

INTER- RUPTING JESUS

"BREAKING THE VESSEL"

Mark 14 | Sermon #5 in the Lenten Series "Interrupting Jesus"

April 7, 2017

GATHERING

1. What is the most valuable thing you own?
 2. What is the most valuable "thing" passed on to you by your parents, not a value or principle but an actual heirloom or inheritance?
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LOOKING AT THE TEXT

It is not always easy to put a time and place to the narratives in the gospels which is why different gospel writers often present material thematically. It is unusual for Mark to give the time and place of a scene which he does here. More specifically he tells us that the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away which would make it Wednesday of the last week of Jesus' life on earth. Jesus has been traveling in and out Jerusalem and is now reclining at the table of a man called Simon the (former) Leper in Bethany. But Mark does not begin the story there. First he reveals the plans of those who oppose Jesus. Then he shares the story of an unknown woman anointing Jesus. After which he returns to those who oppose Jesus. This technique of burying one story within another is common in Mark and it is a way of contrasting two themes. Look for the contrast.

One other note before we look at the text. This same story is recorded by two other gospel writers. It is in Matthew 26 and John 12. There is a story like this in Luke 7 but most think that is an entirely different episode.

Read Mark 14:1-9

1. Who does Mark identify as those opposing Jesus? What do they hope to do and why are they going to wait before moving against him?
2. Nard was an expensive perfume made from a root found in India. The text does not say that she opened the jar. What does it say and what does that mean?

3. Anointing the head with perfume is usually done for cosmetic reasons or celebration. Anointing with oil can be medicine or part of a religious ceremony. This was an extravagant action of devotion, but Jesus sees something else in it. What does he connect this to?
4. The reaction to this woman's act of devotion is mixed. How do the disciples react? What is their logic? In Mark's account we are not told anything more about the disciples' motives, but what might they have been feeling?
5. Read John 12:1-6. What does this tell us about the reaction? In what ways does this add to the contrast between the woman and the disciples? If pouring out this perfume is a waste, what does that say about Jesus?
6. Jesus sides with the woman against the disciples. We know Jesus cares about the poor so why does he rebuke the disciples? What words does he use to describe this woman's act?
7. Up to now, Mark has not mentioned Judas. What happens in verses 10-12? How might this be connected to the scene with the woman? How does Judas' offer change the leaders' plans?

APPLICATION

Most women could not work in a job that would allow them to make the money to purchase an alabaster jar of perfume. Most commentators think it was a family heirloom or an inheritance.

1. What monetary sacrifice did she make?
2. What family sacrifice did she make?
3. Let's assume for a moment that not all the disciples were as selfish as Judas. Was their logic about selling the perfume so bad? Is there anything inherently bad about that? If not, then what point was Jesus making?
4. This is what it all comes down to: what was so wonderfully beautiful about this woman's actions?
5. What would her devotion look like in our day?
6. How can we show spontaneous, heartfelt devotion to Jesus?