

Gratitude and Treachery -- Mark 14:1-11

by Travis Dean
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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

Lord, we need you just now. Help us put aside everything that would distract us and fix our minds and thoughts on You. We lay aside our own ideas and opinions in order to learn from You. May our hearts be open to the message you want us to hear. And may we not only be hearers of Your word, but doers. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our family loves homemade granola. We make a large double batch quite often and store it in a large Tupperware container. One morning this past week the container slipped out of my hand and crashed to the floor. The container was almost full and granola was piled up on the floor in front of the outside door. I felt sick at wasting so much of this delicious granola. I methodically swept it up and dumped it in the trash bin. Only later did the thought cross my mind that what seemed an awful waste might actually be an abundant provision for the birds and animals.

Our story from the book of Mark reveals a very valuable product being spilled out. And what seemed to be a terrible waste was actually a priceless demonstration of love and sacrifice.

Here's a summary of our story today:

Two days before the Passover the chief priests and scribes were trying to figure out a way to put Jesus to death. In contrast, while Jesus was in Bethany at Simon the leper's house, a woman came to Him with a bottle of expensive oil and poured it on His head. Some of those present became very upset that this expensive oil had been wasted instead of being sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus, however, defended the woman, saying that she had done a very good thing. In fact, her act would be told along with the preaching of the gospel throughout the whole world. Judas then left the house and went to the high priests, offering to hand Jesus over to them.

Let's now consider what Jesus experienced in this story. First of all, Jesus experienced death plots. The time frame is "two days before the Passover". This was one of the greatest celebrations in the Jewish culture. Yet at this festive time the hearts of the "chief priests and scribes" were filled with hatred and thoughts of premeditated murder. Since Mark chapter 3 they have been trying to figure out a way to get rid of Jesus. They have tried to outwit Him. They have tried to use His own words and actions to trap Him. They have debated Him in public multiple times, trying to humiliate Him. But they have lost every time. So, now, according to Mark 14:1, they have resorted to "trickery", in other words, treachery. They were desperate enough to use even more corrupt methods to get rid of Jesus.

There was one problem, though - "the people". They could not afford to offend the multitudes that held a high opinion of Jesus. That could cause an "uproar". The chief priests and scribes had no respect for those whom they held to be ignorant and deceived. They had even lost respect for the Passover. The one thing that consumed them was hatred for Jesus, who dared to contradict their teachings and expose them as transgressors of God's Law.

Second of all, Jesus experienced hospitality. Mark 14:3 states that Jesus was invited to a meal at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany. Interestingly, you discover from Luke's version of this story (Luke 7:36-50) that Simon's hospitality was really not that great on this occasion. His role as a host that evening was somehow restricted. It is interesting that Simon is referred to as a leper. We looked at the story of Jesus healing a leper in Mark 1:40-45. Lepers were outcasts of society and seen as people who were cursed by God. So, it is likely that Simon had been healed by Jesus and that is why he invited Jesus to his house for this meal. Interestingly, though healed, Simon still carries the name of a leper. Perhaps this is simply to distinguish him from the other Simon's mentioned in the life of Jesus. You also learn from Luke's account of this story that Simon was a

Pharisee. So, that further added to the drama of this story, I'm sure, since the Pharisees were some of Christ's bitterest enemies.

Third, Jesus experienced being anointed. Mark 14:3 mentions that "a woman" came to this meal with a bottle of very expensive spikenard oil. John's account of this story (John 12:1-8) reveals that this woman's name was "Mary". He also mentions that Mary's sister, Martha, and brother, Lazarus were there as well. This makes sense for a couple reasons. First, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary also lived in Bethany. And second, Lazarus had recently been raised from the dead, so he would have been a real guest of honor. From Luke's account (Luke 7:39) we learn that Mary was known as "a sinner". Sometime you may want to do a study on her life. It is quite a story of Jesus' love and forgiveness. Doug Bachelor has written a book entitled, At Jesus' Feet, that reveals an in-depth look at the life of Mary.

So, according to Mark 14:3, she came to the meal with "an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard". Alabaster is a soft rock that can be carved with a knife and has a marble-like appearance. It was quarried from Egypt caverns. Inside this alabaster bottle was some oil from the spikenard plant. This plant grows in the mountains of India, China, and Nepal at an elevation of 9,000 to 15,000 feet. So when Mark explains that this oil was "very costly", you can understand why. It is hard to imagine how much work, time, and travel went into the harvesting and transporting of this oil over thousands of miles. Interestingly, the original Greek text adds that this oil was "pure, genuine". This essential oil was used for perfume, medicine, and incense.

Mark 14:3 then explains how Mary "broke" this alabaster bottle. She shattered this soft, rock material. Apparently, there was no lid, and the only way to access this oil was to destroy the container. I have a hard time visualizing what that would have looked like. It seems that it would have created a messy situation. Last of all, Mark 14:3 reveals that Mary poured this oil on Jesus' head. Luke and John both state that she also poured the oil on His feet. Luke also adds that she added her own tears to the oil and then wiped His feet with her own hair. It's an amazing picture of emotion, love, and sacrifice. Other women tried to anoint Jesus after His death, but only Mary's anointing was given in His life.

Fourth, Jesus experienced defending the criticized. We will first look at who Jesus defended. Mark 14:4 reveals that Mary's anointing of Jesus was not kept a secret. You may remember that one of the uses of spikenard is as a perfume. So the aroma would certainly have filled the house. Soon everyone's attention was directed to Mary wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. Mark 14:4 mentions that "some...were indignant among themselves". Whispers start to spread throughout the room. According to John's account of this story (John 12:4), Judas was the instigator of the indignation. When he saw what had happened, he started to whisper to those around him, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted?" And yet his grief was so much greater than mine when I dropped our container of granola. I had done it on accident, but Mary had done it on purpose! According to Mark 14:5 this spikenard oil was worth "three hundred denarii". This was close to a laborer's wage for a whole year, or at least \$20,000 today. According to John 12:6 Judas had a money problem. He actually stole money that had been given to Jesus and His disciples. So, when Judas saw this spilled oil, he saw dollar signs running irretrievably onto the floor. I can almost hear Judas' silent gasp and groan of anguish – "Oh... oh... oh! Judas' grief became the grief of many others in the house. And their grief turned to anger. Mark 14:5 says, "they criticized her sharply." Mary became the brunt of their disgust. They turned on her like a pack of wolves, demanding, "What were you thinking? How could you?! You could at least have sold it and given it to the poor!" Mary felt like dirt. She could not explain why she did what she did. She was about to turn and sneak away from her accusers when Someone spoke up in her defense.

In Mark 14:6 Jesus speaks up. His first words are a command, His second, a question, and His third an explanation: "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me." Jesus stopped the mean and hurtful words. He called for Judas and his sympathizers to identify the cause of their grief and anger. And then He explained that what Mary had done was a beautiful act of love, gratitude, and sacrifice. In Mark 14:7, 8 Jesus also addressed Judas' seeming concern for the poor. A paraphrase of His words might go something like this: "You always have the opportunity to help the poor, if you really want to. But here at the end of my life, Mary has anointed Me. She has done this for Me!" The unspoken implication was, "What have

you ever done or sacrificed to show your love for Me? She has taken what may be her last opportunity to honor Me. No one else has even offered.”

Then in Mark 14:9 Jesus looked by faith into the future. He declared that the gospel of His own love and sacrifice for the world would be proclaimed throughout the whole world. And right alongside that story would be the story of Mary’s love and sacrifice for Him. These two intertwined stories would be spread around the world.

Last of all, Jesus experienced, offending a follower. Mark 14:10 reminds us that Judas was part of the inner circle of the twelve disciples. How tragic that such a one would go “to the chief priests to betray Him to them.” Apparently he was very offended that Jesus would defend Mary’s act of spilling out this extremely valuable bottle of spikenard oil. So he stomped out of Simon’s house and joined up with Jesus’ enemies. Mark 14:11 states that the chief priests “were glad”. Their hearts were filled with rejoicing. This was exactly the break they needed. One of Jesus’ inner circle of friends surely would know how to lead them to Him secretly. They even promised to pay Judas. Judas was all about money, so this was clearly a win-win for both parties. Mark 14:1 started out by saying that the chief priests were looking for a way to arrest Jesus. Now in Mark 14:11 their search is over. Judas was now the one searching. He was looking for the right moment to hand Jesus over to His enemies.

Now that we have considered what Jesus experienced in this story, let’s now look at how this story might impact our own experience. God calls each of Christ’s followers today to live like Jesus lived. So, what does that look like for us? We will consider two ways in which Jesus is revealed as our example in this story.

First, He is revealed as our example in that He was not afraid to offend Judas. Let’s take a quick review on what happened that evening. Mary offended Judas by spilling all that expensive oil on Jesus’ head and feet. Judas then became angry with Mary and with his hurtful words offended her. What did Jesus do? Did He sit and ignore the situation? Did He try to calm things down? No. He clearly landed on the side of Mary and in so doing, He offended Judas. Why did He take Mary’s side in this situation? You could say, “Well, she was outnumbered.” And she was. You could say, “She wasn’t hurting anybody and became a victim of people’s hostility and criticism. Someone needed to stand up for her.” And certainly a case could be made for that. But there is more. According to Mark 1:14, 15 Jesus came to preach the gospel. That was what He was all about. His life, death, and resurrection is the essence of the gospel. Also, according to Matthew 10:34, 35 Jesus did not come to bring peace but a sword. He came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother. The gospel offends people. A man accepts the gospel and the result is alienation from his family. Several times the Bible refers to Jesus and the gospel as a rock of offense that makes men stumble.

According to what Jesus said in Mark 14:9 Mary’s act was a demonstration of the gospel. Jesus’ death on the cross is the pinnacle of the gospel. His death was the supreme act of love and self sacrifice. Mary’s act revealed that the gospel had been born in her own heart. She sacrificed her most valuable possession, the bottle of spikenard oil, for her Lord. It was a powerful demonstration of love and sacrifice returning back to the One who had so loved her. So, when Jesus stood up for her and defended her, He was standing up for the gospel. And, in reality, Judas was offended by the gospel.

So, let’s say God calls our family to a third world country. I sell everything we have except for what we can fit in our suitcases. We go where we have no family or friends, no income, no health insurance, no transportation. Some would be offended by that. Some might say that would be child abuse. But sacrificing our own lives out of love for God is what the gospel is all about.

There is no room for self in the gospel. There is no room for love of worldly possessions in the gospel. Anyone seeking power, position, or possessions will be offended by the gospel and those who demonstrate it by how they live. Those whose hearts are conquered by love for God and consider no sacrifice to great for Him will most surely offend people. I pray that this might be the experience of our church. May we be so moved by the gospel that our lives demonstrate the love and sacrifice shown by Mary.

There is a second way in which Jesus is revealed as our example in this story. And it is the other side of the coin, as it were. Jesus is revealed as our example in that He did not expose Judas. Jesus could have exposed Judas as a thief. He could have revealed the selfish ambition in Judas' heart that he covered with a cloak of seeming concern for the poor. Judas was demeaning, harsh, and critical. Jesus was direct but respectful. Instead of criticizing Judas, He revealed the beauty of what Mary had done. Jesus made it as easy as possible for Judas to be saved. Over the months and years that Jesus interacted with Judas He left no stone unturned in trying to awaken a response of love in Judas' heart. Judas knew in his heart that Jesus loved him.

Notice what Solomon says in Proverbs 18:19. (Read) No wonder Jesus did not expose Judas. He knew how hard it is to win back someone whom you've offended. Winning back someone you've offended is not for cowards or the faint in heart. It's for men and women of courage, persistence, and determination. Maybe there's someone you've offended. Take the challenge. Be like Joshua who did not back down even from Jericho. If you want a challenge, win back a brother or sister whom you have offended.

So, where are you in this story? Maybe you identify with Mary. You know the depths of your sin and depravity. You need the love and blood of Jesus to wash you clean. Maybe your heart is overflowing with love for Your Savior. Maybe you have given up your most valued possessions for Christ's sake. Maybe someone has criticized your acts of devotion and sacrifice for Christ and His church. If for any of these reasons or another that I haven't mentioned, you have felt a connection with Mary, I would like to have a special prayer for you:

Lord, you know the heart of every person in this room. If there's pain, you see it. If there's coldness and callousness, you see it. For those who have identified with Mary, I pray a special blessing. Forgive them. Heal them. Restore and wash them clean. May Jesus' words of affirmation to Mary bring to them an overwhelming sense of their value in Your sight. May they know that You see and appreciate every sacrifice they make out of love for You. In Jesus' name, amen.