

20241027 Radical Devotion: The Cost of True Worship – Ps Bijoy

Mark 14:1-11

“Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ²“But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of 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.

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

⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

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

Extravagant Devotion: Pouring Out the Future

She brought an alabaster jar. The alabaster itself, the container, would have been expensive, and the content of it was obviously very costly. It wasn’t something she casually carried in her purse, nor was it something she picked up on a whim. Perhaps a year’s wages would have been involved in the purchase.

But the monetary value of the material was probably the smallest part of the cost. An alabaster jar like this was often kept in a home for one of two reasons: either as a dowry for marriage or as preparation for burial.

In other words, this woman was pouring away her future on Jesus. Whether it represented the hope of marriage or her own burial, she was saying, “I am bringing all of this, my hopes, dreams, and future, and pouring them out on the Lord.” She didn’t just pour a little; she broke the flask—a gesture of complete abandonment. After it was broken, it couldn’t be used again.

This act of devotion was premeditated. She had already decided, in the privacy of her home and heart, “This is what I’m going to do.” And so she did, offering everything she had to Jesus.

Scorned for Sacrifice: Misunderstanding True Worship

The immediate response from some in the room was not admiration but scorn. Verse 4 tells us they “scolded her.” Mark uses a word that suggests they snorted at her in indignation. She suddenly became the object of angry glances and whispers of disapproval. Verse 4: they scolded her. “There were some who said to themselves indignantly...” So Mark tells us that they grumbled and they growled at the woman. She has in an instant become the object of angry glances. She has in an instant found herself on the receiving end of the whispers of shocked disapproval.

They viewed her action as extravagant and wasteful. “Why was the ointment wasted like that?” they asked, claiming that it could have been sold and given to the poor. Their misunderstanding was profound. They thought her devotion was wasteful, but they didn’t understand the depth of her gratitude and love for Jesus.

This lady was scolded for giving up her treasured possession. She understood that following Jesus meant giving her all, while Judas only wanted to take. This lady was scolded on account of the fact that her gratitude to Jesus caused her to give up her treasured possession. Her gratitude to Jesus caused her to give up her treasured possession. You see, Judas thought that following Jesus was about what he was gonna get. So he went out and said to them, “What will you give me?” She understood that following Jesus was about what she was able to give.

Honoring Christ Above All

Jesus' response to the criticism was clear. He wasn’t disregarding the poor, but He pointed out that the poor would always be there—an ongoing opportunity to help. What this woman did was a one-time act of devotion that honored Him at a critical moment.

Jesus said, "She has done something beautiful." Her act of honoring Christ was significant not only because of its cost but because it pointed to something deeper. She gave all she had, and in doing so, she gained lasting honor. While others may have viewed her sacrifice as wasteful, Jesus affirmed that her act was beautiful and necessary. In a world that often prioritizes self-interest and material gain, we are reminded that true worship requires us to let go of our attachments and to offer our very best to God.

As we reflect on this story, let us ask ourselves: What are the alabaster jars in our own lives? What possessions are we holding onto that God is calling us to release in worship?

May we have the courage to pour out our lives in devotion to Christ, recognizing that it is in our surrender that we find true honor and fulfillment. Let us strive to be known not for what we can gain, but for what we are willing to give for the sake of Christ. In doing so, we align ourselves with His heart and participate in the extraordinary beauty of His grace.