

## 40 Days of Prayer: Mark 14:1-11, The Anointing, 2/26/23

This is our first Sunday in our 40 days of Prayer focus as a church leading up to Easter, which began Wednesday. Over the next six weeks, we will be slowly walking with Jesus to the cross from Mark 14-16. The Gospel of Mark is unique in that 1/3 of this book is focused on the final days and hours of his life. Mark moves swiftly from scene to scene of Jesus' life, but then downshifts dramatically so that we focus our attention on the descent of Jesus down the dark staircase of suffering...his betrayal, rejection, abandonment, humiliation and self-sacrifice to the point of death. He's calling us to enter into the voluntary decrease of the Son of God. And this is the inspiration behind these 40 days of prayer during the Lent season. We are voluntarily entering into a season of decrease (or what we call fasting), and in some small but disproportionately powerful way, sharing in the sufferings of Christ as means of increased worship and intimacy with Him. Over 300 people joined us on Wednesday for our night of worship to start Lent- making commitments. You can too, use the connection card. If you are on our prayer chain, you have begun to receive daily Lent devotions, you can sign up for the prayer chain using the connection card, they are also daily posted to our FB page. On your way out today you can also pick up a Lent calendar that you can use each day in your household. Pray

My wife Shannan, loves sunsets. If she is in the car when there is a sunset she will drive out of her way to get a better view. Now my kids don't appreciate the beauty like she does...they will say, "Mom, it's the same view every day." But if you are paying attention, you know that every sunset is unique. Colors and hues, the shapes of the clouds...and the most beautiful sunsets she would tell you are viewed through the darkest of clouds. In fact, it's the contrast of the dark clouds that make the colors and rays of light even more stunning. Such is the case in the story we encounter in Mark 14:1-11. Dark clouds are forming around Jesus at the sunset of his earthly ministry. This narrative opens in verses 1-2 with the evil scheming of the pharisees looking for an opportunity to arrest and kill Jesus and closes in verse 11 with Judas' plan to betray the Son of God. But in the middle of these dark clouds of evil scheming and betrayal is one of the most stunning displays of worship in the entire Bible, **the anointing** of Jesus [Title Slide].

**<sup>3</sup> While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper.** Here's the setting. Jesus just finished preparing his disciples for the end of the temple and the end of time in chapter 13, now from the Mt. of Olives he travelled to Bethany, just a 1.5mile journey from the Temple mount. Bethany is where Jesus camped overnight during his ministry in Jerusalem. And here we see Jesus invited to a dinner party at the home of Simon the Leper. Now why do you think he was called Simon the Leper? Good job! Of course he didn't anymore, he was healed. Well I would bet that it was Jesus who healed him. And so Simon would have been overjoyed to show Jesus hospitality like this for all that he had done for him. Now we know from John's Gospel that also at this dinner party were three siblings- Mary, Martha and Lazarus whom Jesus had recently raised from the dead, as well as Jesus' disciples.

***a woman [John tells us this woman was Mary] came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.*** John 12 tells us that she also poured it on his feet and was wiping his feet with her hair and the who

house was filled with this fragrance...This was a shocking scene, let me draw out some context to explain why. Nard was not a perfume you just pick up at Nordstrom counter. At that time, Nard was a very expensive, rare, strong aromatic essential oil (all the essential oil fans are cheering), imported from India. And this amount of nard would have been worth about a year's wages- in modern times between 40-50k. She had something like that sitting on her shelf! But I suspect that the monetary value paled in comparison to its emotional and relational significance. This was likely a family heirloom. No doubt this was her most valuable possession, an asset like this was likely to be kept as a dowry on the occasion of marriage or portions used during the burial of beloved family members or even at her own death.

Here comes Mary holding her future security, her future marriage prospects, her family expectations, her most prized possession and essentially pouring it away on the head of Jesus of Nazareth. As one commentary says, "In essence Mary was saying, 'Whatever hopes, dreams, plans, ambitions, convictions I had, I am bringing them here to Jesus.'"<sup>1</sup> And she chooses not to pour out a little, which may have been reasonable, but rather, she chooses instead to break the jar; a gesture, of complete abandonment and surrender. Wow. If you were at this party, what would you have been thinking? Well, let's see the disciples' reaction. <sup>4</sup>*Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume?"*

<sup>5</sup>*It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.* Now we have the vantage point of the armchair QB. And it's easy to judge them. But I suspect I would have been on team disciples, not team Mary in that moment. And I suspect you would have too.

[Blank slide] Several years ago I was at a wedding, now as a pastor, I have been to a lot of weddings and so don't be offended by me saying this...but I don't remember whose wedding it was, whether I officiated it (I suspect I did), I don't remember who was there, or whether I had the steak or the fish...but there is one moment from that wedding seared into my memory. During the reception the bride's father gave a toast, and after his speech he took out a case of wine bottles and said that this wine had special significance to him, but on this occasion he decided to break it open and everyone at the reception was going to toast with this wine in honor of his daughter and her new husband. I thought, "Oh that's nice and sweet of him." And so they put a bottle of this wine on each table, about 12 tables and we all poured the wine for the toast. Cheers! And, just out of curiosity I googled the name of the wine and the year- it was French from the early 90s. Leroy Domaine d'Auvenay... and when I saw the selling price I almost spit my wine across the table. This was a rare wine and year, averaging between 6k-10k per bottle! 120k was just casually consumed by unsuspecting guests who went on in their conversations as if nothing happened. We got married in a fire hall, we couldn't even afford wine. We toasted with Welch's Sparkling Grape Juice. I did a quick calculation...and thought to myself...I just drank about \$1000 dollars. Now maybe you are a romantic and you think this is just the most precious thing...but me? I was thinking, "What a waste! That would pay my mortgage!" And how much more so for these disciples, who aren't at a wedding, they are just at

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<sup>1</sup> Alistair Begg sermon on Mark, [www.truthforlife.org](http://www.truthforlife.org)

dinner, and it's not spread out on everyone, just on one. They are indignant, "Why this waste? Isn't this bad stewardship? Isn't this an unreasonable allocation of resources that could be used more wisely? I mean 50k could go a long way toward alleviating poverty couldn't it?" Honestly, not a bad question IF...you are talking about pouring it on any other person, at any other time...  
<sup>6</sup> "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me."

<sup>7</sup> The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.

<sup>8</sup> She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial

<sup>9</sup> Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." And here we are today, 2000 years later in a completely different culture telling her story as we proclaim the gospel of Jesus.

What the disciples saw, and what we might see, as unreasonable and excessive, Jesus saw as appropriate and beautiful. What the disciples considered wasteful, Jesus considered as filled with sacred purpose. The disciples were focused on practicality, Jesus was focused on the heart of worship. **What is the heart of worship?** Is it coming to church, singing songs or praying or giving? Well those things may be expressions of worship but they aren't the heart of worship. **The heart of worship is valuing or ascribing worth to someone or something above all else.** It's not only church going people who do this. As the famous author David Foster Wallace once said, "Everyone worships. The only choice we get is what we worship." Everyone bestows value, everyone treasures something above all else. What is it that we give our time, our money, our identity, our passions to above other competing priorities? What are we willing to sacrifice for in order to have?

A few weeks ago, there were hundreds of stories about Eagles fans who were spending tens of thousands of dollars to get a Superbowl tickets. Some of them wiping out their savings, taking loans out on their 401k or against their homes, going into debt. Many celebrate that as loyal fandom...make no mistake- that's worship. Many people today will spend countless hours working on their bodies, staring at themselves in the mirror, constantly taking pictures at just the right angles with just the right lighting to post them on social media- desperate to get likes and validate themselves. That's worship. And then there are countless examples of run of the mill things we worship like a relationship, careers, possessions, a cause, security, experiences or substances.

Now why do we worship something or someone? Why do we consider something worthy and valuable above all else, willing to give our time and resources to it, even willing to sacrifice to have it? **We worship whatever we believe will give us what our hearts desire most. Love.** Love in the form of acceptance, validation, value, forgiveness, meaning, comfort, security.

Now here's the question I want us to consider for the next few minutes. **What was it about Jesus that compelled Mary to worship him in such an extravagant way?** Why would Mary give up her most valuable possession? Why would she put her financial future, hopes and dreams at risk? Why would she be willing to be criticized and put down by others for her extravagant act? I believe the answer is in **1 John 4:19 We love him because he first loved us.** Mary's heart grasped the infinite worth of being loved by Jesus. How had Jesus loved Mary? The same way he loved the adulterous woman who stood condemned by her accusers whom Jesus defended and accepted, the same way he loved Matthew the tax collector whom everyone hated and rejected but Jesus called, the same way he loved Peter who denied him and abandoned him, but that Jesus forgave and restored, the same way he loves every man, woman and child that would let him. He opens his arms wide, he offers what the world would not give, could not give: supernatural, unconditional love and acceptance that restores worth, value, dignity, that builds and redeems, forgives and restores. His arms are always open like the prodigal father no matter what. Not based on our performance. Not based on what you have done for me lately. A love that you can in no way do anything to diminish. A supernatural, unconditional love that goes to the cross and dies for you. That's how he loved Mary. The same way he loves you and me.

Now I realize that for some of us, this is the hardest thing for us to truly grasp in our hearts like Mary. Because so many of us can only think about love in terms of what we produce for others, in terms of earning it, in terms of performance or being used by others. Some of us have never experienced this kind of love from another human.

**[Blank Slide]** I want to tell you about a dear friend of mine who grew up with an absentee father and an overbearing, awful mother. He would often say that growing up when he would mess up, his mother would stop speaking to him, sometimes for days at a time even though he would keep saying he was sorry. She would literally act as if he didn't exist, sending messages through his other siblings. She would criticize him, belittle him and tell him he would never be good enough. He never once heard I love you, or I'm proud of you from his mother. And so he grew to hate his mother, and began to shut off his heart from any feelings, protecting himself from being hurt by another human. He kept everyone at a distance, numbed himself with drugs and alcohol. Hiding his deep wounds behind a big personality. He set out to make something of himself to prove his mother wrong. One day while in college he was walking across campus and bumped into a campus evangelist who told him for the first time that Jesus loved him and shared the gospel with him. He scoffed and became angry and combative, but he also saw the genuineness and kindness in this man's eyes, and knew that this guy really believed it. Over the course of the next few days, the Spirit began to work in his heart to soften it, each day he talked with this street evangelist and eventually he started to read the Bible for himself, the more he read about Jesus, the more he believed it just might be true. One night, alone in his dorm room, he read Jesus' words, **Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** And it was as if Jesus was speaking directly to him and was embracing him and wouldn't let go, and whispering I love you... the words he longed to hear. He surrendered his life to Jesus and became a Christian. And the Spirit began to transform his hard heart. And as the love of Jesus poured into him, his hatred toward his mother began to be turned to compassion. He surrendered his own plans to do whatever God wanted him to do. This friend of mine was

also a mentor and my former pastor, **Lon Solomon** [Picture], of McLean Bible Church, whom God has used and continues to use over the last 50 years to transform 10s of thousands of people with the same gospel of Jesus Christ. And wouldn't you know it, after 20 years of reconciling with his mother, praying for her, sharing the gospel with her, she became a Christian and had her life transformed as well.

**We love him because he first loved us.** Lon's story is my story, and the story of everyone who truly embraces the love of Jesus Christ that expels from our heart anything that we might worship in his place. This is the power of the infinitely, unconditional love of Christ, if our hearts can only grasp it. And that's why now, when I think back to that wedding reception, and I think about what that father did...I'm convicted that my instinct was to scoff and look at this as waste, because now it takes me to the love of Jesus displayed in the gospel. This father loved his daughter so much, that he didn't think it was a sacrifice at all to celebrate her in such an extravagant way. How much more does Jesus love us who so extravagantly displayed that love by giving his very life on the cross? As it says in Hebrews 12 says, for the joy set before him, he endured the cross... what Joy? The thought that through his eternal sacrifice he would make us into sons and daughters of God, to celebrate for eternity.

We love him because he first loved us. Do you know the infinite worth of being loved by Jesus like Mary? Has he gripped your heart, making you so secure, filled with dignity and such meaning? Or are you still gripping to something or someone to worship that can never fill you, wasn't meant to? Maybe Jesus is calling you to do something extravagant like he did Mary. Or maybe he wants to fill you with his love in ways that just slowly loosen the grip you have to anything else in this world to embrace him. He's worth it.