

Mark 14:1-11

A Different Kind of Influencer

A 2017 study revealed that given the choice, Generations Z and Alpha would prefer being an Influencer over a doctor, lawyer, or some other career. Before that, generations desired to be celebrities, rock stars, famous actors, or influential entrepreneurs. Although the aspirations may have a different name, it is all essentially the same. Deep down we want to be known. To be remembered. To have a legacy. Whether that involves eating Tide Pods on YouTube or inventing something that changes history, we all want to matter. Here, we meet a lady whose has been forgotten by history, but not by God.

We begin with **The Surrounding** (vs. 1-2, 10-11). A common literary tool throughout the Gospels is to bookend a narrative between two statements, events, characters, etc. To open Mark 14, we continue to march quickly to the cross. Each narrative prepares the reader for that significant event. That is made explicitly clear. The religious elite are conspiring to execute Jesus without being attached to it. The irony here is that although they tried to hide their part in the conspiracy, they fell into God's plan. They are not the ones ultimately in control.

Compare this with the conclusion of this narrative. The religious elite are looking for a way to have Jesus killed without looking responsible. In walks Judas. In the narrative it looks like Judas's motive is financial. Thus, Judas's bribe is laid in contrast to that of the woman worshiping at the feet of Jesus. Ultimately, what Mark manages to do is surround this beautiful scene with ugliness. While she is engaged in an intimate worship, she is surrounded by treachery, betrayal, and corruption. Such is the work of the gospel.

The main section of the text shows **The Surrender** (vs. 3-9). We now go back in time to Saturday, the day before the Triumphal Entry. This is made clear in John's Gospel who places this event between the resurrection of Lazarus and the Triumphal Entry. Remember that in ancient narrative, chronology matters less than it does today. It does help us see its placement as significant. Between two statements regarding the conspiracy to kill Jesus, we meet a woman locked in worship. What a contrast!

First, we meet *The Woman and Her Contribution* (vs. 3). It is in this context that an unnamed woman comes to Jesus, armed with "an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly," and pours it over Jesus. This costly perfume was often used as a dowry and for burial. Either way, she was pouring out her future. Don't miss that detail. She breaks the flask to ensure that there was no going back. So, then, this vital gift is surrendered at the feet of Jesus. In fact, every time this character shows up in the Bible, she is seen at the feet of Jesus. What a testimony of faith! Although Mark does not identify her (unlike Simon the Leper), John does. She is Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. She is engaging in this act of worship following the resurrection of her brother.

This leads to *The Men and Their Condemnation* (vs. 4-5). We are not told, by Mark, who is criticizing this woman, but John does. It is Judas Iscariot. More than blaming Judas, Mark wants us to indict the rest of the disciples. Judas, then, is more of a ringleader. One of their concerns was that Mary hated the poor. Despite this being an example of Bulverism, it was custom for the Jews, on the eve of Passover, to pay alms to the poor. If this woman really was so eager to waste this perfume, she could have sold it for a year's wage and fed 300 people in a single day or a person for a whole year! The Disciples pretend that if they had been given the opportunity, they could have formulated the perfect plan to help the maximum amount of people.

To be fair, there is nothing wrong with being careful with God's blessings or giving to the poor. Those are good things as the Olivet Discourse demonstrated. But these are merely excuses. In truth, the critics want the perception of righteousness. They want others to think they are good and generous. Mary, on the other hand, is offering her best to her Savior. That is worship and that trumps everything. Worship precedes humanitarianism because it is the foundation of true justice.

We then meet *The Savior and His Commendation* (vs. 6-9) In contrast to all the noise makers, Jesus celebrates Mary. We learn several things from Jesus. First, poverty is perpetual in a fallen world. To be clear Jesus is not against the poor (see Mark 10:21, 12:42-43), but rather their hypocrisy. Why are they so eager to rob an innocent woman of her worship? Are they not perfectly capable of giving to the poor? Can they not give themselves? Generosity is easier when it is not your money being used.

Secondly, we discover that worship is always the priority. It's worth noting that her anointing was an intrusion (vs. 3). Despite the social inconvenience, Jesus celebrates her and calls her act "beautiful" (vs. 6). How we desperately need to hear this. We're all busy. We just make poor priorities. Nothing should ever replace our need to worship – both corporately and personally.

Thirdly, the heart of the worshiper matters. In praising this woman's sacrificial act of worship, Jesus applauds her heart. Mary does not see worship as a duty, but a delight. If we view worship as mundane and something we must suffer through, then our view of God is too small. By breaking the alabaster jar, she expresses her heart. To her, Jesus is more valuable than the most precious thing she owns. Ultimately, Jesus cares more about the heart than the rituals of the worshiper.

Finally, the cross is the main thing. Jesus's interpretation of this event is significant. It is not only an act of surrender and worship, but also a picture of the cross. Jesus directs our attention to the crucifixion. Theologians and commentators debate the specifics of what Jesus says here. What did this woman understand about Jesus's mission and death? Etc. What matters is how Jesus interprets this scene: she has prepared him for death. At the core of worship and devotion is the cross. As Jesus surrenders his very blood, so true faith understands worship as surrender.

If we were to isolate this passage, it seems odd that the host, Simon the Leper, is named, but the story's main character isn't. We know it's Mary because of John's Gospel, but Mark strangely leaves her unidentified. Isn't that strange? What makes her great is not that her name is memorable, but her sincere worship is. What makes her great is not her notoriety, but her faith. You and I will die and be forgotten. The aim of the Christian walk is not to be remembered by men but welcomed by Christ. We seek the glory of God in all that we do. May we decrease so that he can increase. Jesus praises sincerity, not celebrity; surrender, not ceremony.