

THE ADULT TEACHER
LESSON 4 ~ EXTRAVAGANT LOVE
OCTOBER 25, 2020

Background Scripture: Mark 14

Lesson Passage: Mark 14:1-9, 22-25 (KJV)

Introduction: Have you in your life as a follower of Jesus ever made a sacrifice of extravagant love?" Can you recall a time when you did something for Jesus that really cost you? You actually went without something you really wanted because of a sacrifice of extravagant love for Jesus? The sad fact is we are good at giving Jesus our leftovers and hand-me-downs. Do we donate old, worn, ratty couches to the less fortunate? Do we purchase new couches for our homes and donate our old, worn couches to the church and in the process got a tax break, and felt good that we have done something noble?

In our lesson we seek something totally different, something truly remarkable, an indisputable sacrifice of extravagant love by a woman Mark allows to remain anonymous. And we also see the tale of two lives that could not stand in greater contrast when it comes to true and unreserved devotion to our Lord: an unnamed woman who gave her very best.

Scripture Reference: Mark 14:1-9 (KJV)

1 After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. 2 But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people. 3 And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. 4 And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. 6 And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. 7 For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. 8 She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. 9 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her. 22 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. 23 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. 24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. 25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Topic Explored: "Extravagant Love" ~ Our lesson is a story of a person named Mary who beautifully showed the importance of devotion over mere religious duties. Mary was so appreciative of Jesus that she took a most precious, if not the most precious item that she possessed, and poured it over Jesus. The event signaled an overwhelming spirit of thankfulness and joy in Mary's heart to know Jesus' blessings in her life. Love is costly. Love means a willingness to use all that we have to pursue the needs of another. The vial of perfume seemed like a strange demand, but it stood for what was most supreme in her heart. The love she had for Jesus!

Memory Verse: *24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many (Mark 14:24). KJV*

Lesson Focus: Mark 14:1-9 (KJV)

Verses 1-2 ~ The Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were two different things. The Feast of the Passover fell on 14th Nisan, that is, about 14th April. The Feast of Unleavened Bread consisted of the seven days following the Passover. The Passover itself was a major feast and was kept like a sabbath. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was called a minor festival, and, although no new work could be begun during it, such work as was "necessary for public interest or to provide against private loss" was allowable. The really great day was Passover Day.

The Passover had a double significance. It commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-51). It also had an agricultural significance (Leviticus 23:10-11). Not until after this observance, could the barley of the new crop be sold in the shops or bread made with the new flour be eaten.

Every possible preparation was made for the Passover. For a month beforehand its meaning was expounded in the synagogue, and its lesson was taught daily in the schools. The aim was that no one should come ignorant and unprepared to the feast. The roads were all put in order, the bridges repaired. It was compulsory for every adult male Jew who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem to come to the Passover, but far more than these came. It was the one ambition of every Jew to eat at least one Passover in Jerusalem before he died. Therefore, from every country in the world pilgrims came flocking to the Passover Feast. The Jewish authorities knew that in an inflammable atmosphere like that, the arrest of Jesus might well provoke a riot. That is why they sought some secret stratagem to arrest Him and have Him in their power before the populace knew anything about it.

Verses 3-9 ~ Here we have a wonderful account of the love of this woman. Mark does not give her name, but John tells us it was Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who seized this occasion to anoint the head of Jesus. There are three movements in this brief account.

The first is the act of loving sacrifice. You can picture it in your imagination: Mary coming into the room with the jar of expensive ointment as Jesus is reclining on the couch. John tells us that she anointed both His head and His feet, which were both easily accessible to her as He lay, oriental fashion, on the couch beside the table. She breaks the jar and pours the whole contents upon His head and feet. It is a beautiful act, one which captures the attention of all those present. *Second*, it awakened a response. Mark tells us the first response was one of indignation that she should waste this ointment. John says it was Judas who raised this objection. This is characteristic of Judas -- that he was concerned only about the waste of money. John says he was a thief.

Now, *third*, our Lord takes this beautiful incident and shows us the true value of it. He says five things about it which mark it an extremely valuable act. First, he says, "She has done a beautiful thing to me." The beauty of it lay in its very extravagance. This woman did not spare any of the ointment but broke the flask and poured the whole quantity out upon Him. Now, it was costly ointment. Judas, with his practical, computer mind, reckoned it up as worth three hundred denarii. A denarius was the day's wage for a laborer. In these inflated times, three hundred days' wages would be a tremendous sum -- probably at least \$10,000. But in those days, a denarius was worth about 20 cents, so that would make this ointment worth approximately \$60.00 -- almost a year's wages. In the eyes of Judas, this woman wasted an extravagant amount of money when she poured the ointment upon Jesus. It was such a lavish act, and therein lay the beauty of it. Jesus said, "That's beautiful! She hasn't held anything back, but has simply poured it all out. It's a beautiful thing she has done to me."

Second, he said that it was a timely thing she had done. "It was something that could only be done now. Anytime you want to do good to the poor you can, because they are always around." And it is right to help the poor. But there are opportunities which come in our life which must be seized at the

moment; they never happen again. Mary had sensed this and had seized the moment to do this which could only have been done then, for such a time would never occur again. It was out of the sensitivity of her heart that she realized that the timing was right, that Jesus recognized.

Then, she did that which was feasible. That is, she did what she could. It was all that was open to her. She could not fix Him a meal; there was no time for that. She could not make a garment for Him; there was no time for that. There was nothing else she could do to show her love but this, and so this is what she did. She did what she could. I am sure our Lord has called our attention to it because it is so practical for us.

This is really the attitude the Lord asks of all of us. You cannot do everything. You cannot feed the starving world, but you can feed one person. You cannot comfort all the lonely hearts on earth, but you can comfort one or two. And Mary did what she could. Everywhere in Scripture, this is all God asks of us -- that we bring Him what is at hand. Some of you think that you live dull lives, and that you never have an opportunity for real service. But you do! This is what this story tells us. You have something that you can do today. And in doing it with the expectation that God will take it and enlarge it, you will find that tremendous results can follow. We are to bring our loaves and fishes -- a simple little meal -- and Jesus will feed the multitude. We must fill the jars with water, but He will turn it into wine. When we do what we can, when we bring what we have, God will use it, what a beautiful expression it is!

The fourth element of this act was that it was insightful. Our Lord says, "She has anointed my body beforehand for burying." Time and time again Jesus warned them that He was heading for death. Not one of them believed Him -- except Mary of Bethany. She believed Him, and understood that He was here for that very purpose. This was what motivated her. She understood that He was heading for burial. And just as love would long to do some act of service for Him since she could not be sure she would ever have the opportunity later to find His body and anoint it for burial in the Jewish custom, she did it now. Jesus knew she did this deliberately for that very purpose. What a comfort this must have been to our Lord!

Finally, what she did was memorable. Jesus said, "The story of this beautiful act will be told in memory of her wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world." Here we are today, 2000 years later, fulfilling this very word, telling again of the act of Mary of Bethany, when she anointed our Lord's head and feet.

Verses 22-25 ~ Our Lord is teaching again by means of symbols, and the symbols are very significant. We might call them "symbols" of extravagant love. He took the bread, and said, "This is my body," and he broke the bread, symbolizing how His body would be broken. And He took the cup, and said, "This is the blood of the new covenant," i.e., the new agreement that God makes with men by faith, and not by works; by believing, and not by performance. That is the New Covenant. Then He reminded them that this was the end, that He would never drink of the cup again until He drank it new in the fulfillment of the kingdom of God.

Now we can understand why Mark has put this account alongside the story of Mary of Bethany. For here our Lord is showing these disciples that He was doing to them what Mary had done to Him. She brought a beautiful alabaster flask, and she broke it. He said, "My body is that flask, and I am going to be broken for you." She poured out of the flask all the ointment that was in it, so that the fragrance of it filled the room, as it has filled the earth in the centuries since.

God came to this earth, and became one of us, and He suffered with us, was crucified and died. And He did that out of His extravagant love for us! That is what this story is saying to us. This is love's extravagance. When you and I partake of the table of the Lord together, Jesus is saying, "Look, it is I who break the flask of my own body, to pour out upon you all the precious ointment, so that you may understand that it is no longer law which governs your life; it is love."

Let's talk about it. . .

Making it Personal:

- Extravagant love never calculates the cost. Genuine devotion never considers the investment. It simply and spontaneously acts and does all that it can, disappointed only in the fact that it could not do more! This is exactly what we see in Jesus and Mary.

Closing Prayer: *Our Father, we thank You for this beautiful lesson, so wonderfully exemplified by this sacrifice of this woman. We pray that You will help us to understand that she is depicting a far greater sacrifice, a more beautiful act of love which can never be forgotten which will grip our hearts and teach us and strengthen us all the days of our life. May we rejoice in this, Lord, and give thanks at this moment to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. We ask in His name, Amen.*

*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most— I sacrifice them to His blood.
See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?
Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.*