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~ *Leave Her Alone* ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read John 11:47-12:11.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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John 11:47-12:11 NASB	John 11:47-12:11 NLT
<p>⁴⁷Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ⁴⁹But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.” ⁵¹Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, ⁵²and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.</p> <p>⁵⁴Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples.</p> <p>⁵⁵Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?” ⁵⁷Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him.</p> <p>¹²Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus</p>	<p>⁴⁷Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. “What are we going to do?” they asked each other. “This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. ⁴⁸If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.”</p> <p>⁴⁹Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about! ⁵⁰You don’t realize that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.”</p> <p>⁵¹He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation. ⁵²And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world.</p> <p>⁵³So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus’ death. ⁵⁴As a result, Jesus stopped his public ministry among the people and left Jerusalem. He went to a place near the wilderness, to the village of Ephraim, and stayed there with his disciples.</p> <p>⁵⁵It was now almost time for the Jewish Passover celebration, and many people from all over the country arrived in Jerusalem several days early so they could go through the purification ceremony before Passover began. ⁵⁶They kept looking for Jesus, but as they stood around in the Temple, they said to each other, “What do you think? He won’t come for Passover, will he?” ⁵⁷Meanwhile, the leading priests and Pharisees had publicly ordered</p>

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was one of those reclining at the table with Him. ³ Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, *said, ⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?” ⁶ Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said, “Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. ⁸ For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.”

⁹ The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. ¹⁰ But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

that anyone seeing Jesus must report it immediately so they could arrest him.

¹² Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. ² A dinner was prepared in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. ³ Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus’ feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

⁴ But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, ⁵ “That perfume was worth a year’s wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.” ⁶ Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples’ money, he often stole some for himself.

⁷ Jesus replied, “Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

⁹ When all the people heard of Jesus’ arrival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, ¹¹ for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.

2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

The following insights are from *A Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* and *A Social Science Commentary on John* by Malina and Rohrbaugh.

- A meal such as this was held in two stages. In the first stage, servants washed the hands and feet of guests and anointed them with perfumes. Initial courses were served. In stage, two the main the host’s servants would offer the main courses.
- For a woman to be present at a meal would be highly unusual, and she would usually be considered a woman with questionable reputation.
- It was customary for servants to wash the feet of people.
- Anointing the feet meant that the person would soon be involved in important action.
- It was expected that a perfume worth such a large sum should never be used upon one person, but some of the value should be sold and given to the poor.

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- Alabaster jars were five to nine inches long and made out of ground translucent calcite stone. They were imported from India and the Far East and were heavily taxed. Thus, they were worth considerable sums to the purchasers.
- The money box that Judas had was a coin case or coin box normally used as security for pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem with money to buy animals for sacrifice, to pay taxes, or to give to the poor.

The following insights are from the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible

- The council in which the chief priests and Pharisees participated was the Sanhedrin which was Israel's top ruling body. They often were concerned about maintaining public order to prevent the Romans from intervening further in their affairs.
- Caiaphas was high priest from AD 18-36. High priests were to hold their office for life, but in the first century AD, the Roman governor could withdraw it or bestow it upon whomever he wished at any time.
- Bethany was about two miles east of Jerusalem on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives. During major festivals, especially Passover, the population of Jerusalem would swell to 70-80,000 from the arrival of pilgrims from all parts of the Mediterranean world. Thus, many pilgrims would stay in Bethany during the festival. Some would come early to ensure they were ceremonially clean for the festival as their long journey might cause them to contact impure things. Thus, John 11:55 speaks of ceremonial cleansing before the Passover.
- The perfume was called nard. Mary had about 12 ounces, a considerable amount as many people would have flasks with only one ounce.
- Jesus' statement, "you always have the poor" is based on Deuteronomy 15:11, "the poor will never cease to be in the land." In context, God promised his people that if they cared for the poor, he would care for them. Jesus is not diminishing the importance of taking care of the poor. Instead, he is prioritizing devotion. Although it is crucial to love one's neighbor, loving God is still the first and greatest command.

3. Answer these reflective questions.

Why do you think the Pharisees and others did not believe in Jesus even though they knew he had raised Lazarus from the dead? Does this say anything about human nature and a hardness of heart to believe?

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Why do you think Jesus ate his meal in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper? What would this say to the community in Bethany?

How would you describe Mary's heart toward Jesus? Would you say you have this kind of heart toward Jesus?

The account in John tells us that Judas was upset with Mary because he was greedy and wanted the nard for himself. The accounts in Matthew (26:6-13) and Mark (14:3-9) show the other disciples were upset with Mary's action. Why do you think they were upset?

Jesus said, "The poor you have with you always, but you do not always have me." Why did Jesus say this, what did he mean, and how can we apply this in our relationship to Jesus?
