

Mark 14:1-9

“Driven by devotion”

- I. **Introduction**
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I. **Introduction**

This section comes right after Mark recording the Olivet Discourse with Jesus’ focus on what the Church should do when the world is coming apart prior to His return, keep busy working at the work that He has called us to and we need to watch for those who would come into the church to rip us off from our work! In the 14th chapter Mark puts forth several stories that contrast the responses of people towards Jesus. What’s interesting to note is that these stories are NOT in chronological order. The fact is by design and ought to cause the reader to investigate what these stories are trying to communicate to the reader. In both of these stories we see that the people involved were “*driven by devotion*”, yet with two polar opposite outcomes!

II. **Vs. 1-2 The religion of self**

Vs. 1-2 In the first two verses Mark gives us some inside information of the Chief priests and scribes intentions with regards to Jesus and what the chief factors were that altered these plans. There is no mention of how Mark obtained this information as I’m certain that it wasn’t common knowledge and would have been considered “*inside information*”. My guess (and that is all it is) is that after the resurrection and Pentecost someone who had access to that information became a follower of Christ and came forwards and spoke openly about it. This plan reveals several things that the religious elite were very aware of:

- a. *That their opportunity to kill Jesus was growing very short: The timing of this event had a very narrow window.*

- b. **That there were no grounds to accomplish their desired result.** *This is why they would have to resort to “trickery” to accomplish this task.*
- c. **That they were very conscious of Jesus’ over all popularity with the multitudes outside of Jerusalem.** *Their concern as to the timing lie in the reaction of the crowds favorable towards Him.*

These facts reveal the motive and hatred the religious leaders had towards Jesus. Their jealousy was aimed at protecting their prestige and power that they had utilized to their advantage. Jesus was a direct threat to their way of life. Here was the religious elite whose responsibility it was to lead the people into a greater understanding of God but had become so enraptured with the trappings of religion that they were blinded by it; seen in:

- Their indifference to a man they knew was innocent of any real charges
- Their defiance of all that they held sacred to accomplish their desired results
- Their level of self love that they could hate a man whose only crime was that the people loved Him
- Their blindness, that schemed and panned under the power of darkness and secrecy

They were not radicals that believed in their cause, they were secretly meeting and discussing how to kill Jesus which went against the very religion they were sworn to uphold. Jesus was a threat to them and they loved to pose as holy, godly men and Jesus had exposed their hypocrisy and their actions towards Him only confirmed what He had spoken about them as being truth! When evil and hatred are exposed all it can do is retaliate and prove what it truly is.

III. Vs. 3-9 The beauty of devotion

Vs. 3-9 Though this next story appears immediately after in reality the story of the “anointing of Jesus at Bethany” happened 6 days earlier. We know this because John in His gospel has it chronologically correct in John 12:1-8. That leaves us with only two possibilities:

- **Mark was ignorant of the timing of the event:** Something that I find hard to

believe seeing that he was there and wrote long before John did.

- **Mark knowingly inserts this story out of chronological order for a reason:** I believe that Mark deliberately inserts these stories in this chapter to convey the contrast between “true devotion” and false devotion.

The religious elite demonstrated “*intense devotion*” but the devotion that had was to themselves under the false banner of religion. I believe Mark wants to demonstrate this truth because of Jesus’ warning to the Church in the Olivet Discourse with regards to evidence of what false religion looks like.

Mark doesn’t identify the woman who broke the expensive flask of spikenard and anointed Jesus but John does and there we are told that it was Mary of Bethany the sister of of Martha and Lazarus. The account recorded for us in John tells the story of the three siblings and give us a full picture **of what true devotion.** The three of them we are told in John 12 verse 2-3 were engaged in three things that make up true devotion.

- A. First it says that “*Martha served*”: We always find Martha serving; she expressed her devotion by serving. Back in Luke 10 she became stressed in her service and told Jesus to tell her sister Mary to get up and help her in the kitchen. Jesus had to remind her to not allow her service to keep her from devotion. Something changed Martha’s perspective on her service as now we read, “*they made Him supper and Martha served*”. We see that “**they made Him supper**”; **there were some who learned that serving didn’t hinder worship and there was Martha who learned that devotion was the only way to serve.** The second thing that changed Martha was the death of her brother and his sitting at the table with Jesus now. What was at one time seen as a burden was now seen as a blessing because it was lost to her and then brought back.
- B. Second we are told that “*Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.*” This speaks of yet another aspect of devotion and that has to do with our witness. “*Our witness? All Lazarus did was sit at the table with Jesus what kind of witness is that?*” Lazarus seems to be content to be known as **the man who sat at the table with Jesus rather than the man who spent 4 days dead and was now alive.** To Lazarus his devotion centered around his companionship and friendship with Jesus. And in this **we learn three things as it relates to our devotion as a witness:**
 1. **It isn’t what we do it is who we sit next too.** Lazarus presence at the supper table was proof positive that everything Jesus was saying was true. We are called to bear witness of that we who were once dead are now alive. Our witness is most visible not by what we do but rather who we are hanging around the table with.
 2. **It can only be seen when, like Lazarus, we don’t come to the table still bound up in the trappings of death.** The greatest evidence of our devotion is the fact that

you and I aren't still walking around like we just came out of a tomb. We are free from the things of the old life, liberated from the things that stunk.

3. **It is most attractive when people see us at the table with Him, hanging out with Jesus.** I wonder if Jesus spoke of that day when he came out of the tomb and looks on people's faces, I can't be sure but if He did I bet they all joked about it. The best way to demonstrate your devotion is to show people your life.

- C. Finally, we see the third aspect of devotion in verse 3 of Mark 14, where we are told that "*Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.*" This is the focus of Mark's gospel. What might not be immediately apparent is that this act of devotion was far more than what it first appears. That pound of costly oil in the alabaster box was her dowry and as she willingly sacrificed it at the feet of Jesus and it mixed with her tears. **We don't see her using that costly oil to anoint her brothers body at his burial but she couldn't wait to use for Jesus'**. Mary was giving the roses of her love while Jesus was still alive instead of placing them over His coffin after He was dead. To which Jesus both commended her and defended her. Perhaps during those four days of Lazarus death she took inventory of what she wished she should have said and done towards her brother and now she is not going to waste another moment to say I love you to Jesus.

Mark records three movements of Mary's devotion:

1. Vs. 3 **The first movement is Mary's loving devotion:** This happened at the house of Simon the leper as Jesus sat at a table she came with a jar of expensive perfume. John tells us that she took a pound of that costly oil and poured it on Jesus feet and wiped it with her hair and apparently poured it upon His head as well. The act caught the attention of those present to the same degree that the fragrance filled the house. There are four things about Mary's act of devotion:

- A. Mary's act was **premeditated**: She carried this alabaster jar of extremely expensive fragrant oil with her to Simon the lepers house, **this speaks of premeditation.**
- B. Mary's gift was **pedestrian**: When a guest entered the home, usually the guest's feet were washed with water and the guest's head was anointed with a dab of oil or perfume. Here, Mary used this precious ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus. Then she used her hair to spread it upon Him. Her precious ointment was only good enough for His feet.
- C. Mary's gift was **pricey**: She used a pound of oil of spikenard and based upon Judas' estimation it was valued at a year's wage. At that time spices and oils were used as an investment and such was the case as it appears this may have been her dowry. Spikenard comes from a plant found in India and she poured a whole pound of it upon His feet instead of dapping a part of it upon His head according to the other accounts she poured it upon His head and ran over His body unto it dripped upon His feet which then used her hair to wipe His feet.
- D. Mary's gift was **personal**: Jewish women never let their hair down in public they always kept their hair up and covered. The only time they would do so would be for their husband in an act of adoration and devotion (*hence the phrase to let your hair down*). Notice the longevity of Mary's devotion as it is still being remembered to day.

2. Vs. 4-5 **The Second movement is the onlookers' response**: Mark tells us that people present were indignant about Mary's act of devotion. John tells us that this was lodged by Judas. These are **the first recorded words of Judas and we can see that he was the quintessential businessman**, "*Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?*" On the outside it might appear that Judas' actions seem nobler than Mary's but the truth is that it was all a façade. Judas' comments serve as a contrast to true devotion which he considered a waste of time. He does so by false pretenses of suggesting that the best way to worship Jesus is to give to man but we are told that this was only said because the man he had in mind was himself. There are those that suggest that Judas was embezzling in order to purchase land to build himself a mansion so that when Jesus became the leader of the world He would live in luxury and at the time of Jesus death he was only 30 pieces of silver away from the transaction.

What Jesus saw as devotion in Mary's gift, Judas saw as waste. John's commentary says that, "*This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.*" Judas was entrusted with the care of what had been given and he began to see what was in that box as his instead of belonging to Jesus. There will always be people who tend to view giving as an act of investment instead of an act of devotion.

3. Vs. 6-9 **The third movement is defense of Mary's devotion**: Jesus says five things about Mary's devotion:

- a. Vs. 6 "*Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me.* There will always someone that will criticize your devotion. There are those who may profess their relationship with Jesus while putting you down for your devotion. Mary's devotion filled the house with the fragrance of her love. And Judas words filled the house with the stench of the flesh. He complained that he could have had a year's wage in the box but he would betray Jesus for just 30 pieces of silver.
- b. Vs. 7 "*For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not always have.*" **While other's criticized her for being wasteful, Jesus affirmed her for being sensitive to the timing of the moment**. Jesus isn't saying that meeting the needs of the needy is wrong; He is saying that making it a priority over the devotion puts it in the wrong place. We are always going to have the opportunity for activity but such activity should never be at the cost of devotion.
- c. Vs. 8a "*She has done what she could.*" Mary came to realize that what was in that meant nothing when compared to her devotion towards Jesus. When she let down her hair she took on the role of a salve and in her devotion was ridiculed by Judas. She offered the only act of devotion that was open to her at that moment. She could not fix Him a meal or make Him a garment she had no time for that, but she did have time to anoint Him with costly perfume. The teaching in Jesus' affirmation is simple: **Use what you have and do what you can at the moment!**
- d. Vs. 8b "*She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.*" It is interesting to read the amount of times that Jesus had spoken to His disciples that He was going to die and it seems that none of them believed Him except Mary of Bethany. She believed Him and grieved for Him even before His death. Jesus knew her motives and was comforted by her devotion of Him. **Of all those that surround Jesus at that moment only Mary had the sensitivity to understand what was happening to Him**

and cared enough to express it.

Vs. 9 “Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” The Christian life ought to be a beautiful balance of worship, work, and witness. I wonder if Jesus still smelled this sent on the cross? In Ephes. 5:2 we are told that when we “..walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” There were two scents that filled the room Mary’s devotion and Judas’ devotion to himself.

Judas was a critic, he is picking at the thread of Mary’s devotion and will end up making a nose for himself. It is good to heed the words of Jesus, “*Let her alone*”. Jesus will never criticize you if you if your devotion for Him is extravagant. Mary knew that He was soon going to lay down His life for her and the whole world and this was the only way she knew to say thank you.