Lesson 2: A Bold Sacrifice

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: That in the days before His own bold sacrifice, Jesus found appreciation for Mary's perfume offering because it displayed a love and knowledge of who He is and what He came to do.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To reflect on their own love towards Jesus, and how they display that.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: John 12:1-8

KEY TAKEAWAY: Love leads us to be sacrificial.

OVERVIEW:

While Jesus was in Bethany, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume and wiped His feet with her hair. Judas criticized her and claimed it could have been used to help the poor (that is, unless he took the money for himself first!). Jesus' response showed His appreciation for her timely offering. He knew that the time for His arrest and crucifixion was near, and her bold display of sacrificial love was a great pretense to what He would do on our behalf.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

Each *This Is Jesus* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These short videos are designed to help you grasp the lesson's main point as you prepare to teach.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. *The Details* give you background info for each book. *The Setting* informs you of what's happening in and around the passage. *The Main Point* gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible Study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context," we mean, at the very least, helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

John

- *Author*: The Gospel of John was written by John the Apostle, son of Zebedee. A fisherman who left his trade to follow Jesus, John also penned the Book of Revelation, as well as the three letters in the New Testament that bear his name.
- *Time frame:* The Gospel of John was probably written between 85 and 95 A.D. John most likely wrote his gospel in Ephesus before he was exiled to Patmos.
- *Purpose:* John's stated purpose for writing this book can be found in John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

THE SETTING

Jesus' return to Jerusalem was leading directly to His crucifixion. Jesus' disciples and His friends could sense a confrontation building between Jesus and the chief priests. The dinner recorded in this passage of Scripture was a brief respite in the events of the week. Matthew, Mark, and John recorded the event (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9). From Jesus' response to the grumbling disciples, it appeared Mary understood the ordeal Jesus was about to face. He had told His disciples He was going to be crucified (Luke 18:31-34). Mary may have known about those predictions. She could not change what was about to happen, but she could show her love for Jesus by anointing Him.

THE MAIN POINT

As Jesus reclined at the dinner table with the disciples and some of His friends, something strange happened: a woman (Mary) brought out an expensive bottle of perfume and began to anoint Him. Likely knowing that His death was on the way, she abandoned the sensibility of the day and used her own hair to wipe the perfume onto Jesus' feet. Her love was extravagant; she did not stop to count the cost of the perfume, nor did she worry about customs that would condemn her actions as inappropriate. Despite the critiques from Judas, Mary was defended by Jesus because of her bold sacrifice that came from the heart.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: an introductory activity called *The Lead In;* the Bible Study section called *The Main Event;* and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word.*

THE LEAD IN

- *Goal:* To help students understand the idea of a prized possession and the cost of sacrificing it.
- *Set-Up:* Depending on your group, you may wish to bring some extra paper and drawing utensils for students.

FIRST, welcome students. Explain to students that to begin their time, you will give them a few minutes to find a picture on their phone of their most prized possession. If they do not have a phone, or they don't have a picture, you may also pass out a piece of paper and some drawing utensils.

THEN, once they have found a picture, ask students to take part in a small show-and-tell moment. Ask students to show their most prized possession, and also to give a brief explanation of why this is important to them (above most other things). **Ask students:**

- **Without looking it up, who can give me a definition of the word "sacrifice"?**
  - *Answers will vary.* You are looking for two meanings of the word: to willing do without something or to give something as an offering.

- **What would it take for you to sacrifice this prized possession?**
  - *Answers will vary.*

FINALLY, **say something like:**

- **Today, we will be reading a passage about a woman who used her prized possession to honor Jesus before He went to be crucified. Most of us agree that sacrificing our prized possession is a big deal, and that there isn't really a price that you can put on it. However, this is a story of an incredibly brave woman who would be encouraged by Jesus for her sacrificial gift.**

Make sure there are no questions, and then transition to The Main Event.

THE MAIN EVENT

- *Goal:* To examine Mary's anointing of Jesus and how her love contrasted with the disbelief the disciples still had about Jesus' impending death.
- *Set-Up:* Make sure students have a Bible or Bible App.

FFIRST, make sure you take a moment to give students a little bit of context for this passage from the Bible Background portion. At this moment in the narrative, Jesus and His disciples were headed to Jerusalem for the Passover, despite the impending plot against Jesus. This would ultimately lead to His death on the Cross.

THEN, read or have a student read John 12:1-3. **Say something like:**

- **Regardless of the danger, Jesus and His disciples returned to Jerusalem for the Passover. Jesus knew He was headed to the Cross but did not hesitate in following the Father's will. Many Jews would have been traveling along the road to Jerusalem for the Passover. Jesus and His disciples stopped in nearby Bethany to spend time with their friends Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Apparently, Jesus arrived in Bethany on Friday, one week before He was crucified.**

Briefly explain that among the three biblical authors who record this interaction in the town of Bethany (Matthew, Mark, and John), scholars have debated on which night of the week this feast took place in Jesus' honor. John placed the dinner before the triumphal entry, probably on Saturday night. However, Mark and Matthew included this event later in the week, prompting some to place this dinner on Tuesday night (Mark 14:1-3). Matthew and Mark both placed the dinner at the home of someone called Simon the Leper (Matthew 26:6, Mark 14:3). The most important thing for us to understand from all accounts is that Jesus and His friends were gathered together mere days before He would have been arrested and crucified.

NEXT, **say something like:**

- **This passage begins by letting us know that Jesus, the disciples, and His other friends were at the point in the party when they were reclining back, likely winding down from all the party activities and getting ready for dinner. In the custom of the day, it would have been unacceptable for women to recline at the table with the men. Nevertheless, Lazarus' sister Martha was present and helping with the meal preparations, and Mary… well, she decided to do something that would make this an incredibly memorable party!**

Explain that perfume from nard is incredibly aromatic. Nard comes from the plant "Nardostachys jatamansi" (which is referred to as both Valerian and Spikenard). This plant is thought to be native to the Himalayan mountains, and typically only grows in highly elevated locations. Because of its rarity at the time, it was very expensive to obtain. Nard has been used in countless religious practices to anoint (religiously appoint someone to a high office/calling). However, it was also used medicinally for things like eczema, migraines, anxiety relief, and aiding sleep. Not only was Mary emptying out an item of luxury and great expense, but she was also dumping out the medicine cabinet in a sense!

Ask students:

- **To be clear, Mary's actions were just as random and strange during Jesus' time as they would be today. How would you react if you witnessed something like this at your next party?**
    - *Answers will vary.*

AFTER THAT, **say something like:**

- **Based on what we know of the culture at the time, Mary's display would have gotten her kicked out of most other parties. Not only did she make the entire home smell like perfume, but she also approached a table of men and used her hair to spread the perfume on Jesus' feet. A woman's hair was typically covered, especially in front of men. Not only did she uncover and let down her hair in front of them, but she also used it to wipe down Jesus' feet, which would have been dirtied from travel and viewed as very unclean.**

Ask students:

- **What do you think motivated Mary to go so far as to ignore the custom of the day so that she could lavish Jesus in this way?**
    - *Answers will vary.*

Briefly encourage students to think about how much Mary must have heard Jesus say about His role as the Messiah. It is very likely she had heard His warning about His death, and was caught up in her love and adoration for Him. She could have known exactly what she was anointing Him for. However, since we do not know for sure, we can only assume that she was more willing to show her love for Him than all the others at the party. There is one person in particular who found this behavior very disturbing.

NEXT, read or have a student read John 12:4-6. **Ask students:**

- **Wow! Judas had some pretty strong opinions about how Mary should have spent her money. Judas stated the perfume was worth 300 denarii, which is an entire year's wages in that day. What do you think about Judas' response?**
    - o *Answers will vary.*

Explain that only John names Judas as the grumbler. According to Matthew, the disciples were grumbling among themselves (Matthew 26:8-9). The text indicates Judas was the one who verbalized the concern, but he was not the only disciple who was indignant at Mary's extravagant show of love to Jesus. It's likely a case of both-and. The disciples would have all been uncomfortable for sure, simply because of the strangeness of the moment. But Judas takes it a step further. **Say something like:**

- **Judas was in charge of the money collection. His plan was that the nard be sold and the money given to the disciples. Then it would be entrusted to him and redistributed to the poor. However, John made it clear that Judas was not really motivated by his love for the poor but by his greed. There is a very good chance that the money would have never made it to the poor and simply stayed with Judas. John's words in verse 6 pull no punches in calling out Judas for 'helping himself" to the group's money from time to time, and Judas seems to have pulled this scheme many times, and Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas was a traitor (John 6:70-71).**

Ask students:

- **Let's contrast the two people in this narrative. What differences do you notice between Mary and Judas?**
    - o *Answers will vary.* Some possible answers: Mary was a woman/Judas a man, Mary displayed her wealth and used it for Jesus/Judas used Jesus to gain wealth for himself, Mary acted in love/Judas acted in greed, etc.

THEN, **say something like:**

- **Situations like this happen all the time, don't they? Think about a time when you were trying to do something nice for someone, and another person complained that your act of kindness could have been more or that there were people who had bigger needs. It's almost as if this person, who isn't helping anyone, still wants credit for thinking of how you could have done something better. This is exactly what happened when Mary dared to display her love for Jesus. Sure, it was a little weird and counter-cultural to pour out such an expensive possession in the way that she did. But Mary had done something that the disciples seemed hesitant to do: Truly give her all and her best to Jesus. While Judas was pretending to be a good disciple and pocketing money from the ministry, Mary's love for Jesus could not be contained. She was emptying her pockets and proclaiming, "You are worth more to me than even this."**

NEXT, read John 12:7-8. **Ask:**

- **How did Jesus respond?**
    - o *Answer:* He told them to leave her alone.

Say something like:

- **Jesus was not saying that the poor were unimportant, not at all. However, He drew the attention back to Himself and the importance of what was about to happen. The day of His burial was essentially there. This is something that His disciples had been warned about multiple times, and that they, especially Judas, would have known was coming soon. And yet, they grumbled when they saw Him being anointed and honored by Mary. Couldn't they see that Jesus' coming sacrifice for their sins would be more bold and strange than Mary's?**

FINALLY, **ask students:**

- **Mary's sacrifice would pale in comparison to the sacrifice that Jesus was about to make on the Cross. However, she didn't let that stop her. We will never be able to outdo God when it comes to offerings and sacrifices. But there are still a lot of ways we can offer up our best to God, the way Mary did. What are some ways that you can do that?**
    - *Answers will vary.*

Allow for questions, and then transition into The Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- *Goal:* To take a closer look at how we show our love to others and to Jesus.
- *Set-Up:* Make sure you have a large dry-erase or poster board handy, along with something to write with.

FIRST, on a dry-erase or poster board, write the following categories in a column (leaving room to write responses out to the sides): Family, Teachers, Friends, and Strangers. **Say something like:**

- **Each of these represents a group of people that you have contact with on a regular basis. Your interactions with these people indicate the kind of relationship you wish to have with them and how important each of them is to you.**

THEN, **ask:**

- **Can you come up with ways that you communicate with people in each of these categories that show how much you care for them?**
    - *Answers will vary.*

Encourage students to think of everyday examples that communicate meaning as well as ways they go out of their way to show people importance. It may be as simple as telling their parents they love them or as elaborate as cooking dinner for a sick grandparent. Allow students to brainstorm for about five minutes and write down some of their answers in each of the categories.

FINALLY, write the name "Jesus" on the dry-erase or poster board, preferably above the categories of people. **Say something like:**

- **As a follower of Jesus, your relationship with Jesus should be the most important relationship in your life. Mary's sacrifice to Jesus was about showing Him and the others how much He mattered to her and displaying her overwhelming love for Him.**

Explain that you are going to close in a time of prayer, but that you want them to think for a moment about ways they can show Jesus their love and appreciation for His sacrifice on the Cross to pay the price for our sins.

Allow Time For Any Closing Thoughts Or Questions From Your Students. Before Leaving, Close With A Prayer.

- Don't forget to remind students about their devotions this week. If you're posting them on Social Media or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.