

THE SCROLLS

Meeting The Messiah | Mark 14:1-11

Life Lesson

What we value most determines how we respond to Jesus. The woman responds to Christ with extravagant, sacrificial worship, pouring out what is most precious to her. Judas, however, measures Jesus against money and chooses betrayal. This contrast reveals the condition of the heart. When we truly grasp that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, our response should be wholehearted devotion. Worship must come before ministry, and love for Christ must outweigh every competing treasure.

Examine Scripture

1 It was two days before the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a cunning way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 2 "Not during the festival," they said, "so that there won't be a riot among the people." 3 While he was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured it on his head. 4 But some were expressing indignation to one another: "Why has this perfume been wasted? 5 For this perfume might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they began to scold her. 6 Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a noble thing for me. 7 You always have

How Much is Too Much?

Mark 14 begins the Passion Narrative in Mark's Gospel. The backdrop of the Passion Narrative is Passover. Passover is the Jewish festival and feast commemorating the night the Lord passed over the homes of the Hebrews, yet killed the firstborn throughout Egypt: "I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night and strike every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both people and animals. I am the Lord; I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt. The blood on the houses where you are staying will be a distinguishing mark for you; when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No plague will be among you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day is to be a memorial for you, and you must celebrate it as a festival to the Lord. You are to celebrate it throughout your generations as a permanent statute" (Ex. 12:12-14).

What saved the Hebrews from the fate of the Egyptians? The blood of the lamb covered the lintel and doorposts of their homes. That blood provided salvation, leading them out of the bondage of slavery. This is the backdrop for Jesus, the Lamb of God, offering Himself and shedding His blood to provide salvation and freedom from the bondage of sin. Once again, the sovereign hand of God moves through history, weaving together the events of the Old Testament and the New Testament to show the preeminence and glory of Jesus.

In our text, Mark brilliantly "bookends" the anointing of Jesus with the hatred of the Sanhedrin (vs. 1-2) and the betrayal of Judas (vs. 10-11). Typical of the Markan approach, the structure draws attention to the beauty and power of the intended centerpiece. It provides a dark backdrop that allows the anointing of Jesus to shine in brilliance and beauty, fulfilling Jesus' promise: "Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (v. 9).

the poor with you, and you can do what is good for them whenever you want, but you do not always have me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body in advance for burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” 10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. 11 And when they heard this, they were glad and promised to give him money. So he started looking for a good opportunity to betray him.

- Underline “the Passover” in (v. 1). Write “Ex. 12” above it.
- Circle “a cunning way” in (v. 1).
- Circle “a woman” in (v. 3). Write “Mary” above it.
- Underline the actions of the woman: “came with an alabaster jar of expensive perfume,” “pure nard,” “broke the jar,” and “poured it on his head” in (v. 3)
- Underline “she has done a noble thing for me” in (v. 6).
- Circle “promised to give him money” in (v. 11). Write “30 silver coins = 120 denarii” in the margin. Draw a line to (v. 5) and underline “more than 300 denarii” in the margin to show comparison.

Personal Notes

Vs. 1-2

As mentioned, Mark begins his Passion Narrative by ensuring his audience understands the Passover context and its connection to the Passion. It is no coincidence that the betrayal, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus occur within the Passover context. These events are part of redemptive history, from the Fall of Man to the fulfillment of the hope of salvation in the work of Jesus on the cross.

As Passover approaches, the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders, must be cautious in their plans to finally rid themselves of Jesus. Though we have witnessed their anger, hatred, and even their evil desires, their intentions are now abundantly clear and laid bare: “The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a cunning way to arrest Jesus and kill him” (v. 1). The word “cunning” is “dolos,” which means “craft, deceit, or guile.” It carries the idea of tricking or using bait to deceive. The Sanhedrin was not trying to trick Jesus (they had already learned that this was impossible); they were seeking a cunning way to kill him and trick the people, the crowds. Why? They did not want a riot (v. 2).

Perhaps the religious leaders wanted to wait until the Passover pilgrims left the city. They did not want the people who adored or at least were intrigued by Jesus to see them kill Him. They knew they had to use illegitimate means to convict Him, and they did not want their evil and hypocrisy to be exposed. But their timeline was pushed forward by Judas's betrayal. They simply could not miss the opportunity Judas presented. So they had to be even more cunning to arrest Jesus, secure trials and conviction, and kill Him. They thought it was a stroke of luck or an opportune moment, but it was already written by the hand of God before the foundations of the world that Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, mocked, flogged, and crucified in the midst of Passover.

Vs. 3-9

Have you ever received an extravagant gift? Or better, have you ever given an extravagant gift? Have you ever given an extravagant gift of sacrifice for the glory of Jesus? We see such a gift in our text. Now, we come to the beauty surrounded by the darkness cast by the shadows of hatred and betrayal: the anointing of Jesus.

Jesus was having dinner at Simon the Leper's house. Simon was no longer a leper; he had been healed by Jesus. If he were still a leper, he would still be ostracized by society and not allowed to live

Personal Notes

in town, much less have guests in his house. Perhaps this is the leper Jesus heals in Mark 1. Either way, it shows not only the power of Jesus but also His compassion in dining with even a former leper.

As Jesus was reclining at the table, a woman entered (which was against Jewish custom) and anointed Jesus. Though Mark does not name the woman, John, in his Gospel, reveals that it is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:3). What Mark lacks in the detail of her name, he provides in the detail of her actions. First, Mark tells us that she had an alabaster jar of expensive perfume. Later, we will see that the value of this perfume exceeds a year's wages. Next, the perfume is made of pure nard. This shows that the perfume is not only expensive, but also rare and exotic, as it was made from the root of a plant found chiefly in India. Next, instead of simply opening the jar in a way that would allow for later use, she broke the neck of the jar to lavishly pour the entire contents on Jesus' head.

Before examining the reactions of those witnessing such a moment, we must not miss the significance of this text and its application to our lives. In our worship and our lives, Jesus deserves much more than our leftovers; He deserves extravagant, sacrificial gifts! How often do we worship with weary eyes from the weekend or with wandering hearts thinking of tomorrow, bringing half-hearted gifts? The woman brought an expensive, unused jar of perfume. It was not a leftover from a previous purchase; it seems to have been intentionally bought for this purpose. Just as the woman broke open the jar to pour its entire contents on Jesus, we must live in such a way that we are completely emptied by our worship of Jesus. In other words, we ought to be exhausted, emptied, absolutely spent, with our glorifying of God and enjoying Him forever. In the exhaustion of true worship, we find great rest. Only in the emptying of ourselves are we truly filled.

Notice the reaction of those present, which included the Disciples (Matt. 26:8). They were indignant, angry with intense annoyance. Why? Mark tells us, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor" (vs. 4-5). They even rebuked the woman harshly for wasting the perfume (really, its value). Interestingly, the Disciples seemed angry because the perfume could have been sold and the proceeds used to feed the poor. They thought its value could be used to further their ministry. Even in this moment, so close to the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus, the

Personal Reflection

1. In what ways have I experienced the “Passover” reality of Christ’s blood covering my sin, and how does that shape my life of gratitude and obedience today?
2. When I worship Jesus, do I tend to offer Him what is costly and intentional, or what is leftover and convenient? What would “extravagant worship” look like in my life?
3. Have I ever prioritized ministry, productivity, or responsibility over simply sitting at the feet of Jesus in worship? What might need to shift in my heart to ensure that ministry flows from worship rather than replacing it?
4. Where might subtle forms of self-interest, such as Judas’s love of money, be creeping into my devotion to Christ? Are there areas where I am tempted to “profit” from Jesus rather than fully surrender to Him?
5. If my life were remembered as a testimony to the Gospel, as the woman who anointed Jesus, what would it reveal about my love, sacrifice, and devotion to Christ?

Commentaries

Exalting Jesus in Mark by Daniel Akin

MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16 by John MacArthur

BECNT: Mark by Robert Stein

Mt. Zion’s Mission

Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to
MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
 disciples of Jesus Christ.

Disciples lost sight of what was important. They preferred ministry over worship. We must be cautious not to fall into the same “religious trap” of seeing ministry as more important than worship. Ministry ought to flow out of true worship, not in place of it.

Jesus rebuked the Disciples and commended the woman. He tells them to leave her alone. Notice how Jesus describes her actions. First, Jesus says, “She has done a noble thing for me” (v. 6). What a statement of assurance and encouragement. Then Jesus reminds the Disciples that the poor will always be there for them to serve. In other words, there is always work and ministry to be done. Place priority on worshipping Jesus. Jesus then says, “She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial” (v. 8). With all she had, she worshipped Jesus. Even just before his death, the Disciples were more concerned about their ministry; they were looking toward their worship. But this woman was looking toward Jesus. Her reward goes beyond the encouragement of Jesus and the fulfillment she must have experienced in true worship. She will be heard about wherever the Gospel is preached, and since the Word of God endures forever, so will her actions and the lesson she continues to teach all followers of Jesus.

Vs. 10-11

After such a beautiful picture of worship and extravagant love for Jesus, we see Satan’s schemes slither into the Passion Narrative. Judas finally reaches a breaking point. Perhaps, as John reveals, the woman’s waste of the perfume and Jesus’ response anger Judas enough to betray Him (John 12:4-5). Either way, Judas goes to the chief priests to betray Jesus. In (vs. 1-2), the chief priests and scribes seem content to wait until after Passover, but how could they resist such an opportunity as one of Jesus’ own disciples betraying Him? So they promise Judas money (30 silver coins) to betray Jesus. So Judas begins to look for the opportune moment to trap and betray Jesus.

Interestingly, Judas, who is angry that the woman wasted perfume worth over 300 denarii in anointing Jesus, agrees to betray Him for only 30 pieces of silver, valued at only 120 denarii! Judas takes money to hand over Jesus; the woman gives everything to receive Jesus. The woman may have “wasted” perfume, but Judas wastes worship. The woman breaks the alabaster jar, but Judas breaks Jesus’ heart.