

## 83 Mark 14:1-11

### The Faithful & the Treacherous

#### Text

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.”

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. 4 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. 6 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.”

10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. 11 And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

#### Introduction

The book of Mark has been an amazing study. The life of Christ has been set before our eyes in an unadulterated form and we are forced to deal with it. The pace has been quick. We are given just the bare bones of his life. No explanation, no candy coating, no filler. Just the cold hard facts. Still, Mark has shown a knowledge in details that could only have come from a first-hand witness. Although a skeleton sketch, it has been vivid.

His entry was grand. Announced by John the Baptist with all the attendant imagery of Micah and Isaiah, Jesus arrives and begins his ministry when God tears open the heavens, and the Spirit of God descends upon him and the Father speaks his approval. His Galilean ministry is marked by *exousia* - authority. His authority was displayed against the demons who would shriek in his presence. His authority was manifest over nature with the stilling of the storm and the walking on water. His authority over the curse was compassionately bestowed in the many healings he performed. His authority was displayed in his teaching. Although Mark records very little of his teaching, the reaction to his teaching is revealed.

The Journey section focuses more on the disciples than on the crowds. Jesus explicitly foretells his death three times, but it seems to fall on deaf ears. Over and over the nature of the kingdom is explained and greatness in the kingdom is illustrated. But it all seems to fall on deaf

ears.

Jesus begins his Jerusalem ministry and it has been nothing but conflict and judgment. From the cursing of the fig tree to the cleansing of the temple, it is now Jesus who marches upon the stronghold of the religious leaders. Confrontation after desperate confrontation they fight back in vain. Each time they are bested, each time Jesus pleases the on-lookers. These verbal battles finish with no one daring to talk to him anymore. And Jesus, for his part, leaves the temple desolate and predicts its destruction. Jesus then explains things more closely for his disciples while they sit upon the Mount of Olives. He speaks of the horrors of Jerusalem's fall and of the glory of his second coming.

The authority of Jesus was displayed in the first section. Greatness in the kingdom was explained in the second section. The existing powers were confronted and the future foretold in the third section. And now there is nothing left but to wrap up this third section; and in so doing, wrap up the book. Now begins the abandonment of Jesus. Little by little, everyone abandons Christ until at last, he dies alone. Judas is the first to start this cycle.

This section is another example of Mark's sandwich technique. He takes the story of Judas and the chief priests and breaks it in half and inserts this story of the woman with the alabaster jar. France has observed a double sandwich which almost serves as a chiasmatic structure as well. At the center is the story of the woman and Jesus. On one side of that is the chief priest's mirrored on the other side by Judas's answer to their problems. And further on the out, on one side there is a statement that the Passover is coming, mirrored with Passover preparations on the other side. The Passover provides the OT symbolic overtones. And the woman serves as a striking contrast to Judas.

## The Coming Passover

*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."*

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were right next to one another. Thus the two together were sometimes called by the name of one or the other. Passover was different from many of the other feasts. This feast was obviously in remembrance of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. God commanded them on the eve of their departure, to sacrifice a lamb and to cover their doorposts with it. The angel of death was going to kill all of the firstborn in Egypt. However, if your house was covered by the blood of the lamb, the angel of death would passover your home and spare everyone inside. Once they were brought out of the land of Egypt, God made a covenant with Israel.

I am what is known as a covenant theologian. When we step back and look with a wide angle at scripture, what is it about? People have given different answers. Some have said that there are seven discernible dispensations in which God deals with mankind. Others have said that the Bible is basically a love letter. Still others have seen different structures. I am covenantal because when I step back and ask, "What does scripture itself give as its defining structure?" the answer is clearly "covenants." If there are different dispensations, it is because God has established different covenants. If it is a story about love and redemption, the story is told through the framework of covenants.

The covenant God made with Israel was the most explicitly redemptive covenant yet. The Passover, therefore, is a crucial feast in the history of redemption. As we have seen in Mark, much of what has happened thus far can be seen in terms of Isaiah's second exodus. This upcoming feast is not simply a feast for the fun of it. Nor will this Passover be just any Passover. This will be the Passover where the second exodus really does occur. This will be the Passover when God's people will be redeemed, not from physical slavery, but from the bondage of their own flesh. This is the ultimate Passover.

The Chief priests were seeking a way to kill Jesus. But little did they know that their actions were the means by which God would inaugurate the New Covenant.

## A Model of Faithfulness

*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. 4 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. 6 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."*

This is the inside of Mark's sandwich. Without saying a word, so much is communicated by the placement of this story.

This appears to be a rather small gathering as small gatherings go for Jesus. He has his disciples with him. They are at the house of Simon the leper. Since Simon would not even be allowed in the house, let alone to host a social event, it is likely that Simon use to be a leper whom Jesus had previously healed. The only other person we know about was this woman. It would have been quite unorthodox for a woman to interrupt this gathering. So we see a leper (or a former leper) and a woman as the only other people in this gathering. This is another example of Mark's insider vs. outside motif. It is those who are of little significance that are great in the kingdom. Thus the little children are constantly upheld by Jesus. It is the outsiders that are on the inside of Jesus group - the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the lepers, the women. Those who should be on the inside, those who should be closest to Jesus and who should proclaim him most loudly turn out to be on the outside. His family is on the outside. The leaders of Israel who should proclaim Jesus as the Messiah are the ones who are seeking his death. It is the leper that has Jesus for dinner, and a woman that anoints him with expensive oil.

This act of devotion even begot a response from Jesus' disciples. It was a very expensive perfume. 300 denarai was approximately a year's wage. Can you imagine spending an entire year's wage on a perfume that you are going to pour out on someone else? This woman does. "What a waste!" is the response. "How could she pour all of that out like that?" "That could have been sold and given to the poor!" And so they scolded her.

Jesus, however, comes to her defense. He will not be with them much longer. He has explicitly said as much to the disciples, but they never move to honor him in the way this woman did. "You

will always have the poor" Jesus said. In this he was not saying that we should not give to the poor. He was stating that the more urgent thing now was his impending death. In only a couple of days he will be dead and they will have him no more. What a contrast the inner part of the sandwich serves to the outside!

While they sought to kill, she sought to bless.

While Judas sought for money, she poured hers out on Jesus.

While Judas was willing to betray for a little, she was willing to bless with much.

## The Mind of a Traitor

*10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. 11 And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.*

Here is Judas Iscariot. Here is one of Jesus' closest followers. Here is one of only twelve men who traveled with Jesus. He is with him. He saw Jesus cast out demons. He saw him calm the storm. He saw him heal the sick. Judas sat at his feet and listened to his teaching. How can it be?! How can it be that someone so close would be willing to betray his Lord? What did Jesus do?

Notice that it was Judas that went to the chief priests. They did not come to him. He sought them out. What evil was in his heart? I do not understand. We have no reason to think that Judas hated Jesus. There was never any cause for him to hate Jesus. What would make someone who was so close and who had never been wronged, what would make him betray this man? We may never know. Some people have tried their hardest to make Judas out to be a good guy. He was just trying to set up a meeting between Jesus and the authorities to help them talk about and resolve their differences. Maybe he thought Jesus would just get away like all the other times. I'm sure all these attempts are well-intended, but that is revisionist history that we cannot accept. Judas is simply portrayed as a traitor. He is described as a demon. Scripture does not leave open the notion of a well-intentioned Judas.

Judas went to the chief priests and offered to betray Jesus. Naturally, they were ecstatic about this. This was exactly the break they were looking for. They promised him money, and as it turns out it was a measly amount of money at that.

## Application

Think for a moment about this incident with the woman. It was not normal for a woman to interrupt the men, but in she came. Perhaps some of them ignored her at first thinking that she merely came to tend to their drinks or something. But it soon became clear that she was not there for them. She came straight over to Jesus. The room is silent now in an awkward sort of silence. Everyone is wondering what she is up to. She raises the bottle and breaks it. There was not going to be a half-hearted trickle. She breaks the jar so that it must all be used. She pours it on the head of Christ. She pours all of it on him. It was about a pint. Jesus is covered in it. It runs down his head and his shoulders. It covers him. The scent of this oil begins to fill the room. A heavy musky fragrance fills the room.

Can you imagine walking into a room, interrupting a meeting to which you are not invited, walk up to the leader and pour a pint of anything, let alone fragrant perfume all over him. There may have been gasps as she began to pour. Immediately there may have been apologies to Christ. "If I had but know I would have stopped her." "Why have you done this?" "What a waste!" "This could have been sold for a handsome profit and give to the poor." Can't you hear it? Spurgeon comments:

I wish we were all of us ready to do some extraordinary thing for Christ—willing to be laughed at, to be called fanatics, to be hooted and scandalized because we went out of the common way, and were not content with doing what everybody else could do or approve to be done.

But it is wonderful when we consider what the Captain of our salvation hath done for us, that we are content to be such every day nothings as the most of us are. Ah! if we did but think of his glory, and of what he deserves—if we did but think of his sufferings, and of what he merits at our hands, surely we should do something out of the common; we should break our alabaster box, and pour the pound of ointment on his head again.

What strange looks we will receive and what things people will say of us when we spend all we have on Christ. How the world will look at us in disgust and say, "What a waste!" "Why have you so poured out your life?" "Why do you continue as you do?" Oh the things people will say. They do not understand. Let us do extraordinary things. Let us be broken. And let us pour out our lives as a fragrant offering to our Lord.

Is he worth it? I ask you again, "Is he worth it?" The disciples thought not. They thought it was a waste. Dear Christian, is he worth it? Yes! He is! Let us take up the title of fanatic if they so attach it to us. Let us endure with joy the jokes and the laughter. They may not understand, but they do not matter.

Nothing spent on Christ will be a waste. Jesus himself first lifts the head of this dear woman with the words, "She has done a beautiful thing to me." Nothing done for Christ will be a waste. Their assessment was quite wrong.