

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Woman with the Extravagant Gift, Mark 14:1-9

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INTRODUCTION: In this message I ask several questions about this curious passage of scripture.

1. When did this story happen?
2. Where did this story happen?
3. How did this story happen?
4. What about the statement regarding the poor?

BACKGROUND: Alabaster is a common mineral mined for various reasons. It is a soft mineral, which can be carved with tools, and it can be turned on a lathe.

Alabaster comes in different colors. When it is cut thin, it can be used as translucent glass. Today it is mined and sold to craftsmen in blocks. It is not real common in the US, but every now and then, you'll see it at gift stores and craft shows.

Because of its appearance, it can be mistaken for marble, but it's more fragile and porous.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14:1-9 ¹*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? ⁵It 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. ⁷The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

First, Let’s look at— WHEN DID THIS STORY HAPPEN?

It happened before the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The Passover is a yearly Jewish celebration marking the time the Hebrew people were freed from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. God sent ten plagues on Egypt to persuade the Pharaoh to free the Hebrew people. The last plague was the death of the firstborn. The way to be spared from the tenth plague was for each home to have the blood of a lamb painted above the door. Only the Hebrew people did it. The Egyptians did not, and the deaths of the firstborn were just too much for the Pharaoh, and he let the people go. Ever since then, the Jews have celebrated the Passover.

In the Old Testament, the Passover was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread because it was said, when they left Egypt, they left in such a hurry they could not wait for the bread to rise. I believe there is significance in the timing of when this woman came to Jesus, so hang on to that thought.

Second, WHERE DID THIS STORY OCCUR?

It happened at the home of Simon the Leper. In Leviticus 13, the Old Testament required the lepers to shout out “Unclean! Unclean!” if anyone came near them. And in Luke 17, ten lepers called out to Jesus from a distance. They knew the rules. They had to stay at a distance, lest they pass on the dreaded disease to others.

And, here we have Jesus *reclining* at the table of Simon the Leper. Some believe he was a Pharisee who had contracted leprosy. This would have made his situation even worse, because the other Pharisees would have had nothing to do with him. What were the other Pharisees doing? They were outside, plotting against him. Sometimes sickness is not the worst thing ever. Simon’s leprosy was a blessing because Jesus loved the societal outcasts. It was a pretty safe place to be.

The timing of this story was no accident. The “when” I asked earlier in the message came at a time when emancipation was on the minds of the people—freedom from slavery, freedom from oppression, a time of breaking free from the shackles of slavery, and going into the unknown (leaving Egypt), which had to be better than staying oppressed.

This woman would have known the meaning of the yearly celebration: The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which really was a freedom celebration. Her gift to Jesus took careful saving and planning. It took a year’s worth of wages—whatever that must have been—and probably a year’s worth of a man’s wages. With a gift so precious, she wasn’t going to make a mistake. She wasn’t going to miss her opportunity. No doubt, she considered where and how she would find Jesus and cover him with this perfume. And, when she bought the alabaster jar of nard, she knew where Jesus was...at the home of Simon the Leper—a safe place for her to express herself. Or, so she thought.

But, let’s look a little deeper into the passage—

Third, HOW DID THIS STORY HAPPEN?

The scripture says she broke the jar. As I read about this, I tried to picture exactly what happened here. If she had hit the jar and shattered it, then the liquid would have been spilled. To seal alabaster jars, a cork-like item was put in the opening. Probably she snapped the neck of the jar.

And, how did she do it? She poured it out over Jesus. In this day, anointing someone with cologne was a symbol of appreciation or respect.

ILLUSTRATION: A woman I know in Nashville told me she helped some foreigners, and when she went into their home, they got perfume and rubbed it all over her hands.

The woman in the scripture didn’t care what anyone thought. The critics didn’t stop her.

APPLICATION: Remember this was just before Passover. Freedom was on her mind. She gave her best to the Savior. She didn’t come with discount cologne. It

wasn't something she bought at a flea market. And, the fact that it was sealed meant that it hadn't been opened yet.

1. Let me ask—are you bringing Jesus your best, or are you bringing him the leftovers? If you give, do you give with a grudge or out of joy? If you volunteer, do you count the cost beforehand, and are you fully prepared? Or, do you volunteer for everything and never follow through?
2. Let me ask another question—If you feel led of the Lord to do something, are you more concerned about what God thinks or about what people think? In this setting, the woman did not care what others thought.

ILLUSTRATION: Giving your best might be different than others. A few Sundays ago, I preached to you about the woman who gave two copper coins. Jesus recognized her gift as being sacrificial because it was all she had. There's another story about a boy who had some fish and some bread. He gave it, and Jesus multiplied it to feed thousands.

Fourth, WHAT ABOUT THE STATEMENT REGARDING THE POOR?

“... It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor...” (Mark 14:5).

That's an interesting statement and one we hear from time to time. I've even said it a few times. Yes, it's true the money could have been given to the poor. And, had that happened, we wouldn't have this story as an example.

ILLUSTRATION: I asked a friend of mine, Dr. John Killinger, about this question, and he was reminded of the time he went to Guatemala to speak with a group of pastors. He noticed how poor the people were. As he traveled to the town, he noticed people walking along the beat up highway. Most of them had bundles on their backs, and few had donkeys. They carried food, grain, and firewood, which they planned to sell for a few pesos.

When he got to the town, he saw the market square was laid out around a gorgeous cathedral. It was a very old and expensive church, and he made a comment to a local pastor that all the money which was used to build the church could have been given to the poor.

The pastor came to the defense of those who built the cathedral. The church reminded the poor of the grandeur of heaven. He said people's hearts were lifted up when they entered and worshipped. Yes, the money could have been given to the poor a long time ago, but then we would have no church today and the poor would still be with us.

You know we could sell our own property and give the money to the poor, and then there would be no church here, and the poor would still be with us.

FURTHER EXPLANATION: Jesus was not saying to not help the poor. He was telling the critics not to judge the woman for her beautiful, sacrificial gift. This woman knew Jesus was her Savior, and she honored him the best way she knew how.

Nard was a perfume that was used to prepare a body for burial, and in an act of worship, this woman was preparing Jesus for his death. She knew as the Savior, he would die for her sins, and in deep gratitude, she poured the nard onto him.

I believe the reason the critics said what they said was because they were caught off guard. Think about it—a woman showed them up! And, Jesus accepted her gift and rebuked them.

CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION: Let's pay attention to the words of Jesus:

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14:6 ⁶ *“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.”*

Let's not bother someone who is doing a beautiful thing for him!

Just like in the story of the poor widow who gave all she had, Jesus said wherever the Gospel is preached, this story would be told.

What offering do you have for Jesus today?

Notes and suggestions after preaching this message:

- Bring an alabaster jar to show people. In the US, you can find alabaster at rock shops and tourist areas.
- Ask people if they are saving in order to give a sacrificial gift to God.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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