

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

### 54. Radical Devotion

#### Mark 14:1-11

**Mark 14:1–10 (CSB)** <sup>1</sup>It was two days before the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

“The Passover” is a reference to the actual feast that celebrated the redemption of Israel from bondage and death in Egypt under Pharaoh. It took place on the 14th of the month Nisan (April/May) and continued into the early hours of the 15<sup>th</sup>.

***Numbers 28:16 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup>“On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Lord’s Passover,*

***Numbers 9:2–5 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup>“Let the people of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. <sup>3</sup>On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and all its rules you shall keep it.” <sup>4</sup>So Moses told the people of Israel that they should keep the Passover. <sup>5</sup>And they kept the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight....*

Passover was followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the 15<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> days of the month

***Numbers 28:17 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup>and on the fifteenth day of this month is a feast. Seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten.*

Before we go any further, I want us to see that Mark bookends Mary’s radical act of devotion between the treacherous plans of the chief priests and the traitorous heart of Judas. Between the murderers and the traitor is this beautiful pillar of devotion!

**The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a cunning way to arrest Jesus and kill him.**

This plot had been nurtured for a long time, going all the way back to Mark 3:6 — again in Mark 11:18 and in the preceding days in Mark 12:12. The high priest himself was the point man in this plot.

*John 11:47–50 (ESV)* <sup>47</sup>So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup>If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” <sup>49</sup>But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup>Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.”

**2“Not during the festival,” they said, “so that there won’t be a riot among the people.”**

From John 11:57 it seems that the religious leaders originally intended to seize Jesus during the feast. But when they saw the popularity of Jesus at the triumphal entry and His authority on the temple mount, they changed their minds and decided to do it after the feast because they didn’t want to face an uprising of the people against them.

**DON’T MISS THIS** — The religious leaders **did not want** to kill Jesus during the Passover feast — but they ended up doing it during that time anyway.

*Mark 14:21 (ESV)* <sup>21</sup>For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”

The death of Jesus was DIVINELY SCRIPTED. Peter makes this clear In **Acts 2**

*Acts 2:23 (ESV)* <sup>23</sup>this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

These men never took the life of Jesus.

*Mark 10:45 NKJV* "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to **give** His life a ransom for many."

*John 10:17-18 NKJV "... I lay down My life that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup>"No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again ..."*

Jesus was going to **give His life** on **this** Passover because He **is** the Passover lamb.

**<sup>3</sup>While he was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper,**

Simon is an amazing party in all of this. We must assume that this Simon **used to be** a leper. If he were still a leper he wouldn't get many RSVP's to dinners at his place. In fact — not only were lepers to live outside of the city — but when they were diagnosed with leprosy their houses had to be burned to the ground. He is undoubtedly a healed man living in a new house!

What a great picture of the Christian — cleansed from the incurable disease of sin by the blood of Jesus (**Ephesians 1:7**); and then getting a new house to live — Paul says that we become members in the household of God (**Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 2:19**)

The important thing is he **used to be** a leper. This is a man who was pronounced unclean by the Jewish religious system. He lived as an outcast in Israel — living off garbage and excluded from the worship life of Israel. But Jesus has healed him — and he's gone from a leper colony to a feast in his own home.

We need to bear in mind the fact that the religious leaders had commanded that no one associate with Jesus — and if anyone saw Jesus they were turn Him over to them. Simon didn't care! He did the opposite. He opened his home to Jesus as an act of radical devotion! What was it like for Simon to sit there and look across the table at the one who had healed him and cleansed him, to listen to his words, to look into his face?

**as he was reclining at the table, a woman came**

John's account of this incident (John 12:1–8) tells us that this was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha.

**a woman came with an alabaster jar (ESV – flask) of very expensive perfume of pure nard.**

**Nard** was an aromatic oil extracted from a root native to India — which made it a **rare** and **valuable** commodity in Israel.

Often spices and ointments were used as investments because they were small, portable, and could be easily sold.

**William Lane** — *“Early in the first century Pliny the Elder remarked that ‘the best ointment is preserved in alabaster.’ The value of the perfume, and its identification as nard, suggests that it was a family heirloom that was passed on from one generation to another, from mother to daughter.”<sup>1</sup>*

**pure nard.** This rare, costly imported oil was not DILUTED or watered down. It was beyond Mary to think that the One of infinite worth should receive watered down devotion — diluted devotion.

**She broke the jar (ESV - flask) and poured it on his head.**

FIRST — Mary did this without a word. She didn’t announce what she was going to do — she didn’t describe it as she did it. She didn’t explain it after she did it. She simply did it.

SECOND — This alabaster flask was a small bottle with a thin neck. These alabaster flasks were sealed closed after filling. They didn’t have a re-sealable top. You could only open the flask by breaking the neck of the jar. Once the jar is open the precious ointment is spent.

Mary broke the flask and poured it on the head of Jesus!

Mark’s wording indicates that she poured the entire contents of the bottle on the head of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Lane, W. L. (1974). *The Gospel of Mark* (p. 492). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Look at verse 5 — ***<sup>5</sup>For this perfume might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.***

A denarius was a days wage. So 300 denarii was essentially a years income. Think about this — The median household income in Roseville resident is \$76,712 a year (U.S. average is \$53,482 a year).

Whether you fall above or below that median income, how long would it take you to **save** a whole year's wages? That's a tremendous sacrifice. If you were incredibly thrifty and worked incredibly hard — you may be able to save up a year's wages over a long period of time.

Mary took a perfume valued at a year's wages and uses it for a **single moment** of blessing the Lord Jesus. She didn't take a part of it and dilute it to make it look like a lot, and then save the rest of it. It was all or nothing.

## TWO THINGS

**1.** Sometimes radical devotion is expressed in a one-off action — something you can only do once — like Mary breaking the neck of the alabaster flask — you'll never get to do it again. Pour it out. Don't dilute it. Be extravagant in the amount of the gift. Be extravagant in the nature of the gift itself — the purity of the gift — and the cost of the gift.

**2.** Radical devotion involves radical faith.

However she got ahold of this valuable item, it's clear she trusted Christ with her future. With a year of wages in the bank a person could begin to trust in their material goods to get through life.

For Mary, all that value — all that — was gone in a moment. Mary didn't place her trust in the years worth of wages in that flask. She was able to pour that flask out on Jesus because she trusted the object of her devotion to take care her.

**Mark 14:4–5 (CSB) <sup>4</sup>But some were expressing indignation to one another: “Why has this perfume been wasted?”**

John's account singles out Judas as the complainer. Matthew gives us this

**Matthew 26:8 (CSB)** <sup>8</sup>*When the disciples saw it, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked.*

This attitude still exists among followers of Jesus. Drop a chunk of money a state of the art entertainment system for your living room — people say "Awesome." Buy a new projector for the church — people say "Couldn't we get the cheaper one?" Buy a new SUV for the family — *absolutely*. Buy a new van for the youth ministry — *Can't they use our old one instead?*

Mary knew that Jesus is worthy of radical — extravagant love and devotion. Do we know this about Jesus? Do we act as if he's worth the first of everything in our lives? He is. He is worth the first day of the week, the first of each day, the first of our income, and the first of our devotion. There's one thing He isn't worthy of — diluted leftovers.

**<sup>5</sup>For this perfume might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they began to scold her.**

**<sup>6</sup>Jesus replied, "Leave her alone.**

## **TWO THINGS HERE**

**1.** Mary doesn't defend herself — she doesn't rebuke Judas Iscariot and the others — she doesn't get into an argument. Mary is so locked into expressing her love and adoration of Jesus that she is not conscious of what others are thinking. She loves Jesus — she's serving Jesus — She doesn't care what Judas thinks.

**2.** Jesus steps in and defends her cause. ***Let her alone.*** This is one of those passages where I wish we could hear the tone of his voice? This is so awesome! Jesus knows our hearts. He maintains our right and our cause. He defends us.

**Why are you bothering her? She has done a noble thing for me.**

**ESV** — <sup>6</sup>*But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.*

**The CREATOR has become man** — He made the Alps. He made the Yorkshire Dales. He made the blue sky. He made the Oceans. He made every rose, every flower. He came from glory indescribable. If anybody knows what beauty is, it's Jesus — and He says — *What's **she** has done — her devotion to me — is beautiful!* Pouring out THE BEST — TO Jesus and FOR Jesus is BEAUTIFUL in the eyes of the creator of beauty.

<sup>7</sup>**You always have the poor with you, and you can do what is good for them whenever you want, but you do not always have me.**

**THIS IS HUGE STUFF** — Jesus was not indifferent to poverty. **He** was poor! **Nor** was He apathetic towards helping the poor. The Bible He authored, the life He lived, and the church He left behind all testify to His care for those with less or with little.

This is NOT a Jesus vs. the poor argument. It's an **always** vs. **not always** argument. The ones scolding her had been with Jesus 24/7 for nearly three years — but Mary knew something they didn't know. Mary understood what Jesus told them: Jesus wouldn't always be around but Poverty would.

<sup>8</sup>**She has done what she could;**

**THIS IS HUGE** — Real devotion to Jesus isn't expressed in what we wish we could do for Jesus. Real devotion to Jesus is expressed in light of reality — in light of who we are and what we are able to do. Some people can do a number of things — some a few — others, maybe just one thing. We express our devotion to Jesus by way of what we CAN do. Mary simply said to herself: *What can I do for Jesus?* She could express radical devotion to Jesus in a way no one else at that gathering could.

We need to do that thing or those things God has enabled us to do and given opportunity to do.

I pray this for myself — and I pray it for you: I pray that you will discover that when *you* actually begin to do what *you* can that you will see door after door open to you — and that you will find yourself doing more noble and beautiful things for Jesus than you ever dreamed.

**she has anointed my body in advance for burial.**

Time and again Jesus told His disciples about his impending death. But how did Mary know? In **Luke 10:39** she was at the feet of Jesus listening to Him teach. I think it was during these teaching sessions she gained insight into Jesus' coming death. When He said that He would be delivered into the hands of wicked men and mocked and scourged and crucified, she believed it. I don't believe she knew or understood the full ramifications of His death — but she was sure He was going to die so she anointed Him for his grave

Jesus KNEW that this was the reason she did it.

**<sup>9</sup>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."**

The assurance that the gospel will be preached in the whole world anticipates the resurrection!

**<sup>10</sup>Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. <sup>11</sup>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.**