

John 12:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

Analysis

Judas calculates the ointment's value at three hundred denarii (a year's wages for a laborer), questioning why it wasn't sold for the poor. His objection sounds like social justice but springs from greed. This demonstrates how noble-sounding arguments can mask ignoble motives. The question 'Why was not?' implies criticism of Mary, Jesus, or both. Judas' utilitarian ethics miss worship's transcendent value—some things shouldn't be calculated. His mercenary spirit contrasts Mary's generous heart, previewing his selling Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Historical Context

A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer (Matt 20:2). Three hundred denarii represented a substantial fortune for common people. The poor were numerous in first-century Palestine, making Judas' objection seem reasonable.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do we discern between genuine concern for the poor and utilitarian opposition to worship?
2. What does Judas' calculation teach about the limits of economic thinking in spiritual matters?
3. In what ways does mercenary religion miss worship's intrinsic value?

Interlinear Text

Διατί	τοῦτο	τὸ	μύρον	οὐκ	ἐπράθη	τριακοσίων
Why	this	G3588	ointment	not	sold	for three hundred
G1302	G5124		G3464	G3756	G4097	G5145
δηναρίων	καὶ	ἐδόθη	πτωχοῖς			
pence	and	given	to the poor			
G1220	G2532	G1325	G4434			

Additional Cross-References

Luke 12:33 (Parallel theme): Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

Luke 18:22 (Parallel theme): Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.