

Expression of Love Mark 14:1-9; John 12:1-8; Matthew 26:6-13

Read Mark 14:1-2.

Mark introduced the series of events that led to the Cross by showing the contrast between those who sought to kill Jesus, the love Mary had for Him, and the betrayal of Judas.

Read Mark 14:3. John alerted us to the fact that this was a flashback to an event that happened several days earlier. The actual event occurred several days earlier when Jesus arrived in Bethany. It is inserted here to show the contrast between the attempts of His enemies to put Jesus to death and the worship of true followers.

We have no idea who **Simon the Leper** was. It is assumed he was healed, since were he not healed, he could not have been providing a meal for Jesus and His disciple. Because there was no known cure for leprosy in those days, it is likely Jesus had healed him. He was providing this meal as a part of his thanks to Jesus. John wrote that Lazarus was there reclining with Jesus and the others.

Wouldn't it be great if we had a recording of the conversations around that table? Jesus was there and had been discussing His impending death with the disciples so, for sure, that had to be on their minds. Simon had been a leper and was now cured. There had to have been lots of questions for him about that experience. And then there was Lazarus, who had just recently been raised from the dead. Wouldn't you love to hear the conversations the guests had with him? "What was it like to die?" "What did you see when you were dead?" "What did you think when you came alive again?"

In the midst of that meal and the varied conversations going on, Mark wrote of a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of nard. Mark did not identify her, but John wrote that she was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

Mark wrote that she arrived with a jar of "**pure nard.**" Nard was a perfume imported from India that was used almost exclusively as part of the burial process. Both Mark and John record that it was expensive. The actual Greek says it was worth 300 denarii. A denarius was the equivalent to a day's wage for the average person so the NIV translated that value in verse 5 is a year's wages. That was truly expensive. In today's economy, it would be worth \$30-60,000. We have no idea where she got that from.

It was a major gift of love. As we contemplate that huge gift, we can easily assume that it was something well beyond what any of us could give. Read Mark 12:41-43. The issue for God is not the value the world places on the gifts we bring but the sacrifice involved in the giving. God does not want what we can afford to give but what we really cannot afford to give but are still willing to give anyway because we love Him. Mary's gift was huge. The widow's so small but both gifts

were given as expressions of love and worship and both women were equally praised by Jesus. Read Romans 12:1

Mark noted that Mary “**broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.**” From archaeology, we know that the type of jar used for such perfume would have had a long stem on it. When one used it, one normally took a stopper off and sprinkled a little out. Mary literally broke the stem off and poured it all on Jesus. Mark merely made note of it being poured on His head while John added that, “**she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair.**” She literally poured it all over Him.

Mary is mentioned 3 times in the gospels. On each occasion she is seen at the feet of Jesus. In Luke 10:39 she was at the feet of Jesus in her home listening to Him teach. John 11:32 reads that after her brother Lazarus died, Jesus arrived, and she fell at His feet. Here she wiped His feet. Being at the feet of someone in New Testament times was a sign of submission and worship of that individual.

We should not miss the fact that Mary used her hair to wipe His feet. In Israel, and in fact in much of the world at that time, a woman’s hair was her pride or her glory. Using it to wipe the feet of Jesus was a significant expression of worship.

To say the least, that caused a minor uproar. Once again Mark gave us only the bare minimum, while John filled in details. Read 12:4. John noted that it was Judas Iscariot who first objected by suggesting it could have been sold to care for the poor. In a way, his idea was appropriate since it was customary to give to the poor during the Passover season. Read John 12:5.

Borrowing from one of the commentaries I read in preparation for this study, we can see some major points of contrast between Mary and Judas. Daniel Akin noted: **Mary** was a woman with no standing in the community. Judas was a man and one of the apostles. **Mary** gave what she could to Jesus while Judas took what he could from Jesus. **Mary** blessed her Lord while Judas betrayed his Lord. **Mary** loved her Lord and Judas used the Lord. **Mary** did a beautiful thing and Judas did a terrible thing. **Mary** served Him as her Savior and Judas sold Him like He was a slave. **Mary** is notable forever for her devotion while Judas is notorious forever for his betrayal. (Exalting Jesus in Mark loc. 7014)

If all the disciples had done was suggest that the value of her gift might have been better used, it might have been overlooked. The Greek, however, implies more than simply raising an issue of priorities but of a very strong and degrading objection. Mark wrote that they “**they rebuked her harshly.**” The Greek implies that they grunted or snorted at her in a way commonly used to show significant disdain.

Implied in the response of the disciples, although probably not intended by them, was that the poor were more important than the worship of Jesus. You will recall the occasion when Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment. Jesus responded that the greatest commandment was to

love God first and then love our neighbors. It has to be in order. One cannot truly love others until he first loves God. The issue for Mary was her love for Jesus, a love that would inevitably lead to love for others, including the poor. But love for Jesus was expressed first.

Read John 12:3. Think what acts of ours could be described as filling the area where we are with a sweet fragrance. Acts of love and kindness can transform a life, a family or even a community.

Read Mark 14:6. Jesus called her actions **“beautiful.”** That stands in contrast to the attitude of Judas. The response of Jesus causes us to ask who we want to please. Mary could have pleased the disciples by donating her perfume to the poor, but she chose to please Jesus, who saw her gift as beautiful.

What the world often calls wasteful, God calls beautiful. Think of some of the ways the world views a waste what God calls beautiful. The world often says we are wasting time going to church, wasting money giving to the church etc. but God calls it beautiful.

Read Mark 14: 7. That is a quote from Deuteronomy 15:11. As we know, this was not putting down the responsibility we have for the poor but reminding us that worship of God precedes love of neighbors.

Read Mark 14:8, She probably did not understand the impending death of Jesus. I think she did that at the leading of the Spirit without understanding how significant it really was. Then Jesus, as He always does, used it in a way she could never have imagined. God so often does that. We say a word that we think falls on deaf ears and God uses it, sometimes much later, but uses it in a way we could not imagine. We do a kind deed in His name and it is used by Him in ways that go far beyond what we could have expected. He loves to magnify our gifts and use them in ways we can not imagine.

Read Mark 14:9. We just remembered it, so Jesus was right. No act of love toward Jesus or one of His children is ever forgotten by Him. The world may not even know, let alone remember, but God never forgets what we do for Him. How exciting is that!

This week contemplate what you can do for Jesus that is truly outlandish as a way of reflecting your love for Him.