

## Unashamed Love

Read Mark 14:1-11; Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-8.

### The Historical Event

Context: Mark 14 & Matthew 26 accounts of Jesus' anointing for burial at Bethany are identical. Jesus was at the home of Simon the leper. A woman broke an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment and poured it on his head. The disciples criticized her for wasting a large sum of money that could've been used to help the poor. Jesus defended the woman. He made two points: 1) It was preparation for his burial. 2) Her act of extravagant love will be remembered wherever the gospel is proclaimed.

This takes place in between Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11 & Matthew 21) and the final Passover (Mark 14:12-31 & Matthew 26:17-29). Zoom in and see that this act of unashamed love is wedged between the evil plots against Jesus. Before the story we read about the religious leaders plotting to kill Jesus (Mark 14:1-2 & Matthew 26:1-5). After the story we read about Judas betraying Jesus to them (Mark 14:10-11 & Matthew 26:14-16). Matthew and Mark deliberately place this story between two evil plots (therefore it isn't necessarily chronological). So, this act of extravagant love and devotion is like a beautiful flower growing between two rotting human corpses. **Evil plot to murder - unashamed, extravagant love – evil plot to betray.** Why did the gospel writers do this? It is, of course, to create a glaring contrast between hatred of Christ and love of Christ. It's a contrast that makes us choose. Most people see themselves as indifferent, neither hate nor love of Christ. But every person will eventually make a choice that leads to either hatred or love.

There's hatred and love and indignation. Another contrast is the indignation of the disciples and the woman's unashamed love (Matthew 26:8). Many Bible versions use "indignation" for the disciple's expression. Indignation is displeasure or anger at unfair or unworthy behavior. They were shocked by the "waste." Their indignation implied that Jesus Christ was not worth the value of the ointment. The disciples were probably also offended and embarrassed by the woman's love and gratitude. Question: Have you ever been indignant at another believer's passionate worship of Jesus Christ?

*John 12:1-8: Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary*

*therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."*

How do we synchronize Mark and Matthew with John's record of this event?

It is my interpretation that John records the same event. Each gospel has its own perspective and the chronological sequence of events isn't always the gospel writer's first concern. John gives us a motive or reason for Jesus' triumphal entry and the woman's extravagant love.

[Note: This is a historical event and we must be careful about the 'spiritual' lessons we make out of it. Spiritualizing historical events isn't proper interpretation. There is a woman in love with Christ and she anoints him, but it's Jesus who gives her act of love the meaning of preparation for his burial.]

John placed the anointing of Jesus at Bethany before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem but 6 days before the Passover (John 12:1). Mark placed the anointing 2 days before Passover (Mark 14:1). Jesus arrived in Bethany 6 days before Passover and raised Lazarus, then visited Jerusalem to cheering crowds waving palm branches, cleansed the temple, returned to Bethany, and then 2 days before Passover his anointing for burial took place.

The reason for the crowds at Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem was the resurrection of Lazarus. John 12:17-18: *The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.* This was the reason for their excitement and proclamation of Jesus as the King of Israel (12:13).

What was the motive for Mary's extravagant love?

Primary motive: The resurrection of her brother Lazarus. Read John 11. (Lazarus was dead longer than Jesus. It was more than a resuscitation; it was a resurrection. Lazarus had been dead for 4 days and his corpse smelled of decay.)

Secondary speculative motive: The event happened in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany (according to Matthew & Mark). This designation described the ‘man of the house’, the owner of the house. Simon the Leper was probably the father of Mary, Martha, Lazarus (or possibly the husband of M or M). At the least, Simon the leper was a close relative of the three siblings - maybe an uncle.

Simon was not a leper anymore. If he were still a leper then he wouldn't be in the house having a party. He would be exiled in a leper colony. [Would you eat dinner at the house of someone with Coronavirus who was quarantined?] It is safe to assume that Jesus had healed him of leprosy. So why did he retain the title “Simon the leper”? Matthew still referred to himself as “Matthew the tax collector.” Maybe John used the title to distinguish “Simon the leper” from other Simons like Simon Peter. Or maybe Simon retained the title as a witness. People would ask, “Why are you Simon the leper if you aren't a leper anymore?” Simon would respond, “Jesus of Nazareth healed me!” So, if Jesus healed Simon the father of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, then she had another motive for her extravagant love and gratitude.

Jesus healed a broken family of Simon, Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Jesus removed the effects of sin: disease and death. Jesus healed Simon. Simon was no longer a leper but only remembered as a former leper. Jesus raised Lazarus. Without Simon and Lazarus, Mary & Martha would have been two broke and destitute women alone in the world. Now we can understand Mary's unashamed love and gratitude toward Jesus Christ. Christ healed her father (or husband) and raised her brother from death. Her family was happy and healthy around Christ. This is family redemption. We all want our families to be happy and healthy around Jesus Christ.

Mary and the alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard: Mary also poured oil on the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The alabaster flask had a long neck and was sealed. It had to be broken to be used. It contained an oil extracted from a root found in India. *Nard* was made from lavender oil. Lavender is an aromatic plant of the mint family. It may have been a family heirloom, something that could be sold in times of financial need. Its monetary value was 300 denarii. *Denarii* was a day's wage. That's 300 day's wages or almost a year.

Mary broke the bottle in a spontaneous act of unashamed love. She wanted to show Jesus her love and gratitude and didn't care what the disciples thought of her. She wasn't self-conscious or embarrassed. She only saw Jesus. She grabbed the most

expensive thing she had, the perfume. She anointed Jesus' head (the proper way to greet a guest to your home or anoint for burial) and then also - according to John - poured some on his feet as a gesture of humble gratitude. She loved Jesus "head to toe."

Some were indignant and scolded (berated) her: According to John, Judas was the instigator of Mary's criticism because he was greedy and jealous, but most of the men around the dinner table probably agreed with Judas. I don't think Mary's feelings were hurt by the criticism. I don't think she was offended. I think she was so focused on Jesus that the criticism didn't affect her. If I were Jesus, then I would be offended. "You disciples don't think I am worth the value of this ointment. Judas, you think I'm worth less than the price of this?"

Jesus' defense of Mary: Jesus defended Mary and shamed the disciples. "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing for me." Stop your male chauvinist bullying!

Jesus makes 3 points:

1. I am with you right now, and that's more important than feeding the poor. *"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."* Doing good without a relationship with Christ or sharing the gospel only benefits a person's physical wellbeing in this world but does nothing to meet a person's spiritual need to be reconciled to God. Do good and let people see and hear your love for Christ. Do good and ask, "Can I also pray for you? Jesus can do more for you than I can."
2. She's anointing my body before burial. *"She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial."* Jesus said, "I have told you guys many times I'm going to be killed and you don't seem to get it, but she does. I get no sympathy from you guys, but she feels for me."
3. Her loving devotion will be remembered wherever the gospel is proclaimed. *"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 made an incredible statement. Why did Jesus say this? Jesus did many miracles, but he never said this about any of the miracles he did for people. This is the only incident in all the gospels that Jesus makes this promise. Wherever we proclaim the gospel we should include this story of Mary's extravagant love. Why? Because it is someone doing something for Jesus out of love and gratitude.

Every miracle Jesus performed was to save broken people. Every broken body he healed, every leper he cleansed, every demon he cast out, and every dead person he raised was loving service to people. Jesus' atoning death for our sins and his resurrection was loving service to save lost people. But this is someone giving back to Jesus the one thing he really wants – love and gratitude. This is what we do every time we worship on Sunday. *(If you do something good to someone then you expect to be thanked for it. You want to be appreciated. I saw a news story about a nurse in NYC. As she went to the hospital to treat Coronavirus patients the neighbors lined the street and clapped and thanked her. She cried.)* Someone may say, "What Jesus wants is really obedience to his commands." I say, "Yes, of course, but obedience proceeds from love and gratitude. Jesus said, 'If you love me then you will obey my commands.' Obedience is the flower that grows out of the soil of love and gratitude." Every time we worship Christ on Sunday or in personal devotions we are doing what Mary did; that is, we aren't preparing Christ for burial, we are expressing extravagant love and gratitude for all the way Christ blesses us.

#### LESSONS: Leave a Legacy

*"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."*

- Do you remember this story? **Luke 10:38-42:** *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."*

- Consider the personalities of these sisters. Martha was more rational, confrontational and task-oriented. She confronted Jesus when he came 4 days late and missed her brother's funeral, "Where were you?" John 11:21: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Then Martha expressed some faith, "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." John 12:2: "Martha served..." while Lazarus reclined at the table. I can hear Martha, "I have so much to do to serve all these men. Where is Mary now? Just when I need help she disappears!"

- Mary was more emotional and relationship-oriented. This is the same Mary who sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his teaching while Martha prepared the meal (Luke 10:38-42). Mary's act of devotion is remembered not just as an act of devotion, but for what it signified - the sacrificial death and burial of Christ. What is most important is the gospel proclaimed in the whole world.
- Martha is remembered for worrying about many things and being stressed out while serving. Mary is remembered for passionate, extravagant devotion focused on Jesus. What do you want to be remembered for? What legacy do you want to leave behind? Leave behind a legacy of loving devotion to Christ and service in his name.

### Love's Unashamed Devotion

God made us to have a loving relationship with Him, so love is the highest devotion. For us to love God we may need to be broken. Our pride keeps us from extravagant love and gratitude to God.

Can we do something like what Mary did? When I listen to a worship song during my morning devo, I sometimes watch the video with it, because I like to watch the people pour out their ointment of love on Christ. I like to see their worshiping faces - their pleasure and satisfaction with Christ. Thousands pouring out the sweet perfume of praise on Christ.

Someone may criticize, "Why are you worshiping in church wasting your time when you should be helping the poor or doing something more productive?" Sunday worship and even worship practice is never wasted. Bible reading and prayer is never wasted. Mission work is never wasted. Service in Christ's name is never wasted if it flows from a heart of love and gratitude.

If Mary's ointment was a family heirloom, then imagine pouring out your retirement savings on Christ. Would Christ be worth it? 300 denarii are almost one year's salary. Would Jesus be worth \$30K, 40, 50, 75, 100 or whatever you make in one year? No amount of \$\$\$ can buy eternal salvation.

I would give everything I have to buy eternal salvation... if it could be bought. But it can't. Jesus gave everything to buy it for me.

In conclusion, let's consider again Jesus' incredible statement: "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." Why did Jesus say this? Jesus did many miracles, but he never

said this about any of the miracles he did for people. This is the only incident in all the gospels that Jesus makes this promise. Wherever we proclaim the gospel we should include this story of Mary's extravagant love. Why? Because it is someone doing something for Jesus out of love and gratitude. Every miracle Jesus performed was to save broken people. Every broken body he healed, every leper he cleansed, every demon he cast out, and every dead person he raised was loving service to people. Jesus' atoning death for our sins and his resurrection was loving service to save lost people. But this is someone giving back to Jesus the one thing he really wants – love and gratitude. This is what we do every time we worship on Sunday.