A Beautiful Service for Christ

Mark 14:1-9
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1 It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, 2 for they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.” 3 And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. 4 There were some who said to themselves indignantly, “Why was the ointment wasted like that? 5 For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they scolded her. 6 But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. 9 And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

My sermon title this morning is “A Beautiful Service”

Did you know that over *eight hundred million* people in this world, live in extreme poverty living on less than *three* dollars a day?
There is a lot a poverty in this world.
Jesus knows what poverty is. His parents could afford no more than two turtle doves or pigeons for the mother’s purification. Jesus was a friend of the poor.
When Jesus was invited to a synagogue to teach, the first thing he said was read from Isaiah 61, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor”* Luke 4:18

It is right to consider and give to the poor. However, even if you had an extra change of 800 million dollars x 3 = 2400 million to feed all the poor in the world for *one* day, that amount would be far less than what you owe Christ.

Jesus commends and praises this woman who spent a years’ worth of salary to buy perfume and anoint his head. Jesus says she has done a beautiful service. A good thing.

We live in a very prosperous country and yet I wonder how many people enjoy true riches. True riches are godly contentment, joy and peace which you cannot buy with money.
Only Jesus can give those things.
This lady found a contentment and joy in Jesus and therefore gave her best to Jesus.
The disciples did not understand this radical sacrifice but this Jesus did.

Before we expound this passage, let me begin with a little bit of a context.
The remaining chapters 14, 15 and 16 in the Gospel of Mark are perhaps the most important in the life of our Lord Jesus.
Our Lord's earthly ministry will slowly come to a conclusion as Jesus prepares for his betrayal, his rejection, his trial, his abandonment from his disciples, his humiliation, his suffering, his lonely walk to Golgotha, his inhumane crucifixion, his death, and finally his glorious and triumphant resurrection.

You won't see much teaching from Jesus except for the Passover and the Lord' Supper.
Jesus had told his disciples many times that he would be rejected. Some were in denial. Others were lacking in understanding of the full scope of what Jesus meant.
And right after the Olivet Discourse, Jesus tells his disciples that he will be handed over.
We don't see that detail in Mark's Gospel but in Matthew's - When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, "*You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified*." Matthew 26:1-2

And in the beginning of our passage in Mark 14, we see an evil plot in motion. The scribes and the chief priests were already putting plans together to have Jesus arrested. Why? They were envious of him and want to shut him up for good. They want to kill him. However, they could not arrest him during the day as the feast was in progress. The Passover was the biggest festival. Huge crowds would be expected. And Jesus was very popular with the crowds.

You see what envy, jealousy, politics, power and greed does? It wants to kill and destroy.
All the good that Jesus did doesn't matter. Jesus was a threat to their establishment.
If you are insulted, ridiculed and shamed for doing right know that you are blessed. 1 Peter 4:14.

So, what do the chief priests and the scribes desire to do? They want to seize Jesus using *deception* or *stealth* in the night away from the public eye.
The Jewish leaders knew better. They knew that the Law of God prohibited them from plotting to kill by cunning or stealth.

- "*But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die*" Exodus 21:14.
- "*Cursed be anyone who strikes down his neighbor in secret*" Deuteronomy 27:24
- Christians should "*put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander*" 1 Peter 2:1

So, as the chief priests and the scribes wait for their opportunity to arrest Jesus, Jesus is having a meal at an ex-leper's house in Bethany two miles from Jerusalem. And there, an unnamed woman honors him with all that she has with the best perfume. What a contrast!

Look at verse 3
3 And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

The account of a woman anointing Jesus is narrated in the others Gospels. Matthew and Mark's Gospel have almost identical accounts. Luke's Gospel has a lady anointing Jesus in Luke 7 not towards the end. John 's Gospel has Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus anointing Jesus. They could all be one account or separate accounts but according to Mark, this lady is a stranger.
Notice, whose house Jesus is in? Very likely this man Simon was healed by Jesus and hosts a meal for him. And he was reclining, meaning having a meal a woman stops by. That was taboo in those says.

And what this lady does is outrageously lavish and radical at the same time.
She brings a flask or pure nard. It is said this kind of nard, perfume or ointment was imported from India. Very expensive and rare.
And what does she do? She breaks the flask.
Why? Perhaps that was the only way to open it because it was sealed when she bought it.
And this lady pours the nard over Jesus' head.

What was she doing? She is honoring Jesus. She is giving Jesus the glory.
In Luke's account of a woman anointing Jesus, you see there that the woman loved Jesus and sought forgiveness from Jesus and wanted she could to get his approval. And Jesus commends her saying, "*Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little"* Luke 7:47
It's unlikely that this woman is the same woman in Luke 7 because that woman was in Galilee early in the ministry of Jesus. It's likely that this is woman is Mary, the brother of Lazarus (John 11) but we don't know for sure. She is unnamed as far as Mark is concerned. However, there can be no doubt this lady spared no expense to honor Jesus.

Why? Although the text does not say it explicitly, you can conclude that this woman found *great joy* in the person and presence of Jesus Christ and because of that joy she gladly honored him.
If this woman is Mary, she had already been commended by Jesus for sitting at his feet and learning. (Luke 10:42).

Implication#1: *Give your heart to Jesus before your goods*.

Remember what King David told his son Solomon, "*And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind*" 1 Chronicles 28:9.
This lady was willing and gave with a wholesome heart.

However, as the lady honors Jesus with such extravagance, those watching don't like this service and call it a waste.

Verses 4 and 5.
4 There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? 5 For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her.

In the Gospel of John, it was Judas Iscariot who protested the wastage of such nard to anoint Jesus. But Jesus knows what was in Judas' heart than his supposed virtue signaling. "*He (Judas) said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it*" John 12:6. Jesus cares for the poor. Judas does not. Jesus attended to the poor. Judas stole from what could be given to the poor. Judas was a thief and a taker. Jesus was a giver.

Implication# 2: You waste nothing when you serve Christ.

Application: People say they will serve God when they are retired. Others say they will give a little more to God when they get a raise or when the children are out of the home. This lady very likely had no clue Jesus was going to be arrested soon. She saw this an opportune time to get facetime with Jesus.

Jesus has a rebuke for those who got angry and scolded her. Jesus has the last word.

Verses 6 through 8.

6 But Jesus said, "*Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial".*

Jesus is rather direct in his rebuke of those who scolded this lady. He tells them don't trouble her, leave her alone, get out of her way.
Why? She has done a beautiful service, a good thing, a generous honor to him. To the Lord Jesus Christ.
And then Jesus makes a provocative statement in response to their murmuring.

The poor are always there. You can give to the poor whenever you want. The poor and needy often came to Jesus and Jesus cared for them all.

- "*Blessed is the one who considers the poor*" Psalm 41:1
- "*Blessed is he who is generous to the poor*" Proverbs 14:21
- "*Whoever mocks a poor man insults his Maker*" Proverbs 17:5
- God equates giving to the poor as lending to God. "*Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord*" Proverbs 19:17
- True fasting according to Isaiah is sharing your bread with the hungry, the poor, the destitute. Isaiah 58:7-11

So, Jesus knows and cares for the poor than anybody. However, here at this point, prior to his betrayal, Jesus tells them he is not always going to be there. Jesus is going to die, rise from the dead and ascend to heaven.

You see, there is one life to live. One chance before the breath of life departs from us. Then will come either judgment or eternal life. Hell or heaven.
What is done for Jesus will last. Somehow this lady figured out that secret.

Application: Good deeds are not optional but necessary. Good deeds are evidence of your faith in Christ. Be zealous for good deeds. However, good deeds cannot earn the forgiveness of God nor can they improve on the favor of God in your life.
Good deeds must wait if you have not honored Jesus Christ first.
How do you honor Jesus? By being right before him. By being forgiven and living right. By producing fruits of repentance.

Jesus concludes his response by saying something quite profound. This lady has done this anointing to prepare for Jesus' burial. This kind of anointing is usually done for kings prior to their coronation. But Jesus says this lady had done to prepare for his burial?

Jesus was only about 33 years old. Normal young men don't usually talk like that. Jesus was young, lively, energetic, full of joy, full of the Holy Spirit and always on the move. And yet his time to fulfill his mission was getting close.

Jesus' mission was to give himself away for the sin of the world. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, Jesus will soon be betrayed, killed, crucified and buried.
Why? To pay for the penalty of your sin and mine. No amount of payment would be enough to pay for our sins. A million lifetimes would not be enough. Only a sinless man like Jesus can redeem us. This lady figured out this - If she honored Jesus, she would receive redemption. And she spared no expense.

Lastly, Jesus concludes with saying that *wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.*

Gospel proclamation includes the stories of those who have found Jesus Christ and their devotion to Christ.
How will you serve Christ? Nothing is wasted in his service.
Give your heart and give your best to Christ. The blessing you will receive will be beyond what this world will ever offer.

In conclusion, this passage shows us the contrast between boastful sinful pride and humble service even if it is done in obscurity.

The chief priests and scribes occupied positions of prestige, power and knowledge within the temple establishment. They were public officials of the temple. They were supposed to be the guardians of the law of God. Yet, they conspire to kill Jesus.

On the other hand, this woman whose name is not even known gives her all to honor Jesus. Who does Jesus defend, commend and praise? This unknown woman.

When a rich man young man came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "*Go, sell, give all you have to the poor and then come and follow me*". The rich man was so sorrowful when he heard those words.
Why? His heart was on his wealth. This woman's heart was given to Jesus. And, therefore, in her joy, she gladly gave and served.

God gave His Best and Only Beloved Son to this sin loving world.
How will you serve Christ?

---------- Discipleship Questions----------

MESSAGE SUMMARY: A Beautiful Service. Mark 14:1-9
HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why were the chief priests and scribes plotting to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him? What is Jesus doing while these men plot to kill him?

2. HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

    - What could have motivated this unnamed woman to spend expensive nard to anoint Jesus' head? Read Luke 7:44-48, John 12 for a similar story. Do you believe giving to the work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is ever in vain? Why or why not?

    - What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

3. HANDS For personal reflection: In what way will you love and serve Christ more by this woman's example?