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Mary of Bethany

A Character Study

1. Calling – One thing is needed

If Jesus came to your house, how would you prepare? You'd probably sweep, spray, mop, and dust until your house is cleaner than the day it was built. Every dish would be spotless, you wouldn't risk a new recipe, and you'd make sure everyone helps out to make His stay comfortable.

But when Jesus visited Mary's house, she sat down with Him. It's probable that Mary, her brother Lazarus, and her sister Martha grew up as family-friends with Jesus. After all, they lived in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. Perhaps Joseph, Jesus, and his mother Mary stayed with this little family in Bethany a few times a year during the High Holy days.

So when Jesus came back to Bethany just a few months before His crucifixion, Mary decided to spend time with Him. Dishes, cleaning, and hosting will always be there for her. But sitting with Jesus? That wouldn't last forever.

She did not have a loud, formal calling like Joshua or John the Baptist. Her calling was really just a desire to spend time with Jesus. God puts desires in our hearts, and often that serves as the calling within us (Ps. 37:4). For Mary, this desire would grow throughout her story, always resulting in adoration,

worship, and love for Jesus.

2. Equipping – The reality of death

Mary's brother Lazarus was sick. Mary and Martha sent for Jesus, the Healer. He did not come. And Lazarus died. Mary believed Jesus was a healer. But what happens when someone dies?

Perhaps death was the ultimate challenge to Mary. Her parents probably died by this point, since the house was left to Martha. And now her brother had died. And she even she sat with Jesus *because* He would not be here forever. Death must have filled her mind.

"Jesus can heal, but death will take *even Jesus*," she thought. "What can He do for my dead brother now?"

Jesus arrived in Bethany, Mary went to meet Him, and she told Jesus that if He'd just come when she asked, her brother would be fine. But He took too long, and now... Now, Lazarus is dead.

And in that moment, Jesus' spirit groaned within Him. The Greek word describes it like a bellyache. He wept, just as Mary had been doing.

And yet, Lazarus walked out of the tomb a few moments later.

Jesus even had power over death! Mary had no reason to doubt anymore.

And of course, word spread. The grieving orphan sisters turned from bitterness to joy, just as Ruth helped Naomi to do.

And when Jesus visited again a few months later, Mary anointed Him with an expensive perfume. This was the most prized possession in the house, and Mary poured it out freely a week before Jesus' death... A death she knew He would victor over. Perhaps Jesus could smell the last whispers of that perfume as the cross crushed Him on the way to Golgotha. It was the scent

of burial anointing for a dead Man. And yet, death could not keep Him.

Once broken and overcome with the pain of death, Mary now knew that even death was not greater than her Lord.

Formerly broken, she broke the perfume bottle.

Once flowing with tears, Mary poured that perfume on Jesus.

And once hopeless, she now knew the Hope-Giver for Who He is.

3. Sending – Remembered everywhere

Just as Mary did not spare in her sacrifice of the perfume, Jesus did not spare in His blessing to her. She had full faith in Jesus—and that faith would be remembered as far as the Gospel is preached.

Today, we're still telling the story of Mary. The story of Mary's worship for the life-giving Creator has traveled as far as God's Word has spread. Although Mary's story began with simple conversation in a home, God equipped her for the kind of worship that would become part of the Gospel itself. And now, her story is sent all around the world, showing us what faith and love for Jesus looks like.

Summary

- **Called by the desires God gave her**
- **Equipped through immense pain—and victory anyway**
- **Sent to show the world what worship is**

May we all learn to trust the Messiah like Mary!