

Jesus' Last Week: Anointed at Bethany

In 1977 NASA launched Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 satellites to explore the galaxy. A recording called "The Sounds of Earth" was attached to each spacecraft – a message from earth to anyone out there in the universe who might be listening. It contained both music and the sound of a human heartbeat.

Annie Druyan was the NASA Communications Director charged with choosing the music. Her first choice was a Beethoven piece from something called the Cavatina Movement. In the margin of the original score, Beethoven had written the one German word *sehnsucht*, which means "longing." Annie said of this choice, "Part of what we wanted to capture in the Voyager message was this great longing we feel." ⁱ Isn't that interesting?

We come now to the last quarter of the gospel of Mark. These are chapters of action but Jesus is no longer the one performing the action. He is the one being acted upon. Mary anoints Him, Judas betrays Him, Peter denies Him, the Sanhedrin arrests Him, the Romans try Him and "we all" condemn Him.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee notes:

As we come into the shadow of the cross, the reverent heart realizes we are on holy ground... there is a strange agreement of heaven and hell. Light and darkness are going together in the same direction. Righteousness and sin are going to the cross, and God and Satan have decided that Jesus shall be crucified. ⁱⁱ

In our passage today, we find both the reason and the remedy for our deep longing. First, we must notice...

I. The Evil Intent

Over the next four weeks, we will patiently and purposefully study the events of the last week of Jesus' life. Let me briefly give you his day-by-day schedule:

Friday: Six days before the Passover He is anointed by Mary in Bethany.

Saturday: Sabbath – a day of rest with friends

Sunday: The Triumphal Entry (Palm Sunday)

Monday: Clearing of the Temple

Tuesday: Teaching on the Mount of Olives

Wednesday: Rest? (Scripture is silent about this day.)

Thursday: Passover/Last Supper, Gethsemane, arrest and trial

Friday: More trials, beatings, crucifixion and is buried before 6 p.m.

Saturday: Sabbath rest in the tomb

Sunday: Resurrection and appearance to the women and disciples

Because of what Mark says in verses 1 and 2, some people mistakenly think that he is saying that the anointing took place two days before the Passover. That's not what Mark says. He says the chief priests and teachers of the law were plotting to kill Jesus two days before the Passover. He then jumps back to Friday, six days before the Passover, and tells the story of the anointing. But what we need to see in

verses 1 and 2 is the evil intent of the chief priests and teachers. They've been Jesus' intense critics for a long time, but now they're arriving at the decision to put their anger into action. John tells us that it was the High Priest, Caiaphas, who finally suggested that *"...it is better... that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."* (John 11:50)

What do you see in this scene? Who proposes the final evil act? It's the leader of the Sanhedrin, the High Priest! Is the Sanhedrin an inherently evil organization? NO! There were godly men in the Sanhedrin like Nicodemus and Gamaliel. Then, how did this happen? They were misled by their leader.

In a moment we're going to look at Jesus' being anointed by Mary. And who is it that criticizes Mary for doing this? John says that it was Judas, but Matthew says that all the disciples were indignant with Mary. What's likely is that Judas started the criticism and the others joined in. Mark says that it was that same day that Judas went to the chief priests to betray Jesus and Luke says that Satan actually "entered" Judas before he went to the chief priests (Luke 22:3), which means that Judas was under the control of Satan when he criticized Mary.

How often do you pray for the leaders of this church – the staff, the elders, various ministry leaders? Jesus told Peter that Satan is constantly at war with Christian ministries and he has a very consistent strategy – he goes after the leaders. Jesus said to Peter:

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. (Luke 22:31)

How many churches do you know of that have dissolved because of a leader's sin? How many ministries have dishonored Christ because of a leader's sin? This is Satan's consistent strategy! What can you do? Do what Jesus did. Jesus said to Peter:

But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. (Luke 22:32)

Did Simon still sin? Yes, but his faith did not fail and the ministry did not dissolve. So, let me ask again, "How often do you pray for the leaders of this church?" Satan is not dead and his strategy has not changed.

Secondly, we must see...

II. The Extravagant Act

Out of this surrounding evil steps a young, single woman. We've met her only once before in Scripture. Unnamed in Mark, John tells us that this is Lazarus' sister, Mary. Some have confused this Mary with the woman in Luke 7 who also anointed Jesus with oil. That's a separate incident. That was in the home of a Pharisee. This is in the home of Simon the leper.

This Mary comes with expensive perfume and... (Mk. 14:3b-5)

She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

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.

Why did Mary do this? Be honest now, when you first read this story didn't you react like these disciples? Didn't you think to yourself, "Yeah, why DID she waste that perfume like that? I mean, what was the point? Perfume is meant to be used a little dab at a time. What was she doing? Wasn't she just grandstanding here?"

Wasn't she just showing off for the crowd? Why DID she waste all that perfume?" Have you ever thought that about this incident?

Here at Valley, we've done a lot of asking for money in the last five months - a lot more than we normally do. Maybe you've thought that about our asking for money. "Why ARE you guys asking for all this money? I mean, even if I'm not tithing, why does this church need any more money than it has already?" Have you been thinking that lately?

Dave Ramsey is a Christian financial planner. Maybe you've heard him on the radio giving advice to people on how to get out of debt. He teaches a video course called "Financial Peace University." In the last session of that course, Dave tells about a time he was up early reading his Bible and his five-year-old son came downstairs just to sit with him. I want you to hear how Dave finishes that story...

[Financial Peace University, tape 9 begin at 25:00 and end at 29:10]

We are happiest and most fulfilled when serving and when giving. If you don't know why Mary gave this extravagant gift, if you think she "wasted" that perfume on Jesus, it's because you've never experienced what she experienced - the joy of giving. The sheer joy of it!

How much do you make in one year? How much? That's how much Mary poured on Jesus that day. And please notice something else: she didn't say a word while she did it! She didn't make a speech about the fact that she was doing this so that everyone would know how much she wanted to thank Him for raising her brother from the dead. NO, she didn't say a word! She just poured her one year's salary on Jesus' head. I've had people argue with me about whether they really need to give Jesus 10% of their salary. She gave Him 100% of her salary!!!

And the disciples criticized her for it! They tried to make her feel small, foolish, greedy, wasteful for doing it. And still - she didn't say a word! She didn't feel any need to defend herself. Jesus defended her!! Jesus knew EXACTLY why she did it and, like the real man that He was, He stepped in and said, "All right, knock it off!! (That's what my Dad used to say when my brother and I were pushing the limits or if we were disrespecting our mom! He'd say, "All right, knock it off!!" And we did, immediately!!) Mary gave an unusually extravagant gift to Jesus and, even though she was roundly criticized for it, she felt no need to explain herself or defend herself. Why? Because she knew that Jesus understood EXACTLY why she had done it, and that's all she needed to know.

Yes, we've made some "extra" appeals for money this year. Why? So more people, whether they live locally or globally, could hear about this Savior that we love. Many of you have given extravagantly. But if you haven't yet participated, it's not too late. It's not too late to join us as we "WASTE" our money on Jesus.

But before we leave this remarkable story, I want us to see one more thing...

III. The Enormous Result

In Jesus' defense of Mary, He said something right at the end that I puzzled over for years. Do you know what I'm talking about? In verse 9, Jesus said:

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. (Mk.14:9)

What does this mean? Why did He say this? What is it that Mary did that is connected with every preaching of the gospel?

Many of you know of my indebtedness to the insights of Watchman Nee, the Chinese evangelist of another era. In teaching on this passage, Nee points to a word in verse 8 that is the key to understanding what Jesus is talking about. It is the word “beforehand.” Do you see it? Jesus said in verse 8:

She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. (Mk. 14:8)

Nee then points out that one day, when we meet Jesus, oh, what a response we will have! We’ll fall at His feet and worship Him! Nee writes:

When we see him face to face, I trust that we shall all break and pour out everything for him. But today – what are we doing today? ...the question above all questions is: What am I doing to the Lord today?

Have our eyes been opened to see the preciousness of the One whom we are serving? Have we come to see that nothing less than the dearest, the costliest, the most precious, is fit for him? ...If we do not think much of him then of course to give him anything at all, however small, will seem to us a wicked waste. But when he is really precious to our souls, nothing will be too good, nothing too costly for him; everything we have, our dearest, our most priceless treasure, we shall pour out upon him, and we shall not count it a shame to have done so.

But how is this connected with preaching the gospel? Nee’s point is that the reason Mary’s extravagant gift will always be remembered in connection with the gospel is because it wasn’t about the monetary value. It was about the soul-commitment value of her gift. Listen again to brother Nee:

We are speaking here of what we are; not of what we do or what we preach. Perhaps you may have been asking the Lord for a long time that he will be pleased to use you in such a way as to impart impressions of himself to others.

(This is exactly what we SHOULD be asking of Him in connection with sharing Grace and Mercy with the people Hartford and Litchfield County or in another country!)

That prayer is not exactly for the gift of preaching or teaching. It is rather that you might be able, in your touch with others, to impart God, the presence of God, the sense of God. Let me tell you, dear friends, you cannot produce such impressions of God upon others without the breaking of everything, even your most precious possessions, at the feet of the Lord Jesus.

But if once that point is reached, you may or may not seem to be much used in an outward way, but God will begin to use you to create a hunger in others. People will scent Christ in you. The most unlikely people will detect that. They will sense that here is one who has gone with the Lord, one who has suffered, one who has not moved freely, independently, but who has known what it is to subject everything to him. That kind of life creates impressions, and impressions create hunger, and hunger provokes men to go on seeking until they are brought by divine revelation into fullness of life in Christ...

There must be something – a willingness to yield, a breaking and a pouring out of everything to him – which gives release to that fragrance of Christ...

And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (Jn. 12:3)

Oh, to be wasted! It is a blessed thing to be wasted for the Lord. ⁱⁱⁱ

It was the fragrance of Mary’s total commitment to Christ that Jesus said would always accompany the preaching of the gospel around the world.

Do you want that fragrance to be released through your life? Then, I'm going to ask you to do an extravagant thing right now. Some of you, up until today, have been like the disciples, more concerned about "wasting" your time or money or talent on Jesus' agenda. But today, the Holy Spirit has spoken to your soul. Today, you want to join Mary. You want to break your alabaster flask of precious possessions. You want to break it and pour the contents on Christ. You want Him to know that He's worth it, that all you have and all you are belongs to Him. If that's your commitment today, while we sing this last song, I want you to come to the front, bow in prayer, and break the flask of your most precious possession and then return to your seat. Let's stand together and worship Jesus...

www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/ 2012/October

ⁱⁱ Dr. J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, Vol. IV* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 220

ⁱⁱⁱ Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 278, 279, 282, 284