

Introduction

1. Mark has prepared another one of his famous “sandwiches” at the beginning of the Passion narrative.
 - a. The plot of the Jewish authorities against Jesus and Judas’ agreement to betray Him serve as the two pieces of bread (vv. 1-2, 10-11).
 - b. The meat of the sandwich is the contrasting story of His loving and worshipful anointing by a woman from Bethany (vv. 3-9).
 - c. Warren Wiersbe notes, “. . . Mark contrasted the treachery of Judas and the leaders with the love and loyalty of Mary. The ugliness of their sins makes the beauty of her sacrifice even more meaningful” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 161).
2. **Read Mk 14:1-11.**

A. The Plot Thickens (1-2) – The bottom slice of bread in our Markan sandwich

1. “Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away . . .” (1a)
 - a. Mark takes a step back in time as he begins the account of Jesus’ Passion.
 - b. Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread are the first two of the four spring Feasts of Yahweh prescribed in Leviticus 23. The other two spring feasts are First Fruits and Weeks/Pentecost. In the fall there are three feasts: Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Booths.
 - c. God told Moses, ““These are the Lord’s appointed festivals, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: The Lord’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the Lord’s Festival of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. For seven days present a food offering to the Lord. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work”” (Lev 23:4-8).
 - d. James Brooks notes, “The Feast of Unleavened Bread began at the same time as the Passover, but it lasted for seven days through 21 Nisan . . . the 14th was sometimes referred to as the first day of unleavened bread Feast of Unleavened Bread . . . In popular thinking the two feasts had been merged (cf. Luke 22:1)” (James Brooks, *Mark*, 219).
 - e. So these events in this passage most likely took place on the Thursday evening before Palm Sunday, exactly one week before the Last Supper and Judas’ final betrayal of Jesus in Gethsemane.
2. “. . . the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him” (1b)
 - a. They had been planning to kill Jesus from their early encounter with Him in Galilee (cf., Mk 3:6).
 - b. They would soon renew their commitment to eliminate Him as Jesus would soon clear the Temple of merchants and money changers on Sunday of Holy Week (cf., Mk 11:18).
 - c. They were “scheming” (Gk., *kratesantes*) to find a way to kill Jesus even before He gave wise answers to their tricky questions and His audaciously confronted of their hypocrisy (cf., Mk 12). They were furious, envious, and murderous toward Jesus.
3. They plotted against Jesus “secretly” (Gk., *in dolo*) because it was the time of the Passover and they were afraid that “the people may riot” if they confronted Jesus openly.
 - a. Brooks notes, “. . . during the pilgrim feasts the inhabitants of Jerusalem doubled, tripled, quadrupled, or more; and emotions ran high” (Brooks, 220).
 - b. The Jewish leaders feared the people (cf., Mk 11:32, 12:12) and their Roman overlords even more as they expected the Jewish leaders to keep order and would hold them personally responsible for any incidents during Passover.
 - c. Jesus had the people on His side at the beginning of Holy Week (i.e., the Triumphal Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem), and the Jewish leaders failed in their attempts to turn the crowd against Jesus.

B. The Anointing of Jesus (3) – The meat of our Markan sandwich

1. “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper”
 - a. We believe Jesus most a frequent visitor in the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha at their home in Bethany which was just near the crest of the Mount of Olives on the road to Jericho just before coming to Jerusalem.
 - b. On this evening Jesus and His disciples dined at the home of Simon the Leper.
 - 1) Simon was a leper no more or he would not have been allowed in his own house.
 - 2) Many commentators speculate that Simon had been healed by Jesus and may even have been the father of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 321).
 - 3) Perhaps Simon treated Jesus to hospitality in thanks for his own healing and for raising his son Lazarus from dead (cf., John 11).
2. As they ate in Simon’s home “. . . a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard (Gk., *alabastron murou nardou*)” approached Jesus.
 - a. This story of a lowly woman making a loving, worshipful sacrifice to her Lord reminds me of the story of the widow (cf., Mk 12:41-44) who gave all that she had as an offering at the temple. Both women gave all they could to honor God.
 - b. Her oil may have been similar to the myrrh brought by the wisemen as a gift to Jesus at His birth.
 - c. This perfume would have been used for many purposes including anointing dead bodies.
 - d. The woman is not named by Mark, but John identifies her as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus.
 - e. The text does not indicate this, but perhaps Mary understood Jesus’ teaching about His impending death. Jesus later interprets her actions in this regard.
 - f. Like Simon, she wanted to do something beyond the ordinary for her Lord.
3. “. . . She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.”
 - a. Her actions indicate the lavish nature of her gift. She did not use just a small portion of the expensive perfume to anoint Jesus. She broke the jar and used it all.
 - b. Brooks states that there was messianic significance in her action. “In the Old Testament kings (e.g., 1 Sam 10:1; 16:12-13; 1 Kgs 1:38-39; 2 Kgs 9:1-6), priests (e.g., Exod 28:41), and prophets (1 Kgs 19:16) were anointed. The very word Messiah/Christ means *the anointed one*” (Brooks, 222).
 - c. Wiersbe notes three consequences of her actions: “**First**, the house was filled with the beautiful fragrance of the ointment . . . There is always a ‘spiritual fragrance’ in the home where Jesus Christ is loved and worshipped. . . . **Second**, the disciples, led by Judas criticized Mary for wasting her money! . . . It is interesting that the word translated ‘waste’ in Mark 14:4 is translated ‘perdition’ in John 17:12 *and applied to Judas!* Judas criticized Mary for ‘wasting money,’ but he wasted his entire life! . . . **Third**, Jesus commended Mary and accepted her gracious gift. No matter what others may say about our worship and service, the most important thing is that we please the Lord. When Mary gave her best at the feet of Jesus, she started a ‘wave of blessing’ that has been going on ever since. She was a blessing to Jesus . . . her village, Bethany, . . . to the early church . . . [and] to the whole world” (Wiersbe, 162-63, emphasis mine).
 - d. To Wiersbe’s list of blessings I would add Mary herself as one who was blessed as she gave a lavish sacrifice to anoint the Passover Lamb of God in preparation for His death.
 - 1) We can never outgive God.
 - 2) We do not give to be blessed, but we are not only a blessing but are blessed ourselves when we give sacrificially in love and worship of our Lord.

C. Three Responses (4-11)

1. The Response of Those Present (4-5)
 - a. The disciples and other diners present didn’t understand the woman’s lavish actions.
 - 1) Some of those present were saying indignantly (Gk., *aganaktountes*) to one another, “Why this waste of perfume?” and they “rebuked her harshly (Gk., *enebrimonto*).” (4)
 - 2) They saw the lavish use of this expensive perfume as a “waste” (Gk., *apoleia* – “release”).
 - b. They thought of a better use for this valuable commodity.
 - 1) The perfume was worth more than a year’s wages for a common man.
 - 2) They would have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor which was something done regularly by a righteous Jew and especially during the Passover season.

- c. All-in-all the disciples seemed to have a point.
 - 1) They may have finally gotten part of Jesus' teaching about self-sacrifice and care for the sick, weak, and poor.
 - 2) Unfortunately, they totally missed the important point of the woman's lavish symbolic action.
- 2. The Response of Jesus (6-9)
 - a. Jesus defended Mary's act—"Leave her alone . . . Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me" (6)
 - 1) Jesus received the lavish gift as the act of a follower who understood who He was and that He was about to die.
 - 2) He called her actions "a beautiful thing (Gk., *kalon ergon*)."
 - b. Jesus said "The poor (Gk., *ptochous* – "impoverished," like the widow in Mk 12:43, "you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me." (7)
 - 1) Jesus affirmed the disciples' intention of selling the perfume to help the poor. "You can help them anytime you want" (7a).
 - 2) Daniel Akins says, "Some readers misread verse 7, supposing Jesus to be insensitive toward the poor. We should do good for the poor. Jesus believed and taught that. The issue here is between 'always' and 'not always.' The poor are always there, but Jesus would not be. The opportunity to show Him this kind of personal love and affection would soon be gone. . . . Care for the poor but worship the Savior!" (Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 322).
 - 3) While the disciples had a good idea, they had missed the point of Mary's action.
 - c. Jesus stated the point of her action when He said that she ". . . poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial" (8).
 - 1) Jesus did not evaluate her action as wasteful but worshipful.
 - 2) Whether the Mary fully understood what was about to happen to Jesus or not, Jesus interpreted her actions in that way.
 - 3) "She did what she could" (8a) – She held nothing back in worship of Jesus.
 - 4) She made a costly sacrifice in anticipation of the even costlier sacrifice that the son of God was about to make by laying down His life for sinners.
 - 5) What Mary did was a prophetic action regarding what would soon happen to Jesus.
 - d. Jesus declared "Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (9)
 - 1) "Truly" (Gk., *amen*)—Jesus made a powerful statement of truth.
 - 2) The word gospel (Gk., *euaggelion*) means the "good news" and became the word used to describe Jesus' coming, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection.
 - 3) Note that Jesus believed "the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mk 13:10).
 - 4) Part of the gospel story is this lavish gift given by a woman preparing her Lord for His death.
- 3. The Response of Judas Iscariot (10-11) – The top slice of bread in our Markan sandwich
 - a. Judas was one of the twelve disciples whom Jesus had called (cf., Mk 3:19).
 - b. According to Matthew, Judas was the keeper of the disciple's common purse (cf., Jn 12:6).
 - 1) He could not get over the woman's lavish gift and the money it would have brought into their purse.
 - 2) Perhaps he saw Jesus' actions as unfaithful or simply wanted money?
 - 3) John notes, "Judas 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 take from what was put into it" (Jn 12:6).
 - c. Regarding Judas' motive, Brooks notes "Matthew 26:15 suggests that it was money . . . Mark was silent. Luke 22:3 and John 13:2,27 indicate that he was demon possessed. . . . Was Judas disappointed about Jesus' refusal to be a political Messiah? Was he attempting to force Jesus to take decisive action against his enemies? Was he a spy all along? No confident answer can be given" (Brooks, 220).
 - d. Judas went to the "chief priests to betray (Gk., *paradoi* – "hand over") Jesus to them" (10)

- e. The chief priests were “delighted” (Gk., *echaresan* – “overjoyed, happy”) to hear Judas’ plan and “. . . promised to give him money,” the infamous thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave. (11)
- 1) This price of thirty pieces of silver was set in the Law as the price to be paid to the owner of a slave who was accidentally killed (cf., Ex 21:32).
 - 2) This was the price that the Prophet Hosea paid to redeem His unfaithful wife Gomer from slavery (cf., Ho 3:2 – Note: Hosea gave 15 shekels plus barley grain in lieu of the other 15 shekels. He gave all he had to redeem Gomer!).
 - 3) This was also the price mentioned in prophecy as that to be paid for the betrayal of God’s servant (cf., Zech 11:12-13).
- f. The plot to kill Jesus has been laid and the time for its hatching was near. “So [Judas] watched for an opportunity to hand him over.” (11)
- g. Akin give several insightful contrasts between Judas and Mary (Akin, 323):

Mary	Judas
A woman with no standing	A man, one of the apostles
Gave what she could to Jesus	Took what he could get for Jesus
Blessed her Lord	Betrayed his Lord
Loved her Lord	Used his Lord
Did a beautiful thing	Did a terrible thing
Served Him as her Savior	Sold Him like He was his slave
Notable forever for her devotion to the	Notorious forever for his betrayal

- h. Wiersbe concludes, “Mary gave her best in faith and love; Judas gave his worst in unbelief and hatred” (Wiersbe, 163).

D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. What have you lavishly given to the Lord Jesus through your life and ministry?
2. What is the costliest sacrificial offering you have given to Jesus?
3. How should we handle the Lord’s money?
4. What is our responsibility to care for the poor today?
5. Like the woman, are you doing all you can to honor and serve the Lord?
6. Are your prayers, gifts, and service making a lasting impact as you help spread the gospel throughout the world?