

Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson

The Gospel According to Mark

May 19, 2019

Worship or Betrayal?

Situational Context: Mark 14:1-2 (NIV2011) ¹ Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ² “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

Being one of the Jewish pilgrimage feasts, the Passover drew enormous numbers of people to Jerusalem. Josephus estimated that the population of 50,000 increased to 3,000,000. Though his figures are generally considered greatly exaggerated (250,000 is more likely), there was a reason for the authorities’ fears.

Lesson Theme: In this narrative we have two contrasting responses to Jesus, worship and devotion and rejection and betrayal. In one instance we have a woman devoting an entire year’s wages to Jesus and on the other a disciple betraying Him for a six month’s wages. The Master accepts both on His way to the cross. This woman, grateful for Jesus and His raising Lazarus from the dead, pours out her heart in worship and devotion to Jesus. While receiving criticism for her extravagance, Jesus sets this woman and her devotion apart of for special remembrance. God is using her to anoint Jesus as the High Priest.

John places this right after the raising of Lazarus and before the Triumphal Entry.

Mark 14:6-9 (NIV2011) 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 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

- 1. Worship Offered: Mark 14:3-5 (NIV2011)** ³ 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.

2. 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.

Interpretation: No doubt no longer a leper; he may have been healed by Jesus. He was clearly an important member of the wider circle of disciples since Jesus chose to visit his house at this time. This woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. Nard is a rare perfume made from the root of a plant grown in the Himalayas. Its value of "three hundred denarii" (v. 5) was roughly equivalent to a year’s wages. To prevent loss, amounts suitable for a single application were sealed into flasks that were then broken at the neck at the time of use. According to Jn 12:3, the flask contained twelve ounces of perfume.

Supporting Texts:

John 11:20 (NIV2011) ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

John 12:1-2 (NIV2011) ¹ Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had risen 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.

John 12:3 (NIV2011) 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.

John 11:25 (NIV2011) ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;

Discussion Starters:

Why is this narrative preserved for us by the Holy Spirit?

What role might John 11:20 played in Mary’s devotion?

How did Mary know to do what she did?

Why were the disciples upset?

2. Worship Accepted: Mark 14:6-9 (NIV2011) ⁶“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.” ⁷The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸She 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.”

Interpretation: Jesus approves of what others see as a waste, for by this gesture she shows the inestimable worth of Jesus, of His death (v. 8), and of the profound communion that His sacrifice on the cross will establish. This gesture recalls the precious ointment poured over Aaron the high priest.

Supporting Texts:

Exodus 29:7 (NIV2011) ⁷ Take the anointing oil and anoint him by pouring it on his head.

Exodus 30:30 (NIV2011) ³⁰ “Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.

Leviticus 8:12 (NIV2011) ¹² He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him to consecrate him.

Discussion Starters:

What was the Father doing in the anointing of Jesus?

How is Jesus acting as the High Priest in His death?

How can stewardship issues cloud real issues?

Isn’t giving money to the poor honoring Jesus?

3. Worship Mocked: Mark 14:10-11 (NIV2011) ¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.

¹¹ They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Interpretation: For some reason, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. Judas knew that Jesus' life was in danger from the religious authorities. This act was an act of mockery, rejection, and greed.

Supporting Texts:

Luke 22:3-6 (NIV2011) ³ Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.

⁴ And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. ⁵ They were delighted and agreed to give him money. ⁶ He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

Acts 2:23 (NIV2011) ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Acts 1:24-25 (NIV2011) ²⁴ Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."

John 12:6 (NIV2011) 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.

Discussion Starters:

What turned Judas off?

Why did Jesus have a treasurer?

Might greed have been Judas' downfall?