

WORSHIP - WHEN EXTRAVAGANCE BECOMES PRUDENT

- 1) **Mark 14:1-2** - "It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, [2] for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

These verses set the framework for the story that follows. This woman's devotion shines much more brilliantly against the backdrop of conspiracy and bloodshed. These are the verses that give more pointed meaning to Jesus' words - *that this woman had anointed His body for burial*.

- 2) **Mark 14:3** - "And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

Some extra details come into focus when the parallel passages are brought all together. In all likelihood, this is the same woman identified by John (**John 12:1-8**) as *Mary*. I will call her this throughout this study. The fact that John says she poured the oil over Jesus' feet (**John 12:3**) shouldn't be disturbing. As Jesus was reclining at the table, there was enough oil in the container to pour it on Jesus' head (as in Mark) and anoint his body for burial (as Jesus Himself indicated).

The flask of oil was very valuable - it was worth a *year's wages* (**Mark 14:5**). That detail shouldn't be skipped over too quickly. If this woman was, in fact, Mary, we know she probably wouldn't have had sufficient funds to *buy* this kind of perfume. Usually, in that culture, these alabaster vases were passed down from generation to generation, from mother to daughter. In all likelihood, Mary had kept this vase for years, guarding it from thieves and intruders. *This was why the disciples were all so amazed that she had broken it open to anoint Jesus*.

- 3) **Mark 14:4-5** - "There were some who said to themselves indignantly, 'Why was the ointment wasted like that? [5] For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they scolded her.

A) A LITTLE BACKGROUND IS IMPORTANT HERE.

Mary showed extreme extravagance in anointing Jesus. *Why?* What drove her to do this?

- i) **REMEMBER, SHE WAS SITTING THERE WITH HER BROTHER LAZARUS**

John 12:1-2 - "Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. [2] So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table."

Not long ago Lazarus was dead. Jesus called him out of the grave. We also know that this all took place at the house of *Simon the leper* (**Mark 14:3**). While we know next to nothing about this man, we do know that people wouldn't have gathered in his home if he were still leprous. His nickname no longer applied to his condition. Had he been healed by Jesus? Was he one of the nameless lepers healed by Jesus in the gospels? At least it's an interesting possibility.

- ii) **DID MARY KNOW THAT JESUS WOULD SOON DIE?**

It certainly isn't impossible that she *could* have known. Jesus had predicted His death on

many occasions. She could have heard some of those discussions. Maybe she grasped something that the others had been too busy or distracted to hear. ***Don't forget how intently Mary loved to listen at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:38-42).***

B) NOTICE THE REACTION OF THE DISCIPLES.

John records Judas as the spokesperson for the group, but Mark makes it clear that all of those in the room "**rebuked her harshly**" (Mark 14:5).

I think we can ***all relate*** to their complaint. I mean, ***what good did this action accomplish?*** It doesn't strike us as ***practical*** or ***prudent***. Even devout Christians might wonder what ***ministry*** this advanced. That perfume really could have been sold. It really could have fed a lot of hungry people for a whole year. In our eyes, that deed seems like such a waste. There is an enormous danger in underrating the beauty and necessity of acts of devotion and worship to Jesus. The duty of humanitarian and utilitarian actions does ***not*** replace nor override the duty of devotion to God alone. We must keep the ***first*** command in first place and the ***second*** in second place.

- 4) **Mark 14:6-9** - "But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. [7] For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. [8] She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. [9] And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Jesus saw a beauty and appropriateness in Mary's action. It wasn't that Jesus was against helping the poor. He did much to relieve the suffering of the poor and needy. He challenged His disciples to do the same. Yet He recognized a divine order - a priority of life - that we tend to neglect. ***Perhaps there is no virtue we more admire than prudence.*** We admire people who have the capacity to calculate everything they do and have to maximize their investments. And however passionate this woman's actions appeared, they didn't seem very prudent.

Yet there are times when ***prudence doesn't receive very high marks in Scripture*** - "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and ***prudent*** and revealed them to babes" (Luke 10:21 NKJV). There are important things the prudent will miss. There are times for ***measured carefulness*** and there are times for ***extravagance***. We tend to be extravagant with earthly things and careful with Kingdom treasures. Jesus taught it should be the other way around. ***His presence calls for passion and love that are costly and unbounded - almost reckless.*** The person who calculates his devotion to the Lord in cool detachment doesn't realize the One with whom he or she is dealing.

5) WHAT ABOUT THE POOR?

Actually, we have already looked at this. Remember the two great commandments - **Mark 12:29-31** - "Jesus answered, 'The most important (command) is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30] And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' [31] The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The poor, like our neighbor and even our enemies, never lose when God is put first. As our hearts are drawn toward Him, they are drawn out of self and into the mission field of human need - the Father's creation.