

THE ANOINTING OF JESUS MENTIONED IN FOUR PASSAGES IN THE SCRIPTURE

BY

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There are four accounts in the Gospels concerning the “anointing of Jesus.” The specific verses are Mat. 26:7, Mark 14:3, Luke 7:37, and Jn. 12:1-3. The context of the verses are very important because there is much confusion in the commentaries concerning the reports in the Gospels. Some relate they are all the same event; others, do not. Part of the confusion is the mention of an “alabaster box” in the various accounts (Mat. 26:7, Mark 14:3, Lk 7:37). Also, Simon is a common name in Scripture and is mentioned in three of the accounts (Mat. 26:6, Mark 14:3, Lk. 7:43, 44). However, one individual is “Simon the leper” (Mk. 14:3) and the other is “Simon the Pharisee.” Obviously, the passages do not refer to the same event. Here are the differentiating points:

(1) The account in Luke 7 takes place in Nain, which is located in Galilee.

(2) The other three passages take place in Bethany, which is located 2 miles from Jerusalem on the east side of the Mount of Olives. Some mention the village of Bethpage, but this is either another name for the village of Bethany or is a district or part of the city of Jerusalem. Bethany is now called Aziriyeh, which interpreted means the place of Lazareth.

(3) The woman in Lk 7 was a great sinner (“a woman in the city, which was a sinner,” Lk. 7:37, 47).

(4) The woman in Lk 7:37 also used an “alabaster box” to store the valuable “ointment” or the perfume, but so did Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, mentioned in the other three accounts (Mat. 26:7, Mark 14:3, Jn. 12:1-3). The perfume was expensive and it is reported by various commentaries that it came from India. Obviously, an “alabaster box” was a common way to store precious “ointments.”

(5) Simon the leper’s house is the location of the supper prepared by Martha and Mary in honour of Lazarus, who was raised from the dead (Mk 14:3). This is the same event mentioned in all the accounts except the one in Luke 7.

(6) Simon the Pharisee’s house (not Simon the leper’s) is the location of the event in Luke 7 (Lk. 7:36)

(7) Another important difference between the events is the timing. Three of the passages (Mat. 26, Mark 14, John 12) take place shortly before our Lord’s crucifixion at the last Passover mentioned in the book of John (Jn. 12:1, Jn. 11:55).

(8) The event in Nain, where the anointing took place, was because the woman loved Jesus much (Lk. 7:48) and was **not** for the purpose of anointing Him for burial as was reported in the other accounts (see the comparison of passages below).

John Gill’s explanation comes the closest in the commentaries. However, I do **not** agree that the “dinner” was held in the house of Lazarus (see Mark 14:3). The dinner where Mary anointed Jesus was held in the home of Simon the leper, who lived in Bethany. Also, it is very likely that Lazarus lived with Martha and Mary (Jn. 11:1-2).

[John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible] Luke 7:37

And behold, a woman in the city, Not Mary Magdalene, spoken of in Lu 8:2 under another character; and is a different person, who had not been taken notice of by the evangelist before; nor Mary the sister of Lazarus, who is said to anoint the feet of Christ, and wipe them with her hair, Joh 12:3. The character given of this woman,

does not seem so well to agree with her; at least, the fact here recorded, cannot be the same with that; for this was in Galilee, and that in Bethany; this in the house of Simon the Pharisee, that in the house of Lazarus; this was some time before Christ's death, and after this he went a circuit through every city and village, that was but six days before his death, and after which he never went from those parts; nor is this account the same with the history, recorded in **Mt 26:6** for that fact was done in Bethany also, this in Galilee; that in the house of Simon: the leper, this in the house of Simon the Pharisee; that was but two days before the death of Christ, this a considerable time before; the ointment that woman poured, was poured upon his head, this upon his feet: who this woman was, is not certain, nor in what city she dwelt; it seems to be the same in which the Pharisee's house was; and was no doubt one of the cities of Galilee, as Naim, Capernaum, or some other at no great distance from these:

which was a sinner; a notorious sinner, one that was known by all to have been a person of a wicked, life and conversation; a lewd woman, a vile prostitute, an harlot, commonly reputed so: the Arabic word here used, signifies both a sinner and a whore¹; and so the word, sinners, seems to be used elsewhere by Luke; see **Lu 15:1** compared with **Mt 21:31**. Some think she was a Gentile, Gentiles being reckoned by the Jews sinners, and the worst of sinners; but this does not appear:

when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house; having observed it herself, that he was invited by him, and went with him, or being informed of it by others,

brought an alabaster box of ointment: ointment was used to be put in vessels made of "alabaster", which kept it pure and incorrupt; and this stone was found about Damascus,² so that there might be plenty of it in Judea; at least it might be easily had, and such boxes might be common; and as this woman appears to have been a lewd person, she might have this box of ointment by her to anoint herself with, that she might recommend herself to her gallants. The historian³ reports, that "Venus gave to Phaon an alabaster box with ointment, with which Phaon, being anointed, became the most beautiful of men, and the women of Mitylene were taken with the love of him."

If this box had been provided with such a view; it was now used to another and different purpose. 1. Vid. Castell. Lex. Heptaglott. col. 1195. 2. Plin. Nat. Hist. l. 36. c. 8. 3. Aelian. var. Hist. l. 12. c. 8.

The Four Passages Compared

<p>Matthew 26:1-13 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is <i>the feast of the passover</i>, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, And consulted</p>	<p>Mark 14:1-8 After two days was <i>the feast of the passover</i>, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put <i>him</i> to death. But they said, Not on the feast <i>day</i>, lest there be an uproar of the people. And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the</p>	<p>Luke 7:11, 36-48 And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people... And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city,</p>	<p>John 11:1-2, 12:1-8 Now a certain <i>man</i> was sick, <i>named</i> Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of <u>Mary</u> and her sister Martha. (It was <i>that</i> Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)... Then Jesus six days before the passover came to</p>
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<p>that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill <i>him</i>. But they said, Not on the feast <i>day</i>, lest there be an uproar among the people. Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat <i>at meat</i>. But when his disciples saw <i>it</i>, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose <i>is</i> this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood <i>it</i>, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, <i>there</i> shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.</p>	<p>leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured <i>it</i> on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.</p>	<p>which was a sinner, when she knew that <i>Jesus</i> sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind <i>him</i> weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe <i>them</i> with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed <i>them</i> with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw <i>it</i>, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman <i>this is</i> that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that <i>he</i>, to</p>	<p>Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's <i>son</i>, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? 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. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.</p>
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		<p>whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped <i>them</i> with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, <i>the same</i> loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.</p>	
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