

Foreshadow

John 12:3-8

Pierre Cannings, Ph.D

I. Present Insight

- a. Very Costly
 - i. Perfume
 - 1. Such a flask normally had a long thin neck which would be broken (cf. Mark 14:3) in use, and the contents could then be poured out.
 - 2. “having an alabaster cruse or flask of ointment,” and then goes on to tell that she broke the flask and poured the contents on the head of Jesus. To anoint the head of a guest (cf. Ps. 23:5) was an act of Eastern courtesy and respect, but Jn. treats the incident differently, and tells that Mary anointed Jesus’ *feet*
 - ii. Pure Nard
 - 1. This nard **an aromatic oil** probably extracted from the root (and “spike”) of the Indian nard plant
- b. Anointed Feet
 - i. Anointed
 - 1. anointing is a mark of honor shown to a guest, as in Judaism. In the first of the instances quoted it is also a prophetic action in the Gospels. By anointing the head (v. 7) of Jesus the woman has honored Him in a deeper sense, anointing His body (v. 12) for burying. This anointing is a proleptic anointing of the Crucified in death. Reference is made to the anointing of the body in Mk. 16:1.
 - ii. Wiped with Hair
 - iii. Feet
 - 1. touching the feet of someone was regarded by Jews as a very degrading experience and was normally reserved for slaves and others to whom little “honor” was due. The fact that Mary was willing to do this act at a meal in the presence of others communicates volumes about her elevated regard for Jesus. It might also be argued by some that it indicates a lack of self-worth on her part. But such a theory would seem to fit the Lukan story of the sinful woman more than Mary of Bethany because in Luke the woman was seemingly unburdening herself; she not only anointed the feet of Jesus but also tenderly kissed his feet and dampened them with her tears (cf. Luke 7:38, 44–48). In the

Johannine story, however, there is no such indication of sinfulness, remorse, or kissing and sobbing over his feet. The story is focused on a proclamation of his death and burial (John 12:7).

2. been directed to the fact that a perfumed anointing of *feet* (as distinct from the washing of them, of which there is no mention here) is a custom not mentioned in Scripture elsewhere than here and Lk. 7:38. It is further to be observed that for a woman to have her hair unbound was counted immodest by the Jews, and that Mary should unloose her hair at an entertainment where men were present requires some special explanation. A towel would be readily accessible (cf. 13:5) whether this supper was in the house of Martha and Mary, or not; and it would be more seemly and convenient to use it.
3. That Mary anointed the *feet* of Jesus, not his head, will have been interpreted by the Evangelist as a consecration of Jesus to royal service, i.e., to a death by which the saving sovereignty comes

c. House filled with fragrance

II. Present Problem Future Consequence

a. Disciple

1. Yet, unlike John, Matthew and Mark charged the disciples with condemning the woman for her wastefulness. The disciples there thought that the poor could have been the beneficiaries of such a large economic sum. In view of such a charge, Jesus rebuked them because of their misunderstanding of the good or beautiful (*kalon*) thing she had done. Typical of the Markan message, the disciples there had once again misunderstood the events in the life of Jesus. So Jesus had to enlighten them to the effect that the act was an important preparatory symbol of his forthcoming burial (cf. Mark 4:8; Matt 26:12).
2. Disciples **one who engages in learning through instruction from another, *pupil, apprentice* one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views, *disciple, adherent***. Discipleship means entering into a lifelong relationship with Jesus (cf. Mark 3:14, where the meaning of discipleship is given: "That they be with him"). This includes the participation in the uncertain life of a traveling preacher and then also in the suffering and death of the teacher (cf. Mark 10:39; 8:34). The disciple is not there merely to learn from the teacher but to share his whole life with him without reservation.

ii. Intending to betray

1. Intend- *propose, have in mind* to occur at a point of time in the future which is subsequent to another event and closely related to
2. The story in John, however, makes a slightly different point. It certainly picks up the burial symbolism (12:7), but it refocuses the picture from the misunderstanding of the disciples to Judas, who was not merely mistaken. In this story John makes it plain that Judas was not an unfortunate, misguided person. He was inherently an evil thief who had no concern for the poor (12:6). Thus John would never agree with some modern portrayals of Judas as a tragic hero who merely misunderstood Jesus. For John, Judas was a devil-man (*diabolos*; 6:70), a receiver of Satan (13:27), and the son of doom or destruction (17:12). For John, he was the unforgivable betrayer (*hōparadidous*) who stood with the enemies of Jesus (18:5; cf. *paradidonai*; 12:5). For a discussion of Iscariot, see my comments at 6:71.
3. Betray - hand him over - *hand over, turn over, give up* a person
The word occurs frequently in the passion story, being used for the betrayal of Jesus by Judas (Mk. 14:10); for His handing over to Pilate by the Sanhedrin (Mk. 15:1) and for His delivering up by Pilate to the will of the people (Lk. 23:25) or to the soldiers for execution (Mk. 15:15 and par). The frequent occurrence of the term in this context finds a parallel in the

b. Questions Money Allocation

i. Sold for 300 Denarii

1. Jn. here follows Mk., just as he does at 6:7 when he recalls 200 *denarii* as the estimated cost of bread for the multitude.
2. “300 denarii” should be reckoned in terms of a man’s wages rather than of modern currency; since a denarius was the normal pay for a day’s work, and the working week was six days, the sum represents a year’s wages for a fully employed man.
3. According to our Gospel, the role of Judas in the band of Jesus’ disciples would be likened to that of the treasurer, indeed a fraudulent treasurer who made the community money box (*glōssokomon*, NIV “money bag”) his personal estate. The value of the pure nard, therefore, did not escape his greedy interest. His estimate of its worth was three hundred denarii (12:5; Mark even suggests “more than” three hundred at 14:5), which was the equivalent of a laborer’s annual wages (calculated at six days a week less festival days). Such an amount was very significant. Indeed, it could have served as an economic security blanket or, as I have suggested below, as a woman’s dowry. Judas’s suggestion that the money should have been given to the poor is regarded by the evangelist as a mere hoax or fraud in the mouth of the deceptive thief.

- ii. Given to the poor
 - 1. According to the Synoptists (Mk. 14:4, Mt. 26:8), the uneasy feeling that the ointment was wasted was shared by several of the onlookers, but Jn. specifically mentions Judas as the one who remonstrated. Perhaps he first suggested to the others the extravagance of what had been done by Mary in purchasing exceptionally rare and costly ointment.
- c. Man in Question
 - i. Not concerned for the poor
 - 1. ***care/concern, is of interest to someone***
 - 2. The criticism that the money spent on the costly ointment might have been better spent is very natural on the lips of the disciple who, as keeper of the common purse, was responsible for the moneys spent by the Twelve, amounting in all, we may be sure, to no large sum. But Jn. roundly says that he was a thief. Judas was not above a bribe, for he took the thirty pieces of silver; but he was not therefore dishonest, although the value which he attached to money may have made ill-gotten gains a strong temptation.
 - ii. He was thief
 - 1. Thief-
 - a. Of Judas the informer is condemned as a selfish and loveless breaking of fellowship. It is to be replaced by work and service in the new disposition of love.
 - 2. Had the money box
 - a. Hence we must translate, "he was a thief, and having the money-box used to steal what was cast into it." To render ἐβάσταζεν here as if it only meant that Judas, as the treasurer, used to "carry about" what was put into it
 - b. The γλωσσόκομον or money-box of the disciples was kept by Judas (it was not necessarily carried about with him habitually: τὸ γλωσσόκομον ἔχων is the phrase), and into it well-wishers (cf. Lk. 8:3) were wont to throw (βάλλειν) small coins to provide for the needs of Jesus and His followers.
 - c. It stands for a coffer into which money is cast, at 2 Chron. 24:8, 10
 - 3. Pilfer money
 - a. **to carry someth (freq. burdensome) from a place, carry away, remove** with moral implication *take surreptitiously, pilfer, steal*
 - b. as Jn. says, he had been guilty of small peculations, for which he had full opportunity. However that may be, the bitterness of the words about Judas in this verse is easily

explained if they go back to one who was a former comrade in the inner circle of the Twelve, who had had no suspicions even at the end (see on 13:28, 29), and whose indignation, when disillusioned, was all the more severe.

III. Into the Future

a. Let Her Alone

1. Judas was not like the other disciples. In those Gospels, Jesus attempted to inform the disciples about the good or beautiful nature of the deed performed by the woman. Here in John, Judas is given the curt reply, “Leave her alone,”

ii. Keep it for His Burial

1. Some have suggested that although Mary did not realize what she had done, Jesus understood the implications. Others have posited that “keep” means “keep in mind
2. Thus, Jesus in John gives this act a theological significance far beyond the mere act itself. John recognized the great significance of this act and used this event as a hermeneutical key to introduce in this segment of his book the death of King Jesus.
3. Since Mary’s gift was of such an economic significance, sociologically Mary had depleted her potential of gaining a husband. That move is not to be understood as merely some nice act of honoring the Lord but as a tremendous demonstration of commitment to him. As a result, Jesus graciously accepted the act of dedication that many might consider both strange and wasteful.
4. The words of Jesus tell of His impending death and burial to any of the company who had sufficient insight; the rest of the spikenard will soon be needed, and will not be wasted.

b. Always have Poor but not Him

- i. There is no means of knowing whether Jesus attributed to Mary’s action more than she knew; his comment, however, in v 8 shows that he saw in her act the expression of an unwavering faith and love
- ii. In interpreting this statement concerning the continuing presence of the poor, it is not to be seen as an excuse for not helping them. But the imminent departure of Jesus (“you will not always have me”) supplies the rationale for why the special act of anointing here is fully acceptable in the overall mission of Jesus and the Johannine view of the good news. In censuring Judas (12:7), Jesus was not advocating neglect of the poor (12:8). He was highlighting the importance of the arrival of one of the most significant events in the history of the world—his departure/death.
- iii. The woman’s gift then could be regarded as an incredible expression of attachment to Jesus. Moreover, positioned where it is in John at the point

of the coming of the hour (12:23) and the declaration of Jesus' readiness for death (12:27–33), the story of the anointing becomes nothing less than an important signal for the forthcoming glorification of Jesus. Without doubt then the gift of the woman was a tremendous memorial, wonderfully preservable in the light of the forthcoming death of Jesus. It was a marvelous symbol of burial that would answer the ultimate question of life itself; just as Jesus said, seed that dies bears much fruit (12:24). It was an anointing fit for a king who came to save the world (cf. also elaborate spicing at John 19:39–41).

Word Studies

Pound of costly **a (Roman) pound** (327.45 grams) **J 12:3; 19:39** (does the quantity suggest a royal burial¹ In speaking of perfume in Jn 12:3 it may be far better to indicate quantity rather than weight, and therefore one may translate 'then Mary took a pint of perfume.' In translating λίτρα in the NT, one need not identify the pound as being 'a Roman pound.'²

Pure Nard - **an aromatic oil of the (spike)nard plant**, extracted³

Anointed feet - **to anoint by applying a liquid such as oil or perfume, anoint**⁴ anointing is a mark of honour shown to a guest, as in Judaism.² In the first of the instances quoted it is also a prophetic action in the Gospels. By anointing the head (v. 7) of Jesus the woman has honoured Him in a deeper sense, anointing His body (v. 12) for burying. This anointing is a proleptic anointing of the Crucified in death. Reference is made to the anointing of the body in Mk. 16:1.⁵

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 597.

NT New Testament

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 732.

³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 666.

⁴ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 41.

² Cf. Str.-B., I, 427 and 986.

v. verse.

v. verse.

⁵ Heinrich Schlier, "[Ἀλείφω](#)," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 230.

Wiped feet with hair -

Disciples **one who engages in learning through instruction from another, *pupil, apprentice***⁶ **one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views, *disciple, adherent***⁷ Discipleship means entering into a lifelong relationship with Jesus (cf. Mark 3:14, where the meaning of discipleship is given: “That they be with him”). This includes the participation in the uncertain life of a traveling preacher and then also in the suffering and death of the teacher (cf. Mark 10:39; 8:34). The disciple is not there merely to learn from the teacher but to share his whole life with him without reservation.

Discipleship is characterized by establishing a fundamental life relationship to the person of Jesus (and not merely to his teaching). Jesus newly qualifies the life of his disciples: They are now “wedding guests” whose time is entirely determined by the presence of the “bridegroom”; this makes it impossible for them to fast (Mark 2:18–22). Jesus gives them the freedom to let the law be for humanity (instead of humanity for the law, cf. Mark 2:23–28). The qualitative difference between master and disciple always remains preserved. It can therefore never be the goal of a disciple to become like the master. Discipleship means to live from what Jesus distributes, to realize that to which he calls. The disciple is a recipient dependent upon what Jesus embodied in his person, not merely upon what he taught.⁸

Intending - *intend, propose, have in mind*⁹ to occur at a point of time in the future which is subsequent to another event and closely related to it—‘to be about to’¹⁰

⁶ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 609.

⁷ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 609.

⁸ Hans Weder, “[Disciple, Discipleship,](#)” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, trans. Dennis Martin (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 208.

⁹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 628.

¹⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 636.

Betray - hand him over - *hand over, turn over, give up* a person¹¹ The word occurs frequently in the passion story, being used for the betrayal of Jesus by Judas (Mk. 14:10 and par. etc.); for His handing over to Pilate by the Sanhedrin (Mk. 15:1 and par.); and for His delivering up by Pilate to the will of the people (Lk. 23:25) or to the soldiers for execution (Mk. 15:15 and par.).¹ The frequent occurrence of the term in this context finds a parallel in the accounts of other trials, e.g., of martyrs (cf. Mt. 10:17; Ac. 12:4 etc.). The Heb. equivalent is מסר.¹²

300 Denarii

Concerned - *care/concern, is of interest to someone*¹³

Thief - Of Judas the informer is condemned as a selfish and loveless breaking of fellowship. It is to be replaced by work and service in the new disposition of love.³ Jn. 12:6 characterises the

¹¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 762.

par. parallel.

par. parallel.

par. parallel.

¹ The reference in 1 C. 11:23b is undoubtedly to Judas' treachery. For Jesus was betrayed "in the night" only by Judas (as against Pr.-Bauer, s.v., 981).

Heb. Hebrew.

¹² Friedrich Büchsel, "[Δίδωμι, Δῶρον, Δωρέομαι, Δῶρημα, Δωρεά, Δωρεάν, Ἄπο-, Ἀνταποδίδωμι, Ἀνταπόδοσις, Ἀνταπόδομα, Παραδίδωμι, Παράδοσις,](#)" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 169.

¹³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 626.

³ Lv. r., 3 on 2:1; Midr. Qoh. on 4:6: "Better is he who goes and works and gives alms of his substance than he who goes and robs and extorts and gives alms of that which belongs to others." Eph. 4:28 is rather different, since here we do not have a comparison between two men, one of whom gives alms of what he has won honestly and the other of what he has stolen, but a great change is demanded in the thief himself, so that instead of being a disruptive element he becomes a useful member of society.

κλέπτης as a betrayer of fellowship. 1 Pt. 4:15 groups him with murderers, receivers and criminals. A similar judgment is found in¹⁴

Money box

Pilfer - **to carry someth. (freq. burdensome) from a place, *carry away, remove***¹⁵ with moral implication *take surreptitiously, pilfer, steal*¹⁶

Day of Burial

Commentary Studies

¹⁴ Herbert Preisker, "[Κλέπτω, Κλέπτης](#)," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 755.

someth. someth. = something

freq. freq. = frequent(ly)

¹⁵ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 171.

¹⁶ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 171.

3–4 The description of the perfume as “very expensive” is no understatement; “300 denarii” should be reckoned in terms of a man’s wages rather than of modern currency; since a denarius was the normal pay for a day’s work, and the working week was six days, the sum represents a year’s wages for a fully employed man. That Mary anointed the *feet* of Jesus, not his [p 209](#) head, will have been interpreted by the Evangelist as a consecration of Jesus to royal service, i.e., to a death by which the saving sovereignty comes.

7 On the translation of the sentence see the *Notes*; ἵνα ... τηρήσῃ relates to the action already performed by Mary, not to one that she might wish to take later; she had kept the perfume (as a family treasure?) to embalm the body of Jesus, and by her action had actually achieved it in advance of his death. Is this a motive imputed by Jesus to Mary without her being conscious of it, so that her act is accepted by him as having a more profound significance than she could have intended? Most scholars so interpret it (in Bultmann’s estimate the Evangelist views the deed as an impressive prophecy, to be contrasted with that of Caiaphas, but equally without understanding of its deeper meaning, 415). Hoskyns, on the other hand, viewed Jesus’ interpretation as bringing to light Mary’s intention: “Mary consciously recognized the necessity of the death of Jesus, and also, recognizing that the hour had come, anticipated his burial by an act of intelligent devotion” (416). A. M. Hunter saw a confirmation of this view in Mary’s breaking the neck of the alabaster jar, since it was customary, when anointing a dead body for burial, to break the neck of the flask before laying it in the coffin (*St. Mark*, TBC [London: SCM, 1948] 127); this latter point cannot be pressed, however, since an expensive perfume in an alabaster jar might be released only through breaking its long neck (so BGD,34). There is no means of knowing whether Jesus attributed to Mary’s action more than she knew; his comment, however, in [v 8](#) shows that he saw in her act the expression of an unwavering faith and love: “Mary has recognized the dignity and greatness of Jesus and, in an exemplary action, has shown the others whom they have in their midst” (Schnackenburg, 2:370).¹⁷

TBC Torch Bible Commentaries

SCM Student Christian Movement

BGD W. Bauer, F. W. Gingrich and F. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*

¹⁷ George R. Beasley-Murray, [John](#), vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1999), 208–209.

3. ἡ οὖν Μαριάμ. This is the reading of B 33, and is probably right, despite the authority of κ ADLWΘ for **Μαρία**. See on 11:20.

λαβοῦσα λίτραν μύρου. λίτρα (*libra*) occurs again in N.T. only at 19:39. Mk. says of the woman (whom he does not name) ἔχουσα ἀλάβαστρον μύρου, “having an alabaster cruse or flask of ointment,” and then goes on to tell that she broke the flask and poured the contents on the head of Jesus. To anoint the head of a guest (cf. Ps. 23:5) was an act of Eastern courtesy and respect, but Jn. treats the incident differently, and tells that Mary anointed Jesus’ *feet*. The Lat. *fuldensis* tries to combine the two, and its text here gives “habens alabastrum ... et fracto effudit super caput ihesu recumbentis et unxit pedes.” Syr. sin. has a similar conflate text.

This marked difference between the narratives of Mk. and Jn., which clearly refer to the same incident, is considered above (p. 410).

νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτίμου. This is almost identical with Mk.’s νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτελοῦς. A special point is made in both narratives (not in the earlier story, Lk. 7:38) of the costliness of

B *Vaticanus* (δ 1). Rome. Cent. iv.

℣ *Sinaiticus* (δ 2). Leningrad. iv.

A *Alexandrinus* (δ 4). British Museum. v. Cc. 6:50–8:52 are missing.

D *Bezae* (δ 5). Cambridge. v–vi. Græco-Latin. Cc. 18:14–20:13 are missing in the Greek text, and the gap has been filled by a ninth-century scribe (D^{supp}).

L *Regius* (ε 56). Paris. viii. Cc. 15:2–20 21:15–25 are missing.

W *Freer* (ε 014). Washington. iv–vi. Discovered in Egypt in 1906. The Gospels are in the order Mt., Jn., Lk., Mk. Collation in *The Washington MS. of the Four Gospels*, by H. A. Sanders (1912).

Θ *Koridethi* (ε 050). Tiflis. vii–ix. Discovered at Koridethi, in Russian territory, and edited by Beermann & Gregory (Leipzig, 1913). The text is akin to that of *fam.* 13, *fam.* 1, and the cursives 28, 565, 700 See Lake and Blake in *Harvard Theol. Review* (July 1923) and Streeter, *The Four Gospels*. Cf. also *J.T.S.* Oct. 1915, April and July 1925.

the ointment provided (cf. “the chief ointments” of Amos 6:6). The adj. πιστικός (only here and at Mk. 14:3 in the Greek Bible) is of uncertain meaning. It may be derived from πίστις, and it is applied, as Abbott (*Diat.* 1736d) has pointed out, to a “faithful” wife. Thus it might mean here *genuine*, as indicating the quality of the spikenard. The vg., however, at Mk. 14:3 (but not here), renders it *spicati*, and Wetstein called attention to the word σίκικτον, which means a luxurious unguent. It is possible that, as Abbott suggests, some form of σίκικτον originally stood in the Gospel texts, and that it was altered to πιστικός by an attempt at allegorical interpretation. Swete quotes Jerome as playing on the word thus: “ideo uos uocati estis *pistici*.” Another, less likely, derivation of πιστικός is from πίνω, so that it would mean “potable,” as some perfumes were; but this would be quite out of place in the present context. Yet another explanation is quoted by Dods (*in loc.*) from the *Classical Review* (July 1890), sc. that we should read not πιστικῆς, but πιστακῆς, the latter word referring to the *Pistacia terebinthus*, which grows in Palestine “and yields a turpentine in such inconsiderable quantities as to be very costly.” Whatever the precise derivation of the word may be, the combination νάρδου πιστικῆς (νάρδου, like πιστικῆς, occurring again in the N.T. only at Mk. 14:3) is so unusual, that we must suppose Jn. to have followed here either the actual text of Mk., or a familiar tradition embodying these words.

With this costly unguent, Jn. tells that Mary anointed the feet of Jesus. He insists upon the word *feet*, repeating τοὺς πόδας twice, that there may be no misunderstanding, and to show that he is deliberately correcting Mk.’s account. He adds, in words that reproduce Lk.’s story of the sinful woman (Lk. 7:38), that Mary wiped the Lord’s feet with her hair (καὶ ἐξέμαξεν ταῖς θριξίν αὐτῆς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ). Attention has already (p. 411) been directed to the fact that a perfumed anointing of *feet* (as distinct from the washing of them, of which there is no mention here) is a custom not mentioned in Scripture elsewhere than here and Lk. 7:38. It is further to be observed that for a woman to have her hair unbound was counted immodest by the Jews,¹ and that Mary should unloose her hair at an entertainment where men were present requires some special explanation. A towel would be readily accessible (cf. 13:5) whether this supper was in the house of Martha and Mary, or not; and it would be more seemly and convenient to use it. But for what purpose were the Lord’s feet wiped *after* the unguent had been applied? In the story of Lk. 7:38 the woman wiped His feet with her unbound hair, because her tears had fallen on them by inadvertence, but she did not wipe off the *ointment*. These considerations seem to prove that when Jn. reproduces as nearly as possible the words of the earlier narrative (Lk. 7:38) he does so, not by any inadvertence or mistaken recollection, but because the act of Mary recorded here did actually reproduce her former gesture, then dictated by a sudden impulse of penitence, now inspired by adoring homage of her Master. The moment of her “conversion,” to use the modern word, was the moment to which she looked back as the most memorable in her life; and when she learnt that Jesus was to honour a supper in Bethany by His presence, she decided that she would once again anoint His feet, and present herself in the guise of a penitent and grateful

Diat. E. A. Abbott’s *Diatessarica*, including his *Johannine Vocabulary* and *Johannine Grammar*, Parts I.–X. (1900–1915).

¹ See Lightfoot, *Hor. Hebr.* in Jn. 12:3.

disciple, the significance of whose strange gesture would be well understood by all her friends, as well as by Jesus.

This, at least, is what Jn. seems to indicate. If he did not regard Mary as identical with the unnamed sinner of the earlier incident, he has told the story of the anointing at Bethany in a way which is unintelligible.

ἡ δὲ οἰκία ἐπληρώθη ἐκ τῆς ὀσμῆς τοῦ μύρου. For this use of ἐκ as indicating “with,” cf. Rev. 8:5, Mt. 23:25.

This detail is peculiar to Jn., and suggests that the narrative is due to the recollection of some one who was present on the occasion. It seems to have been known to Ignatius, who interprets the savour of the ointment pervading the whole house as typifying the fragrance of incorruptibility diffused throughout the Church from the Person of Christ (*Eph.* 17). Cf. also Clem. Alex. *Pæd.* ii. 8 (P 205) for a similar spiritualising of the incident.

Wetstein quotes from *Midr. Koheleth*, vii. 1: “A good unguent spreads from the bedroom to the dining-hall; so does a good name from one end of the world to the other.” The latter clause recalls Mk. 14:9, “Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she hath done shall be told for a memorial of her,” a saying which Jn. does not record. It is possible, but improbable, that the circumstance told by Jn., that the house was filled with the odour of the ointment, gave rise, by an allegorical interpretation, to the saying of Mk. 14:9. But the idea that Jn. *meant* it to be taken allegorically is devoid of evidence and may be confidently rejected.

4. The description of Judas is almost identical with that given in 6:71 (where see note).

We must read **δέ** (κBW) for the rec. οὐν.

Ⲭ *Sinaiticus* (δ 2). Leningrad. iv.

B *Vaticanus* (δ 1). Rome. Cent. iv.

W *Freer* (ε 014). Washington. iv–vi. Discovered in Egypt in 1906. The Gospels are in the order Mt., Jn., Lk., Mk. Collation in *The Washington MS. of the Four Gospels*, by H. A. Sanders (1912).

Apparently we should omit ἐκ before **τῶν μαθητῶν** (with BLW 33 249), although it is inserted, in accordance with Jn.'s general habit (see on 1:40), by κΑΔΘ. ἐκ is also omitted in similar sentences at 18:22, 19:34.

κBLW, *fam.* 1, and most vss. read here **Ἰούδας ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης** (cf. 14:22 for ὁ Ἰσκ.); but ΑΓΔΘ have Ἰούδας Σίμωνος Ἰσκαριώτης, introducing the name of his father (as at 6:71, 13:2).

B *Vaticanus* (δ 1). Rome. Cent. iv.

L *Regius* (ε 56). Paris. viii. Cc. 15:2–20 21:15–25 are missing.

W *Freer* (ε 014). Washington. iv–vi. Discovered in Egypt in 1906. The Gospels are in the order Mt., Jn., Lk., Mk. Collation in *The Washington MS. of the Four Gospels*, by H. A. Sanders (1912).

℣ *Sinaiticus* (δ 2). Leningrad. iv.

A *Alexandrinus* (δ 4). British Museum. v. Cc. 6:50–8:52 are missing.

D *Bezae* (δ 5). Cambridge. v–vi. Græco-Latin. Cc. 18:14–20:13 are missing in the Greek text, and the gap has been filled by a ninth-century scribe (D^{supp}).

Θ *Koridethi* (ε 050). Tiflis. vii–ix. Discovered at Koridethi, in Russian territory, and edited by Beermann & Gregory (Leipzig, 1913). The text is akin to that of *fam.* 13, *fam.* 1, and the cursives 28, 565, 700 See Lake and Blake in *Harvard Theol. Review* (July 1923) and Streeter, *The Four Gospels*. Cf. also *J.T.S.* Oct. 1915, April and July 1925.

℣ *Sinaiticus* (δ 2). Leningrad. iv.

B *Vaticanus* (δ 1). Rome. Cent. iv.

L *Regius* (ε 56). Paris. viii. Cc. 15:2–20 21:15–25 are missing.

W *Freer* (ε 014). Washington. iv–vi. Discovered in Egypt in 1906. The Gospels are in the order Mt., Jn., Lk., Mk. Collation in *The Washington MS. of the Four Gospels*, by H. A. Sanders (1912).

A *Alexandrinus* (δ 4). British Museum. v. Cc. 6:50–8:52 are missing.

Γ (ε 70) Oxford and Leningrad. ix–x. Contains cc. 1:1–6:13 8:3–15:24 19:6 to end.

Δ *Sangallensis* (ε 76). St. Gall. ix–x. Græco-Latin.

Θ *Koridethi* (ε 050). Tiflis. vii–ix. Discovered at Koridethi, in Russian territory, and edited by Beermann & Gregory (Leipzig, 1913). The text is akin to that of *fam.* 13, *fam.* 1, and the

The rec. text, following ADΘ, places the sentence εἷς [ἐκ] τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ before Ἰούδας; but κBLW place it after Ἰσκαριώτης.

For ὁ μέλλων, D has ὃς ἤμελλεν (perhaps a reminiscence of 6:71). μέλλων may convey the idea that Judas was *predestined* to betray Jesus (see on 3:14 and 6:71).

According to the Synoptists (Mk. 14:4, Mt. 26:8), the uneasy feeling that the ointment was wasted was shared by several of the onlookers, but Jn. specifically mentions Judas as the one who remonstrated. Perhaps he first suggested to the others the extravagance of what had been done by Mary in purchasing exceptionally rare and costly ointment.

5. This verse reproduces Mk. 14:5 ἡδύνατο γὰρ τοῦτο τὸ μύρον πραθῆναι ἐπάνω δηναρίων τριακοσίων καὶ δοθῆναι τοῖς πτωχοῖς. 300 *denarii* would be about ten guineas, a large sum. To suppose, as Schmiedel does (*E.B.* 1797), that 300 is a symbolical number indicating “the symmetrical body of humanity,” is fantastic. The Gospel of St. Mark, at any rate, does not deal in allegories of this cryptic kind.

cursives 28, 565, 700 See Lake and Blake in *Harvard Theol. Review* (July 1923) and Streeter, *The Four Gospels*. Cf. also *J.T.S.* Oct. 1915, April and July 1925.

A *Alexandrinus* (δ 4). British Museum. v. Cc. 6:50–8:52 are missing.

D *Bezae* (δ 5). Cambridge. v–vi. Græco-Latin. Cc. 18:14–20:13 are missing in the Greek text, and the gap has been filled by a ninth-century scribe (D^{supp}).

Θ *Koridethi* (ε 050). Tiflis. vii–ix. Discovered at Koridethi, in Russian territory, and edited by Beermann & Gregory (Leipzig, 1913). The text is akin to that of *fam.* 13, *fam.* 1, and the cursives 28, 565, 700 See Lake and Blake in *Harvard Theol. Review* (July 1923) and Streeter, *The Four Gospels*. Cf. also *J.T.S.* Oct. 1915, April and July 1925.

℣ *Sinaiticus* (δ 2). Leningrad. iv.

B *Vaticanus* (δ 1). Rome. Cent. iv.

L *Regius* (ε 56). Paris. viii. Cc. 15:2–20 21:15–25 are missing.

W *Freer* (ε 014). Washington. iv–vi. Discovered in Egypt in 1906. The Gospels are in the order Mt., Jn., Lk., Mk. Collation in *The Washington MS. of the Four Gospels*, by H. A. Sanders (1912).

D *Bezae* (δ 5). Cambridge. v–vi. Græco-Latin. Cc. 18:14–20:13 are missing in the Greek text, and the gap has been filled by a ninth-century scribe (D^{supp}).

E.B. Cheyne's *Encyclopædia Biblica*, 4 vols. (1899–1903).

Jn. here follows Mk.,¹ just as he does at 6:7 when he recalls 200 *denarii* as the estimated cost of bread for the multitude.

6. Εἶπεν δὲ τοῦτο κτλ. This is the evangelist's comment (cf. 7:22; and see Introd., p. xxxiv). It has been thought by some that he is unfair to Judas, and that he is so possessed with the conviction of the baseness of his treachery, that he imputes the lowest of motives to him (see on 6:70, 18:5). The criticism that the money spent on the costly ointment might have been better spent is very natural on the lips of the disciple who, as keeper of the common purse, was responsible for the moneys spent by the Twelve, amounting in all, we may be sure, to no large sum. But Jn. roundly says that he was a thief. Judas was not above a bribe, for he took the thirty pieces of silver; but he was not therefore dishonest, although the value which he attached to money may have made ill-gotten gains a strong temptation. "Temptation commonly comes through that for which we are naturally fitted" (Westcott), *i.e.* in this case the handling of money. And it may have been found out, after the secession of Judas, that, *as Jn. says, he had been guilty of small peculations, for which he had full opportunity.* However that may be, the bitterness of the words about Judas in this verse is easily explained if they go back to one who was a former comrade in the inner circle of the Twelve, who had had no suspicions even at the end (see on 13:28, 29), and whose indignation, when disillusioned, was all the more severe.

τὸ γλωσσόκομον: cf. 13:29. A γλωσσοκομεῖον originally meant a case to hold the reeds or *tongues* (γλῶσσαι) of musical instruments, and hence any kind of *box*, *e.g.* it is used for a *coffin* (by Aquila, Gen. 50:26). The word became accepted by Aramaic speakers, and appears as כְּהַרְסִילָא in the Talmud. It stands for a coffer into which money is cast, at 2 Chron. 24:8, 10 ἐνέβαλλον εἰς τὸ γλωσσόκομον, and this is the sense in which the word is used here. The γλωσσόκομον or money-box of the disciples was kept by Judas (it was not necessarily carried about with him habitually: τὸ γλωσσόκομον ἔχων is the phrase), and into it well-wishers (cf. Lk. 8:3) were wont to throw (βάλλειν) small coins to provide for the needs of Jesus and His followers. In this it was like the begging-bowl of an Eastern holy man. To translate it "purse" is misleading; and the Latin vss. rightly render it by *loculi*, *i.e.* a box or coffer with several compartments. See Field, *in loc.*, on γλωσσόκομον and βαστάζειν.

¹ See Introd., p. xcvi.

For ἔχων (κBDLWΘ) the rec. has εἶχεν καί (ΑΓΔ).

τὰ βαλλόμενα, sc. the moneys cast into the box by well-wishers and friends; cf. 2 Chron. 24:10 quoted above.

ἐβάσταζεν. The verb βαστάζειν is used (10:31, 16:12, 19:17) of carrying or bearing something heavy; but here and at 20:15 it is equivalent to the vulgar English “to lift,” i.e. to carry off furtively or unscrupulously, and so “to steal.” Field gives a convincing illustration of this usage from Diog. Laert. iv. 59 μαθόντα δὲ ταῦτα τὰ θεραπόντια ... ὅσα ἐβούλετο ἐβάσταζεν, “When therefore the servants found this out, they used to *steal* whatever they pleased.” Deissmann (*Bible Studies*, Eng. Tr., p. 257) cites some further instances from the papyri of this use of βαστάζειν.¹

Hence we must translate, “he was a thief, and having the money-box used to steal what was cast into it.” To render ἐβάσταζεν here as if it only meant that Judas, as the treasurer, used to “carry about” what was put into it, would give a tame and superfluous ending to the sentence.

7. With vv. 7, 8, cf. Mk. 14:6–9.

℣ *Sinaiticus* (δ 2). Leningrad. iv.

B *Vaticanus* (δ 1). Rome. Cent. iv.

D *Bezae* (δ 5). Cambridge. v–vi. Græco-Latin. Cc. 18:14–20:13 are missing in the Greek text, and the gap has been filled by a ninth-century scribe (D^{supp}).

L *Regius* (ε 56). Paris. viii. Cc. 15:2–20 21:15–25 are missing.

W *Freer* (ε 014). Washington. iv–vi. Discovered in Egypt in 1906. The Gospels are in the order Mt., Jn., Lk., Mk. Collation in *The Washington MS. of the Four Gospels*, by H. A. Sanders (1912).

Θ *Koridethi* (ε 050). Tiflis. vii–ix. Discovered at Koridethi, in Russian territory, and edited by Beermann & Gregory (Leipzig, 1913). The text is akin to that of *fam.* 13, *fam.* 1, and the cursives 28, 565, 700 See Lake and Blake in *Harvard Theol. Review* (July 1923) and Streeter, *The Four Gospels*. Cf. also *J.T.S.* Oct. 1915, April and July 1925.

A *Alexandrinus* (δ 4). British Museum. v. Cc. 6:50–8:52 are missing.

Γ (ε 70) Oxford and Leningrad. ix–x. Contains cc. 1:1–6:13 8:3–15:24 19:6 to end.

Δ *Sangallensis* (ε 76). St. Gall. ix–x. Græco-Latin.

¹ See also Moulton-Milligan, *Vocab.* 106.

The rec. text, with ΑΓΔ, omits ἵνα and reads τετήρηκεν, while κΒDLWΘ support ἵνα ... τηρήσῃ.

We must render “let her alone, in order that she may keep it (sc. the remainder of the spikenard) against the day of my burying.” In Mk.’s narrative (here being corrected silently by Jn.¹) the flask of ointment was broken and its entire contents poured upon the head of Jesus; but Jn. says nothing of the flask being broken, and it is not to be supposed that *all* the ointment was used for His feet. ἑνταφιασμός (cf. 19:40) is “preparation for burial,” and might or might not include the anointing of the whole body. The words of Jesus tell of His impending death and burial to any of the company who had sufficient insight; the rest of the spikenard will soon be needed, and will not be wasted.

We have above (p. 412) identified Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene; and thus she who began His ἑνταφιασμός by anointing the Lord’s feet in Bethany, was among the women who finished the anointing of His body eight days later (cf. 20:1, Mk. 16:1).

For ἄφες αὐτήν, cf. Mk. 14:6, Mt. 15:14, 2 Sam. 16:11, 2 Kings 4:27. We might translate (with R.V.^{mg}) “Let her alone; (it was) that she might keep it,” or (with R.V.^{txt}) “Suffer her to keep it,” but we prefer to render “Let her alone, in order that, etc.”

A *Alexandrinus* (δ 4). British Museum. v. Cc. 6:50–8:52 are missing.

Γ (ε 70) Oxford and Leningrad. ix–x. Contains cc. 1:1–6:13 8:3–15:24 19:6 to end.

Δ *Sangallensis* (ε 76). St. Gall. ix–x. Græco-Latin.

Ξ *Sinaiticus* (δ 2). Leningrad. iv.

B *Vaticanus* (δ 1). Rome. Cent. iv.

D *Bezae* (δ 5). Cambridge. v–vi. Græco-Latin. Cc. 18:14–20:13 are missing in the Greek text, and the gap has been filled by a ninth-century scribe (D^{supp}).

L *Regius* (ε 56). Paris. viii. Cc. 15:2–20 21:15–25 are missing.

W *Freer* (ε 014). Washington. iv–vi. Discovered in Egypt in 1906. The Gospels are in the order Mt., Jn., Lk., Mk. Collation in *The Washington MS. of the Four Gospels*, by H. A. Sanders (1912).

Θ *Koridethi* (ε 050). Tiflis. vii–ix. Discovered at Koridethi, in Russian territory, and edited by Beermann & Gregory (Leipzig, 1913). The text is akin to that of *fam.* 13, *fam.* 1, and the cursives 28, 565, 700 See Lake and Blake in *Harvard Theol. Review* (July 1923) and Streeter, *The Four Gospels*. Cf. also *J.T.S.* Oct. 1915, April and July 1925.

¹ See *Intro.*, p. xcvi.

8. This verse is identical with Mt. 26:11, and both Jn. and Mt. reproduce exactly the words of Mk. 14:7, both of them omitting Mk.'s καὶ ὅταν θέλητε, δύνασθε αὐτοὺς εἶποι. But that Jn. is using Mk. rather than Mt. all through the story is not doubtful.²

D and Syr. sin. omit the whole verse here for some unknown reason, perhaps because ἐμὲ δὲ οὐ πάντοτε ἔχετε was (mistakenly) deemed to be at variance with Mt. 28:20. But cf. 17:11 οὐκέτι εἰμι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.¹⁸

12:3 During the meal Mary brought to that place a “pound” (*litran*, cf. 19:39, apparently similar to the Roman *libra*, equivalent nearly to our twelve ounces or 327.45 grams)¹⁴ of ointment or perfume (*myron*, either “myrrh” or a generic word for “perfume”). Such ointment is here designated more specifically as being very expensive (*polytimou*, virtually synonymous with the Markan *polyteles*, 14:3, similar to the Matthean *barytimou*, 26:7) and composed of genuine (*pistikēs*, cf. also Mark 14:3) nard. This nard was a special oil probably extracted from the root

² *Ibid.*, p. xcvi.

D Bezae (δ 5). Cambridge. v–vi. Græco-Latin. Cc. 18:14–20:13 are missing in the Greek text, and the gap has been filled by a ninth-century scribe (D^{supp}).

¹⁸ J. H. Bernard, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*](#), ed. Alan Hugh McNeile, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner' Sons, 1929), 416–421.

¹⁴ See BAGD, 475.

(and “spike”) of the Indian nard plant.¹⁵ While John does not mention the container, there is no reason to doubt the Synoptic description of the perfume or ointment being preserved in a valuable alabaster flask or jar (Matt 26:7; Mark 14:3; Luke 7:37). Such a flask normally had a long thin neck which would be broken (cf. Mark 14:3) in use, and the contents could then be poured out.

The Johannine story has Mary pouring the ointment or perfume over the feet of Jesus and wiping his feet with her hair. As indicated in the John the Baptist story (see my comments at John 1:27), touching the feet of someone was regarded by Jews as a very degrading experience and was normally reserved for slaves and others to whom little “honor” was due. The fact that Mary was willing to do this act at a meal in the presence of others communicates volumes about her elevated regard for Jesus. It might also be argued by some that it indicates a lack of self-worth on her part. But such a theory would seem to fit the Lukan story of the sinful woman more than Mary of Bethany because in Luke the woman was seemingly unburdening herself; she not only anointed the feet of Jesus but also tenderly kissed his feet and dampened them with her tears (cf. Luke 7:38, 44–48). In the Johannine story, however, there is no such indication of sinfulness, remorse, or kissing and sobbing over his feet. The story is focused on a proclamation of his death and burial (John 12:7). In this sense the point of the story is not unlike the Markan and Matthean stories, where the anointing serves as an act of Gospel proclamation, but in those Gospels the woman anointed the head of Jesus (cf. Matt 26:13; Mark 14:9).

12:4–7 The reaction to the anointing by Mary is focused here as in Matthew (26:8–9) and Mark (14:4–5) on economic evaluation of the situation. The Lukan story, however, does not concentrate on economics. Instead, the Pharisees charged Jesus with lacking sufficient insight as a prophet to recognize that a sinful woman had touched (*haptesthai*) him. The focus of the Lukan story is, therefore, very different. Yet, unlike John, Matthew and Mark charged the disciples with condemning the woman for her wastefulness. The disciples there thought that the poor could have been the beneficiaries of such a large economic sum. In view of such a charge, Jesus rebuked them because of their misunderstanding of the good or beautiful (*kalon*) thing she had done. Typical of the Markan message, the disciples there had once again misunderstood the events in the life of Jesus. So Jesus had to enlighten them to the effect that the act was an important preparatory symbol of his forthcoming burial (cf. Mark 4:8; Matt 26:12).

The story in John, however, makes a slightly different point. It certainly picks up the burial symbolism (12:7), but it refocuses the picture from the misunderstanding of the disciples to Judas, who was not merely mistaken. In this story John makes it plain that Judas was not an unfortunate, misguided person. He was inherently an evil thief who had no concern for the poor (12:6). Thus John would never agree with some modern portrayals of Judas as a tragic hero who merely misunderstood Jesus. For John, Judas was a devil-man (*diabolos*; 6:70), a receiver of Satan (13:27), and the son of doom or destruction (17:12). For John, he was the unforgivable betrayer (*hōparadidous*) who stood with the enemies of Jesus (18:5; cf. *paradidonai*; 12:5). For a discussion of Iscariot, see my comments at 6:71.

¹⁵ For a discussion of nard or spikenard see R. H. Harrison, *Healing Herbs of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 48–49. See also J. E. Bruns, “A Note on Jn 12:3,” *CBQ* 28 (1966): 219–22 and R. Koeber, “Nardos Pistike-Kostnarde,” *Bib* 29 (1948): 279–81.

According to our Gospel, the role of Judas in the band of Jesus' disciples would be likened to that of the treasurer, indeed a fraudulent treasurer who made the community money box (*glōssokomon*, NIV "money bag") his personal estate. The value of the pure nard, therefore, did not escape his greedy interest. His estimate of its worth was three hundred denarii (12:5; Mark even suggests "more than" three hundred at 14:5), which was the equivalent of a laborer's annual wages (calculated at six days a week less festival days). Such an amount was very significant. Indeed, it could have served as an economic security blanket or, as I have suggested below, as a woman's dowry. Judas's suggestion that the money should have been given to the poor is regarded by the evangelist as a mere hoax or fraud in the mouth of the deceptive thief.

In responding to Judas, Jesus did not engage in any explanation or indicate a correcting spirit, such as he expressed to the disciples, especially in Matthew (26:10–13) and to some extent also in Mark (14:6–9). Judas was not like the other disciples. In those Gospels, Jesus attempted to inform the disciples about the good or beautiful nature of the deed performed by the woman. Here in John, Judas is given the curt reply, "Leave her alone," somewhat like Mark 14:6 but with none of the softening that follows. Instead, what comes next are the somewhat confusing words "in order that she might keep it for the day of my burial."

This Johannine shorthand here concerning "keep" (NIV "save") has led to much debate on the part of scholars. Obviously, it can hardly mean that the perfume or ointment had not all been used and/or that she would keep it (or the remainder of it) until the actual burial date. What then can it mean? Some have suggested that although Mary did not realize what she had done, Jesus understood the implications. Others have posited that "keep" means "keep in mind."¹⁶ Hoskyns and Davey argue that Mary "consciously recognized" what she had done and anticipated the burial.¹⁷ Carson thinks that it is not the anointing itself that is in focus but the burial of Jesus.¹⁸ Daube argues from his rabbinic background that her act was culticly in anticipation of his death.¹⁹

To what does "keep" refer—to the act, or the nard, or a play on both? Why would a woman "keep" such an expensive item? It must have been very important to her. Could it have been part of a possible dowry? If that was the case, then the gift of the ointment or perfume would be for a woman of marriageable expectation almost the equivalent of an ultimate gift to Jesus. That Matthew (26:13) and Mark (14:9) saw in this gift a significant commitment, worthy of a "Gospel"

NIV New International Version

NIV New International Version

¹⁶ Cf. C. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: S.P.C.K., 1956), 345. Note also the discussions in B. Newman and E. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook of the Gospel of John* (New York: UBS, 1980), 391–92 and Brown, *John*, 1.449.

¹⁷ See E. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956), 416.

¹⁸ See D. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 429–30.

¹⁹ D. Daube, "The Anointing at Bethany," in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone Press, 1956), 312–24.

notation in relation to Jesus' death, is very suggestive indeed. The woman's gift then could be regarded as an incredible expression of attachment to Jesus. Moreover, positioned where it is in John at the point of the coming of the hour (12:23) and the declaration of Jesus' readiness for death (12:27–33), the story of the anointing becomes nothing less than an important signal for the forthcoming glorification of Jesus. Without doubt then the gift of the woman was a tremendous memorial, wonderfully preservable in the light of the forthcoming death of Jesus. It was a marvelous symbol of burial that would answer the ultimate question of life itself; just as Jesus said, seed that dies bears much fruit (12:24). It was an anointing fit for a king who came to save the world (cf. also elaborate spicing at John 19:39–41).²⁰

From both the sociological and theological perspectives the response of Jesus then is very appropriate here. Since Mary's gift was of such an economic significance, sociologically Mary had depleted her potential of gaining a husband. That move is not to be understood as merely some nice act of honoring the Lord but as a tremendous demonstration of commitment to him. As a result, Jesus graciously accepted the act of dedication that many might consider both strange and wasteful. Thus, Jesus in John gives this act a theological significance far beyond the mere act itself. John recognized the great significance of this act and used this event as a hermeneutical key to introduce in this segment of his book the death of King Jesus.

12:8 Although a few manuscripts omit parts of this verse, there is no compelling reason to omit the words of the text here.²¹ It is almost identical to the statement in Matthew (26:11). In interpreting this statement concerning the continuing presence of the poor, it is not to be seen as an excuse for not helping them. But the imminent departure of Jesus ("you will not always have me") supplies the rationale for why the special act of anointing here is fully acceptable in the overall mission of Jesus and the Johannine view of the good news. In censuring Judas (12:7), Jesus was not advocating neglect of the poor (12:8). He was highlighting the importance of the arrival of one of the most significant events in the history of the world—his departure/death.¹⁹

²⁰ The reader of John should not miss the fact that the word *litra* (pound) is used in only two places in the entire NT, namely at John 12:3 and at 19:39, both related to the burial of Jesus.

²¹ For a discussion of the text of John 12:8 see B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 236–37. See also Newman and Nida, *Translator's Handbook*, 392.

¹⁹ Gerald L. Borchert, [John 12–21](#), vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 35–38.