

### Mary Anoints the Lord

#### Mark 14:1-11

Mark 14:1-11 – *“After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death. <sup>2</sup> But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people.”*

*<sup>3</sup> And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came, having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. <sup>4</sup> But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, “Why was this fragrant oil wasted? <sup>5</sup> For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they criticized her sharply. <sup>6</sup> But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. <sup>7</sup> For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. <sup>8</sup> She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. <sup>9</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”*

*<sup>10</sup> Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. <sup>11</sup> And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.”*

#### Background Notes

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were two of the seven annual festivals in the Jewish calendar. Held in the spring of the year, Passover was the first feast. It was followed immediately by the week long Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jews came to Jerusalem from all over Israel and from around the Roman Empire to celebrate these two feasts. For this reason, the Jewish leaders decided to wait before they arrested Jesus, because they knew that a number of Jesus’ supporters from the Galilee would be in Jerusalem for the feasts.

The religious leaders themselves were unaware how quickly the events of the next few days would unfold. They were quite surprised when Judas, one of the twelve close followers of Jesus, offered to betray Him (v10). Furthermore, these religious leaders didn’t know that all of the events of the final week of our Lord’s earthly ministry were under the complete control of a sovereign God. The Lord Jesus knew exactly what was happening, and He knew the schedule of events. In Matthew 26:2 Jesus said, *“You know that after two days is the Passover and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”* In Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, *“[Jesus], being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (Acts 2:23).*

Verses 1-2 reveal the hatred and hostility of the Jewish leaders, and verses 10-11 expose the treachery and betrayal of Judas. Sandwiched between those two events - between these two sad commentaries on human nature - is the wonderful account of Mary's act of worship. Her beautiful act of worship is highlighted against the dark background of hatred and betrayal.

Mary's act of worship is also covered in Matthew 26 and John 12, but the event recorded in Luke 7 is the act of worship of a different woman - maybe Mary Magdalene. We know that the woman in Mark 14 was Mary of Bethany because of the parallel account in John 12. In fact, from John 12 it appears that the event may well have taken place in Mary, Martha, and Lazarus's home in Bethany. Our Lord was often in this home when He was in the Jerusalem area. Mark 14:3 says it was the home of "Simon the leper." It's possible that Simon was Mary, Martha, and Lazarus's father, or perhaps Martha's husband. In any case, it seems that Simon was a leper who had been healed by the Lord Jesus.

It wasn't culturally out of place for Mary to anoint the Lord with perfume in that day, as it would be today. Suppose somebody were to come over for dinner and pour perfume on you? Kind of strange - and definitely out of place! Well, in the dry and dusty conditions of that day, it was normal to anoint the guest's head and feet with ointment. And don't think of this perfume as something that was oily and sticky and had to be cleaned up. No, it would have evaporated very quickly, leaving a beautiful fragrance.

John 12 says that Mary also anointed the Lord's feet. This would have been easy to do, because in that day people didn't sit at the table in chairs with their feet underneath the table. Rather, they reclined on their sides on backless couches or lounge chairs, with their heads propped up on one elbow and their feet extending away from a low table upon which where the food was set. So Mary had no problem, then, when she anointed the Lord's head and feet as He reclined at the table.

What was unusual about Mary's action was the cost of the perfume, and the fact that Mary went well beyond anointing the Lord just because of the dry and dusty conditions. Verse 8 tells us that she had planned it beforehand. She came prepared to **anoint the Lord's body for burial**. Mary realized that the Lord was going to die. Mary had entered into this truth even more than the Lord's closest friends, the twelve disciples did.

What is the Bible teaching us in Mark 1-11? Certainly, it's teaching us about worship.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Worship involves sacrifice.

Mary's action was unusual - not because it was contrary to the culture of that day, but because the perfume was very costly. It was made from an aromatic herb that was imported from the Far East, and it was worth 300 denarii. 300 denarii was about a year's wages for an average working man! A lot of hard work and sacrifice went into Mary's act of worship. Think of all the things she could have done with that money! Worship does involve sacrifice.

In Hebrews 13:15-16 says, "*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*" So God sees the praise of our lips and our acts of service for the Lord as **sacrifice** - and therefore it is **worship**.

The question for us is, "How much does our worship of God cost us? Is it a sacrifice? Or do we just give the Lord our *spare* time and our *spare* thoughts and the *spare* change in our pockets? Is that the kind of worship we give?" If that's all we give, it's like using cheap perfume for anointing.

Let's be willing to sacrifice and pay the price to add quality to our worship. Let's not just give God the leftovers of our time and thought. Worship involves sacrifice.

### 2. Worship is not a waste!

Notice that some of the people at the dinner were saying that this perfume could have been sold for a lot of money and used to help the poor. They even used the term "waste" - "*Why was this fragrant perfume wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.*" From the account in John 12, we know that it was Judas who instigated these comments.

Isn't that what people do today as well? "You Christians waste so much time reading the Bible and singing hymns when there are so many pressing needs around us—the needs of the inner city, needs of hurting people, needs in Third World countries. How can you justify wasting your time in singing and praying? How can you waste money building places for worship when that money could be used to help the poor?"

Notice our Lord's answer: **Worship is not a waste!** We *should* help the poor and needy, and in verse 7 the Lord very definitely indicates that's what we *should* be doing. But worship of the Lord should be a priority. It's not a waste of time and effort. The Lord told her critics that Mary had done the right thing.

In addition, the Lord said that her act of worship would be remembered, and every time this Scripture is read, that prediction is fulfilled. Mary's act of worship will be remembered forever! The time we spend in worship may seem like a waste of time and effort to the unbeliever, but our worship will be remembered forever.

Worship not only brings glory to God now - it has eternal value! Worship is not a waste.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Have we done what we could?

In verse 8 the Lord said, *"She has done what she could."* What did the Lord mean by that? Here's what He *didn't* mean: She couldn't do much, but she did what little bit she could do. No - that's not the idea. The Lord meant that **she did all that she could!** She went to the limit of her resources - she went all out - she did all that she could.

Have we done all that we could - or have we only given a few drops of ointment to the Lord? That doesn't mean that we all have to be foreign missionaries, or that we can't have regular jobs. But are we holding back in our commitment? Maybe there's a ministry at your church or in your community that needs *you*. Have we done **all** that we could?

### 2. Is it possible that you are a Judas in disguise?

Who would have thought that Judas was actually an unbeliever? He was part of the group— he was one of the favored Twelve! He traveled with the Lord and listened to Him teach and preach. He saw Him do miracles. According to Mark 6:13, Judas was even involved in casting out demons and in healing. He mouthed a profession of faith, and I'm sure at the beginning he himself thought he was a true believer. But his true colors were emerging. Judas had become disillusioned with the Lord's message and ministry, and now he was even making plans to betray the Lord.

Judas despised Mary's act of worship. He considered it a waste of money and a waste of time. He sanctimoniously mentioned the poor, but John 12 reveals the real reason for his complaints: Judas was a thief! *"He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the moneybag"* (John 12:6). Judas was the "treasurer" for the group, and he helped himself to the donations that were given to the Lord. He would have preferred that Mary give the money she had spent on the perfume to the Lord, because he wanted to pilfer from the money that was under his control!

I'm assuming that no one who is listening to this Talk is a Judas in disguise! However, there's always a possibility that some of you are not "true believers" in Jesus Christ – you may be just "religious" and "going through the motions of worship" for your own reasons. Make sure you know the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior!

Make sure you're not a "Judas in disguise."