

- What would you do for someone that you loved? What lengths would you go to for that person that meant most to you in the world?
- Think of what you did when you met your first love? How was it when you first met the person who is currently your husband or wife? I think back to the letters, love notes, little gifts (12 days of traveling) going way out of the way that we did when we fell in love, we didn't care a lot what anyone thought. It was all about them.
- We are in Mark 14 on the eve of the death of Jesus.

Mark 14:1 Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 2 "But not during the festival," they said, "or the people may riot."

- Jesus is a threat (or at least that's how the religious leaders see it) to their way of life.
- The Passover was the biggest feast of the year in Jerusalem. There were thousands of people there . . . huge crowds.
- There were many Jews who believed that the Messiah would come and deliver them from the Rome rule during the Passover.
- The Romans weren't stupid – they knew this. This put them on high alert during the Passover. They were on edge as trouble could pop up at any time.
- The chief priests and the scribes knew that arresting Jesus during this time could cause a riot in Jerusalem. They knew the tension. They knew the Romans wouldn't stand for it.
- So they sought to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.
- In the midst of all this, what did Jesus do? He went to a friend's house for dinner.

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper

- Picture the scene.
- We have Jesus. We have 12 disciples. That is 13 people off the top. But then there were the hosts. We know from John's account that this was a place where Jesus went frequently. You had Simon the Leper and his good friend Lazarus. There were in all likelihood some other men. Martha was serving dinner and working to make it all great. Probably some other women as well. If you have ever been at a party with 20-30 people you know how it is crazy.
- Think of the nature of the dinner. Simon the Leper (probably healed by Jesus because if he was still an active leper they would not all be eating together with them as he would be unclean). Lazarus had been dead only a few weeks earlier and now was there. Then you had the disciples who had just seen Jesus overturn tables in the temple, confront religious leaders, curse and wither a fig tree and make some disturbing claims about the future.
- Imagine the conversations going on all over the place. In addition, they were eating dinner in a way we don't. They reclined near the table. It was all very informal, intimate and familial.
- The dinner was in full swing.

a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

- We know the identity of this woman from the apostle John who tells us that this woman is Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. She was known to most of those there.
- Typically, in this culture, women were not allowed to interrupt the fellowship of Jewish males, except for serving food.
- Mark tells us that this woman brought an "*alabaster jar of perfume, made of pure nard*" which was "*very expensive.*"
- Nard was an expensive aromatic oil extracted from the root of an Indian herb named "nard."
- In Jesus' time, such spices and ointments were used as investments (just as we invest in gold) as it was portable and could be easily sold.
- This was not just any perfume. This was the good stuff.

4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

- This was not casual. They were highly critical. We know that Judas led the charge in this criticism. Did you catch what she did. This perfume was worth a year's wages! Can you imagine a perfume worth \$75,000? Using it all in one spot? At one time?
- It was breathtaking. It was extravagant. The response was swift and harsh. She had interrupted their dinner. She put it all into a weird spot. She was wasteful.
- If she didn't want the perfume, at least sell it and use it for good.
- I can picture her in the room still, ears burning, cheeks red as she is kneeling in front of Jesus while the others are murmuring, insulting and criticizing her.
- Jesus' response is another one of those reasons that make me love him.

6 "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

- Here we are, 2000 years later telling her story!
- What do we take from this? Why did Mark feel the need to put this story in? What is he getting at?
- As always, he is leading his reading to make a comparison between the actions of Mary and the actions of the religious leaders on one side and Judas on the other, which sandwich this story.
- This is a story of love. Of extravagant, amazing, I-would-do-anything-for-you love. Of a woman's complete and utter devotion and worship of someone that, for her, was worth everything she had.
- I was a little reluctant to pull this story apart. There is something of trying to reduce this story to lists or bullet points that loses some of the impact. Yet there is much to learn and be challenged from this story. The challenge of this entire story is this:
- **JESUS IS WORTH OUR MOST EXTRAVAGANT LOVE AND DEVOTION.**
- The reader is left considering their own view of Jesus in light of Mary's demonstration.
- So at the risk of stripping this story of its poignancy, let me make some observations that I pray will challenge our own view of Jesus.

I. An extravagant act of love.

- She loved Jesus enough to give radically of herself.
- You don't just up and give up something that is worth a year's wages for anyone.
- Women often did not have the means to make wages the way others did.
- This was something valuable. Special.
- The jar itself gives an indication of its value. The stone jar was usually sealed up with a wax plug so it would not leak or evaporate. Mary didn't just pour out the ointment, but she also broke the alabaster flask which meant that the flask couldn't be used again. Mary was holding nothing back. It was not carefully doling out little portions of it. It was not a judicious use of the perfume. It was all or nothing. There was no putting the lid back on the bottle. It was used up. Gone. Finished. All for Jesus.
- When you are desperately in love with someone or something, money becomes no object. You will spend ridiculously more than you should to see the expression on their face when they receive that thing or go to that event that they love.

- She loved him beyond reason – it was not logical, prudent or anything like it. It was over the top and the kind of thing every parent would tell their child not to do.
- She loved Jesus more than her reputation.
- She prostrated herself before Jesus. We know from John that she ended up using her hair to wipe the perfume over Jesus ending with his feet. Washing the feet of others was considered the work of slaves. Only prostitutes and promiscuous women took their hair down in public.
- Mary was willing to risk her reputation, not caring what others thought of her, in order to honor and worship her Lord.
- The men around her disparaged her. Criticized her. Ran her down. Questioned her motives.
- She loved Jesus more than the opinion of others. She probably knew that what she was about to do might get criticism. This was not spur of the moment. You don't walk around with something this valuable and casually decide to do something. She thought about it. She considered it. She thought of what was most valuable to her and how she could demonstrate her love. Then did it.
- She valued Jesus more than her reputation.
- She loved Jesus without expectation.
- Mary was not getting something from this. It was not giving in order to get. It was an act of utter thanksgiving and adoration for what she had already received from him. No strings attached.
- She was not there to be seen of men or gain recognition. She was there as an act of surrender without demanding. Without wanting in return.
- Every relationship deteriorates when we begin to expect to get something in return for something. When we give a gift and are disappointed when they don't give back. When we doing something nice and hope that in turn, at some point, they will do something nice back.
- Mary was not asking Jesus to fix her life. To bless her. She was not giving extravagantly so Jesus would bless her with stuff.
- She simply loved him and wanted to honor him.
- What's amazing to me is that Jesus is not bothered by it. He doesn't try and stop her. He doesn't redirect her. He instead hold her up as an amazing example.

II. Jesus is worthy of extravagant love.

6 "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

- A beautiful thing. The words means good, valuable and worthy.
- She saw the true value of Jesus.
- The biggest contrast in this story is with the religious leaders and the disciples and Mary.
- The religious leaders had the fulfillment of their hopes, dreams, prophecies right in front of them and they wanted to kill him because he was upsetting the status quo and making them uncomfortable.
- The disciples had listened to Jesus talk about his death and yet were so concerned with what they could get from Jesus that they completely missed it.

- Somewhere in all this, Mary got it. She saw the value of Jesus. Perhaps she heard all of Jesus' prophecies about his impending death and got all of this death-talk just went over the heads of the disciples.
- Jesus got it. He made a comment about they always will have the poor but they will not always have access to him in his physical form.
- He's not pitting himself against the poor but rather is calling out their unholy hypocrisy. They weren't actually concerned about the poor. It had more to do with themselves than the poor.
- The implication of their statement is that they do not regard Jesus as worthy of such extravagant devotion. Unlike Mary, they failed to comprehend how worthy Jesus is.

In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:2-3)

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17-18)

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

- That is the value of Jesus.
- The value of a gift demonstrates the value of a person.
- Jesus deserves our utmost love and devotion.
- You can tell how you feel about someone by what you are willing to give up for them.
- This woman's gift demonstrates that Jesus is absolutely worthy!
- The disciples fail to understand Jesus' worth, but this woman understood that Jesus is worthy of costly devotion.
- If someone were to look at your life, what conclusion would they come away with in regards to your love and value of Jesus?
- She did not wait for a "better time". If Mary hadn't poured the perfume on Jesus at this time, she would have missed the window of opportunity. After Jesus died, some other women make their way to the tomb in the early morning hours. They are carrying spices to anoint the corpse of Jesus. He had been buried so quickly they didn't have time the day He died. But when they arrived, the tomb was empty.
- They never got to anoint His body – but Mary had and Jesus commends her reckless love.
- Mark concludes his account of this event with this:
10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. 11 They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.
- The phrase "one of the twelve" highlights the treachery of Judas. He had seen it all. He had experienced the love of Jesus. For him, Jesus was not meeting his ultimate expectations. Jesus was not giving him everything he wanted. So he took things into his own hands.
- The chief priests didn't come to him, but he went to them.
- **JESUS IS WORTH OUR MOST EXTRAVAGANT LOVE AND DEVOTION.**

- The question that the reader is left pondering is this. "What does my life and actions demonstrate about the value of Jesus in my life? What is my life for him?"
- Some scholars think that this nard was probably an heirloom or an inheritance which was passed on from a mother to her daughter. In that case, this nard had sentimental value along with its monetary value. It generally was kept for one of two purposes.
- A dowry to be presented to her husband.
- An oil to be used to anoint a body before burial because nard was also used as part of the embalming process. Perhaps she was saving this perfume for her own funeral or someone in her family.
- By breaking the bottle and pouring it all out on Jesus, she was giving up her security and putting her future in His hands. She's putting her dreams into the hands of the One who gave His all for her.
- Is your love for Jesus such that you give him your all?
- Do you love Jesus more than what anyone else thinks of you?
- Is your love conditional on what Jesus will give you back?
- **JESUS IS WORTH OUR MOST EXTRAVAGANT LOVE AND DEVOTION.**
- John says that when she broke the jar, the fragrance of the perfume "filled the house."
- It was clear to everyone what had happened.
- And when Mary was done with Jesus, that fragrance that was on Jesus was also on her. For the rest of the night and the next day wherever Mary went she carried with her that fragrance. People might have said, "My, you smell lovely" And she would have been reminded of being with Jesus.
- You can usually tell when you're around someone who has poured out his or her life to Jesus. There's a certain spiritual fragrance about them. There is a beautiful perfume that accompanies their life. Paul wrote, "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."
- May we be people who are that aroma to others.