

# Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 41

## CHRIST ANOINTED AT BETHANY

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### Transcript

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John 12:1-11

Below is an Analysis of the passage which we are about to study:— 1. Jesus at Bethany again, verse 1. 2. The supper, verse 2. 3. Mary's devotion, verse 3. 4. Judas' criticism, verses 4-6. 5. Christ's vindication of Mary, verses 7, 8. 6. The curiosity of the crowd, verse 9. 7. The enmity of the priests, verses 10, 11. What is recorded in John 12 occurred during the last week before our Lord's death. In it are gathered up what men would term the "results" of His public ministry. For three years the unvarying and manifold perfections of His blessed Person had been manifested both in public and in private. Two things are here emphasized: there was a deepening appreciation on the part of His own; but a steady hardening of unbelief and increasing hostility in His enemies. Three most striking incidents in the chapter illustrate the former: first, Christ is seen in the midst of a circle of His most intimate friends in whose love He was permanently embalmed; second, we behold how that a striking, if transient, effect, had been made on the popular mind: the multitude hailed Him as "king"; third, a hint is given of the wider influence He was yet to wield, even then at work, beyond the bounds of Judaism: illustrated by the "Greeks" coming and saying, "We would see Jesus." But on the other hand, we also behold in this same chapter the workings of that awful enmity which would not be appeased until He had been put to death. The hatred of Christ's enemies had even penetrated the inner circle of His chosen apostles, for one of them was so utterly lacking in appreciation of His person that he openly expressed his resentment against the attribute of love which Mary paid to his Master. And at the close of the first section of this chapter we are told, "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death." "In this hour there meet a ripeness of love which Jesus has won for Himself in the hearts of men, and a maturity of alienation which forebodes that His end cannot be far distant" (Dr. Dods). In a most remarkable way and in numerous details John 12 abounds in contrasts. What could be more exquisitely blessed than its opening scene: Love preparing a feast for its Beloved; Martha serving, now in His presence; Lazarus seated with perfect composure and in joyous fellowship with the One who had called him out of the grave; Mary freely pouring out her affection by anointing with costly spikenard Him at whose feet she had learned so much. And yet what can be more

solemn than the death-shades which fall across this very scene: the Lord Himself saying, "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this," so soon to be followed by those heart-moving words, "Now is my soul troubled" (John 12:27). His own death was now in full view, present, no doubt, to His heart as He had walked with Mary to the tomb of Lazarus. As we have seen in John 11, He felt deeply the groaning and travailing of that creation which once had come so fair from His own hands. It was sin which had brought in desolation and death, and soon He was to be "made sin" and endure in infinite depths of anguish the judgment of God which was due it. He was about to yield Himself up to death for the glory of God (John 12:27, 28), for only in the Cross could be laid that foundation for the accomplishment of God's eternal counsels. Christ had ever been the Object of the Father's complacency. "When he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him and I was daily his delight" (Prov. 8:29, 30). So too at the beginning of His public ministry, the Father had declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). But now He was about to give the Father new ground for delight: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:17). Here then was the deepest character of His glory, and the Father saw to it that a fitting testimony should be borne to this very fact. His grace prepared one to enter, in some measure at least, into what was on the eve of transpiring. Mary's heart anticipated what lay deepest in His, even before it found expression in words (John 13:31). She not only knew that He would die, but she apprehended the infinite preciousness and value of that death. And how more fittingly could she have expressed this than by anointing His body "to the burying" (Mark 14:8)! The link between John 11 and 12 is very precious. There we have, in figure, one of God's elect passing from death unto life; here we are shown that into which the new birth introduces us: Lazarus sitting at meat with the Lord Jesus. "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who some times were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). This is the marvel of grace. Redemption brings the sinner into the presence of the Lord, not as a trembling culprit, but as one who is at perfect ease in that Presence, yea, as a joyful worshipper. It is this which Lazarus sitting at "the table" with Christ so sweetly speaks of. And yet the opening scene of John 12 looks forward to that which is still more blessed. The opening verses of John 12 give us the sequel to what is central in the preceding chapter. Here we are upon resurrection ground. That which is foreshadowed in this happy gathering at Bethany is what awaits believers in the Glory. It is that which shall follow the complete manifestation of Christ as the resurrection and the life. Three aspects of our glorified state and our future activities in Heaven are here made known. First, in Lazarus seated at the table with Christ we learn of both our future position and portion. To be where Christ is, will be the place we shall occupy: "That where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). To share with Christ His inherited reward will be our portion. And how blessedly this comes out here: "They made him a supper... Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him." This will find its realization when Christ shall say, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22)! "And Martha served." As to our future occupation in the endless ages yet to come Scripture says very little, yet this we do know, "his servants shall serve him" (Rev. 22:4). Finally, in Mary's loving devotion, we behold the unstinted worship which we shall then render unto Him who sought and bought and brought us to Himself. "Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead" (John 12:1). This verse has long presented a difficulty to the commentators. A few have demurred, but by far the greater number in each age have considered that Matthew (Matthew 26) and Mark (Mark 14) record the same incident that is found in John 12. But both Matthew and Mark introduce the anointing at Bethany by a brief mention of that which occurred only "two days" before the passover; whereas John tells us it transpired "six days" before the passover (see Matthew 26:2; Mark 14:1; John 12:1). But the difficulty is self created, and there is no need whatever to imagine, as a few have done, that Christ was anointed twice at Bethany, with costly ointment, by a

different woman during His last week. The fact is, that, excepting the order of events, there is nothing whatever in the Synoptists which in any wise conflicts with what John tells us. How could there be when the Holy Spirit inspired every word in each narrative? Both Matthew and Mark begin by telling us of the decision of the Sanhedrin to have Christ put to death, and then follows the account of His anointing at Bethany. But it is to be carefully noted that after recording the decision of the Council "two days" before the passover, Matthew does not use his characteristic term and say "Then when Jesus was in Bethany, he was anointed"; nor does Mark employ his customary word and say, "And immediately" or "straightway Jesus was anointed." But how are we to explain Matthew's and Mark's description of the "anointing" out of its chronological order? We believe the answer is as follows: The conspiracy of Israel's leaders to seize the Lord Jesus is followed by a retrospective glance at the "anointing" because what happened at Bethany provided them with an instrument which thus enabled them to carry out their vile desires. The plot of the priests was successful through the instrumentality of Judas, and that which followed Mary's expression of love shows us what immediately occasioned the treachery of the betrayer. Judas protested against Mary's extravagance, and the Lord rebuked him, and it was immediately afterward that the traitor went and made his awful pact with the priests. Both Matthew and Mark are very definite on this point. The one tells us that immediately following the Lord's reply "Then one of the twelve called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests" (Matthew 26:14); Mark linking together without a break, the rebuke of Christ and the betrayer's act by the word "and" (Mark 14:10). John mentions the "supper" at Bethany in its historical order, Matthew and Mark treat of the events rising out of the supper, bringing it in to show us that the rebuke of Christ rankled in the mind of Judas and caused him to go at once and bargain with the priests. But how are we to explain the discrepancies in the different accounts? We answer, There are none. Variations there are, but nothing is inconsistent. The one supplements the other, not contradicts. When John describes any event recorded in the Synoptists, he rarely repeats all the circumstances and details specified by his predecessors, rather does he dwell upon other features not mentioned by them. Much has been made of the fact that both Matthew and Mark tell us that the anointing took place in the house of Simon the leper, whereas John is silent on the point. To this it is sufficient to reply, the fact that the supper was in Simon's house explains why Jesus tells us Lazarus "sat at the table with him": if the supper had been in Lazarus' house, such a notice would have been superfluous. Admire then the silent harmony of the Gospel narratives.[1] "Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany" (John 12:1). The R.V. more correctly renders this, "Jesus therefore six days before the passover came to Bethany." But what is the force of the "therefore"? with what in the context is it connected? We believe the answer is found in John 11:51: Caiaphas "prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation" etc.—"Jesus therefore six days before the passover came to Bethany." He was the true paschal Lamb that was to be sacrificed for His people, therefore did He come to Bethany, which was within easy walking distance of Jerusalem, where He was to be slain. It is very striking to note that the very ones who thirsted so greedily for His blood said, "Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people" (Matthew 26:5—repeated by Mark 14:2). But God's counsels could not be thwarted, and at the very hour the lambs were being slain, the true passover was sacrificed. But why "six days before the passover"? Perhaps God designed that in this interval man should fully show forth what he was. "Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany." The memories of Bethany cannot fail to touch a chord in the heart of any one who loves the Lord Jesus. His blood-bought people delight to dwell upon anything which is associated with His blessed name. But what makes Bethany so attractive is that He seemed to find in the little company there a resting-place in His toilsome path. It is blessed to know that there was one oasis in the desert, one little spot where He who "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself" could retire from the hatred and antagonism of His enemies. There was one sheltered nook where He could find those who, although they knew but little, were truly

attracted to Him. It was to this "Elim" in the wilderness (Ex. 15:27) that the Savior now turned on His last journey to Jerusalem. "Where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead." This is very blessed as an introduction to what follows. The Lord Jesus interpreted the devotion of Mary as "against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (John 12:7). The Father ordered it that His beloved Son should be "anointed" here in this home at Bethany in the presence of Lazarus whom Christ had raised from the dead: it attested the power of His own resurrection! "There they made him a supper" (John 12:2). This evening meal took place not at the home of Martha, but, as we learn from the other Evangelists, in the house of Simon, who also dwelt at Bethany. He is called "the leper" (as Matthew is still named the "tax-gatherer" after Christ had called him) in remembrance of that fearful disease from which the Lord, most probably, had healed him. It is quite likely that he was a relative or an intimate friend of Martha and Mary, for the elder sister is here seen ministering to his guests as her own, superintending the entertainment, doing the honors, for so the original word may here imply—compare the conduct of the mother of Jesus at the marriage in Cana: John 2. It is blessed to observe that this "supper" was made for Christ, not in honor of Lazarus! "There they made him a supper." Note the use of the plural pronoun. Though this supper was held in the house of "Simon the leper" it is evident that Martha and Mary had no small part in the arranging of it. This, together with the whole context, leads us to the conclusion that a feast was here made as an expression of deep gratitude and praise for the raising of Lazarus. Christ was there to share their happiness. In the previous chapter we have seen Him weeping with those who wept, here we behold Him rejoicing with those who rejoice! When He restored to life the daughter of Jairus, He gave the child to her parents and then withdrew. When He raised the widow's son at Nain, He restored him to his mother and then retired. And why? because so far as the record informs us He was a stranger to them. But here, after He had raised Lazarus, He returned to Bethany and partook of their loving hospitality. It was His joy to behold their joy, and share in the delight which His restoration of the link which death had severed, had naturally produced. That is His "recompense": to rejoice in the joy of His people. Mark another contrast: when He raised Jairus' daughter He said "Give her to eat"; here after the raising of Lazarus, they gave Him to eat! "There they made him a supper." This points another of the numerous contrasts in which our passage abounds. Almost at the very beginning of His ministry, just before He performed His first public "sign," we see the Lord Jesus invited to a marriage-feast; here, almost at the very close of His public ministry, just after His last public "sign," a supper is made for Him. But how marked the antithesis! At Cana He turned the water into wine—emblem of the joy of life; here at Bethany He is anointed in view of His own burial! "And Martha served." This is most blessed. This was her characteristic method of showing her affection. On a former occasion the Lord had gently reproved her for being "cumbered with much serving," and because she was anxious and troubled about many things. But she did not peevishly leave off serving altogether. No; she still served: served not the less attentively, but more wisely. Love is unselfish. We are not to feast on our own blessings in the midst of a groaning creation, rather are we to be channels of blessing to those around: John 7:38, 39. But mark here that Martha's service is connected with the Lord: "They made him a supper and Martha served." This alone is true service. We must not seek to imitate others, still less, work for the sake of building up a reputation for zeal. It must be done to and for Christ: "Always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). "And Martha served": no longer outside the presence of Christ, as on a former occasion—note her "serve alone" in Luke 10:40. "In Martha's 'serving' now we do not find her being 'cumbered', but something that is acceptable, as in the joy of resurrection, the new life, unto Him who has given it. Service is in its true place when we have first received all from Him, and the joy of it as begotten by Himself sweetly ministers to Him" (Malachi Taylor). "But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him" (John 12:2). This illustrated the true Christian position. Lazarus had been dead, but now alive from the dead, he is seated in

the company of the Savior. So it is (positionally) with the believer: "when we are dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ... And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:5, 6). We have been "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). Such is our perfect standing before God, and there can be no lasting peace of heart until it be apprehended by faith. "But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him." This supplies more than a vague hint of our condition in the resurrected state. In this age of rationalism the vaguest views are entertained on this subject. Many seem to imagine that Christians will be little better than disembodied ghosts throughout eternity. Much is made of the fact that Scripture tells us "flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God," and the expression "spiritual body" is regarded as little more than a phantasm. While no doubt the Scriptures leave much unsaid on the subject, yet they reveal not a little about the nature of our future bodies. The body of the saint will be "fashioned like unto" the glorious body of the resurrected Christ (Phil. 3:21). It will therefore be a glorified body, yet not a non-material one. There was no blood in Christ's body after He rose from the dead, but He had "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39). True, our bodies will not be subject to their present limitations: sown in weakness, they shall be "raised in power." A "spiritual body" we understand (in part) to signify a body controlled by the spirit—the highest part of our beings. In our glorified bodies we shall eat. The daughter of Jairus needed food after she was restored to life. Lazarus is here seen at the table. The Lord Jesus ate food after He had risen from the dead. "But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him." "A happy company it must have been. For if Simon was healed by the Lord at some previous time, as has been supposed, full to overflowing must his heart have been for the mercy vouchsafed. And Lazarus, there raised from the dead, what proofs were two of that company of the Lord's power and goodness! God only could heal the leper; God only could raise the dead. A leper healed, a dead man raised, and the Son of God who had healed the one, and had raised the other, here also at the table—never before we may say without fear of contradiction had a supper taken place under such circumstances" (C. E. Stuart). "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus" (John 12:3). Mary had often heard the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth: the Lord of glory had sat at their humble board in Bethany, and she had sat at His feet to be instructed. In the hour of her deep sorrow He had wept with her, and then had He delivered her brother from the dead, crowning them with lovingkindness and tender mercy. And how could she show some token of her love to Him who had first loved her? She had by her a cruse of precious ointment, too costly for her own use, but not too costly for Him. She took and broke it and poured it on Him as a testimony of her deep affection, her unutterable attachment, her worshipful devotion. We learn from John 12:5 that the value of her ointment was the equivalent of a whole year's wages of a laboring man (cf. Matthew 20:2)! And let it be carefully noted, this devotion of Mary was prompted by no sudden impulse: "against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (John 12:7)—the word means "diligently preserved," used in John 17:12, 15! "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus." Mary's act occupies the central place in this happy scene. The ointment was "very costly," but not too costly to lavish upon the Son of God. Not only did Mary here express her own love, but she bore witness to the inestimable value of the person of Christ. She entered into what was about to be done to and by Him: she anointed Him for burial. He was despised and rejected of men, and they were about to put Him to a most ignominious death. But before any enemy's hand is laid upon Him, love's hands first anoint Him! Thus another striking and beautiful contrast is here suggested. "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus." Mark tells us she "broke the box" before she poured it on the Savior. This, in figure, spoke of the breaking of His body, of which the broken bread in the Lord's Supper is the lasting memorial. Both Matthew and Mark tell us that she anointed the head of Christ. This is no discrepancy. Evidently, Mary anointed both His head

and feet, but most appropriately was John led to notice only the latter, for as the Son of God it was fitting that this disciple should take her place in the dust before Him! "And wiped his feet with her hair" (John 12:3). How the Holy Spirit delights in recording that which is done out of love to and for the glory of Christ! How many little details has He preserved for us in connection with Mary's devotion. He has told us of the kind of ointment it was, the box in which it was contained, the weight of it, and its value; and now He tells us something which brings out, most blessedly, Mary's discernment of the glory of Christ. She recognized something of what was due Him, therefore after anointing Him she wiped His feet with her "hair"—her "glory" (1 Cor. 11:15)! Her silent act spread around the savor of Christ as One infinitely precious. Before the treachery of Judas, Christ receives the testimony of Mary's affection. It was the Father putting this seal of deepest devotion upon the One who was about to be betrayed. "And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment" (John 12:3). This is most significant, a detail not supplied in the Synoptics, but most appropriate here. Matthew and Mark tell us how Christ gave orders that "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:9). This John omits. In its place he tells us, "And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." In the other Gospels the "memorial" goes forth: here the fragrance of Christ's person abides in "the house." There is much suggested here: not simply the "room" but "the house" was filled with the sweet fragrance of the person of Christ anointed by the spikenard. Sooner or later, all would know what had been done to the Lord. The people on the housetop would perceive that something sweet had been offered below. And do not the angels above know what we below are now rendering unto Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:10, etc.)! "Mary came not to hear a sermon, although the first of Teachers was there; to sit at His feet and hear His word, was not now her purpose, blessed as that was in its proper place. She came not to make known her requests to Him. Time was when in deepest submission to His will she had fallen at His feet, saying, 'Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died'; but to pour out her supplications to Him as her only resource was not now her thought, for her brother was seated at the table. She came not to meet the saints, though precious saints were there, for it says 'Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus.' Fellowship with them was blessed likewise and doubtless of frequent occurrence; but fellowship was not her object now. She came not after the weariness and toil of a week's battling with the world, to be refreshed from Him, though surely she, like every saint, had learned the trials of the wilderness; and none more than she, probably, knew the blessed springs of refreshment that were in Him. But she came, and that too at the moment when the world was expressing its deepest hatred of Him, to pour out what she had long treasured up (John 12:7), that which was most valuable to her, all she had upon earth, upon the person of the One who had made her heart captive, and absorbed her affections. She thought not of Simon the leper—she passed the disciples by—her brother and her sister in the flesh and in the Lord engaged not her attention then—'Jesus only' filled her soul—her eyes were upon Him. Adoration, homage, worship, blessing, was her one thought, and that in honor of the One who was 'all in all' to her, and surely such worship was most refreshing to Him" (Simple Testimony). "Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" (John 12:4, 5). What a contrast was this from the affectionate homage of Mary! But how could he who had no heart for Christ appreciate her devotion! There is a most striking series of contrasts here between these two characters. She gave freely what was worth three hundred pence; right afterwards Judas sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver. She was in a "Simon's" house; He was a "Simon's son." Her "box" (Mark 14:3); his "bag" (John 12:6). She a worshipper; he a thief. Mary drew the attention of all to the Lord; Judas would turn away the thoughts of all from Christ to "the poor." At the very time Satan was goading on the heart of Judas to do the worst against Christ, the Holy Spirit mightily moved the heart of Mary to pour out her love for Him. Mary's devotion has given her a

place in the hearts of all who have received the Gospel; Judas by his act of perfidy went to "his own place"—the Pit! Everything is traced to its source in this Gospel. Matthew 26:8 tells us that "When his disciples saw it [Mary's tribute of love], they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?" But John shows us who was the one that had injected the poison into their minds. Judas was the original protester, and his evil example affected the other apostles. What a solemn case is this of evil communications corrupting good manners (1 Cor. 15:33)! Everything comes out into the light here. Just as John is the only one who gives us the name of the woman who anointed the Lord, so he alone tells us who it was that started the criticizing of Mary. In John 12:3 we have witnessed the devotedness of faith and love never surpassed in a believer. But behind the rosebush lurked the serpent. It reminds us very much of Psalm 23:5: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil!" The murmuring of Judas right after the worship of Mary is most solemnly significant. True valuation of Christ always brings out the hatred of those who are of Satan. No sooner was He worshiped as an infant by the wise men from the East, then Herod sought to slay Him. Immediately after the Father proclaimed Him as His "beloved Son," the Devil assailed Him for forty days. The apostles were seized and thrown into prison because the leaders of Israel were incensed that they "taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2, 3). So in a coming day many will be beheaded "for the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 20:4). "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" (John 12:5). This was the criticism of a covetous soul. How petty his range of vision! How sordid his conception! He argued that the precious unguent which had been lavished upon Christ ought to have been sold. He considered it had been wasted (Mark 14:4). His notion of "waste" was crude and material in the extreme. Love is never "wasted." Generosity is never "wasted." Sacrifice is never "wasted." Love grudges nothing to the Lord of love! Love esteems its costliest nard all inferior to His worth. Love cannot give Him too much. And where it is given out of love to Christ we cannot give too much for His servants and His people. How beautifully this is expressed in Philippians 4:18: "having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smelt, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." Judas had no love for Christ, hence it was impossible that he should appreciate what had been done for Him. Very solemn is this: he had been in the closest contact with the redeemed for three years, and yet the love of money still ruled his heart. Cold-heartedness toward Christ and stinginess toward His cause always go together. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:47). There are many professing Christians today infested with a Judas-like spirit. They are quite unable to understand true zeal and devotedness to the Lord. They look upon it all as fanaticism. Worst of all, such people seek to cloak their miserliness in giving to Christian objects by a pretended love for the poor: 'charity begins at home' expresses the same spirit. The truth is, and it had been abundantly demonstrated all through these centuries, that those who do the most for the poor are the very ones who are most liberal in supporting the cause of Christ. Let not Christians be moved from a patient continuance in well doing by harsh criticisms from those who understand not. We must not expect professors to do anything for Christ when they have no sense of indebtedness to Christ. "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?" These are the first words of Judas recorded in the Gospels; and how they reveal his heart! He sought to conceal his base covetousness under the guise of benevolence. He posed as a friend of the poor, when in reality his soul was dominated by cupidity. It reminds us of his hypocritical "kiss." It is solemn to contrast his last words, "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4). "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:6). It is good to care for the root, but at that moment the whole mind of God was centered on the Person and work of His Son, evidenced by His moving Mary to anoint the Savior for His burial. Opportunities for relieving the poor they always had, and it was right to do so. But to put them in

comparison with the Lord Jesus at such a time, was to put them out of their place, and to lose sight of Him who was supremely precious to God. Judas evidently acted as treasurer for the apostolic company (cf. John 13:29), having charge of the gifts which the Lord and His disciples received: Luke 8:2, 3. But the Holy Spirit here tells us that he was a "thief." We believe this intimates that the "field" (or "estate") which he purchased (Acts 1:18) "with the reward of iniquity" (or, "price of wrong doing") had been obtained by the money which he pilfered from the same "bag." Usually this "field" is confounded with the "field" that was bought with the thirty pieces of silver which he received for the betrayal of His Master. But that money he returned to the chief priests and elders (Matthew 27:3, 5), and with it they bought "the potter's field to bury strangers in" (Matthew 27:7). "Then said Jesus, Let her alone" (John 12:7). How blessed! Christ is ever ready to defend His own! It was the Good Shepherd protecting His sheep from the wolf. Judas condemned Mary, and others of the apostles echoed his criticism. But the Lord approved of her gift. Probably others of the guests misunderstood her action: it would seem an extravagance, and a neglect of duty towards the needy. But Christ knew her motive and commended her deed. So in a coming day He will reward even a cup of water which has been given in His name. "Let her alone": did not this foreshadow His work on high as our Advocate repelling the attacks of the enemy, who accuses the brethren before God day and night (Rev. 12:10)! "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (John 12:7). This points still another contrast. Other women "brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him" (Mark 16:1), after He was dead; Mary anointed Him "for his burial" (Matthew 26:12) six days before He died! Her faith had laid hold of the fact that He was going to die—the apostles did not believe this (see Luke 24:21 etc.). She had learned much at His feet! How much we miss through our failure at this point! Matthew and Mark add a word here which is appropriately omitted by John. "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:9). He whose Name is "as ointment poured forth" (Song 1:3), commended her who, all unconsciously, fulfilled the prophecy, "While the king sitteth at his table my spikenard sendeth forth the sweet smell thereof" (Song 1:12). In embalming Him, she embalmed herself: her love being the marble on which her name and deed were sculptured. Note another contrast: Mary gave Christ a momentary embalming; He embalmed her memory forever in the sweet incense of His praise. What a witness is this that Christ will never forget that deed, however small, which is done wholeheartedly in His name and for Himself! "Hereupon we would further remark that while this can not diminish the sin of Judas, by making his covetousness any thing but covetousness, yet but for his mean remonstrance, we might not have known the prodigality of her love. But for the objection of Judas, we might not have had the commendation of Mary. But for his evil eye, we should have been without the full instruction of her lavish hand. Surely 'The wrath of man shall praise thee!'" (Dr. John Brown). "For the poor always ye have with you: but me ye have not always" (verse 8). There is a little point here in the Greek which is most significant, bringing out, as it does, the minute accuracy of Scripture. In the previous verse "Let alone (aphes) her" is in the singular number, whereas, "The poor always ye have (exete) with you" is in the plural number. Let her alone was Christ's rebuke to Judas, who was the first to condemn Mary; here in verse 8 the Lord addresses Himself to the Twelve, a number of whom had been influenced by the traitor's words. Remarkably does this show the entire consistency and supplementary character of the several narratives of this incident. Let us admire the silent harmonies of Scripture! "For the poor always ye have with you: but me ye have not always" (John 12:8). There is a very searching message for our hearts in these words. Mary had fellowship with His sufferings, and her opportunity for this was brief and soon passed. If Mary had failed to seize her chance to render love's adoring testimony to the preciousness of Christ's person at that time, she could never have recalled it throughout eternity. How exquisitely suited to the moment was her witness to the fragrance of Christ's death before God, when men deemed Him worthy

only of a malefactor's cross. She came beforehand to anoint Him "for his burial." But how soon would such an opportunity pass! In like manner we are privileged today to render a testimony to Him in this scene of His rejection. We too are permitted to have fellowship with His sufferings. But soon this opportunity will pass from us forever! There is a real sense in which these words of Christ to Mary, "me ye have not always" apply to us. Soon shall we enter into the fellowship of His glory. O that we may be constrained by His love to deeper devotedness, a more faithful testimony to His infinite worth, and a fuller entering into His sufferings in the present hour of His rejection by the world. "For the poor always ye have with you: but me ye have not always." One other thought on this verse before we leave it. These words of our Lord's "me ye have not always" completely overthrow the Papist figment of transubstantiation. If language means anything, this explicit statement of Christ's positively repudiates the dogma of His "real presence," under the forms of bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. It is impossible to harmonize that blasphemous Romish doctrine with this clear-cut utterance of the Savior. The "poor always ye have with you" in like manner disposes of an idle dream of Socialism. "Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there; and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead" (John 12:9). "This sentence is a genuine exhibition of human nature. Curiosity is one of the most common and powerful motives in man. The love of seeing something sensational and out of the ordinary is almost universal. When people could see at once both the subject of the miracle and Him that worked the miracle we need not wonder that they resorted in crowds to Bethany" (Bishop Ryle). "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus" (John 12:10, 11). "Lazarus is mentioned throughout this incident as forming an element in the unfolding of the hatred of the Jews which issued in the Lord's death: notice the climax, from the mere connecting mention in verse 1, then nearer connection in verse 2,—to his being the cause of the Jews flocking to Bethany in verse 9,—and the joint object with Jesus of the enmity of the chief priests in verse 10" (Alford). Mark it was not the Pharisees but the "chief priests," who were Sadducees, (cf. Acts 5:17), that "consulted that they might also put Lazarus to death": They would, if possible, kill him, because he was a striking witness against them, denying as they did the truth of resurrection. But how fearful the state of their hearts: they had rather commit murder than acknowledge they were wrong. Let the thoughtful student ponder carefully the following questions: — 1. What does verse 13 teach us about prophecy? 2. Why a "young ass," verse 14? 3. Verse 15 (cf. Zechariah 9:9); why are some of its words omitted here? 4. In what sense did Christ then "come" as King, verse 15? 5. Why did not the disciples "understand," verse 16? 6. Why does verse 17 come in just here? ENDNOTES:

[1] Other points which have occasioned difficulty to some will be dealt with in the course of this exposition.

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