

The Perfume Incident as Related in All Four Gospels

	Matthew 26:6-13	Mark 14:3-9	Luke 7:36-50	John 11:1-2, 12:1-8
Village	Bethany (26:6)	Bethany (14:3)		Bethany (12:1)
House	Simon the leper (26:6)	Simon the leper (14:3)	The house of a Pharisee named Simon (7:36-40)	They [people of Bethany] gave a dinner for [Jesus]... Martha served (12:2)
Woman	a woman (26:7)	a woman (14:3)	a woman of the city who was a sinner (7:37)	Mary, the sister of Lazarus (12:3; cf. 11:2)
Container	alabaster flask (26:7)	alabaster flask (14:3)	alabaster flask (7:37)	
Ointment	very expensive ointment (26:7)	pure nard / very costly (14:3)	ointment (7:37)	a pound of expensive ointment / pure nard (12:3)
Anoint	she poured it on his head (26:7)	she broke the flask and poured it on his head (14:3)	she wet his feet with tears, wiped them with her hair and anointed them (7:38)	she anointed Jesus' feet and wiped with her hair (12:3)
Odor				the house was filled with the fragrance... (12:3)
Reaction 1	the disciples were indignant (26:8)	some said to themselves indignantly (14:4)	Simon said to himself (7:39)	Judas, one of his disciples (12:4)
Reaction 2	why waste / could have been sold for large sum / given to poor (8-9)	why waste / could have been sold for 300 denarii, given to poor (4-5)	If this man were a prophet he would know this woman is a sinner (39)	why not sold for 300 denarii and given to poor? (12:5)
Jesus 1	Why trouble the woman? (26:10)	Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? (14:6)		Leave her alone (12:7)
Jesus 2	beautiful thing (26:10)	beautiful thing (14:6)		
Jesus 3	poor always with you (11)	poor always with you (7)		poor always with you (8)
Jesus 4	prepared for burial (12)	prepared for burial (8)		...that she may keep it for the day of my burial (12:7)
Jesus 5	in memory of her (13)	in memory of her (9)		
Jesus 6			Parable of moneylender / forgiving debts (7:40-47)	
Jesus 7			Your sins are forgiven (48)	
Reaction 3			Who is this that forgives sins? (7:49)	
Time	"After two days Passover is coming" (Mt 26:2; 6ff)	"It was two days before Passover" (Mk 14:1, 3ff)	this event appears in the early part of Jesus' ministry (topically arranged)	Six days before the Passover* (12:1)
Next Event	Judas meets with chief priests (26:14)	Judas meets with chief priests (14:10)	Jesus goes through cities and villages proclaiming the kingdom (8:1)	the triumphal entry occurs "the next day" (12:12; Mt 21:9, Mk 11:9, Lk 19:29)

* How are we to reconcile John's account with Matthew and Mark on this point? Did this feast take place 2 days before Passover, or six? See *explanation below*.

Jn 12:1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.

- According to John the feast was *six days before Passover*, and the day before the triumphal entry (Jn 12:12-14). But this chronology does not seem to square with the timeline we find in both Matthew and Mark. Below are the passages in question, along with some commentaries that help to make sense of the apparent discrepancy.
 - Mt 26:1 When Jesus had finished all these sayings [i.e. the Olivet Discourse], he said to his disciples, 2 “You know that *after two days the Passover is coming*, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. 5 But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” 6 *Now* when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon leper, 7 a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment... (the triumphal entry took place back Mt 21).
 - Mk 14:1 It was now *two days before the Passover* and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, 2 for they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.” 3 *And while he was at Bethany* in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head (the triumphal entry took place back in Mk 11).
- John Cavin: “[A]fter mentioning *two days*, [Matthew & Mark] add the history of the anointing; they place last in the narrative what happened first...”
- Craig Blomberg: “Mark 14:1-2 begins by observing that the Passover was still two days away...Mark 14:3, on the other hand, is linked with verse 2 merely by a *kai* (and) and goes on to describe an incident that takes place at some unspecified time ‘while Jesus was in Bethany.’ Once we observe that both Mark and John have Jesus interpreting the anointing as preparation for his burial, one can understand why Mark would insert the story immediately preceding a description of other foreshadowings of his death, including his last meal with the Twelve...” (*The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel*, p. 175).
- Richard Bauckham: “Mark makes the supper at Bethany the ‘filling’ in a typical Markan ‘sandwich’ (an A B A pattern...). He frames the event with the two stages of the plot against Jesus: (1) The authorities determine to put Jesus to death, but hesitate to provoke the people to riot (14:1-3); (2) Judas offers to betray Jesus, thus enabling the authorities to arrest him secretly, away from the crowds (14:10-11). Markan sandwiches are contrived for thematic rather than chronological reasons. Thus, for example, the sandwiching of Jesus’ demonstration in the temple (11:15-19) between the two-stage narrative of the cursing of the fig tree, makes the fig tree a symbol of the temple...Recognizing that Mark’s apparent chronology here is artificial makes it entirely possible that John is historically correct in placing the anointing before the triumphal entry. It is an example of John’s habitual precision in chronological and geographical matters, a precision that distinguishes John markedly from the Synoptics” (*The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, p. 180).