

# Anointed for Burial

Mark 14:1—9 (v. 8)

## Introduction

Our narrative of the Passion of Christ begins with *the chief priests and scribes seeking how to arrest [Jesus] by stealth and kill Him (Mark 14:1)*. Judas went to them and made a deal with them to *betray Him for money (v. 10—11)*. This sets everything in motion for all the rest of the week, from the Last Supper to Gethsemane to Pilate's Hall to the cross. But there are seven verses sandwiched between these two events that are pivotal to our understanding of the Gospel. And that is the story of Jesus Anointed at Bethany.

## Bethany

Bethany was a town about two miles from Jerusalem. It was the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Jesus often stayed with them when He was in Jerusalem. It was close enough to Jerusalem but was a place where He could retreat from His enemies. Today, we find Him at the home of Simon the Leper. Tradition says that he was the father of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. That he is called "the Leper" seems to indicate that he must have had leprosy for several years. There would be other men named "Simon" in Bethany. He was known for having leprosy. He must have been cured or perhaps healed by Jesus some time in the past. One who has leprosy wouldn't be able to host a dinner party.

## The Woman and Her Nard

John has an account of this event and names the woman as *Mary (John 12:3)*. This is like a "thank you" dinner for Jesus having raised Lazarus from the dead (*John 11*). Mark doesn't see a need to identify the woman. The woman isn't important. What she does is what matters. The perfume she anointed Jesus with was expensive, worth about three hundred denarii, or about a year's wages for a common laborer.

## The Disciples' Objection

Some of the disciples object to this extravagant act. Could these be the same ones who tried to prevent little children from coming to Jesus (*Mark 10:13*)? Their objection seemed pious enough: the nard could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Once again, John tells us that it was Judas who objected and that was not out of concern for the poor, but *because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put in it (John 12:4—6)*.

## What About the Poor?

Jesus treats this as a legitimate objection but puts things into perspective: *“You’ll always have the poor. But you won’t always have Me” (Mark 14:7)*. Helping the poor is a noble thing to do. But the poor aren’t at the heart of the Gospel. The heart of the Gospel is Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross. The Gospel is good news to the poor, but the poor are not the Gospel.

## Anointed for Burial

Jesus says she is *anointing Him for burial (Mark 14:8)*. By this time, He has foretold his death three times. It seems like the only one to really understand is this woman. She is showing her love and devotion to her Lord who is going to die soon. It’s worth another look to compare her with Judas once again. While Judas seeks to get money for betraying Jesus, the woman lavishes expensive perfume to support Him.

## Women and Jesus

This picture of love and devotion shows us what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The unnamed woman is a good example for us. Women were looked down on in Jesus’ day. But they were important to Him. They would become even more important from now on. Women were the ones who were at the foot of the cross when His disciples ran away. Women were the first ones to hear the news of His resurrection. This woman was chastised for her act of love and devotion to Jesus. May we be brave like her and not give in to disapproval when it comes to loving and serving Jesus.

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*And the peace of God,  
Which surpasses all understanding,  
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

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