

Jesus Was Anointed By A Woman

Mark 14:1-11

Key Verse: 14:9

by Steve Stasinos

“I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

A man of God once said that there is no history without romance. In this passage we see a love story, expressed through a woman who pours out her heart in love and appreciation to Jesus. But it is not primarily about her. It is the beautiful love story of Jesus, who poured out his life for us.

First, “A woman came with an alabaster jar” (1-5). Look at verse 1. “Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him.” The Passover was the first day of a celebration called the “Feast of Unleavened Bread,” commemorating the historical events recorded in Exodus, and captured in modern movies like “The Ten Commandments” and “The Prince of Egypt.” The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. But God saw their misery, and God intervened, delivering them through 10 spectacular plagues. For the tenth plague, God was going to slay all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the slave. God told his people to slay a lamb and spread its blood on the doorposts of their houses. When God saw the blood, he passed over that house.

Every adult male Jew was bound to come to Jerusalem and slay a lamb to remember this event. Jerusalem would be overcrowded. It would be like the entire population of Toledo, OH coming to stay for a week in Evanston, IL. There was so much work to be done! The religious leaders, who were only thinking about a sly way to arrest and kill Jesus, had to postpone their plans. Verse 2 reads, “‘But not during the Feast,’ they said, ‘or the people may riot.’” Although that was their plan, the words, “only two days” had great significance.

When we studied Revelation 4-5 at the beginning of this year, we learned that Jesus is the Lamb who was slain. Paul states that Jesus, our Passover Lamb has been slain. How does this factor in? God had shown in the plagues on Egypt that he was more than able to distinguish between his people and the Egyptians. For example, while the 9th plague brought darkness on the Egyptians, the land of Goshen, where God’s people lived, was well lit. He didn’t need blood on the door to tell who his people were. So why did God ask his people to slay the lamb and spread the blood? It is because in two days time, Jesus, the Son of God, would be led like a lamb to the slaughter. He would be killed, and his blood shed. In Jesus’ blood, we too are passed over, from death, to life. The Passover Feast was to prepare the minds of God’s people to accept the blood of his Son, shed for their sins. The chief priests decided they were not going to kill Jesus during the Feast. However, in two days, on the very day of the Passover, Jesus, the Lamb of God, would die for our sins. The point is, Jesus’ time was short. He had only two days left with his disciples, and then time was up.

What was Jesus doing while facing his impending suffering? Look at verse 3a. “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper...” Jesus spent his final days serving others. It is interesting to note that Mark says “a man known as Simon the Leper,” and not that he actually was a man with leprosy. He was a wealthy man, to have a home large enough to accommodate Jesus and his entourage. Perhaps he had been a leper once, and was healed by Jesus. But he kept the name, “Simon the Leper,” to remember Jesus’ grace.

The disciples and Simon enjoyed the meal. They laughed and joked, as though living with Jesus would go on forever. No one understood what the coming days meant to Jesus. Who could encourage Jesus in this hour? Verse 3 reads, “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.” Mark doesn’t mention anything about who she was, or how she came to be there, or even what her motivation was. He emphasizes two things: her alabaster jar of perfume, and what she did with it.

Alabaster is a semi-translucent mineral quarried in Egypt and prized for its ability to keep perfumes and oils fresh. Nard is harvested from the Spikenard plant which only grows in the Himalayan Mountains of China, India and Nepal. Those few who could afford such an expensive, imported item would use it very sparingly, or keep it on a

shelf as a symbol of wealth. Likely this alabaster jar of perfume was the most valuable thing the woman owned. She may have been saving it for her wedding. But she ran up to Jesus, broke the skinny top off the jar and poured the entire bottle onto Jesus' head, before anyone could stop her. This was an extravagant expression of love for Jesus. It was a deeply personal act that cost this woman everything she had. In her mind, there was only Jesus. When she poured the perfume on Jesus, she was pouring her everything on Jesus. She was saying to Jesus, "Jesus, you are worthy of this, my most treasured possession. I want you to know that I love you, I cherish you, and to me you are the most valuable thing in the world. I am so thankful for you, Jesus! Please accept my love, Jesus, in response to your great love!" This was a timeless moment between a redeemed woman and her Savior. This jar represented her life, and she broke it and poured it out on Jesus.

But there was a different view of this event. Verses 4-5 read, "Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly." Matthew's account tells us that all the disciples said this. Indignant is more than just disappointed. They were angry, as though something terribly tragic had just occurred. Why such a response? Certainly the strong smell of the perfume disturbed their appetite. But they were very angry at her waste. What is a waste? Waste means misusing more than you receive. If you pump too much gas into your car such that five gallons or more spill out all over the pavement, you understand waste. This jar was of such great value, that even clueless fishermen knew it was worth more than a year's wages. In 2006 the median personal income of a full-time worker in the US was just under \$40k. You could go out onto Western Ave. and buy the most expensive Hyundai on the lot. \$40k could support 100 children a whole year through Compassion, Intl. Imagine how many food pantries would be well stocked with that income. Imagine how fancy our center would be if we invested that much into remodeling. Instead, this woman poured it all over Jesus. As the disciples watched the perfume stream down his face and soak into his robe, all they could think was, "What a waste."

Honestly, some of us might be thinking the same thing. For the past eight years I have written software for cell phones. Due to limited battery life, our code must be as efficient as possible; waste is not an option. But God's work sometimes seems to have a lot of waste. Earlier this year I began to ask, why are we having a Purdue Conference, spending so much money, time and labor? Is it a waste? Maybe we should go to Disneyland?

Second, "she has done a beautiful thing to me" (6-9). The woman was getting quite a brow-beating by the disciples. But Jesus got involved. Look at verse 6. "'Leave her alone,' said Jesus. 'Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.'" Jesus defended this woman, and silenced his disciples. There Jesus was, smelling like lilies of the field, soaked through with perfume. The woman's act was so impractical and in some ways even offensive. Perfumes and heavy scents give me migraine headaches and stomachaches. If it were me I'd feel like dying. But Jesus deeply understood her beautiful heart and called her extravagant action "something beautiful." This word translated beautiful is more than just aesthetically pleasing. It means acceptable and appealing as well. Jesus accepted her act of love towards him. This is what pleases Jesus, and what he deems beautiful. Jesus approves of wasteful expressions of love for him that the world would never understand.

Why is it so? Look at verses 7-8. "The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." Yes, disciples of Jesus serve the poor. This was the example that Jesus gave to us, and the woman should be responsible for the poor and sickly people around her. But Jesus emphasizes here, "You will not always have me." It is saying, "Do you realize in two days I will be gone from you?" There is an opportunity to express our love to Jesus, and it is limited. This woman, seeing the chance to express her love lavishly on Jesus took it, and received Jesus' approval and acknowledgement. Jesus declares that loving him and doing what pleases him takes higher priority than even the poor and needy. Does that shock you? Who is Jesus, to claim such a place?

Jesus understood and accepted the woman's lavish gift. But he still said, "She did what she could." She gave everything, pouring out her life. But Jesus is worth all this and more. Why? Jesus burial is why. This woman, out of deep thanksgiving for all Jesus had done for her, poured out her life to Jesus in love. Yet in Jesus burial is an even greater love, of which her love only shadows. Philip Yancey once contrasted the demonstrated love of God in this way: In the movie "The Last Emperor", the young emperor demonstrates his privileges to his servants. Once his lover asked, "What happens when you do wrong?" He said, "Nothing happens to me. Someone else is instead punished for me." To prove his point he broke a jar deliberately. His servant was immediately beaten for the emperor's thoughtless act. The rule was that for the emperor's wrongdoing, his servant was to be punished. Jesus is

different. We are the sinners who do wrong, and Jesus is punished in our places. Romans 5:8 reads, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Why was Jesus so brutally treated and crucified? Why did Jesus die so young? Why was he buried? It is because of his amazing love. Jesus sacrificed himself totally for our sake. Jesus loved us so much that he buried his honor, glory and power on our behalf. This Jesus was broken, poured out, and used up for us. Revelation 5:12b says, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” When we know his love we begin to know just how worthy our Lord Jesus is. He is worthy to be served. He is worthy to give our lives to. He is worthy of all our heart, soul, mind and strength. What Jesus is looking for from us is not titles, accomplishments, degrees and achievements. What Jesus looks for in us is a life laid at his feet. A soul crying out from the very depth of our being, “Lord, here it is! It is all yours, because you are worthy!” This was the woman’s confession.

Look at verse 9. “I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” What she did was personal and impractical. But Jesus promises to include this woman’s great act of love into the gospel down through history. This is the meaning of the gospel, not that we did many things for Jesus, but that he loved us. We express our love for him by preaching. Jesus is not looking for great works because that is not worthy of him. Jesus wants this example of the woman; he wants us to give our lives.

The disciples considered the acts of service for the poor to be more valuable, because it is measurable, and visible. When a person works for a minimum wage job, he sees the effect – a weekly paycheck. So when he starts serving Jesus, he also begins to measure it by the visible effect, and soon stops simply loving Jesus. Still other people desperately struggle to make outward fruit, and get recognized, but only remain fruitless year after year. Many people waste their lives for worthless things while trying to avoid any “wastes” for God. For example, one young woman spent several hours in a beauty shop to get her hair done. Her hair looked great. But to make time for Bible study was too inconvenient, and so she canceled.

Through history God has used this kind of wasteful love toward Jesus to advance the gospel. Whether we see fruit or not isn’t as important as loving Jesus, and looking for his acceptance. Mother Barry told the story of how she went to Korea simply in love with Jesus. As she traveled into towns, she would out of habit reach out to the ill and take them to the hospital. One man had contracted TB in prison, and was sent home to die. Mother Barry didn’t know this, but only saw a man in need, and took him to the hospital, because she loved Jesus. She forgot about it. While loving Jesus, she humbly worked with Dr. Lee for the gospel. She never married. She poured out her youth and love into the people of Korea, and became an elderly woman with no family of her own, and not even a position in our church. But she is so happy, because Jesus accepts her love. God also blessed UBF ministry to expand all over the world. So many children of all ages love to hang out with Mother Barry. And by the way, that one dying TB patient later met Jesus, and became a prominent Pastor in Korea.

William W. Borden graduated from a high school in Chicago in 1904 as the millionaire heir to the Borden Dairy estate. As he traveled through Asia, the Middle East and Europe at the age of 16, his heart was burdened for suffering people in the world. He wrote home, stating his clear desire to go as a missionary for Jesus. Some people felt it was a waste, throwing away his life and potential. Borden wrote in his Bible, “No reserves.” While attending Yale, his steadfast commitment to love Jesus had great influence on his fellow students. Small group Bible studies he started in his freshman year increased from 150 students to over 1300 student participants by his graduation. He presided over a huge student missionary conference held at Yale. Yet in all this he kept his focus and direction, and narrowed down the calling to the Muslim Kansu people of China. Upon graduating, he turned down several high paying and noble job offers. He wrote in his Bible, “No retreats.” After graduate school in Princeton Seminary, he set sail for China. Stopping in Egypt to study Arabic, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of 25. Headlines across the nation mourned his loss. Was it a waste? Borden didn’t think so. Before his death, underneath the words, “No reserves” and “No retreats,” he wrote in his Bible, “No regrets.”

Let’s read verse 9 again. “I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” This woman’s act of love is an example and standard to be shared throughout the world. At the core, the gospel is not primarily about serving people, although sinners are lost without it. At its core, the gospel is primarily about pleasing God. The gospel creates in sinners a condition that satisfies the heart of God. The gospel reveals the love of God that we cannot but respond to with whole-hearted surrender. Do

you know the value of our Lord Jesus? Oh, to be wasted and considered worthy to be poured out only for him and his glory and love! So many of us are being used, and used up. But we don't know what it means to be wasted on Jesus. We always want to be on the go, running here or there; but Jesus wants us to sit down, pray and love him. We think in terms of apostolic journeys and glorious achievements; while Jesus wants us to take advantage of the opportunities before us now to love him. How much is Jesus worth to you? Is he only worth working for, like a shift manager? Or is Jesus worth wasting your life on, pouring it out without reservation?

Third, Judas, one of the Twelve, betrays Jesus (10-11). Look at verses 10-11. "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over." When we read the gospel accounts, it seems these events are not directly chronological. Judas had time to consider Jesus' words. He really didn't like it. The example of the woman disgusted him. She had done what she could, and now he was going to do what he could. He decided to make a profit, by any means. He was one of the disciples, even chosen by Jesus as his Twelve. Yet while the woman gave up her most precious valuable in love for the Lord, Judas betrayed the Lord for the love of money. Their stories are a great contrast. They were both his disciples. Judas betrayed Jesus, and the woman devoted herself to Jesus. Judas later destroyed himself, while the story of this woman's beautiful act for Jesus has endured for 2000 years. What is the difference? The beautiful life in Jesus is to know the love of Jesus, and just how worthy he is of our everything. The beautiful things we do are in response to his love for us. May God help us to know how valuable our Lord is, how lavish his love is for us, and we may be those who do many beautiful things for Jesus, like this woman.