

COMPELLED BY THE CROSS

STUDY TWO

Extravagant Love on Everlasting Display

Mark 14:1–9

The woman broke open the jar and poured the perfume over Jesus' head. What a beautiful expression of her adoration for Jesus.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN Caesarea Philippi, Jesus warned of the coming storm:

Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, leading priests, and the teachers of the religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.
(Matthew 16:21)

The dark clouds that seemed so distant from Caesarea Philippi now hung on the horizon. Jesus and His disciples had come to Jerusalem for Passover and were staying in nearby Bethany. This Passover would be like none other, for it would fulfill all the Passovers that had come before. Those were mere foreshadowing of the ultimate Passover when Jesus would lay down His life as the paschal lamb slain for the sins of the world.

The setting was a friend's home where Jesus and His disciples had been invited for dinner. In this warm and welcoming place, the disciples relaxed around the table enjoying their meal. Only Jesus felt the chill of the approaching storm. One woman, however, sensed Jesus' burden, and she ministered to Him with an unforgettable expression of extravagant love.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Imagine yourself among Jesus' disciples, and express in prayer your desire to draw close to Him.

Father, how I long to have been present in the room with Jesus to hear His voice and to see His face. May Jesus receive my heart as He received Mary's offering, for if I had been there, I, too, would have been at Jesus' feet. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

According to John, “Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem” (John 11:18) and was the hometown of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. In his account of the event, John mentioned that Lazarus, whom Jesus had earlier raised from the dead, was also at the table (12:2). John also added, “Martha served” (12:2).

Turn to Mark's account in [Mark 14:1–9](#), where he paints the background and takes us into the scene.



Observation: The Setting, an Extravagant Act, and the Responses

Observing a passage of Scripture shouldn't be done in a hurry. Take time to notice how Mark selected each word and constructed each sentence. Enter the scene as if you could see the lamps flickering on the table, smell the spices in the food, and feel the thick air in the crowded room.

Setting the Scene—Mark 14:1–2

How does Mark describe the setting in [Mark 14:1a](#)? What would the religious and political atmosphere have been like with tens of thousands of pilgrims streaming into Jerusalem?



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What sinister undercurrent did Mark include in *Mark 14:1b–2*?

At this hinge point in Mark's gospel, Mark ushers his readers into the main section of his book—the final week of Jesus' earthly life (Mark 14–16). Mark purposefully leaves us hanging with the religious leaders wringing their hands over how and when to kill Jesus. Judas will solve their dilemma by offering to betray Jesus (*14:10–11*)—but not before one woman's act of love toward Jesus.

An Extravagant Act of Love—Mark 14:3

Write down your observations of *Mark 14:3*, noting Mark's details about the perfume used to anoint Jesus. Consult the footnotes in the *NET Bible* for more information about the jar and its precious contents. Had you been present, what sensations would you have experienced? What thoughts and feelings would you have had?

John 12:2–3 tells us the woman is Mary. What additional details did John include?



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Mary said nothing but did something extremely extravagant. She broke open the jar of perfume. The scent filled the room instantly, and she poured it on Jesus' head. This was her sacrificial act of worship. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Responses—Mark 14:4–9

Mary's perfume may have been a family heirloom given to her to enjoy throughout her life. It was her most prized possession. As the bottle gave up its exquisite contents, the oil infused Jesus' skin with a sublime scent usually known only to nobles, kings, and queens. Instead of savoring the aroma and delighting in the gesture, however, some disciples were calculating the cost per drop spilled. Jesus saw pure devotion. Others saw price tags.

What shortsighted, even sinful, perspectives may have prompted these men's reaction, according to [Mark 14:4–5](#)? Whom did John point out as the primary antagonist, according to [John 12:4–6](#)? What was this man's true motive?

How did Jesus respond to their criticism of Mary, according to [14:6–8](#)? How did He interpret her actions?



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Judas would go down in history as a sell-out, a contemptible man who betrayed his master for cash. How did Jesus say Mary would be remembered in *Mark 14:9*?

Judas saw no value in what Mary did; Mary saw only the value of Jesus. The perfume was the most priceless possession she owned. Therefore, only the perfume was good enough for her Savior. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Examining the Action of Mary

If Mary's action could speak, what *message* do you think Mary was communicating to Jesus by anointing Him with perfume? For insight, read about the uses of *perfume* in the online *Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

Jesus interpreted Mary's actions as anointing His "body for burial ahead of time" (Mark 14:8). Whether or not Mary understood the full meaning of her actions, she gave herself in total devotion to her Lord with a gift worthy of Him.



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What principles about worship and devotion do Mary's actions model?



Correlation: The Heart of Mary

What does Mary's previous encounter with Jesus in her home tell you about her heart, according to *Luke 10:38–42*?

What further insight into her character can you gather from her encounter with Jesus when He arrived in Bethany after Lazarus died, according to *John 11:31–44*? What do you think her tears communicated to Jesus? How did Jesus' actions strengthen her faith in Him?



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Mary anointing Jesus with costly perfume was the third time she appeared in Scripture. All three times, we find Mary at the feet of Jesus. What does Mary's example teach about the heart of a true disciple?

The wonderful part of Mary's gift to Jesus was her silence. Not once did she defend her act. Not once did she explain her motive. Jesus read everything. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Thoughts to Ponder

Mary's extravagant act of anointing Jesus is an everlasting display of love. Among the many lessons Mary models, here are two thoughts to ponder.

First, *there's a great difference between the price of something and the value of it.* Judas fixated on the price of the perfume because money was his treasure. Mary focused on the value of worship because Jesus was her treasure.

Do you sometimes confuse price and value? What or who holds the most value for you? Where does your treasure lie?



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Second, *every once in a while*, we should be like Mary and break open a jar. Sometimes an extravagant gesture is the only way to truly express great love.

How does Mary's extravagance inspire you?

The scent of Mary's perfume must have clung to Jesus for many days. Perhaps the lingering fragrance comforted His heart during the humiliation of His arrest and trials and the pain of His beatings and crucifixion.

Jesus gave Himself on the cross as the most extravagant gesture of love the world has ever seen. He broke the alabaster jar of His own body and spilled His priceless blood for us. What can we give in return but our lives and our eternal worship?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how can I demonstrate the extent of my devotion to Jesus? Help me pour out the perfume of my life for Him every day and may the fragrance of my love for Him be pleasing to You. May I be extravagant in my worship as I demonstrate to the world how much I value my Savior and Lord. In His name, amen.

