

WHAT CHRIST TAUGHT TO A HUNGRY HEART

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While Martha was busy serving, “Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to His word” (Luke 10:39). We have indications as to what Christ taught her on that occasion, especially through the consultation of harmonies of the Gospels.

There is an observable pattern in Christ’s teaching. For the first year-and-a-half of His public ministry (of which the total duration was about *three-and-a-half* years), He taught about the coming Kingdom of God (as, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount); and as long as He taught on *that* subject, He was popular among the masses of the people. They agreed that it would be wonderful to have such teaching practiced. But then, Christ took the apostles to Caesarea Philippi and introduced a new subject to them—the Cross, which was necessary in order to make the Kingdom possible (Matthew 16:13-25). After that, the closer Christ got to the time of His crucifixion, the *more* He talked about the Cross. Even Peter’s first reaction was to resist the idea; and from that moment on, Christ’s popularity declined until, when the moment to go to the Cross came, all His disciples abandoned Him and fled (Matthew 26:56). He was then, as a messianic prophecy had foretold, “despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

We learn from harmonies of the Gospels that the occasion when “Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to His word” was about six months before He went to the Cross. A further indication is that it seems to have been during the last Feast of Tabernacles in His earthly life, which was celebrated in the fall. There are two reasons to believe that. Firstly, Martha was so busy, apparently making a complex meal. Jews in Bible times were generally inclined to make very simple meals. However, the Feast of Tabernacles was an exception, when they made sumptuous meals. Secondly, we read that Martha *came* to voice her complaint against Mary. Those sisters lived in Bethany, which was a *village*; and while houses in *cities* sometimes had several rooms, those in villages were usually one-room houses. But if Martha was in the *same room* with Christ and Mary, she wouldn’t have had to *come* to make her complaint; she’d only have had to *turn around*. However, during the Feast of Tabernacles the Jews made huts of branches and lived in them for a week (Leviticus 23:42, 43). Probably Christ was teaching Mary in the hut, while Martha was cooking in the house; and then Martha came into the hut to make her complaint. That, then, would place the occasion about six months before Christ’s crucifixion.

Since Christ’s teaching of Mary was only about six months before His crucifixion, we may surmise that the teaching He gave her was very heavily concentrated on the Cross and its meaning. He’d have taught, not only that His death on the Cross would atone for sin, but also that anyone who would follow Him must “take up his cross” of rejection by the world, on which “self” would die. His life must be an offering to God, considering no sacrifice too great to make for Him, and recognizing that he didn’t belong to himself, but to Christ who had redeemed him.

That accounts for Mary’s anointing Christ with the precious ointment six days before the Passover (John 12:1-8; Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9). Christ didn’t contradict Judas’ estimate of the value of the ointment as being three hundred denarii (John 12:4, 5). Since a denarius was the standard day’s wage for someone in the laboring class (Matthew 20:2), and some days in a year are not work days, three hundred denarii could be considered a rounded-off figure for a year’s wages. Christ apparently agreed that the ointment could have been sold for such an amount. What would have driven Mary to pour out something so expensive on Christ, a gesture that it would be only natural to think extravagant? She

was showing that she had understood Christ's teaching about the Cross, and was showing that she considered **NO** price to be too great to show her devotion to Christ in the light of the price *He* had paid to redeem her. No sacrifice made for Christ is to be counted extravagant or wasted (Matthew 26:8; Mark 14:4). Remember C. T. Studd's statement: "If Jesus be God, and died for me, then *no* sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."

Christ also mentioned that Mary had anointed His body in advance for His burial (Mark 14:8). Three other women wanted to anoint Christ's body, but came too late (Mark 16:1-6). Because Mary had understood and taken to heart Christ's teaching about His death and resurrection, she *knew when* she could anoint His body. Only those who are receptive to truth about the Cross and its meaning are given an understanding of God's plans and purposes.
