

Holy Wednesday: Preparing Jesus for His Burial

Small Group Follow-up Study for Mark 14:1-11

RE-READ

[1] It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, [2] for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

[3] And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. [4] There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? [5] For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. [6] But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. [7] For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. [8] She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. [9] And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

[10] Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. [11] And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

RECAP

Nine times in the Gospel of Mark (3:20-35; 4:1-20; 5:21-43; 6:7-30; 11:12-21; 14:1-11; 14:17-31; 14:53-72; 15:40-16:8), Mark begins a story, introduces a second story, and then returns to and completes the first story. As James Edwards notes in his commentary, "Each sandwich unit consists of an A1-B-A2 sequence, with the B-component functioning as the theological key to the flanking halves." In other words, in our case, we need to look to the story of Jesus' anointing to help us make sense of what is going on around it.

If we take seriously what James Edwards says about the insertion containing the theological key to the flanking halves, I think we need to pay close attention to what Jesus says about what the woman has done: "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ... She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial." So, yes, while it is true that Jesus is likely chiding Judas and the others for their hypocrisy, that's not what's first and foremost on his mind. What's first and foremost on Jesus' mind is his impending death and he sees this extravagant anointing as preparation for his burial. That—I think—is the key. In both the bread and the meat of this sandwich we see people preparing Jesus for his burial.

In the meat, in the central story, we see Mary's sacrificial faith and tender devotion preparing Jesus for his burial. By contrast, in the flanking halves, in the bread, we see Judas' scheming betrayal and sell out of Jesus preparing our Lord for his burial. What's more, in both of these actions, I would argue we are meant to see God preparing his Son for burial so that he might serve as our perfect Passover lamb.

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise in your mind that you would like to discuss?
2. What do you know about the Passover from the Old Testament? What, if anything, should be made of the "coincidence" that Jesus' passion occurred at the time of the Passover?
3. Considering, again, what we say in our church covenant about giving—Because He is a lavish giver, I too shall be lavish and cheerful in the regular giving of myself and my resources to the financial support of the ministry, to the relief of the poor [and] to the spread of the Gospel at home and abroad—in what ways can we give sacrificially to honour the crucified Christ?
4. What grace is there for those, who like Judas, sell out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver or less?
5. Contrast Judas with the woman mentioned in verses 3-9. What do you notice?
6. Given our conversation tonight, what should we be praying for ourselves and for our church?