

## A WOMAN'S ACT OF LOVE FOR JESUS

Mark 14:1-11 (Key verse 3b)

*“...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.”*

Today's passage takes its setting in Bethany, which is a town near Jerusalem where Jesus had visited just before the Passover festival. The Passover and festival of unleavened bread commemorates the time when God delivered his people out of Egypt. This is the time to celebrate the freedom from slavery from Ancient Egypt that followed the ten plagues. Unleavened bread is bread made without the yeast, it is also called the bread of “affliction” because the Israelites left Egypt in a haste or hurry. God freed his people from slavery that was imposed on them by the Egyptians king Pharaoh. Now the time to celebrate was only two days away. As the preparations to celebrate the Passover continued. Mark Chapter 14 Verse 1b reads “... and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.” The chief priests and teachers of the law were too preparing to have Jesus arrested and killed. However, they couldn't do this during the festival. The reason being that the people will riot.

As we understand Jesus Christ was loved, adored and followed by many people. Many other people physically followed him whenever he travelled from one town to the other. Jesus Christ preached a message of repentance to all people. Let's revisit the reasons why the Chief priest and the teachers of the law were so adamant to have Jesus killed. This was mainly because Jesus exposed the shady dealings of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He spoke harshly against the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders in the church. If we go back and make reference to Mark Chapter 11 verse 17(b) Jesus said “Is it not written: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”? But you have made it “a den of robbers” Amen!. Jesus Christ uttered this words to rebuke the Chief priest, teachers of the law and everyone that participated in the business activities that were taking place in the church. When the Chief priests and teachers of the law heard this they began to plot to kill Jesus. Jesus was a threat to their popularity and therefore a threat to the powers they enjoyed within the spiritual realm of the church. Jesus explained that these men, the chief priests, teachers of the law and elders in the church will be punished most severely. Reason being, they are the spiritual leaders and have to be the honest custodians of the gospel. Instead of repenting and changing their ways they wanted to have Jesus arrested and eventually killed so that they can have their peace. However, this could not be done during the festival, they had wait.

Now when Jesus was in Bethany there were a chain of events that took place. Let's look at verse 3, I will read “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of 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.” Amen!

Bethany is a town near Jerusalem, this is near where the Passover is to be celebrated. The Passover is to be celebrated in Jerusalem. Jesus Christ and his disciples were in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper. It is said that they were reclining on the table. Apart from Jesus and the twelve, there were other people that were reclining on that table. One of them Simon the Leper who is the host-owner of the house. It is said that he is a Leper. It is not likely, had he been a leper at the time, that men would have gathered to a feast at his house, and it is natural to infer that the Lord had healed him, but that the name still adhered to him to distinguish him from other Simons in the bible. John Chapter 12 verses 1-7 identifies some of the people in the house to be Lazarus, Martha and Mary who are sisters to Lazarus.

While they were in the house reclining on the table something strange happened. This is described in Mark Chapter 14 verse 3(b) it reads “. 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”. The woman poured the expensive perfume on Jesus's head. Let's take note that, other than Martha and Mary there were probably other several women in that room. The name of the woman who came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume is not mentioned. It could be any woman amongst the women present in the house. The inference we can make from the reading is that, this gesture by the woman to pour perfume on Jesus's head seems very impulsive. It seems that she was just delighted and excited to see Jesus and thought of the nicest thing to do for Jesus. Jesus was having a dinner night so she must have thought “let me pour this expensive perfume on him to make him smell nice”. She poured the whole jar of expensive perfume on Jesus head, the others didn't get a pinch. At face value this act was merely a nice gesture of appreciation from the woman to Jesus.

When this happened what was the reaction from those who were present in the room.? Mark Chapter 14 verses 4-5 reads, “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. The others who were present, were annoyed by this gesture from this woman. They questioned why would she waste the perfume. The perfume is worth more than a year's wages so it makes sense that it should be sold and the proceeds given to the poor.

It is quite clear that at the time, the woman had a value system that is different to everyone who was reclining at the table. She took a very expensive perfume made of pure nard and poured it on Jesus's head. What is this Nard? Nard is harvested from the spikenard plant which only grows in the Himalayan mountains of China, India and Nepal. Those few who could afford such an expensive, imported item would generally use it sparingly. Others used the perfume as a way of investing their money in a lucrative commodity which they could easily sell at a profit. So this perfume was a very scarce and lucrative commodity. And yet this woman poured all of it on Jesus 'head. One other point which is worth some emphasize to put things into context regarding this woman is that. What we know is that back in the ancient day's women relied mostly on men for provision. Most women worked to serve their husbands while the husbands worked to provide for the family. Here it is not mentioned if the woman was wealthy or poor. However, given the circumstances and difficulties that women faced at that time it was unlikely that she was wealthy. It is very likely that she accumulated that jar of perfume over a long period of time. It is also likely that she kept the perfume as an investment that will be sold in the future. She didn't use it on herself or expect that she will meet Jesus one day and use it on him. This alabaster jar of expensive perfume was something that was very valuable to her.

This woman has surrendered something of great value to Jesus Christ. She has put her future financial security and that of her family at risk. Why would she do such a thing? Were the others who were in the house not right when they rebuked her? The woman didn't see her kind gesture to Jesus as being wasteful like the others. She did this with love and she did it whole heartedly. What I would like us to think about is what is it that we are doing for Jesus in our personal capacity? What sort of sacrifices are we making for the sake of Jesus's ministry? Are we being active in serving Jesus or are we like those who rebuke or discourage others when they do the Lord's work.

This are straight forward and yet difficult questions to answer. It also raises the concept of grace. What we know is God's grace is for all people and no amount of work will earn you his grace. When the woman poured the whole jar of expensive perfume on Jesus's head, she was not expecting anything in return. Doing that was her own way of serving Jesus and offering herself to the Lord. And she served Jesus with something that was so valuable to her. She served Jesus with her whole heart and she made no reservations.

We should also find our own unique ways of serving Jesus. I believe if you pray the Lord will lead you to what he wants you to do. There are certain things we are doing as an offering to the Lord's ministry. The list being weekly testimony sharing, bible studies, participating in the worship team, inviting students to the ministry, attending the worship service and many other things required to run a ministry. These are what we normally do which are a sacrifice and should not be taken lightly. This is a way of showing our act of love to Jesus, Amen! And I also believe with prayer God can enable or move our hearts to offer more to his ministry. Remember we shouldn't prejudge our sacrifices or offering to the Lord as being too little or too big. If we do that then we are no different to the other people who were reclining on that table and judged the women 's offering before Jesus could even say anything. The people who rebuked the woman wanted to set their own standards of what offering is acceptable or not acceptable and furthermore impose their standards on the woman. Through prayer the Lord will lead us to offer to his Ministry whole heartedly and with no reservations. Amen!

Let's look at Mark Chapter 14: verses 6-7. And see what was Jesus's reaction when the woman was rebuke harshly for wasting the perfume. "(6) Leave her alone, 'he said. '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 anytime you want. But you will not always have me" Here we see Jesus responding in defence of the woman, saying that they must leave her alone and that she has done a beautiful thing to him. Jesus is saying the woman's offering is a beautiful thing to him. He is the Judge in that regard. It doesn't matter what the others think. And also this gesture by this woman to pour perfume on Jesus's head seemed impulsive. She really didn't expect that Jesus will make such a big deal out of it.

Let us read verse 8-9 to understand the significance of this woman's seemingly impulsive act. It reads "(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." Jesus Christ is saying the woman did what she did to prepare for his burial. The woman was not aware that the act of pouring perfume on Jesus's head was necessary to prepare for Jesus's burial. Her offering to the lord has become a landmark in Christ's resurrection faith. Who could have predicted that? What the woman has done will also be told generations to come in her memory, wherever the Gospel is preached.

I conclusion.

Jesus Christ has predicted his arrest, persecution and subsequently his crucifixion. He taught this many times and his disciples found it hard to believe. He repeated this once more in Simon the Leper's house when he said "(7) the poor you will always have with you, and you can help them anytime you want. But you will not always have me" The disciples wanted Jesus to become a worldly king and enjoy the powers that will be entrusted on them as his disciples. However, that will not be the case. The reality is Jesus was to be crucified. The woman who elected herself to be a servant and poured perfume on Jesus's head, she did so to help fulfil the prophecy. She did so to prepare Jesus body for his burial beforehand. The woman's

selfless act of offering to Jesus her expensive perfume was magnified to something immeasurable. She never expected her offering to be of this much significance to the Christian faith. All she did was to offer her all with an open heart.

I pray that God works amongst us, I pray that he truly moves our hearts to give our all to him. I pray that he removes all doubts we may have in our hearts. And that he is honoured at all times in our acts of kindness and worship forever and ever. Amen!

Let us all kindly bow our heads, close our eyes and pray.