

The Character of Jesus 66
Feast in Bethany
(John 11:55 – 12:11, Matthew 26:6 – 13, Mark 14:3 - 9)

- Characteristic: In the moment
 - Following the John account.
 - (11:55 – 57) Most uncleanness required only to wash the clothes and be unclean until evening. But two types of uncleanness required a sacrifice: childbirth (Leviticus 12) and recovery from leprosy (Leviticus 14). So, some came before the festival to accomplish the appropriate ceremonies. These people were speculating while waiting around in the Temple. The Sanhedrin had put out an appeal for information so they could arrest Jesus, although they did not want it to happen until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matthew 26:3 – 5).
 - (12:1 – 2) Matthew and Mark add the detail that the host was Simon the Leper. We have no other details about him. We should assume that he was no longer a leper, but the name had stuck. Whether Jesus had healed him is unknown. Apparently, Simon was friends with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, since Martha helped serve.
 - (12:3) Matthew and Mark do not identify the woman with the fragrant oil. John includes that she was Mary, sister of Lazarus.
 - In the earlier story (Luke 10:38 – 42), Martha served and was frustrated because Mary sat and listened to Jesus. Their choices seem to be similar here.
 - Nard was a liquid perfume mixed with oil, imported from the Far East (Himalayan areas of Nepal, India, and China). To avoid spoilage, the containers generally were sealed. Alabaster is fine gypsum and may be worked after filling to seal the flask. Such flasks could be opened only by breaking them. Generally, such a flask of nard would be a family asset (not having banks or 401k's). Most often, they were used in burials to mask the stench of decomposition. Very wealthy people used it as a perfume.
 - Anointing the head and feet was a custom of the time.
 - As Judas will note in 12:5, it was worth more than a year's wages. Although they worked six days a week, Israelites had a lot of holidays, so they ended up with about 250 workdays per year.
 - (12:4 – 6) Judas objected to the “wastefulness.” His motives were not pure. This is the only place where his thievery is mentioned.
 - (12:6 – 7) Jesus' economic status was always low, and the group was known for giving away a lot of what was donated to them (John 13:29). But, He was not rigorous about it. Rather, He was “in the moment,” much like the other scene with Mary and Martha. Matthew and Mark add, “She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”
 - (12:9 – 11) Jesus was not the only attraction. People wanted to see the resurrected Lazarus, too. The Sanhedrin plotted to kill Lazarus, too, to put an end to this attraction to the gospel. Once dead, the leadership could publish a different narrative of the events.

- Application: In the moment
 - Not having Jesus to pamper, how might the modern church be “extravagant” in a good way?
 - When an obviously good and exciting opportunity arises, go for it. What’s the worst that can happen?
 - Do ornate buildings fall into this category?
 - Mary’s extravagance is remembered to this day. Will the same remembrance occur with “in the moment” actions in modern times?
 - Setting aside Judas’ poor motives, does the modern church ever react badly to “excess”?
 - A few church employees are overpaid. The majority are not. Where is the “yellow line”?
 - The poor are given used items and leftovers. What about new stuff?
 - Can we use our facilities more often?
 - In what ways might the modern church be more “in the moment”?
 - Be less confined by budgets that restrict spontaneity.
 - Don’t budget the last dollar or attempt to extract more contributions by overestimating revenue and underestimating expenditures.
 - “Don’t worry; be happy.”