



Mark 14:1–9

14 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.’ 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 per-

fume, made of pure nard. 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. 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.’

Reflection

Of all the images that flood our minds when we read through the gospel stories, I’m not sure that I can imagine a more beautiful scene than this one, especially when we combine it with John’s account in chapter 12 of his gospel. Try and picture this scene, as I read it to you from Mark 14:1–9, and we’ll add in a few more details from John’s gospel as we speak about it. Mark 14:1–9,

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er the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.’

The house is that of Simon the Leper who’s been recently healed by Jesus. And his guests according to John 12 include some of Jesus’ closest friends – Mary, Martha and Lazarus whom Jesus has very recently raised from the dead. When we piece together the gospel stories about Mary, Martha and Lazarus we’re left with a surprisingly intimate picture. Jesus and his disciples love enjoying the hospitality of Mary, Martha and their younger brother Lazarus. Deep bonds of friendship have developed between them and their family is very dear to our Lord. Mary loves to sit at Jesus’ feet, listening intently to his teaching, taking everything in. Whereas

Martha, while just as devout as her sister, likes to busy herself, pouring herself out in service of Jesus. Their younger brother Lazarus is described as the 'one Jesus loves' by the apostle John who himself shared a similarly intimate relationship with Jesus.

In John chapter 11 their household was in mourning; today, in the house of Simon the Leper there is feasting. Simon's healed, and Lazarus has been raised from the dead. This feast, this final happy moment, a matter of days before Jesus' excruciating death on the cross.

Can you imagine this scene? It's a dinner in Jesus' honour. The house is packed not with mourners come up from Jerusalem for Lazarus' funeral but with new converts

from Judaism to Christianity, their host Simon and special guest Lazarus, living miracles that have perhaps even brought them to faith in our Lord. Simon the outcast is there utterly cleansed of his incurable disease. Lazarus is there, full of life, drinking, eating, celebrating every moment because who knows how many of them are left. In my mind's eye I imagine them the life of the party, except in those moments when they steal glances at Jesus and their eyes shine bright with tears. Martha's serving, using her gifts of hospitality as she always does, pouring herself out for all of her guests but especially for Jesus. Oh, how she loves him, the one who had given her, her little brother back. But Mary (unnamed in Mark's version but clearly identified in John's), Mary upstages her sister. Martha is serving, Mary is

adoring. She enters the room and walks over to Jesus. Conversations slowly quiet, and every eye follows her. She's carrying a sizeable jar of perfume, not diluted but pure, worth a small fortune, a year's wages for a labourer, the envy of courtesans and the kind used to perfume the bodies of kings and statesmen upon their deaths. Jesus is reclining at the table, lying on his side and eating off a low table along with the other guests as was the custom in his day. Lavishly, extravagantly, dramatically Mary pours all of the perfume over Jesus' head and then his feet. The fragrance fills the entire household; the memory etched indelibly in the minds of everyone in that room. In the silence that follows she kneels and unclasps her hair, it falls down past her shoulders. And then with everyone watching on, Lazarus as I

imagine him by now openly weeping, she wipes Jesus' feet with her hair. Time stops as Mary adores; in the pages of the Bible this moment of adoration will last forever. And I'm not sure there is a more beautiful scene anywhere in all of Scripture.

Have you ever lost something, searched everywhere for it, almost given up hope of ever seeing it again, and then finally, just before you gave up the search, you found it again? In that moment, that lost item affords you ten times the joy you experienced when you first bought it. Because it was lost but now it is found. Imagine what it would be like with a brother. Lazarus was dead; and now he is feasting with them. Utterly lost; but now alive again. Same too for Simon, with lepers treated like the living dead. This is a resurrection feast and the

joy of this occasion and Mary's adoration is only the smallest window into the heavenly resurrection feast of the Lamb that awaits us all. On that day, at the wedding feast of the Lamb, Jesus too will be the guest of honour, but so will we, his Bride, the church. And every single eye will be bright with tears of joy because every single one of us will have been brought from death to life, once lost but now found.

Think

Meditate over this text of Scripture this morning. This is the last happy moment of Jesus' life. In a few days he will be hanging, bruised, battered and bleeding on a Roman cross. Mary is anointing him for his death. Because of his death we too like Simon and Lazarus will be brought from

death to life. And as Jesus' life fades on that cross, his blood poured out as an offering for our world, not the saline smell of blood and sweat, but the fragrance of this perfume that now fills the room.

Imagine rejoicing with Simon, these two sisters and Lazarus. Imagine rejoicing at the resurrection feast of the Lamb in heaven. Share in Mary's adoration of Jesus this morning. Express your devotion to him by pouring yourself out today like Martha does. Or simply look across the room at him like Lazarus; eyes bright with tears as you come to fully appreciate what he has done for you.

Pray

Then close in prayer. Thank Jesus for the

great celebration that awaits those of us who die having put our trust in his name. Thank him for the joyous reunion that awaits us with our loved ones when death is undone. And thank him above all for exchanging his life for ours.