

Wasting Precious Ointment

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

A. Mark 14:3-9 - Being a Christian doesn't make much sense from a fiscal perspective.

B. A businessman was traveling in Korea. In a field by the side of the road was a young man pulling a rude plow while an old man held the handles. The businessman was amused and took a snapshot of the scene. "I suppose these people are very poor," he said to the missionary who was interpreter and guide to the group. He replied, "Those two men happen to be Christians. When their church was being built, they were eager to give something toward it, but they had no money. So they decided to sell their ox and give the proceeds to the church. This spring they are pulling the plow themselves." "The businessman was silent for some moments. Then he said, "That must have been a real sacrifice." "They did not call it that," said the missionary. "They thought themselves fortunate that they had an ox to sell."

C. "When God cannot get religious leaders to appreciate Christ, He will get harlots to do so" (H. C. Woodring).

D. Luke 7:36-50 - The sinful woman of Nain in the house of a Pharisee is not under discussion; it is another account often conflated with Mary's sacrifice

I. A WASTED SACRIFICE?

A. Mark 14:3-4; Matt. 26:7-9; John 12:4-6

1. 300 pence (denarii); a year's wages for a working man; \$35,000.00
2. Spikenard was produced from a rare plant that grew in India. It was very expensive, and many people saved for years to be able to provide this for their own funeral preparations.
3. Also called nard or muskroot, is a class of aromatic amber-colored essential oil derived from a flowering plant of the valerian family which grows in the Himalayas of Nepal, China, and India. The oil has been used over centuries as a perfume, a traditional medicine, or in religious ceremonies across a wide territory from India to Europe. (Wikipedia)

B. Two ancient eastern customs are involved in breaking the alabaster box, which would have been hand carved; a third is very likely the case

1. The first has to do with the breaking of glasses. When a distinguished person ate in a home, often the glass they had used was broken to prevent a lesser person from using it in the future.
2. The second custom had to do with burial rituals. After the body of the deceased had been washed and anointed, the box that had contained the embalming spices was broken and the fragments were buried with the departed
3. Such boxes were as valuable as the contents, and would often be sealed with a wax or soft clay seal that would have to be broken for the contents to be accessed

C. Mary gave all she had to Jesus

1. Paul describes his life similarly - 2Tim. 4:6

II. A WASTED SERVICE?

A. Jesus said she had done everything that was in her power - Mark 14:6-8

B. "Service without devotion is rootless; devotion without service is fruitless"
(Albert M. Wells, Jr.).

1. The legend is told of a desert wanderer who found a crystal spring of unsurpassed freshness. The water was so pure he decided to bring some to his king. Barely satisfying his own thirst, he filled a leather bottle with the clear liquid and carried it many days beneath the desert sun before he reached the palace. When he finally laid his offering at the feet of his sovereign, the water had become stale and rank due to the old container in which it had been stored. But the king would not let his faithful subject even imagine that it was unfit for use. He tasted it with expressions of gratitude and delight, and sent away the loyal heart filled with gladness. After he had gone, others sampled it and expressed their surprise that the king had even pretended to enjoy it. "Ah!" said he, "it was not the water I tasted, but the love that prompted the offering." Many times our service is marked by imperfections, but the Master looks at our hearts and says "It is good." (Bible Illustrator)

III. A WASTED SUBMISSION?

A. By kneeling to Him and anointing Him, she was declaring her faith in Him as the Messiah. She was publicly confessing Jesus Christ.

B. There were four classes of people anointed in those days:

1. Kings - 2Kings 9:3 - Elisha anointing Jehu son of Jehoshaphat as king
2. Priests - Ex. 29:7 - Moses anointing Aaron as high priest
3. Prophets - 1Kings 19:16 - Elijah anointing Elisha as prophet in his place
4. The dead - John 19:39-40; Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1 - Fragrant oils and spices brought by Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, the Galilean women to anoint the body of Jesus

C. Jesus is all of those things.

1. He is the King of Kings - Rev. 19:16
2. He is the Great High Priest - Heb. 3:1
3. He is the promised Prophet - Matt. 13:31
4. He was dead, but is alive forevermore - Rev. 1:18

D. "Let others sacrifice, serve, and submit; I can't afford to waste the ointment."

1. There is a story from the Middle East of four brothers who decided to have a feast. As wine was rather expensive, they concluded that each should bring an equal quantity and add it to the common supply. However, one of the brothers, thinking to escape the expense of such a contribution decided to bring water instead of wine. "It won't be noticed," he reasoned. But at the feast when the wine was poured out it wasn't wine at all. It was only water. Each of the four brothers had thought alike, "Let the others do it. Water is less expensive."

2. Everyone loves a servant, but no one wants to be one - Matt. 10:24-25

Conclusion:

A. What level of sacrifice, service, and submission must we offer the Lord?

1. William and Mary Tanner were crossing a railroad track some years ago when Mary's foot slipped and became wedged between the rail and a wooden

crosswalk. Frantically she tried to get loose as a train approached around the curve. Her husband desperately attempted to free her. As the express came closer with its brakes screeching, Mary realized it couldn't stop in time. "Leave me, Bill! Leave me!" she cried. Seeing his efforts were useless, he arose quickly and held her in his arms to protect her as much as possible. While bystanders shuddered in horror, the train thundered over them. It was reported that just before the engine hit them, they heard William cry, "I'll stay with you, Mary!"

2. Would you do that for the Lord?