

Your Alabaster Jar...

We are all devoted to something. We have an innate part of us that must give of ourselves to worship. Some give themselves to sports, others to their work, others to family. Some of us even give ourselves to worthy causes and ministries. Many of us, however, end up filling the devotion-sized hole in our life with material things instead of giving ourselves wholly to the true object of devotion.

There comes a time when each of us has to look at where our devotion truly lies. Mary did. Unlike her sister Martha, she was always content to sit at the feet of Jesus and spend time with him. Even when Martha complained that she was doing all the work by herself, Jesus said Mary had the better idea (see Luke 10:38-42).

Now we come to another evening, just before Jesus begins his last stint in Jerusalem. It is a beautiful night on the sloping hills of Bethany. The stars are twinkling, the air crisp, and Jesus and the disciples are all over at Simeon's house for an evening get together (see Matthew 26:6). Also in attendance are the three siblings who were so close to Jesus (see John 12:1). Martha is busy getting the meal ready, while Mary hangs out with the boys to hear the words of Jesus. No doubt, Jesus himself is reclining at the table with Lazarus and Simeon, discussing the events of the day. Some of the disciples are at the table as well; others are just outside breathing in the coolness of the night air.

Then something happens. Something stirs in Mary and she gets up from the seating area and leaves for a moment. Martha is hopeful that she's coming in to help with the h'orderves, but that's not the direction Mary heads. When she reappears, she has cupped in her hands the alabaster jar that she had been waiting for the just right moment to use.

It was a beautiful jar made of finely grained gypsum and so polished that you could see through its delicate walls and into the liquid it contained inside. It was probably sealed at the top with some sort of wax so that the exquisite scent and the expensive substance would not escape². The substance contained within this treasured vessel was the essence of nard (see John 12:3), which was an ointment carefully derived from a perennial herb that only grew in the Himalayan Mountains³.

Now was the time, now was that moment. Mary had twelve ounces of this perfume inside the walls of the beautifully sealed container (see John 12:3). This cup and a half of fragrance held within the alabaster jar was worth an entire year's wages

Can you picture it? Martha has stopped getting the meal ready; Lazarus has sat up from his reclined position at the table and is watching intently, as are the others around the table. The disciples outside feel the hush and turn to look in through the doorway. Everyone within earshot now has their head turned and their eyes fixed on Mary.

Mary doesn't see them, though. There is only one set of eyes that she is looking at, and those are the eyes of her Master, eyes that peer back at her filled with love, compassion, and a hint of sadness at the prophetic meaning that is behind what is about to happen.

Mary kneels down and breaks the seal of her beautiful jar. The sound of the fracturing cap resonates throughout the entire room as the beautiful fragrance immediately begins to tickle the nostrils of everyone around the pair. Mary slowly stands up, her eyes filling with emotion, and begins to pour the ointment over the head of her Lord. She continues, pouring more over his feet and washing them with her own hair. Everyone around is stunned, some are indignant - what could all of this mean?

I believe that what we have just witnessed was more than a true act of devotion. Yes, Mary showed great compassion for and devotion to her Saviour. But, I think there is more to be said in her sacrifice. No doubt, that jar and its contents were very precious to her - you don't invest a year of your life into something and not take special attention of it.

Mary poured out what could easily have been another source of her devotion. In order to show her true devotion, she took something that was dear to her, something that was costly to her, and broke the seal of one devotion for the love of the other. Yes, she was preparing the body of her Saviour for burial, but I believe she was also allowing a part of her own soul to die - a part that she realized didn't matter in light of the man who was sitting in front of her.

We all have objects of devotion. We all have stuff that is in our life vying for the one seat available in our heart. Perhaps we say that God is our one devotion, but do our deeds match our words? Do the actions of our heart line up with the actions of our tongue, the actions of our body? More often than not, they in fact do line up, and we need to take the time to painfully consider this. The question is - what is the object of our devotion?

What's in your alabaster jar? What talent or resource is God tugging on your heart about? Maybe it's your finances, maybe it is a relationship. Perhaps it's time to break the seal and pour out that one object of devotion that is trying to hold itself against the true object of your devotion. Perhaps it's time, with tears in your eyes, to fall at his feet and declare to him once and for all that you are willing to be poured out as an offering to him - that you are willing to live your life in purity. Perhaps it is time to declare that you are willing, against everything else, to offer him yourself as a reasonable act of worship.