

Wasteful or Beautiful?

Mark 14:1-11

We're continuing our study through Mark's Gospel. **We've been looking at this all-important question, "Who is this Jesus?"** If you're here and you're not a Christian, we're really glad you're here. You're always welcome here. And I can think of no better study for you to be in than this one!

We believe that Jesus Himself is the main argument for why you should become a Christian. Pray

Who are some good role models for young ladies?

We have three girls, so it's especially important question for us (ages 12-15). And we have many young ladies in this church. I read a parenting article that listed the best 7 female role models today:

1. Jennifer Lawrence
2. Hillary Clinton
3. Miranda Cosgrove
4. Ellen DeGeneres
5. Oprah Winfrey
6. Emma Watson
7. Abby Douglas

These are popular ladies in American culture. They're popular because of their power, their influence, their physical beauty, and/or their ability to perform/act. You can read other articles with different pop icons, and you will find similar qualities exalted.

What comes to your mind when you hear these answers?

Well, I have no desire to put down these ladies, or any other lady in American culture that appears on such lists. **My reaction is this: Most American young girls know these ladies.**

But most American girls don't know the ladies in Mark's Gospel, and that's a tragedy.

Once again in Mark's Gospel, **it's an amazing lady** that gives us a pattern to follow.

James Edwards:

Women play especially important roles in the Gospel of Mark (1:1-16:8). Not only are they mentioned frequently, but the highest acclaim of Jesus in the Second Gospel goes to women.... Fifteen of the twenty-two mentions of women, however, appear in unusually positive contexts. The value and dignity of women—and girls—are signified by the fact that Jesus heals them (1:30-31; 5:25-34; 5:23, 41-42; 7:25). In their following and serving of Jesus and the Christian fellowship women are models of discipleship (1:30-31; 15:40, 47; 16:1). In special instances they play prominent roles, even preeminent roles, receiving the highest praise that Jesus gives in the Gospel. On two occasions women appear in the heart of the sandwich technique as the ideal of faith (5:21-43) and devotion (14:1-11). The woman with a hemorrhage is a model of faith for Jairus, the synagogue president (5:25-34); and the Syrophenician woman is a model of faith for all "outsiders" (7:25ff.). The widow in the temple is praised for giving more than everyone else, "her whole life" (12:42). And above all, the anointing at Bethany is so exemplary that the proclamation of the gospel in the world is a commemoration of her act (14:9).

These women are known for some different qualities; some deeper qualities; some more desirable qualities than the qualities other popular ladies are known for: (1) faith, (2) devotion, (3) generosity; (4) being transformed by Jesus; and (5) beautiful displays of worship to Jesus.

Today, we see real beauty on display by this unnamed lady, whom John tells us is Mary, the sister of Lazarus.

- Mary is mentioned **three times in the Gospels**; each time she is **at the feet of Jesus** (Luke 10:38–42; John 11:31–32; 12:1–8). Mary loved Jesus.

But she's not just an example for women!

- Every man, woman, every race, every background, class, should pay attention to her.
- If you're a **young person**, please look at her.
 - **Here's a goal for you: To Adore Jesus with all your heart, for all your life.**
- **Parents**, is this your deepest longing for your kids? That they would be passionate worshipers of Jesus? Is your biggest concern this, or with their grades, career, spouse?

In a world searching of role models, here's one for us all.

She's a model for us all because this passage is all about the HEART.

The story forces us to ask this question: **Who or what do you really love?"**

- **How much is Jesus worth to you?**
- **You see, you praise what you prize.** If you don't prize Jesus, you won't praise him.
- A lot of teaching just emphasizes **behavioral modification**, but to really see change, there must **be heart transformation.**
- If a person's affections are changed, then their actions change!
- **And here's the key: We must rightly assess the worth of Jesus in order to truly love him wholeheartedly.**
- Hopefully, the whole study of Mark's gospel is helping you **rightly assess Him**, and consequently, be **more moved by Him**, so that your actions **may glorify Him.**

Mark 14 – Wednesday of the Passion Week (the actual week of Jesus' death)

14:1-11: There are **4 sets of characters** around Jesus and they show us 4 types of responses to him.

- This is a classic "**Markan Sandwich**," where he inserts a story in the middle of a story in order to make a point. The "bread" – Hostility and Betrayal and the "filling" is this beautiful scene of a woman's adoration of Jesus. **It's a deliberate contrast intended to underscore her wholehearted devotion.**
- This story appears to be **the same story in John 12:1-8 and Matt 26:6-13**, and if so, appears to be a flashback (since John says it happened "Six days before Passover").

4 Responses to Jesus

Response #1: Absolute Hostility (14:1-2)

V 1: The Setting for the Events to Follow

The **Passover** occurred on the first day of the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

- God's people gave Him praise for freeing them from Egyptian slavery (Ex 12). This day included the slaughter of the Passover Lamb, whose blood on the doorpost 1,400 years earlier spared the home from the wrath of God. (More about Passover next week).
- They also had a Messianic longing, that One would come to free them from all oppression.
- Anywhere from **85K – 300K pilgrims** would be in Jerusalem at this time.

- Pilgrims slept in tents in the surrounding country.
- The atmosphere **was like a State Fair (Garland)**.

The **Unleavened Bread** also looked back to the exodus when during their deliverance they ate unleavened bread.

“After two days” is not as precise as you might think. Using Jewish reckoning of time, this could mean “the next day.” And it does seem that **this is Wednesday** morning or afternoon.

- **James Edwards:** The reference to the Passover as “two days away” should probably be understood according to the inclusive reckoning of time among the Jews, meaning “the day after” (so, too, 8:31). Mark dates the crucifixion on the day before Sabbath (i.e., Friday, 15:42), and the Last Supper on the night before (i.e., Thursday). The day before Passover would be Wednesday, on which Judas conspired with the religious leaders to betray Jesus.¹

The context is **very bloody** in this section of Mark. It’s a turning point.

- **Passover. A conspiracy to kill him.**
- The cross is coming.
- The Lamb of God will soon be slain.
- **Jesus death will transform the meaning of the Passover. (cf., 1 Cor 5:7)**
- **Christians will remember this time when the Lamb of God was slain for our sins.**
- **Everything in these three sections foreshadow the cross:**
 - Plot
 - The ointment for burial
 - Judas’ betrayal

These leaders hate Jesus.

- They’re **jealous** of him.
- They’re **threatened** by him.
- They’re enraged by his teaching and actions in the **temple**.
- They call him a **blasphemer**.
- They want him dead.
- This is **the climax** of what we’ve read earlier about their hatred (Mark 11:18; 12:12; 3:6)
- This is a **Psalm 2** kind of thing: Setting themselves up against the Anointed. But God will have the last word. (See also Psalm 10:7-11; 31:13; 54:3; 71:10).

V 2: They’re also cowardly and conniving.

- They don’t want to go after him **publically**.
- They will **opt to get him in the dead of night in the secluded Gethsemane**.
- Judas will help them do their **dirty work**.
 - But their attempt to silently put him away won’t work!
 - **Soon the whole world will know what they’ve done!**
- They **feared the crowds** (many were attracted to Jesus).
- The **Roman Governor** normally moved to Jerusalem during this time from his headquarters in Caesarea in order to monitor the crowds.

Application: Does anyone have this kind of hostility today?

Yes, but it just looks different.

Here are three common ways hatred for Jesus is expressed today:

¹ Edwards, J. R. (2002). *The Gospel according to Mark* (p. 411). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

1. *Through hateful comments about the church.*

- Sometimes people's hateful comments about the church **are a cover for hatred for Jesus.**
- Don't get me wrong; **sometimes the church needs to be criticized.**
- But **there are some who outright hate the church and Christian people.**
- Where does that come from? I would argue it comes from a **hatred of Christ.**

2. *Through mockery.*

- Kathy Griffin, at 07 Emmy Awards, "A lot of people come up here and thank Jesus for this award. I want you to know that no one had less to do with this award than Jesus." She went on to say, "[Explicative] Jesus. This is my God now!"
- **Everyone laughed.**

3. *Through theological editing.*

- **Many hate the biblical Jesus so they try to shave off the parts about Jesus and his ministry that they don't like:** what he said about hell, money, marriage, the necessity of being born again, his uniqueness, his atoning work satisfies God's wrath.
- **They can't kill him physically, so they try to kill him theologically.**
 - "I can't believe in a God who... sends people to hell... allows evil to exist..."
 - Or, my Jesus would never say, "Depart from me, I never knew you."
 - "You can't possibly believe a man got swallowed by a whale"
- **Notice that it's the professional religious guys who want to kill Jesus!**
 - They're professional ministers today that don't teach the gospel.
 - Don't listen to them.

Response #2: Deceitful Betrayal (14:10-11)

1. **Judas betrayed Jesus out of his own initiative (10)**

- "He went to the chief priests in order to betray him" (10)
- **What drove Judas?**
 - Luke 22:3 – **Satan** entered him
 - Acts 2:23; 4:28 – This was according to **God's plan**
 - Matthew 26:15-16 - **Greed**
- God's plan? Satan's work? Greed. Yes and yes and yes.
- **But was Judas responsible? Yes.**
- **Mark** wants us to see **Judas' choice** in the matter. He was accountable.

Application: We are accountable for our actions!

- **We will answer for them.**
- **Jesus knows all of them!**
- **You can't hide your sin from Jesus.**
 - You may think that no one knows but Jesus knows.
 - **Matthew 26:47ff: "Friend, do what you came to do" (Matt 26:50)**
 - How could a person walk with Jesus for three years, be given so much spiritual insight, see so much love and power, do such a wicked thing?

2. **Judas was one of the twelve (10)**

- He had **seen Jesus**
- He had **heard sermons**
- He had been given the **privilege of privileges!**
- And yet, he **sells him out!**

- **Ps 41:9:** “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.”

Application: He serves as a warning to us

- It’s possible to be **very religious and actually be very wicked.**
- It’s possible to be an **insider in a church but end up an outsider in the kingdom.**
- **Here’s a big theme in Mark’s Gospel: the Insiders are sometimes Outsiders, and Outsiders are sometimes Insiders.**
 - Look at our passage: Religious Leaders? They’re outsiders. Judas? He’s an outsider. Simon the leper? Insider! An unnamed woman? Insider!
- Let this serve as a **warning to you.**
 - The book of **Hebrews** gives us many **sobering warnings.**
 - It’s possible to taste of heavenly things (not regenerate/justified) but turn away from God.
 - “It’s a fearful thing to fall on the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31)
- Don’t go the way of Judas.

3. He sought an opportunity to betray him (10-11)

He looked for the right time.

And the religious leaders **were “glad”** that Judas would plot with them.

This phrase should make us walk in the fear of the Lord: **“He sought an opportunity to betray him.”**

- **Judas made such a foolish choice!**
 - When we betray Jesus we never get what we think we will get!
 - 30 pieces of silver (Matt 26:15)
 - Terrible trade.

Application: People make this type of trade all the time.

- **Sell out Jesus for 30 minutes of porn, sex**
- **Sell out Jesus for one fun, Friday night**
- **Sell out Jesus for approval, a raise, etc.**
- You **never get what you give up!**

Before you head out on your next bender; your next adulterous rendezvous, your next porn search, your next shady business deal, think about this phrase: “I sought an opportunity to betray him.”

- **Don’t let this ever be written about you!**
- You want verse 6 written about you – **“She did a beautiful thing.”**
- **The only way you will ever break your addiction to sin is by finding a superior satisfaction in Jesus. He must be more beautiful than sin.**
- **It’s possible to go to church often but frequently seek for ways to betray Jesus.**
- May God have mercy on you. May God have mercy on us all. May God deliver us from evil.

Response #3: Religion in Moderation (14:3-6)

V. 3: In the next scene, we find Jesus dining in the home of Simon the Leper.

The event is taking place in Bethany. Bethany, a village about two miles from Jerusalem on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, has been Jesus’ base camp since arriving in Jerusalem (11:1, 11, 12).

This is an interesting party! The guest list is fascinating.

- **We don’t know anything about Simon.**

- We can safely assume he was no longer a leper! He may have been healed by Jesus.
- In John's account, we also read of **Lazarus** being there.
 - And he had been raised from the dead!
 - **One could have some interesting questions for Laz! It's not often you get to talk to a guy who was just dead!**
- The woman in named in John's account: **Mary**.
- And **the disciples and others were present** (Matt 26:8, 10, Jn 12).
 - Matthew: Jesus' disciples corporately
 - John: Judas alone.
 - Mark is less specific.

"Often the context gives a clue to their identity, and here they are presumably **fellow guests at the meal**. Since Jesus is accompanied by **his disciples** during these days, including their visits to Bethany for the night (11:11-12, 19-20), it is likely that *they would have made up a substantial part if not the whole of the gathering in Simon's house.*" (France)

Those invited to the party are those who are **pro-Jesus**, or at least they appear that way.

But while some in the house may have truly confessed Jesus as the Messiah, their hearts haven't caught up with their confession; and they still lacked spiritual insight.

They are in Pro-Jesus crowd, but they still need help in knowing what it means to follow Jesus **wholeheartedly**.

Mark doesn't give us names (except for Simon) because **he wants our attention to be focused on this unnamed lady**.

She gives us the example to follow, while some of the company gives us something to avoid.

V 3: She pours out this costly perfume: **nard**.

- **This was not Axis Body Spray.**
- **You're not picking this up at K'Mart**
- It was derived from **a plant native to India**. So hard to get.
- She **breaks the flask** and pours the whole thing out on Jesus.
- Often, these ointment jars, when used for anointing the dead, were broken and left in the tomb.

V 4: The company reacts negatively

- They were "**indignant**" (Same attitude here as earlier in Mark 10)
- They **rebuked** her harshly.
- The verb in v 5, "scolded" means **to snort or roar; it's used of horses**.

Those who just want **a little dab of religion** are often have this attitude.

Why the criticism?

1. **The Cost of Nard (4)**

- They say she did a "wasteful" thing!
- 300 denarius, we may call about 40K
- They think it's **excessive**.

They don't have a problem with doing something nice for Jesus (it was customary to put some perfume on the feet of guest), but she has done something radical... Extravagant ... Over-the-top.

They prefer a "little dab will do you" kind of discipleship.

They're very pragmatic and calculated.

This is not the only time we've found them counting (Mark 6).

Perhaps you can identify with them if you're a frugal type.

- My wife is great and giving gifts to people, but I'm a bit tighter.
- **Pastoring: 1,000 bucks to buy suits. "I can get 10 at JC Penny!"**
- **Can you imagine giving a guy a 40K gift right before he dies?**

The disciples think this is wasteful.

The disciples demeaning of her is actually a demeaning of Jesus.

2. The Needs of the Poor (5)

V 5: They go all social justice on the woman.

- Were they were sincere or was this just a convenient remark?
- We are to care for the poor (Deut 15:11)
- **But people can use the poor as a spiritual 2X4**
- Were they really concerned?
- **Their problem was this: they weren't assessing the situation rightly.** Jesus was about to leave them. **Jesus is more valuable than anyone or anything.**
- **Jesus places himself above the poor.**
 - He's either evil, crazy, or the Son of God.
 - Loving God precedes love for neighbor.
 - Love for God actually inspires and informs love of neighbor.
 - Only Jesus could say this.
- **Imagine anyone else saying what Jesus said in verse 8!**
 - He's crazy unless He's God.

Application: Discipleship requires wholehearted devotion to Jesus.

The worship that Jesus desires is **not a casual, dispassionate worship that's done in moderation.**

Here's the question for all of us: **Am I all in?**

Do you just want to go to church a few times per month, and be decent and reasonable person, but not a passionate follower of Jesus?

- Remember, Jesus had raised her brother from the dead!
- **How do you respond dispassionately to that!? "Oh, thank you Jesus, I really appreciate this nice display of power. Now, please excuse me, while I go about my business."**
- "I was never really insane except upon occasions when my heart was touched." - *Edgar Allen Poe*
- **Her heart was deeply moved; the disciples should have followed her instead of criticizing her!**

The world has no problem with religion in moderation.

- **But if you** walk away from a “real career” to follow Jesus that’s deemed “foolish.”
- If you walk away from Mom and Dad to serve in an inner city among the poor, then many will think you of as unwise.
- Walk away from family and friends to go serve among the nations, and some may suggest **counseling.** (ht: Akin)

Do not live to **please people, but to please the Savior!**

- Paul says, “We are fools for Christ’s sake.”

V 6: Jesus says that this act wasn’t wasteful; it was beautiful!

- “beautiful” (*kalos*) – fine, fitting, beautiful.

If you just want a little discipleship in moderation, then know this:

- **It doesn’t honor Jesus.**
 - Imagine me doing this with **my wife:**
 - “I’d like to spend two hours with you once a month.”
 - “I bought you a cracker for your birthday. Hope you like it.... I didn’t really want to do it but I thought it was common in culture to buy spouses a gift.”
 - “I thought we could talk for 15 seconds today. Sound good?”
 - Are you serious?
 - We’re talking about the Resurrected Lord of Glory!
 - **Give yourself to prayer, Scripture, the local church.**
 - **Give yourself to the needs of the world, and for those who are far from God.**
 - Cultural Christianity doesn’t honor Christ.
- **It will never lead you to true and lasting joy.**
 - The most miserable religious people are the people that are either missing Jesus all together, or are not putting anything into their faith.
 - **Half-hearted religion is miserable.**

Response #4: Wholehearted Devotion (14:6-9)

Why was this act beautiful?

1. The Situation (7)

- The time to adore Jesus **was limited**
- This is like what he said about **fasting (Mark 2:19-20)**
- **Caring for the poor is implied.** Do that!
- But this was a **unique situation.**
- **Loving God precedes loving neighbor.**

2. The sacrifice (8a)

- She has done what she could. She sacrificed.
- Where did she get it? Rich? **Heirloom?** Most likely it was an heirloom that a family would keep to sale in a difficult time.
- **She gives her whole future to Jesus.**
- **Last woman: Mark 12 – the worth of the gift is determined by how much it cost the giver.**
- **She broke it.**
 - She could have opened it by lid or something
 - **She’s not wanting to save any of it!**

- **C.T. Stud:** “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”
- **Sacrificial giving has now appeared twice in three chapters, receiving Jesus’ commendation!**
 - **Keller:** The perfume was worth “a year’s wages” (v. 5), an enormous sum. The implication is that we can never give too much to Jesus. (For example, this obviously is generosity well beyond “the tithe”!). So this means we should be lavish with our money, when it comes to giving to Christ and ministry. We cannot conclude from this passage that we should not have a savings account! But clearly, a committed Christian will not accrue as much personal wealth as he or she would apart from faith. For a Christian gives generously to Christ’s ministry.
- Her sacrifice, like ours also involves the receiving of criticism as well.
- But she doesn’t care.
- She finds Jesus beautiful, whereas the critics merely find him useful.

3. The symbolism (8)

- It’s unlikely that she was thinking of a burial; but **Jesus gives the symbolic meaning to everyone.**
- **In his humanity, it seems that Jesus was comforted and encouraged by this preparation for his death.**
- He was moved by it.
- **The King receives his anointing, not with oil, but with an ointment for a burial.**
- He is a King going to the cross.
- Jesus’ disciples are missing in action after the crucifixion; his body is taken away quickly and there’s no mention of anointing the corpse. **This will be his only anointing.**

V 9: Commendation

- **Jesus assures the disciples her act will be remembered.**
- **Everywhere where his story is told, this act will be told.**
- **It’s recorded in three of the gospels!**
- **The fact that I’m preaching it today demonstrates the truth of this statement!**
- **He also reminds the disciples of the worldwide mission that they will be part of: “in the whole world”**
- Notice, that Jesus knows about the upcoming events. He’s in charge.

Concluding Applications:

What do we learn about whole-hearted devotion to Jesus?

1. Rightly assess the worth of Jesus.

- **How much is Jesus worth to you?**
- My friend, he deserves all we have.
- **Actions flow from affections.**
- **My non-Christian friend**, if you’re exploring Christianity, you need to see that **Jesus is the point.**
 - There’s a lot that goes on **here on a Sunday, but the point is Jesus.**
 - **Ultimately we’re not here to give us something to do, to keep kids out of trouble, to raise money – we’re here because He is worthy!**
- **Believer, we must not “lose our first love.”**
 - It’s possible for affections to cool. That’s dangerous.
 - We minister and live **best out of a healthy soul that is devoted to Jesus.**

- **If you wrongly assess Jesus, everything in your life will be messed up**
- **You can't love Christ too much!**
 - **Every other person can become an idol!** But not Jesus. He's worth everything!!
- If there are no affections for Jesus, you aren't rightly assessing him - or you haven't yet been changed by Him!

2. Realize that wholehearted worship is beautiful not wasteful.

- Think about this woman's example **personally**:
 - Jesus knows who honors him and he takes note of it.
 - **Your financial offerings are not a waste of money.**
 - **Your time spent listening to that friend, praying for them, is not a waste of energy.**
 - **Practicing hospitality is not a waste of time.**
 - Jesus takes note of our devotion.
 - **Even if others may criticize you, continue worshiping Him wholeheartedly.**
- Think about this example **corporately**.
 - **Why don't we take a month off of Sundays? Isn't this selfish? Aren't we thinking about ourselves?**
 - No. That's wrong-headed thinking.
 - Corporate worship is not a waste of your time.
 - **Stephan: "We got to do the end for which we've been created."**
 - No worship is too extravagant for him!
- Think about this example **Christocentrically**.
 - **True worship is beautiful because He is beautiful!**
 - **JE: Every trace of beauty in creation is but a glimpse of His infinite beauty.**
 - **You're made for beauty. But people prefer cheap expressions of beauty.**
 - **Edwards, "God's beauty happiness us."**

Non-Christian: **"To become a Christian is to become alive to beauty." (Dane Ortlund)**

- It involves being caught up in Trinitarian love, infinite beauty.

The greatest beauty one can behold can't be Instagrammed; it can only be experienced in the heart.

- It's not captured by a camera; It's beheld in gospel.
- **"Though you do not see Him, you love Him, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Pet 1:8)**
- One day we will behold Him in beauty, as faith gives way to sight.
- **We will be caught up in the most beautiful worship service we've ever experienced!**

Pour out your praise to Him, who poured out His blood for you.

I think Mary would have liked Isaac Watt's *The Wonderful Cross*:

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.

Indeed. The appropriate response to His love, is *love*.

Let us follow her example of whole-hearted devotion to this One who loved us and gave Himself for us.