

Mark 14:1-11 “How Much Is Jesus Worth to You?”\*\*

Main Idea: How much is Jesus worth to you? What happened in Mark 14:1-11 invites us to ponder that question. We see four types of people in the story each demonstrating a different value judgment regarding Jesus.

I. Some people blatantly reject Jesus (1-2).

- A. They often use religion as a cloak.
- B. They are threatened by Jesus.

II. Some people sacrificially worship Jesus (3).

- A. We see this in Mary.
  - 1. She gave much.
  - 2. She had received much (see Luke 10:38-42).
- B. We can learn from Mary.
  - 1. Serving is good, but sitting at Jesus’ feet is better.
  - 2. In order to have something to give, you must first receive.
  - 3. Once you have received, the appropriate response is to give.

III. Some people piously ignore Jesus (4-9).

- A. The people rebuked Mary (4-5).
  - 1. They said they were concerned about waste.
  - 2. They said they were concerned about the poor.
  - 3. What they should have been concerned about was Jesus.
- B. Jesus commended Mary (6-9).
  - 1. It is good to give to the poor.
  - 2. It is beautiful to give sacrificially to Jesus.

IV. Some people hypocritically betray Jesus (10-11).

- A. Mary’s act of worship revealed the truth about Jesus.
  - 1. He was going to die.
  - 2. He wasn’t going to be the kind of Messiah many wanted.
- B. Mary’s act of worship revealed the truth about Judas.
  - 1. He wanted money more than Jesus.
  - 2. He was willing to use Jesus to get what he wanted.

Make It Personal: Do you see yourself in the story?

Our values determine our actions. If I value athletics, I will spend money and stand in the rain to watch a Friday night football game. If I don't, I won't—unless of course, I value a child or grandchild who is on the team or in the band. Once again, our values determine our actions.

We all attach value to things. The reason you did what you did this week has to do with your values. You took the overtime, or didn't, based on your values. You attended church this morning because you valued it—or because you valued a by-product of coming (like keeping a family member happy). You read your Bible during the week, or didn't, based on whether you considered it a better value to spend 15 minutes longer in bed or learning from God's Word. You bought things this week, perhaps a new car or clothes or some recreational item, because you made a value choice and decided the item was worth the money you spent to obtain it.

Sometimes we don't value things as we ought because we don't really understand how much they're worth.

A story is told of a man who loved old books. He met an acquaintance who had just thrown away a Bible that had been stored in the attic of his ancestral home for generations. "I couldn't read it," the friend explained. "Somebody named Guten-something had printed it." "Not Gutenberg!" the book lover exclaimed in horror. "That Bible was one of the first books ever printed. Why, a copy just sold for over two million dollars!" His friend was unimpressed. "Mine wouldn't have brought a dollar. Some fellow named Martin Luther had scribbled all over it in German."[11](#)

People do what they do because of what they value. If I truly value something it will show up in my actions. You'll know it without a doubt. I can say I value my wife and children, but they know whether I do based on how I treat them.

Likewise, I can say I value Jesus but the true test of my values is not what I say. He knows by looking at what I do (not *did* but *do*). My actions speak so much louder than my words.

The question of the morning, indeed, a question that has eternal significance, is this. *How much is Jesus worth to you?* All of us have made a value judgment about Jesus. All of us ascribe either much value, or little value, or no value to the One who holds ultimate value. Without question, He is worthy of great value, the greatest value, and for many reasons! He is the Maker of heaven and earth. He came to earth in order to rescue sinners, which He accomplished by dying the death sinners deserve to die. For those of us who know Him as Savior, He is preparing an eternal home in heaven. Truly He is worthy.

But the question is, how much is Jesus worth to you? What happened in Mark 14:1-11 beckons us to ponder that question. We see four types of people in the story each demonstrating a different value judgment regarding Jesus.

### I. Some people blatantly reject Jesus (1-2).

We meet this kind of person in verses 1-2—"Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 'But not during the Feast,' they said, 'or the people may riot.'"

Mark indicates that Passover is at hand, the day when thousands of lambs would be slain in Jerusalem, including The Final Lamb, the one that would take away the sin of the world.

Mark 14 is the longest chapter in Mark, seventy-two verses. In Mark 14 Jesus will observe His final meal with the disciples, agonize in Gethsemane, be arrested, mocked and condemned by the Sanhedrin, and abused horribly by wicked men.

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were two separate holy events. Passover was one of three major holidays for the Jews (in addition to the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles). It occurred on 14<sup>th</sup> Nisan, that is, around April 14. The Feast of Unleavened Bread took place the seven days following Passover.

According to Barclay, it was the ambition of every Jew to eat at least one Passover in Jerusalem in his life. Lodging was free, and since the city itself couldn't hold all the guests, the pilgrims lodged as well in the outlying villages, including Bethany and Bethpage .

To get a sense of just how big an event Passover was for the Jews, we turn to Josephus. This Jewish historian records that in A.D. 65, the number of lambs slain during Passover was 256,500. Since the law said there must be a minimum of ten people to one lamb, there must have been close to three million pilgrims in Jerusalem .<sup>[2]</sup> During the “off peak season,” Jerusalem was home to 50,000 people.

Mark mentions the chief priests and scribes were plotting. Critics had been after Jesus most of His public ministry (see 3:6). We learn two things here about people who blatantly reject Jesus.

**A. They often use religion as a cloak.** Remember, these are the religious leaders in Israel we're talking about! They're looking for some “sly” way to get rid of Jesus. They couldn't use legitimate means for there was none. Apparently, their intent was to wait until after the Passover season, after the crowds left, to arrest and kill Jesus. As unthinkable as it was, God came to see them and they rejected Him. Why? The same reason folks reject Him today. They don't want to change. In fact...

**B. They are threatened by Jesus.** As the perfect man, Jesus exposes sinners in their sin. As the Savior, He makes it clear we need something we cannot do for ourselves, namely *salvation*. But that's a threatening thought to a sinner, to admit one's need.

Yes, some people blatantly reject Jesus. They did *then* and *now*. In verse 3 we meet a second type of person, one who made a very different value judgment about Jesus.

Verse 3—“While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.”

## II. Some people sacrificially worship Jesus (3).

In John's account of the same story, we learn some other details (see John 12:1-3). The woman was Mary. Mary's sister, Martha, was serving the meal while Mary anointed Jesus. Their brother Lazarus was reclining with Jesus at the table. Mary applied the ointment, not only to Jesus' head but also to His feet. What's more, she wiped His feet with her hair. John also says that the fragrance of the perfume filled the house.

The event took place at the home of Simon the Leper. Who was he? We're not told. Apparently he was a leper that Jesus healed (or else no one would be coming to his house!) who, out of his great appreciation is now throwing a dinner to express his gratitude. J. D. Jones suggests the option that Simon was Martha's husband, but that can't be proven.

By the way, in John's gospel, John says this incident took place six days before Passover—that would be the Friday before the Triumphal Entry. Matthew and Mark place it in the narrative right next to the Passover. Did they err? No. As J. Vernon McGee points out, “We must remember that neither Matthew nor Mark is attempting to give a chronological order. Their obvious purpose is to place this lovely incident next to the dark deed of Judas—that is, the plot to betray Jesus.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Some people blatantly reject Jesus. In stark contrast, some people worship Him and they do it sacrificially.

**A. We see this in Mary.** The Scriptures make two things very clear about this remarkable woman.

1. *She gave much.* In first century culture, it was common to anoint the head in the dry and hot East. But this was no ordinary anointing.

Jesus was reclining at the table. In that culture people didn't sit to eat. They leaned on low couches, resting on the left elbow and using the right hand to eat.

Mary approached Jesus, took her alabaster jar, snapped the neck, and rather than applying a few drops, she poured the perfume, all of it, on Jesus. Mark clarifies the perfume was made of pure nard, a very precious ointment made from a rare plant imported from far off India. Mark also says the perfume was *very expensive*, worth more than a year's wages according to verse 5.

Which raises the question, "*Why?! Why did Mary give so much?*" The simple answer is...

2. *She had received much (see Luke 10:38-42).* This isn't the first time Mary has been with Jesus. Let's look at two other accounts.

John 11:1—"Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha." You remember the story. Lazarus ended up dying. Mary grieved tremendously and said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died (32)." At that point, Jesus wept (35). And then Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus and raised him from the dead! Yes, I'd say Mary had received much from Jesus, for starters, her brother back from the grave! But there's more, something she experienced before Jesus did the miracle with Lazarus.

Luke 10:38-39—"As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said." What's Mary doing? Sitting at Jesus' feet, feasting on His life-giving words.

In contrast, notice Martha in verse 40, "But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'" We're told that Martha was "distracted." In fact, she was upset with her sister for not helping in the kitchen. Apparently, she complained to Mary but that didn't help, so she told Jesus.

Listen to His response in verse 41, "'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'" Note Jesus' assessment. Showing hospitality to a guest is good, cooking a meal is good, cleaning your house is good, but... Mary chose *what is better*. What's better? Sitting at Jesus' feet.

We'll come back to that thought in a moment, but for now, notice the answer as to why Mary gave so much. It's because she had first received so much. Jesus had given her brother back, and more than that, Jesus had filled her soul with His eternal-life-giving word. That's what we see in Mary. Let's take it a step further...

**B. We can learn from Mary.** Three lessons...

1. *Serving is good, but sitting at Jesus' feet is better.* If you don't learn from Jesus you won't have anything to give to Him. Furthermore, you won't *want* to give anything to Him, not something as costly as Mary gave for sure, if you are not giving first priority to being a learner. Why not? Here's why...

2. *In order to have something to give, you must first receive.* Mary appears in three accounts in the Gospels, and each time she is at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:38-42; John 11:31-32; 12:1-8). That fact is not unrelated to Mary's generosity in Mark 14. Mary had incentive to give lavishly to Jesus because she first received lavishly from Jesus.

Do you see the contrast? Martha served—that's good. But Mary sat at Jesus' feet—and Jesus said that is *better*.

"You mean all Jesus wants us to do is *sit*?" Not at all. But that's what comes first. Sitting at Jesus' feet, that is,

sitting under the ministry of His Word, must come first. It must be priority in our lives.

I urge you, don't let *servicing* the Lord become a substitute for *sitting at His feet*. If you do, in time you'll burn out and stop serving, with your spiritual gas tank on empty.

This principle applies to spending personal on a daily basis at the feet of Jesus. "But my schedule is so full today! I don't have time to sit at Jesus' feet." Someone has rightly said, "Either you come apart, or you will come a part."

It also applies to your involvement at church. It's easy to equate serving with spirituality. "I'm a spiritual person because I do a lot of things at church!" It's good if a person wants to serve in church. In fact, if a person claims to know Christ and doesn't serve in church, something's wrong, for we are saved to serve. But learn from Mary. Service must not become a substitute for sitting under the Word in our lives.

Are you making it a priority to place yourself under the teaching of the Word, to sit at Jesus' feet? Let's address a very practical matter in our church. We have lots of ministries—nothing wrong with that—again, we should be serving. But if you are serving in a ministry during the Sunday morning worship service (like children's church, or nursery, or servant of the day, or whatever), make sure you are taking advantage of other opportunities to sit under the Word (in Sunday School, in the evening service, in the Wednesday Bible study, etc).

My observation as a pastor is that serving is often the last thing to go. I've seen it over and over. We start coming to church and are thrilled with being under the teaching of God's Word. We delight in sitting at Jesus' feet. We know we need it. Then we start serving—which is good and right, for once we have received we should give. But not at the expense of receiving. The moment we stop sitting at Jesus' feet is the moment the branch starts shriveling. If a battery isn't connected to an alternator, it will die. It must be recharged.

In order to serve the Word we must first be *in* the Word personally and *under* the Word corporately. Let me offer a guideline. Make sure you are putting yourself *under* the Word at least one service a week. If you can't, then stop serving, ask God to enable you to change your schedule, and then start serving again. Are there exceptions to this guideline? Probably, but they should be exceptions. If I am not consistently sitting at Jesus' feet receiving His Word, two things will happen—and both aren't good. One, I will get weary. And two, I will be missing what the Lord desires and deserves most from me, which is not what I do for Him, but *me*. He wants *me*.

Here's the third lesson Mary teaches us...

3. *Once you have received, the appropriate response is to give.* Sitting at Jesus' feet isn't a selfish thing. Receiving leads to giving. Mary received much. Consequently, Mary gave much, and she was glad to do it.

Some people blatantly reject Jesus. But some people, like Mary, sacrificially worship Jesus. Next we meet a third type of person...

### III. Some people piously ignore Jesus (4-9).

Verses 4-5—"Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly." Notice that...

**A. The people rebuked Mary (4-5).** They did it on two grounds, both sounded so pious...

1. *They said they were concerned about waste.* "Why this waste of perfume?"

Mark doesn't tell us who "they" were, but the other Gospels do. Matthew tells us it was the disciples (Matt. 26:8). That's right. Jesus' chosen men rebuked Mary. The Greek word indicates they snorted like stampeding horses. "That perfume cost a year's wages (300 denarii)!" they chastened harshly. "What were you thinking, woman?!"

John's Gospel makes it clear that Judas was the instigator and spokesman for the Twelve (John 12:4). "Judas, with calculator in hand," writes Kent Hughes, "a man who knew the price of everything and the value of nothing, instantly calculated the waste (in terms of today's economy, \$25,000 to \$30,000)."<sup>[4]</sup>

"What a waste!" Judas and the others said.<sup>[5]</sup> It's noteworthy that this word "waste" in verse 4 is translated "perdition" in John 17:12 *and applied to Judas!* As Wiersbe observes, "Judas criticized Mary for 'wasting money,' but he wasted his entire life!"<sup>[6]</sup>

The critics offered a second, pious-sounding reason for their rebuke...

2. *They said they were concerned about the poor.*<sup>[7]</sup> Ironically, John 12:6 states, "He [Judas] did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it."

Listen to J. D. Jones: "There is nothing so shallow and so utterly and wholly false as the opinion so popular today [he's writing in 1914 but the opinion hasn't changed], that if only we spent less on religion we should spend more on philanthropy. Again I ask, are the people who spend nothing on religion the people who spend most in philanthropy? Is it secularism that built hospitals and orphanages and homes? Is it atheism that is foremost in caring for the little child? Look around over those great charitable institutions that are the glory of our land. The answer is there... The universal testimony of history and experience is that religion is the mother of philanthropy, that from the philanthropic point of view no money is ever wasted that is spent on Christ. The Church has been all down the centuries the best friend of the poor...All that we do for Christ comes back in blessing upon men...Mary is always a better friend to the poor than Judas."<sup>[8]</sup>

*What waste!* That's what folks said of Henry Martyn when he left a successful ministry in his homeland and went to India as a missionary.

*What waste!* "That is what they said," according to Jones again, "about a brilliant young teacher in the United States, who, after the conclusion of the Civil War, felt it to be her duty to go and teach the emancipated slaves; who, after a few months of toil, sickened and died far away from home."<sup>[9]</sup>

*What waste!* But as we'll hear from Jesus in a moment, it's this kind of joyful, even extravagant devotion, this kind of *waste*, that thrills the heart of our Savior. J. D. Jones offers this needed challenge: "Is not this the mischief with us today, that our love is so cold; that we are so prudent and calculating in all our religious service? There is no suggestion of abandonment in our love. This is the prayer for us—"Warm our coldness we implore."<sup>[10]</sup>

Ironically, Mary's gift *was* a gift to the poor, for Jesus was the poor man *par excellence*.<sup>[11]</sup> We read in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

The critics said they were concerned about *waste* and *the poor*. In reality...

3. *What they should have been concerned about was Jesus.* He had told them repeatedly He was going to die soon. But they missed it. Mary didn't miss it, and Jesus came quickly to her defense.

**B. Jesus commended Mary (6-9).** "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand *to prepare for my burial*. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

We learn two things from the Master's words.

1. *It is good to give to the poor.* Jesus' isn't downplaying the importance of caring for the poor. He's just putting it in perspective. It is good to give to the poor, and we should. But...

2. *It is beautiful to give sacrificially to Jesus.* That's the word Jesus used, *beautiful*. "She has done a *beautiful* thing to me."

Jesus tells us in verse 8 that Mary "did what she could." She gave, not what she could spare, but sacrificially, even extravagantly.

My friend, it's not wrong to have a lot. The question is, "Does it have you?" In other words, "Do you use it for the honor of Jesus or for some lesser purpose?" God has blessed the American church with unrivaled abundance, not so we can hoard the abundance, but so we can give it away for kingdom purposes.

Mary did what she could. Can that be said of us? Ask yourself, "Is my devotion to Christ costing me anything?"

It cost our brother and sister, Steve and Nicole Lee, something this week. Steve took a new job in Hartford, Connecticut and moved his family there in August. A month into his new job he was told by his boss, who operates a physical rehab facility that works with a lot of auto injury people, to remove information from his medical records. The owner has a partnership with an attorney who sends a lot of auto-injury-business to the rehab center. So the boss told Steve to delete information from his reports in order to make the lawyer's job easier.

Steve knew God would not be honored by such action. His boss, who is a professing Christian, insisted. So Steve prayerfully chose the God-pleasing option. He resigned last Saturday, giving his ninety day notice according to his contract. Two days later, his boss countered with an email notifying Steve he was terminated *immediately*. Ironically, the boss rebuked Steve, saying his problem was that he was just a young and immature Christian.

Steve and Nicole made a decision to show Jesus that they love Him, more than money, more than security, more than reputation, more than life. And it cost them. But they are rejoicing in His pleasure!

I asked Steve, "How is Nicole handling this?" Remember, Nicole just became a believer earlier this year and was baptized in July. Steve's response, "If this would have happened before she was saved, she would have gone into 'panic attack'! But now she is saying, 'Well, this is a chapter that must be written before God can write the next chapter for us!'"

I would suggest that Steve and Nicole did a *beautiful thing*. By their actions they said that pleasing Jesus is their greatest value. May God bless them richly! And He will!

And now, the fourth type of person...

#### IV. Some people hypocritically betray Jesus (10-11).

Verses 10-11—"Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over."

Mary's actions produced two effects that day...

**A. Mary's act of worship revealed the truth about Jesus.** They made it clear...

1. *He was going to die.* "She poured perfume on my body to prepare for my burial," Jesus said for all to hear. And since He was going to die, that meant...

2. *He wasn't going to be the kind of Messiah many wanted.* The Jews were expecting a Messiah that would make life better for them *now*, and that's what they wanted. But that's not why Jesus came. He came with eternity in mind, and that meant He had to die first, then conquer death, and return to heaven. He came to *save sinners*, not reward sinners with a better life here and now.

Yes, Mary's act made it clear that Jesus had not come to be what many wanted. And one of those man included one of Jesus' own followers, *Judas*.

**B. Mary's act of worship revealed the truth about Judas.** Note the first words of verse 10, "Then Judas..." Right after Mary demonstrated her devotion, Judas showed his true colors. *Then* he went to the authorities. Why? Because...

1. *He wanted money more than Jesus.* Matthew's account (26:15) indicates that Judas actually went to the authorities and asked them what price they were willing to pay. He bargained with them and agreed upon putting Jesus into their hands for thirty pieces of silver. Let this sink in. In stark contrast to Mary's self-denying love for Jesus...

2. *He was willing to use Jesus to get what he wanted.* How sobering! Judas spent three years with Jesus. He did sit at His feet, but it was a sham. He preached for Jesus. He healed in Jesus' name. He faced opposition for Jesus. But it was all for selfish reasons. And now He's willing to trade in Jesus to get what he really wants, what he hung around Jesus for in the first place. *Money*.

Our values determine our actions.

Make It Personal: Do you see yourself in the story?

May God give us hearts like Mary's, the woman who sat at Jesus' feet and then poured a year's wages those feet with gladness. How much is Jesus worth to you?

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] *Our Daily Bread*, June 7, 1994.

[2] Barclay, p. 324.

[3] McGee, p. 165.

[4] Kent Hughes, p. 146.

[5] The Greek word is *apoleia*, which means "needless squandering of resources," hence, *waste*.

[6] Wiersbe, p. 159.

[7] The word "poor" means "one who crouches and cowers," hence, "beggarly" or "poor."

[8] J. D. Jones, pp. 511-12.

[9] J. D. Jones, p. 507.

[10] J. D. Jones, p. 507.

[11] Observation by Kent Hughes, p. 148.