

# The Unforgettable Perfume

The Cross (Part 1)

Mark 14:1-8 (Mt.26:6-13, Jn.12:1-8) 1/8/2021

*Is it really a good thing for this woman to spend a whole year's wages on a single, momentary act of worship? And if so, why perfume? Wouldn't there be some more practical gifts that could be given with that amount of money?*

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**Mark 14:1 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. 2 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."**

**3 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, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.**

**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.**

**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 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."**

## Introduction

### Head in the Game

What does mean when people say: "Get your head in the game"? Suppose someone from another country saw a football coach grab a player by the facemask and shout at him, "Get your head in the game!" And they asked you, "What does that mean?"—how would define it? Probably what just happened was that player missed a play because of a lapse in concentration. College stars who are drafted always say the same thing after their first game in the NFL—they can't believe how fast the game is in the pros. The slightest, split-second hesitation means the quarterback you're protecting gets sacked. Or the receiver you're guarding gets a half step on you and catches the touchdown pass. And so the slightest

bit of distraction or daydreaming or foggy thinking and you're going to get beat. The only way you're going to survive in the big leagues is if you're able to keep your head in the game from start to finish.

We just finished about 6 months of studying the Olivet Discourse, and do you remember what the bottom line was? What the very last thing Jesus said in that sermon? "Stay awake." And for anyone who might have been nodding off, he repeats it four times in the closing paragraph: Stay awake, stay awake, stay awake ... what I say to you I say to everyone, stay awake! From right now until I return, keep your head in the game. Do not drift off to sleep.

And in that paragraph about staying awake, Jesus mentions four examples of moments when we need to be awake: evening, midnight, rooster crow, and dawn. Then you turn one page and see those are the four key moments when the disciples failed. By doing that Mark is cluing us in that we are to read this passion narrative in light of the command to stay awake. So that's what we're going to do, and there's a whole lot we can learn about exactly what sleepiness and alertness look like in this opening paragraph of ch.14. We're going to learn what it looks like to keep our head in the game.

## Intro to the Series: Holy of Holies

Chapter 14 of Mark begins the passion narrative. Everything from this moment on is focused on the cross. This is where we step inside what one preacher called the holy of holies of God's Word. The holy of holies was the inner sanctum of the Temple where the high priest would enter on the Day of Atonement and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on behalf of the people for forgiveness of sins. But that whole system was nothing but a picture or illustration of the real sacrifice in the real holy of holies, which is described beginning here through the end of the book.

## The Plotting Chief Priests

And it all starts with the account of Jesus being anointed for burial. Normally the embalming process doesn't begin while the person is still alive, but it has to in Jesus' case. We'll see why in a minute. But first, before launching into this story, Mark gives us one verse that seems totally unrelated. But as we look at it more closely we'll see that, as always, Mark's arrangement of the material is masterful.

**Mark 14:1 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. 2 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."**

Coming off the Olivet Discourse we get some major whiplash here. We've been seeing Christ in the future—future Christ in his full glory, coming in the clouds, surrounded by millions of angels, awesome in power, reigning over all, punishing the wicked. Now all of a sudden we're slammed back into the present where Jesus is a murder victim.

Imagine one of the chief priests looking up and down the alley before ducking in the back door to the secret meeting about how to handle this Jesus problem. "What we're doing isn't working. This guy is performing miracles all over the place. If we don't put a stop to it, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away our place of leadership and our nation."<sup>1</sup> "Yeah, but we can't do it now. All these thousands of people here for Passover week—it doesn't take much to set off a riot. We've seen it happen more than once during the feast. That's why the Romans have soldiers everywhere. He's just too popular right now. We're going to have to wait until after Passover week, agreed?" A slow nod from each grey head in the room.

Now back up and remember the structure of this section of Mark. We know Mark loves sandwiches. He sandwiches one event between two other events to make a point. In this case he sandwiches the Olivet discourse between two stories of women who gave costly gifts. The widow in the Temple gives her last two dollars, and now we'll see a woman who gives a gift worth a year's wages. And what's in between? A sermon about the destruction of the Temple. The first woman gave to the corrupt, oppressive

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in this meeting recorded in John 11:47-53.

Temple in Jerusalem. Then Jesus preaches a whole sermon about how that Temple will be destroyed. Now this woman gives a gift honoring the new temple—Jesus. So after the first woman’s gift we hear about God’s wrath against the Jerusalem Temple, and now we see man’s wrath against God’s temple.

How is this possible? How is it possible that the spiritual leaders of God’s holy people are plotting to destroy God’s new temple? How is it that the ones with the most knowledge of the Bible are seeking to murder the one who is going to come in clouds with power and It’s possible because they’re dead asleep to the spiritual world. And that brings us to why Mark sticks this verse right here in this spot.

## The Ring

The book of Mark is a little bit like the ring in Lord of the Rings. In that story, Frodo has a ring that enables him to see invisible realities. He will be in a seemingly normal situation, he puts the ring on, and suddenly he can see all kinds of cosmic drama playing out —spiritual beings carrying on in dramatic ways all around him. Those things are going on around him all the time, but without the ring on, he’s oblivious to it. That’s exactly what the book of Mark does. He begins by revealing who Jesus is—the Son of God. And everyone can see that except for the humans in the story. The narrator sees it, the reader sees it, God the Father declares it at the baptism, demons see it – the only beings who don’t have the ring on and can’t see it are the humans interacting with Jesus. They just see this guy from Nazareth who becomes a spectacle, so they mob him and push forward to try to touch the big celebrity and maybe get healed. The demons see someone with unspeakable power. He weighs 10,000 pounds. They see him and collapse on the ground and scream in fear. But the humans either dismiss him as a demoniac or lunatic, or, at best, they scratch their heads in confusion and don’t know what to make of him.

Mark is teaching us that we, as humans, are the only one’s blind to most of reality. We’re sitting here in this room, and it looks like there are a handful of people sitting around us, and that’s about all that’s happening. But if we put on the ring we would see a whole world of activity in the spiritual realm. And when most people hear that they think, “Oh cool, I would see demons and angels.” And we would see the Holy Spirit, and all the marvelous things he is doing and we would see the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, which would be fantastic. But that’s not all. It’s not just that we would see the spiritual players. Nothing would look the same. Every aspect of our lives would look different. Some of the things that right now seem dry and boring, if we put the ring on, would dazzle us with their stunning beauty and we’d be overwhelmed with desire for them. Other things that currently appear attractive and alluring to our natural eyes, if we put on the ring, would be ugly and disgusting. There are ideas—worldly wisdom that seems to make sense to us now, if we put on the ring, it would be clear—“Oh, that’s total nonsense.” And there are biblical ideas that right now don’t make sense and maybe even bother you a little bit—you put the ring on, those truths would appear as obvious and brilliant. Staying awake means remaining alert to spiritual realities.

That’s a big theme all through the gospel of Mark—spiritual insight. Remember that long section between the two healings of blind men? It was all about ability or inability to see perceive the spiritual realm. The chief priests and Pharisees are completely blind to it. The disciples sometimes slip the ring half way on a finger, but then it slips right back off. But every once in a while the most unlikely person comes along who has 20-20 spiritual insight.

And no one is a better example of that than the woman we’re going to read about today. She is wide awake, has crystal clear spiritual vision—she’s got the ring all the way on. And in order to show us how beautiful that is, Mark places her against the backdrop of the exact opposite. Again, he uses his sandwich technique. He takes the account of this woman (which actually happened a few days earlier) but he places it here, sandwiched between accounts of spiritually blind men just to show the contrast.<sup>2</sup> He wants

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<sup>2</sup> It’s actually a double sandwich. The outer slices of bread are about the Passover. The inner slices of bread show men who are asleep to the reality of who Jesus is. And the meat in the center is a woman who is wide awake.

14:1a - The Passover is coming

14:1b-2 - The chief priests plot the murder of Jesus

14:3-9 - A woman honors Jesus’ death

to showcase her as the supreme example of someone who is wide awake set like a glittering jewel against the black backdrop of people who are asleep. She's got her head in the game, they're in a fog, and Mark puts them side by side to show us exactly what staying awake looks like. Remember, there were no chapter divisions in the original. Jesus just ended the discourse by shouting at us to stay awake, and then Mark immediately shows us a striking side-by-side picture of what it looks like to be awake and what it looks like to be asleep.

## Not During the Feast

**Mark 14:1 Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away ....**

Mark begins by placing us in the context of Passover. That becomes important a little later.

**1 ... and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 2 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."**

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were a week-long feast.<sup>3</sup> Disturbances and unrest were somewhat common at Passover—both because of the massive crowds and because of the messianic fervor that the Jews often had around Passover time. So they say, “Not during the feast.” Anytime was a great time to kill Jesus—anytime except for one time. Not during Passover—too risky. Jesus was popular; arresting him this week could lead to a huge problem.

As we soon find out, they greatly overestimated the people's allegiance to Jesus. They're afraid to kill Jesus for fear that the people may riot. Just two days later, Pilate is afraid *not* to kill Jesus for fear that the people may riot. That goes to show the power of leadership. The masses will respond to leadership. Jesus was extremely popular at this moment. The crowds sided with him and against the chief priests in the conflicts at the Temple. But within a couple days, the chief priests influenced the masses to turn against Jesus. Different leadership and they might have gone a very different way. It really doesn't take that much to move the direction of the masses—especially when it comes to moving them toward hatred.

This is why those men are so deserving of the wrath of God. It's one thing for them to reject Christ, but they led the whole population astray.

So that's the black background of the spiritually blind. These are the spiritual leaders of Israel, trained as experts in the Scriptures. No one had more opportunity to see into the spiritual realm than they did, and yet no one was more blind. That's what happens when you fall asleep spiritually.

## The Woman's Insight

So with that as the backdrop, let's compare that to this woman.

**3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper ...**

Leave it to Jesus to be hanging out in the home of a guy named Simon the Leper.<sup>4</sup> I don't know how he got that nickname—evidently he had recovered from leprosy but not from the reputation that went

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14:10–11 - Judas provides the answer for the chief priests

14:12ff - Preparing the Passover

The outer layer of the sandwich sets the events in their symbolic context, the Passover festival with its sacrificial meal. Within this framework is a further sandwich which contrasts the hostility of the religious leaders and the treachery of one of Jesus' leading disciples with the extravagant love and loyalty of one of the least of his followers.

<sup>3</sup> Sometimes they would distinguish between the two like Mark does here; other times they would just refer to the whole 8 days as Passover.

<sup>4</sup> If you were writing a history, and you wanted to record the most important events of the time, you might document what was going on in the power centers in Rome—the palace of Caesar. Or from a Jewish perspective, you'd go to Jerusalem where thousands were gathering from all over the Roman empire to celebrate the most important holiday of the year. But Mark, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, takes us not to Rome or Jerusalem, but to a tiny town outside of Jerusalem in the home of a guy

with it. But once again we see the people who would be considered outsiders on the inside with Jesus, and the people we think of as insiders on the outs with Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

**3 ... a woman<sup>6</sup> came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.**

When you first read that you think, “Oh, that’s nice. The woman is honoring Jesus.” But then you read down to verse 5 and find out what Mark means by “very expensive.” More than 300 denarii. According to Mark 6:37, 200 denarii would have been sufficient to provide a meal for five thousand families. A denarius was a day’s wage, so 300—that’s a whole year’s salary. Nard perfume was imported from India and was outrageously expensive.

Imagine this. You’re reclining at the table, leaning on one elbow with your legs stretched out behind you. At a regular meal they would sit at chairs, but at this kind of occasion, they would be reclining. It’s been a good time, the food is good, great conversation, you’re taking it all in. You notice a woman come in. At first you don’t really think anything of it. The women didn’t eat with the men at a meal like this, but there were some ladies there serving, brining out food and so on. But this woman, you haven’t seen her serving. Maybe she’s just been in the kitchen? But this woman, you haven’t seen her serving. Maybe she’s just been in the kitchen? She’s not really dressed to serve like the other ladies. She’s got a look on her face that’s ... hard to describe.

But now she’s approaching the table. She doesn’t have a pitcher or tray or anything, but she seems determined—she’s cutting a straight path toward ... she’s headed over toward Jesus. Is she going to sit behind him and try to listen? What’s that in her hand?

Oh, is an alabaster jar! Wow, what’s she ... whoa! She just broke it! She going to put some on his head ... oh! She’s pouring it. She just dumped the whole thing all over him! What in the world?

And then the fragrance reaches you. You’ll all the way on the opposite side of the room, but it’s filling the whole house with the aroma. You breathe it in. It’s unbelievable. You’ve never smelled perfume like this. This must be that imported stuff—no wonder it was in an alabaster jar.

You breathe in again. It’s mesmerizing. You inhale again—you can’t get enough.

A few drops of that stuff would have still been very generous and a great honor. But she breaks the jar<sup>7</sup> and dumps the whole thing on him. Sometimes when a vessel was broken like this it was for someone of great importance, to say, “This vessel will never be used for anyone else.” In the burial, they

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named Simon the leper.

<sup>5</sup> Lepers were the ultimate outsiders. And the focus isn’t even on him as the owner of the house but on a random, unnamed woman. Women were also spiritual outsiders. And Bethany was outside of Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup> Women play especially important roles in the Gospel of Mark. Not only are they mentioned frequently, but they are frequently honored by Jesus, especially lowly women, which is in line with his emphasis on the last being first.

Mark mentions fifteen different women twenty-two times, not counting the mention of Jesus’ sisters (6:3), the “many other women” who followed Jesus from Galilee (15:41), and the mention of the right of women to divorce their husbands (10:12).

Some women appear in negative roles, such as the mother of Jesus who twice obstructs Jesus (3:31–32; 6:3), and Jesus’ sisters once (6:3). The servant girl in the courtyard who questions Peter plays an ambivalent role (14:69ff.), as do Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who bravely visit the tomb of Jesus but fail to declare his resurrection (16:1, 8), and the widow whose household is devoured by the doomed Temple leaders (12:42). The worst roles fall to Herodias and her daughter (6:17ff.). So it’s not that women are portrayed as always being good. But in contrast with the common views of the time, they are regarded as important—both their good and their evil matters.

Fourteen of the twenty-two mentions of women appear in especially positive contexts. The value and dignity of women and girls—are signified by the fact that Jesus heals them (1:30–31; 5:25–34; 5:23, 41–42; 7:25). In their following and serving of Jesus and the Christian fellowship women are models of spiritual insight (1:30–31; 15:40, 47; 16:1). In special instances they play prominent roles, even preeminent roles, receiving the highest praise that Jesus gives in the Gospel. On two occasions women appear in the heart of the sandwich technique as the ideal of faith (5:21–43) and devotion (14:1–11). The woman with a hemorrhage is a model of faith for Jairus, the synagogue president (5:25–34); and the Syrophenician woman is a model of faith for all “outsiders” (7:25ff.). And above all, the anointing at Bethany is so exemplary that the proclamation of the gospel in the world is a commemoration of her act (14:9).

<sup>7</sup> It is often suggested that breaking the jar was the only way to get the perfume out, but I have found no historical basis for that assumption. And it makes one wonder how they got the perfume in the jar.

would sometimes break the jar and lay out the pieces on the body. This woman is giving Jesus the highest honor she can possibly give.

But so much money wasted! The others are speaking up. “What did you do? That’s \$50,000! Haven’t you heard a word Jesus has said these past few years about caring for the poor? Have you been to the pool of Siloam? Have you walked around town? Within one block of here there are people starving. Mothers who can’t feed their children. This would have fed a family for a year! What were you thinking, you stupid ...”

“Hey! Hey! Leave her alone! Why are you attacking her? What she did was beautiful.”

## Insight into His Death

This is extravagant worship. It was extravagant, but why perfume? There are other ways to be extravagant. If you were going to give a gift of \$50,000 to someone, would you choose imported perfume? And then dump it out on them? Or would you get them a new car or something they could keep and use? If I’m ever wealthy enough that I’m spending \$50,000 on a gift for you, I promise you, it’s not going to be perfume. Why such a strange gift? We’ll see why in a minute, but first let’s look at the disciples’ reaction.

## The Disciples’ Blind Response

**4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste<sup>8</sup>of perfume?<sup>9</sup> 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.**

The wording these is very strong—they were mad, and they came at her hard. Whenever someone does something right with Jesus, you can always count on the disciples to rebuke them for it.

It’s easy to criticize the disciples for this in hindsight, but I don’t know if we’re much different today. Let me ask you, which woman is more famous for her giving—this woman, or the widow who put her last dollar in the Temple coffers? We know which woman Jesus wants to be more famous—he says so in this passage. This woman is to be honored. But which one do people talk about more? I think it’s the widow. Pastors love a good story about people putting money into the offering. That’s always going to get plenty of air time in sermons. But what this woman did? Suppose you’re a pastor and someone in the congregation comes up to you and says, “Hey, I just inherited \$50,000 and I’d like to honor the Lord with it.” “Oh, fantastic! Were you thinking the general fund? Or the building fund could really use a boost.” “Actually, my idea was to go out on a boat on Easter Sunday, and right at sunrise I’ll read the account of the resurrection, and then throw the \$50,000 in cash into the ocean as a love gift to God.” “Oh, I see. Um, have you ever taken our stewardship class? Maybe take that before doing anything ... rash?”

If a woman in your church did that, and you were in charge of the benevolence fund, and you’ve been trying everything you can think of to raise some money to help some really desperate, needy families in your church, and you want so much to help them but you just don’t have the funds, and this woman has this idea of throwing a year’s salary in the ocean, are you going to tell me that wouldn’t bother you? I have to be honest, I’m afraid I might have had the same response as the disciples.

And in my example, that’s different because you would at least have a little time to think about it. But what if you didn’t know ahead of time, you were out on the boat with her, and suddenly, out of the blue without any warning, all that cash goes into the water? That’s what happened here. Before anyone even knew what was going on, \$50,000 worth of imported perfume was being dumped. “Whoa, whoa, whoa—wait, what are you doing ... oh, what did you just do?!” What we’re seeing here is their knee-jerk response, and knee-jerk responses are great for finding out what your values really are.

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<sup>8</sup> lit., “To what purpose this destruction?”),

<sup>9</sup> if anything was a waste, it was the widow’s copper coins donated to a bunch of crooks. But no one rebuked that woman because that money got collected and could be used.

So we can understand the disciples' response here. Especially when you think about how much Jesus has been teaching them about the poor. Hadn't Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell everything and give to the poor? He never told anyone to sell everything and use it to anoint Jesus. I'm sure they were perfectly fine with honoring Jesus and everything, but a year's wages? Does Jesus really need *that* much perfume? Anointing is one thing, but drenching seems a little much.

## Would It Be Too Much in His Glory?

Even today, with all we know, the idea of dumping a year's salary for a moment of worship is hard to embrace. It still seems kind of wasteful. But that's only because we're half asleep. We don't quite have the ring all the way on.

Let's try a little experiment. Let's back up a couple paragraphs and see Jesus in his glory at the Second Coming. Picture it. The trumpet sounds, the sky rolls up like a scroll, millions of angels appear shouting praises, and in the center of it all, there he is—the King of kings. The glorious Lord Jesus Christ coming on the clouds in power and majesty. Every eye sees him and every knee bows, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Even the powers of the heaven appear and bow before him. And God the Father decks him out with all of his divine, glory and splendor. And in that moment, someone pours out a whole jar of perfume at his feet. Would that seem like too much in that moment? Would you be thinking, "Really? A whole jar? Wouldn't a few drops be enough?" No, not in that moment. If anything you'd be thinking, "Is that the best you can do?" In that moment—if we were back in ch.13, then no amount of honor would be too much.

But here's the thing—this woman *is* back in chapter 13. When she looks at Jesus, that is what she sees because she's wide awake to the spiritual realm. She has the ring all the way on her finger. Jesus really is that worthy of worship. At the Second Coming it will be obvious to everyone, but here, in this setting, it can only be seen by people who are awake to the spiritual world.

## Did Know What She Was Doing?

Most commentators assure us, for some reason, that the woman probably didn't intend this as an anointing for his burial. She had something else in mind, and Jesus just took the occasion to make a point about his death.

I don't know why they think she didn't know. Jesus said her reason for doing it was to anoint his body for burial—why not just take that at face value? Jesus honors her by saying she would be remembered forever wherever the gospel is preached. And why would she be so honored if it was just an accident? All through Mark, the people who are commended are the people who had spiritual insight. And the people who are rebuked are the people who were spiritually blind. I don't think Jesus is saying this woman will be forever honored because she was just as blind as everyone else but she accidentally stumbled into doing something Jesus could use as an illustration.

I don't even understand why commentators are reluctant to believe she knew what she was doing. I even heard one pastor say maybe she did know through female intuition. Now, far be it from me to say anything against female intuition. I happen to believe females are incredibly intuitive—even more intuitive than males. But figuring out that Jesus was about to die didn't require any kind of intuition—male or female. Jesus has been announcing over and over and over that he was going to be killed. He described how it would happen and who would do it. He couldn't have stated it any more clearly. Even his enemies picked up on it. That's why the chief priests and Pharisees asked Pilate to put a guard on the tomb.

**Matthew 27:63** They said, "while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'

If they understood what Jesus was saying, why is it so hard to imagine this woman understood.

She understood. She's intentionally anointing his body for burial. But why is she doing it while he's still alive? Typically you don't start the embalming process until after the person is dead. No matter who

you are, if you died, before you were buried, someone would prepare your body. That's true of everyone ... except for one category of people. There is one situation where they would bury you without any kind of preparation, and that was if you were executed as a criminal. Criminals' bodies were thrown to the dogs or tossed in a common grave.

Could this woman have known that not only was Jesus about to die, but that this was the only chance to prepare his body because he would die as a criminal? How could she possibly know that? She knew it because, unlike everyone else, when Jesus spoke, she listened.

**Mark 10:33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him."**

It didn't require a towering intellect to know this. It just required faith—believing what Jesus said.

## **The Opposite of Betrayal**

Sandwiched between descriptions of the chief priests who wanted to murder Jesus, and Judas who betrayed him, Mark shows us a beautiful picture of the opposite of betrayal. We might assume the opposite of betraying Christ would be to do what Peter did—pull out a sword and fight for Jesus. But that's not the case. The opposite of betraying Jesus is not to try to prevent his death, but to honor his death. The opposite of betraying Jesus is to believe what he said and get on board with it.

That's what this woman did, and look what Jesus says about it.

**6 ... She has done a beautiful thing to me.**

**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.**

The fragrance filled the house. It filled the house, but soon dissipated. That's why they thought it was a waste. A few moments of a sweet smell, then it was gone. What they didn't realize is the fragrance of Mary's beautiful act of worship and the sweetness of her faith would linger forever, building the faith of the millions who would inhale it, as I trust it has fortified our faith tonight. Long after all the current celebrities, actors, athletes, pop stars; long after every Nobel prize winner and every United States President is completely forgotten, this woman will still be remembered. The only true path to lasting honor is to honor Christ. And the way to honor Christ is to stay awake.

## **Conclusion: Could It Be Me?**

If Jesus said this woman is to be remembered forever, why doesn't Mark tell us her name? That information was available—the gospel of John tells us. And I'll tell you next time. And when you find out who it is, a lot of things will make sense.

I think ark knew her name, but he leaves it out. We also know who it was who rebuked her for wasting so much valuable perfume. John tells us that too—it was Judas. And Matthew tells us that the rest of the disciples joined in. But Mark just says, "Those who were present."

Why does he leave everyone nameless? Could it be that Mark doesn't want you to get distracted with knowing the names because by leaving them nameless, he leaves you to put yourself in the story? John says, "It was Judas who said it." Matthew says, "It was the disciples." Mark says, "What if it was you?" Same with the nameless woman—what if it's you?

Are you awake or asleep? I wish we had time to finish this tonight. Next time I want to walk through the passage point by point and we're going to learn all the signs of sleepiness. How to know when you're drifting off to sleep spiritually, and what to do about it. That's really what I wanted to do tonight, but we had to lay the foundation first. So we'll get to that, but for now, let me just suggest you do what I've been doing the past few weeks. When I wake up in the morning, I imagine myself sliding the ring on my finger, and then looking over at Tracy. If I had 20-20 spiritual vision, if I valued things

according to what the Bible says about them , if I prioritized things the way the Bible does, if I loved and hated things according to what Scripture says , if I put that ring on, what would be different in the way I look at Tracy? Then I consider my day. How would the day ahead of me look with that ring on my finger? As often as I can, I slip that ring on and just look around. Give that a try and next time we'll dig a little deeper and refine the process even more.

## **Summary**

*The Olivet Discourse concluded with a strong warning to stay awake. Chapter 14 begins with a sandwich that contrasts men who were asleep with the beauty of a woman who was awake enough to see Christ's worthiness and understand the importance of his impending death.*

Matthew 26:6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as **Simon the Leper**, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume,

which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

8 When **the disciples** saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. 9 "This perfume could have been sold at a **high price** and the money given to the poor."

10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

12 **When** she poured this perfume on my body, **she did it** to prepare me for burial.

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

Mark 14:3 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, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

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.**

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 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."

Luke 7:36 **Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.** 37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. **Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.**

John 12:1 **Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.** 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 **Then Mary** took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 **He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.** 7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied.

**"It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.** 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

This is one of the most difficult incidents to reconcile the accounts in all four gospels. Matthew and Mark are very similar, placing the incident right after the Olivet Discourse in the home of Simon the Leper. Luke places the account much earlier in the gospel and in the home of a self-righteous, legalistic Pharisee. John says Martha was serving.

The verse preceding Mark's account sets the time as two days before the Passover, whereas John places it six days prior.

In Matthew and Mark the woman anoints Jesus' head and body; the woman in Luke and John anoints his feet and dries it with her hair. In Matthew, Mark, and John the point is about anointing Jesus for burial. The point in Luke is about forgiveness of sins.

While it is difficult to harmonize these accounts, none of them are formal contradictions. It is possible the owner of the house was a former leper who was a Pharisee, and Martha served in that house. Simon may have even been the father of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And it's certainly possible that Mary began with Jesus' head, but then poured the perfume on his whole body as he reclined, including his feet, then wiped his feet with her hair. Most likely, the event happened six days before the Passover and Luke and Mark placed it in other contexts because of the point they were making with it.

It is also likely that Luke's account describes a different incident. It would be coincidental that both hosts were named Simon and that both women anointed Jesus during a meal. But Simon was a very common name, and it could be that the first incident was so moving that it gave Mary the idea to also anoint him, but this time for his burial.