in reality, every time you, or anyone else, tells a story it is selective and therefore incomplete. Only the worst storyteller in the world would attempt to tell every detail – who would sit through such a slog? We constantly edit ourselves and tell the parts necessary to carry the story forward.

Four different authors using the same event to make four different points. Yeah, there will be some significant things left out of all four, but not the same significant things.

My plan is to camp out here comparing the accounts next week, which will set us up nicely for verses 12 and beyond for Palm Sunday the week after next.

Another reason to camp here for a bit and another reason why I think all four Gospels are telling the same basic story is what Jesus said in both Matthew and Mark, “Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the entire world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her” (Mark 14:9). Seems like a written Gospel would have to contain this incident then, doesn't it?

For today, I want to just focus on John's account here before us.

We are in the final week of Jesus' mortal life. He has moved the 12 miles from the northern town of Ephraim back to the home of Lazarus in Bethany, just under 2 miles from the Temple. It is, of course, time for the Passover Festival and the city of Jerusalem would have already been bursting at the seams to accommodate up to a million excited people.

I hope to talk about the Passover along with the Triumphal Entry – so we'll save that bit for then... For

today, we see a tremendously joyous feast prepared in honor of Jesus and in celebration of Lazarus.

Martha was serving and Mary was loafing and yet, according to Jesus, “Mary has chosen what is better. And it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41).



So, here's the scenario: They were undoubtedly eating at what is called a triclinium. Tri is a borrowed word that still means three, and the “clinium” part is from κλίνη (klē-nā), meaning an inclined platform, couch, or bed.

Traditionally, there were three couches arranged in a “U” shape with a table in the center. Most triclinia held 9 to 12 people. Each person would lay down on their

left side propped up on their left elbow leaving their right hand free. It was the way the whole Roman Empire and beyond took meals.

It seems very strange and uncomfortable to us because we are businesspeople – we are incredibly pragmatic as a culture. When we eat, we mostly just eat. We either eat on the go, driving in heavy traffic at well over the speed limit, or we eat seated at a table if we have 5 minutes to spare for the task, or we eat slouching on our couch watching YouTube fails, or playing video games. When we do have guests for dinner, whether at home or at a restaurant we rarely last more than an hour.

Well, guess what? That's not how it used to be. For the whole Greco-Roman world dinner was entertainment, especially if you had guests and even more especially if they were at your place to celebrate someone or something. Dinner would begin at dusk, or even before, and last until very late at night – 5 or 6 hours was common. Think about it... What else were they going to do after dark?

They needed couches. This is where multiple courses for dinner came in, but not one right after another like

we would expect. This was a relaxed, we are here until we go to sleep, kind of thing. Once understood it helps make sense out of a lot of puzzling passages in the Bible.

Lazarus was “reclining at the table with” Jesus. Jesus had the people recline before He fed the 5,000 and the 4,000. Mary anointed Jesus’ feet. She didn’t crawl under the table, she sat on the end of the couch, or on the floor at the end of the couch that Jesus was laying on. His feet were right there.

We’ll hear about the Last Supper in the next chapter. There Peter asks John to ask Jesus who it is that will betray Him. John 13:25, “John then simply leaned back on Jesus’ chest and said to Him, ‘Lord, who is it?’” It makes more sense now.

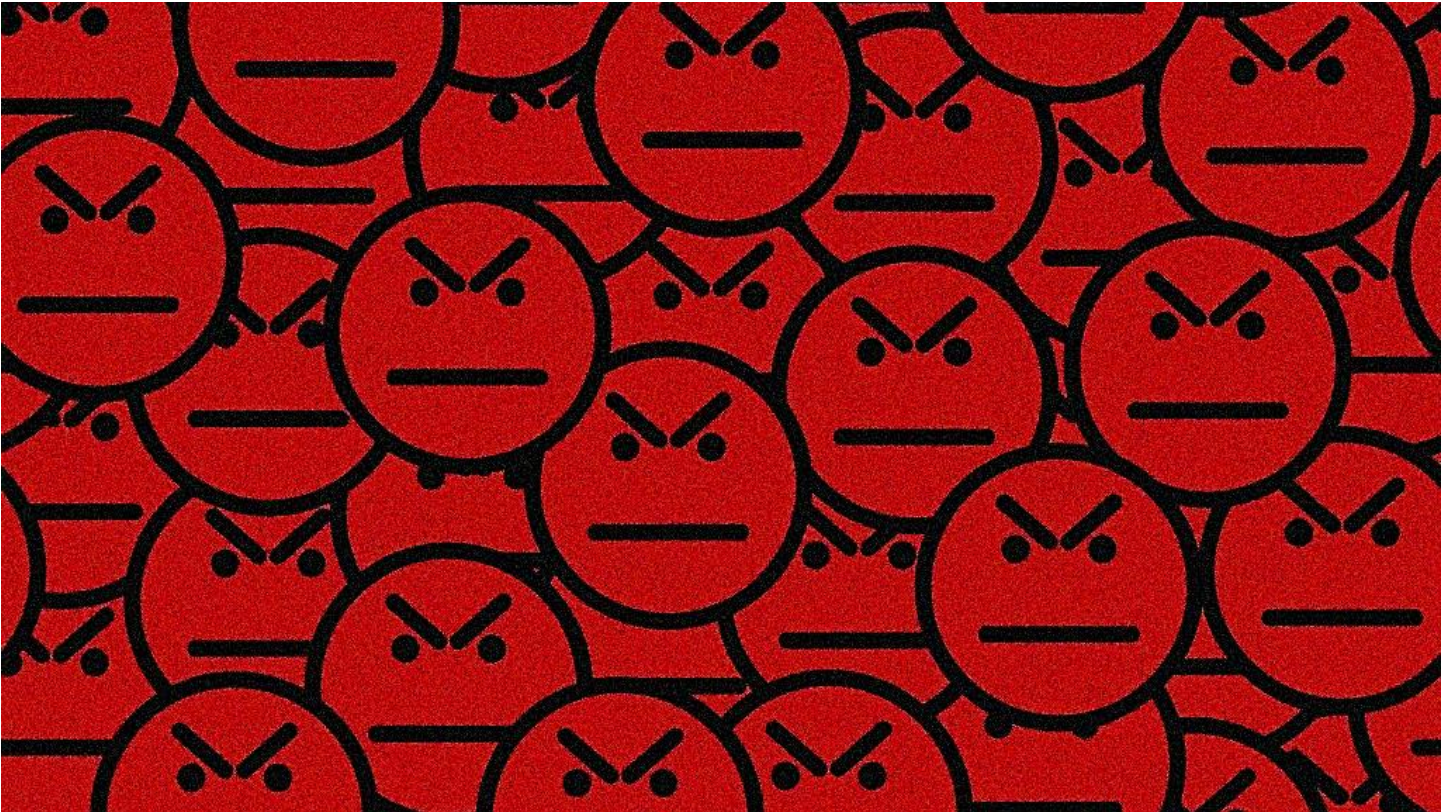
Anyway, the dinner was an extremely long and involved social event where there were a lot of different things going on. John gives us a tiny summary of one incident at the dinner. He informs us that Martha was serving. That most likely means that she was directing and supervising everything, including the seating chart, the decorations, the food selection, and preparation, and all the other details in pulling off a fine dining

experience for a large party. Martha was busy and stressed.

Lazarus would have been the host, if the dinner was at his home, but it is very possible that they were at Martha's home, and if so, then her husband would have then been the host. We'll talk about all of that next week.

If Martha's husband was hosting it would explain why John seems to indicate that both Jesus and Lazarus were honored guests.

Triclinia were typically housed within a small room. Break open a very expensive bottle of perfume and no one was smelling anything other than the overpowering aroma of the perfume for some time.



It would have completely drowned out any smell from the food, and so masked the taste as well. It wasn't like anyone could have ignored the intense odor. Instantly every eye in the room was fixed annoyingly on Mary.

You can imagine how angry Martha would have been – how irritated her husband, the host, if that was the case, would have been. How offended all the other guests felt, how shocked the serving staff would have been. There would have been immediate complaints and calls for Mary's removal.

Beyond the intrusion into their special night, there was the monumental waste!



A pound of pure nard was roughly 12 ounces of Spikenard an essential oil made from a type of Honeysuckle grown in India, Nepal, and China. It was expensive to manufacture and expensive to import it across 2,500 miles of hostile terrain. She broke the costly alabaster container and used up the entire contents.

We don't need to speculate as to its value, because we are given an estimate by Judas that it could have been "sold for three hundred denarii." A denarius was the wage for an unskilled laborer working a 12-hour shift. Nearly a year's wages for an average man living there then.

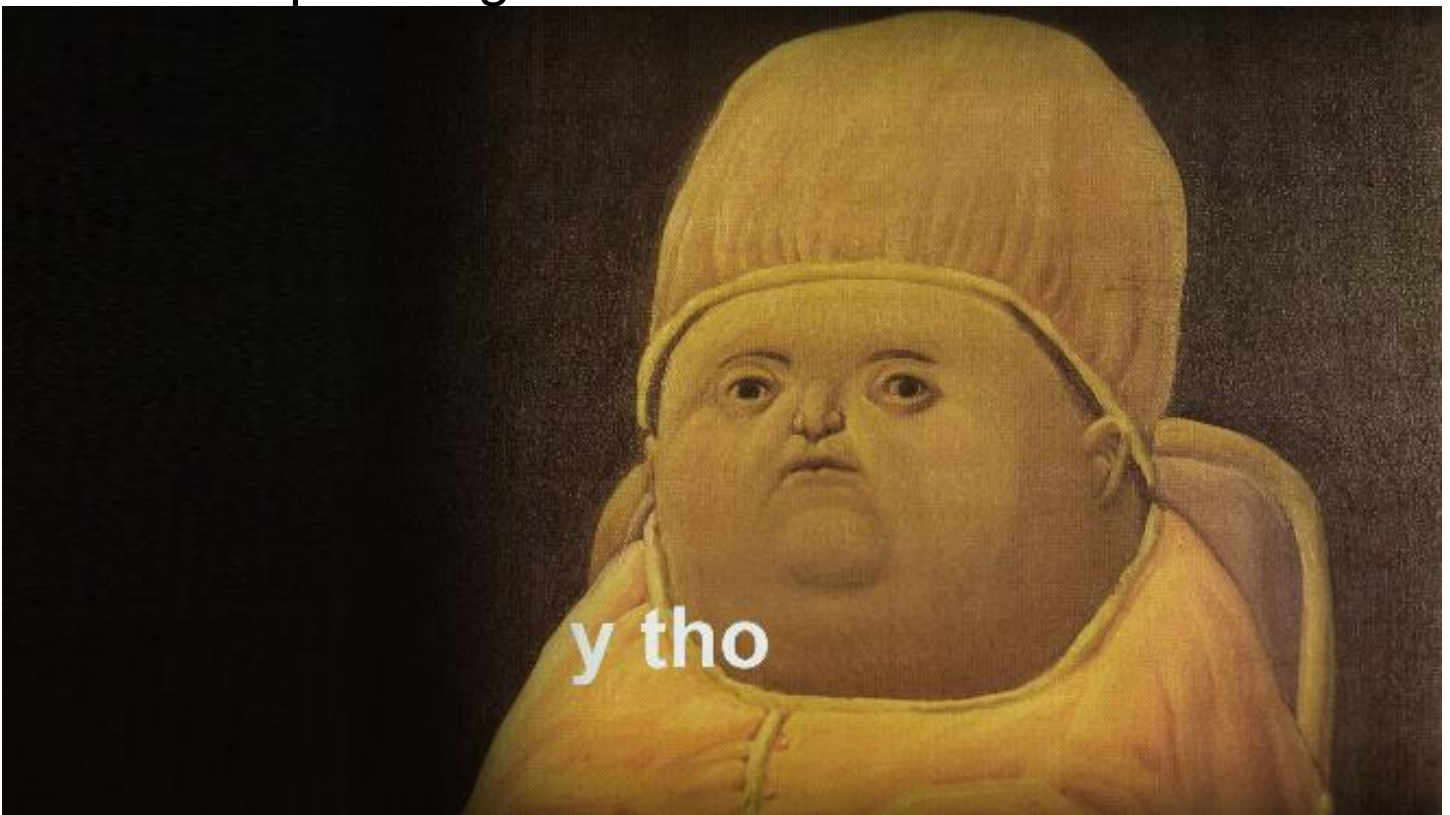


Mary likely poured a bit onto Jesus' head, but the lion's share was used to essentially wash His feet. That was a job reserved for the lowest of slaves. It was a task that some slaves refused as being too demeaning. She not only lowered herself to wash His feet, she did so with the most expensive liquid available and then she really humbled herself by drying His feet with her hair.

That is an act of abject humility and of intentionally lowering oneself in utter submission by elevating the other person to the highest possible place. She was anointing Him as her King.

Beyond that there is an absolute element of total love, entire respect, whole-hearted devotion, and complete surrender. It is an act of intense worship of Jesus publicly.

Mary did not care what anyone else thought when it came to expressing her adoration for her Lord.



Everyone else grumbled – believe me – they were all appalled. Judas Iscariot spoke up with a question focused on the monetary waste that was indignant, contemptuous, and condescending. It was basically, “What in the world? We just watched this dumb girl pour a year’s wages down the drain. And for what?”

The Apostle John gives us several narrators notes here making sure that we all understand who Judas was and the true motivation behind his protest.

Judas was one of the original 12 Apostles. His name was very common as it was the Greek form of the Hebrew name Judah. His descriptor, Iscariot, was shared by his father Simon Iscariot (John 6:71). It either has to do with the town of Kerioth, about 30 miles south of Jerusalem, or with the radical Jewish group loosely associated with the Zealots, called the σικάριος (sē-kä-řē-ős), Latin sicarii, which is translated as “Assassins,” in Acts 22:38.

I lean towards the second meaning for a lot of reasons, not least of which, is the location of the town. Kerioth was down near Beersheba in the province of Idumea, south of Judea. Judas would have been a very awkward addition to a group of guys all from northern Galilee. He would have been suspect from the beginning, but if anything, the Bible shows how utterly surprised the other Apostles were that it was Judas who betrayed Jesus. None of them had a clue!



What's far more likely is that his nickname has to do with the radical Judaism within radical Judaism. While all Zealots felt that violence was the answer, most were thinking in terms of a revolutionary war, hopefully led by a militaristic Messiah. The Sicarii believed that terrorism and assassination were required to get the ball rolling. All Zealots supported overt action to rid their land of corrupt Jewish officials and the Romans whom they served and enabled. It would be difficult to imagine a Zealot, let alone someone associated with the Sicarii making a deal with those hated officials to hand Jesus over to those hated Romans.

The reason that they were called Sicarii was due to their weapon of choice which was a dagger called a sicarius. As I said, they used assassination and other terrorist tactics in an attempt to destabilize and eventually overthrow the anti-God Roman government and the anti-God Jewish leadership in Jerusalem.

They are blamed for the revolt in 66 A.D. that brought the wrath of Nero down upon the Jews and ended Biblical Judaism. The Temple along with the Biblically required sacrifices of the Old Covenant, ceased in 70 A.D. just as Jesus predicted. 960 of them made their last stand at Masada in 73 A.D.



The scholars who favor the town connection do so mostly because they can't see Jesus having an

assassin as an Apostle. It could have been his dad who was the assassin... not necessarily Judas himself. Yet, growing up with such a person would explain Judas' radical, impatient, let's get the party started, streak that was obviously present in him.

Judas was incensed, but he was smart as well. He couched his objection in a seemingly reasonable, although clearly rhetorical, question. "Yeah, why wasn't the perfume used in a way benefiting people in real need?"

It is far more fascinating than it seems at first blush.



1) First, there is a vastly different valuation paradigm used by Mary as opposed to the one used by Judas. What Judas saw was a commodity that had monetary value. It could be traded, or bartered, or sold, for cash and then that cash could be used for other purposes, such as, feeding the poor. Mary saw the perfume as a gift to be lavished upon someone she believed more than worthy of the gesture. It along with her humble service was a public demonstration of her devotion to Jesus.

There's a fundamental difference in their economic approach. To a dog breeder, your dog might be worth a few hundred dollars, if fact, he would only see your dog as a dollar sign. I doubt that's how you'd look at it.

2) The second thing that I think we might overlook is that Judas didn't start his question with, Teacher, or Master, or Lord, he simply asked the question without address. If the question was directed at Jesus that would constitute a not so subtle, slight. If the question was thrown out to the group, that's still a slight, but more subtle.

3) Judas, in criticizing Mary, obliquely criticized Jesus. By condemning the act of Mary also condemns Jesus

for not instantly objecting and putting a stop to it. As the recipient of the gesture, Jesus became complicit in the gesture, by allowing it to continue.



Drive your own car

Jesus harshly admonished Judas by commanding him to “Leave her to it.” It’s a command that carries the sense, not only to allow someone to continue doing what they are doing, but also there is the idea that it has nothing to do with you. It’s like, “Look, this is her thing, leave her to it, you worry about you – you do you and leave her alone – mind your own business.”



Perfume:

\$12,000 per ounce

Then Jesus said something very difficult to interpret. Most people, including me, think that He was saying that Mary unknowingly had the perfume for His burial. Whether she bought it, or more likely came to possess it some other way, she had it and she would have used it on Him after His death, had she not used it on Him already. The point would be that the perfume wasn't ever going to be sold, because it was always going to be used on Jesus.

We know that she never would have had the chance to use it on Jesus after His crucifixion. He was quickly laid in a tomb because of the Great Sabbath and when the

women were finally able to tend His body, He was no longer there.



Verse 8 was so controversial to some, that it was removed from many Bibles. The social gospel, in one form or another, has always had its adherents. In the early days, almsgiving, or giving to the poor, was a vital part of Christianity and it has always been seen as the duty of the church to do what could be done for those less fortunate. This verse seemed to give ammunition to the greedy in the group who used it to justify keeping more for themselves. The thinking goes... Jesus said that you'll always have the poor, so there's not much point in helping them.

What's interesting is that far from diminishing our responsibility to the poor, Jesus' statement here affirms it. He juxtaposes Himself and the poor in a sentence construction that emphasizes the vastly superior position that He has in comparison to the poor. It is a matter of relative importance. In other words, Jesus wasn't lowering the needs of the poor – He was simply saying that devotion to Him was far more important... But why?



I'm going to try to explain this by saying that, in general, for a Christian to help the poor is a noble thing and is no different whatsoever than a Buddhist or a Muslim, or an atheist helping the poor. Many Christians do this exact thing. I served on the Board of Neighbors

in Need for two years alongside such Christians. In fact, the most dedicated volunteers belonged to liberal churches that deny the Bible and many of the fundamental tenants of Christianity. What they affirmed was that Jesus provided an example for being a good person. so please understand, they were Christians helping the homeless. If they were Christians serving Christ by helping the homeless... that would have been an entirely different thing.

It is incredibly easy for people to minister to others and while it is nice, it will never be more than nice, and may be a whole lot less. It comes with all sorts of attendant motivations, expectations, and ramifications.

Let's say that I decide to help others, my motivation may be so that I am noticed, I feel like I'm the one with the answers, to be important, to feel like I'm needed, to get approval, to have others beholding to me, to be in charge, to fill some need in me. I then expect certain things from those I help. I want their admiration, their appreciation, I want to see them change, I want to see my efforts rewarded by some measurable success. Because of my self-serving motivations and my associated expectations, the ramifications are that

those I help may actually be hurt. Then I'm going to be hurt.

Neighbors in Need recently disbanded, and it wasn't because I was no longer on the Board. It was because of volunteer burnout. Why? Because nearly all of the volunteers were people ministering to people. Most of them felt that they were unappreciated.



Now, let's look at a person fully devoted to Jesus and Jesus alone. Someone who would give Him an extravagant gift without thought to the cost or value of the gift because, to them, the Recipient was far more than worthy of it and everything else imaginable.

That person then hears Jesus ask them, could you please be my hands and feet helping those poor people over there?

Now we have Jesus, the Word of God, ministering through one of His Own, to someone else. There is literally a world of difference between the two things and that is what Jesus is trying to teach us this morning.