



10. The Woman the World Can Never Forget

There is a story in the Gospel of Mark that is so beautiful that it charms everyone willing to listen. Like a precious jewel displayed in an ugly clay pot, it is set between two of the worst stories ever told, as the cross of Jesus was set between two wicked thieves.

The first of the three stories tells how "the chief priests and scribes" decided to put Jesus to death. The third tells of the even more shameful deed of one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, selling himself to the devil in order to betray Jesus to death. And in between is this exquisite story about the lady we can never forget.

No other woman has ever performed a deed like hers. And Jesus bespoke for her act a special remembrance "wherever the gospel is preached all over the world" (Mark 14:9, GNB). That means it has to be an essential part of "the everlasting gospel" to be proclaimed by the three angels of Revelation 14. Therefore we must include in this series of lessons a special one about her! Although her story has shone with undimmed luster for nearly two thousand years, many people still do not know it.

All four of the Gospel writers tell about the incident, but each with different details. The full account emerges from the dust of ages like an ancient mosaic brightly tinted but freshly discovered.

This Lady Had Been a Basket Case

1. Read Mark 14:1-9. What gift did this woman bring to Jesus?

ANSWER: An _____ box of _____ of _____.... What was its monetary value? "_____ pence" (the Greek word is denarius, a silver coin equivalent to a man's wage for a day; see Matthew 20:2).

2. How highly did Jesus praise this woman? Mark 14:6,8.

ANSWER: "She hath wrought a _____ for me. ... She hath done _____ ... to anoint _____ for _____."

The Greek word for "good" work means fantastic, neat, super, exactly right. If someday Jesus can say of you and me that we have done what we could, that will be the highest praise possible. He commands us to tell Mary's story "wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world" (Mark 14:9; Matthew 26:13). There must be something in it that makes the gospel clear.

3. What kind of unexpected opposition did she meet? Mark 14:4,5.

ANSWER: "Some ... had _____ within themselves." Who were these mysterious "some"? Matthew 26:8: his _____. How does John 12:4, 5 pinpoint the source of this "indignation"? The man who started it was Judas. He had fooled the Eleven into thinking he was right in condemning this woman. They lacked spiritual discernment. They had no inkling of how bad he was, or how good she was! In these last days, we need better vision or discernment than they had at that time!

4. This woman who anointed Jesus and evoked such praise from Him, was somebody! What kind of shameful past did she have? Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2; John 12:3.

ANSWER: Her name: _____. She had been possessed of seven _____, a terrible condition of lostness.

The anointing "woman" of Matthew 26:7, Mark 14:3, and Luke 7:37 is the same person named in John 12:3 as "Mary." No Gospel writer would dare to tell the story of Jesus and not obey His command to include in his Gospel this story of her anointing.

Luke 7:37, 39 tells us that she "was a sinner," a tactful way of saying that she had lost her moral reputation (compare Matthew 21:31 and Luke 15:1, 2). With great delicacy Luke tells another part of the story (7:36-50), which reveals several astonishing facts: from his remark to himself, Simon the Pharisee discloses to us that he had private, intimate knowledge of Mary. And since Jesus clearly meant that he was the one ten times a worse sinner than she was, He indicated that Simon had originally been the one who seduced her and ruined her life.

Often when a self-respecting girl suffers such misfortune, she becomes a disheveled, psychological wreck. Mary could find no psychiatrist to help her. Feeling violated and polluted, she ran away in despair and took a nose-dive into an abyss of self-abandonment. Demons moved in to possess her heart and mind. This can happen to anyone who knows no hope, only despair.

Mary's Great Good Fortune in Meeting Jesus

5. Although she was lost in guilt, pollution, and despair, what did Jesus do for her? Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2.

ANSWER: He "cast out _____." When Jesus prayed for someone to be delivered from Satan's grasp, how did He pray? Hebrews 5:7: "With _____ and _____ unto him."

Not once or twice, but seven times Jesus poured out His soul in prayer for this devil-possessed wreck of humanity. Acquaintance with human nature would suggest that the seventh devil that was finally "cast out" was Mary's deep resentment against the man who had polluted her soul and wrecked her life. A woman who has suffered incest will naturally harbor deep resentment against the one who abused her, a bitterness which smolders beneath the surface of her conscious heart.

When that final root of hatred was eradicated, Mary's deliverance was complete. Many a person carries hidden scars of hateful resentment that only the voice of Jesus, "in strong crying and tears," can heal. Our appreciation of God's forgiving us makes possible our forgiving another who has deeply wronged us. Since Mary knew that her bitter heart at last was healed, she wanted somehow to say "Thank You."

6. Having heard Jesus mention His approaching death (which the disciples were too dull to hear), what bright idea came to her as a way to say "Thank You for saving my soul"? Mark 14:8.

ANSWER: To anoint His "_____ for _____." (a) What value of ointment or perfume did she buy? Verse 3: "_____." (b) How many silver coins did she spend for it? Verse 5: "Three _____." (c) How did she anoint Him? Verse 3, last part: She "_____ the _____, and _____ it on His head" (and feet, too; see Luke 7:38, 46; John 12:3). (d) What did she use to dry His feet in lieu of a towel? _____ of her _____.

No bargain-sale perfume was good enough for Mary's project, no ointment suitable for peasants or even nobles. This was fit for an emperor. Think of spending 300 silver coins for it--the wage of a working man for a year! Never mind; nothing was too valuable to be expended on the One who had saved her soul from hell.

She learned of Simon's dinner party and conceived a brilliant plan. If she waited until Jesus died, He would know nothing of her deep gratitude. Simon's guest list excluded her, but she would come uninvited and anoint Him there, herself not knowing the deep significance of her deed.

A pent-up fountain in Mary's soul suddenly gushed forth. The hot tears bathed the Savior's feet, and the "sinner" knelt to dry them with her long hair. Here was the most sublime deed ever performed by a repentant sinner, but the hard-hearted Judas and the dull Eleven failed to appreciate the sight.

7. Jesus praised this woman's deed to the skies! Mark 14:6-8. What reasons can be given for His apparently extravagant words about her?

He saw something His disciples were too blind to see:

(a) In the broken alabaster flask He saw an emblem of His body soon to be broken for us.

(b) In the precious ointment running to waste on the floor, He saw His blood shed sufficient to save all of earth's billions of sinners, when only a few would appreciate its value.

(c) In the unselfish motive that prompted Mary to her deed He saw a reflection of His own motive of love in coming to die for us. Her sole desire was to express gratitude for salvation from the hell which she had already known in part. So has Jesus redeemed us with no thought of reward for Himself. He "hath poured out His soul unto death," even the equivalent of the hopeless "second death" in His sacrifice for us (see Isaiah 53:12; Hebrews 2:9).

(d) In Mary's self-sacrifice in buying the most expensive ointment possible Jesus saw His giving all He had for us. A repentant sinner had anointed the soul of the Son of God to His cross.

(e) Her wild extravagance, pouring out its entire contents, even on His feet, touched Him. So must Jesus pour out a veritable Niagara-torrent of loving sacrifice, when only a cupful seems to have won human hearts. Yet the offering must be extravagant, for agape can give no less. He must sacrifice Himself for a world that wanted only to crucify Him.

Would We Agree With What Judas Iscariot Said?

8. What apparently noble purpose did Judas give as why he was angry with what Mary did? John 12:4, 5.

ANSWER: "Why was not this ... three hundred pence [silver coins] ... given to the _____?" How much of it would have gotten through to the poor? Verse 6: _____. Did the Eleven know of his thieving?

Judas's reasoning sounds logical, and apparently in harmony with Jesus' reminders to feed and clothe the poor. If we had been there, would we have joined the Eleven in saying a hearty "Amen!" or "Bravo!" to Judas's cold, dry-eyed, "righteous indignation"?

Are we also blind and hard-hearted? God's greatest problem may not be with the "publicans and the harlots" of today but with the professedly religious people who despise agape when they see it. The spiritual condition of modern "Laodicea" (Revelation 3:14-21) is like that of the Eleven who were blindly deceived by Judas. How often have Christ's professed followers lacked the "eye-salve" and had no more discernment than those disciples, within a few days of Calvary! And they were ordained ministers and apostles, leaders of the church!

Cold and Impenitent Simon - Jesus Loved Him Too!

9. What disease had struck Simon the Pharisee? Mark 14:3; Matthew 26:6.

ANSWER: _____. What did he conclude about Jesus? Luke 7:39: he thought He was not a _____.

Simon was one of the lepers whom the Savior had healed. This was his proud, dignified, Pharisee-like way of saying, "Thanks for healing me." But when he saw Jesus accept Mary's offering, he was glad he had not made a fool of himself by confessing Him to be the Messiah. If Mary had been troubled by "seven devils," Simon was worse off, for he was troubled with an eighth--pride and contempt for the faith which agape inspires.

10. In what kind and tactful way did Jesus reveal to Simon his true spiritual need? Read Luke 7:40-46:

ANSWER: He was the one who owed _____, rather than only _____.

11. What is the ratio between sin and forgiveness? Verse 47.

ANSWER: Those who have been forgiven for _____ sins, love _____; but those "to whom little is _____, _____ little."

Jesus' point is not that we must throw ourselves to the devil and commit "many sins" in order to learn to love as Mary loved (we might never find our way back from that hell!). We must realize that we are guilty of "many sins," that we are the one who owes 500 silver coins, not a mere 50. The sins of others would be our sins but for the grace of Christ. No one of us is innately better than anyone else. As Luther said, we are all made of the same dough. Only through the realism of contrition and humbleness of mind can we have that eighth devil cast out.

12. Theologians and preachers have long debated--what is the meaning of faith. What simple definition did Jesus give to it? Luke 7:50.

ANSWER: What _____ had was genuine faith--a heart-appreciation of the love of _____. Nothing less is worthy of the name, "faith,"

13. Are you truly thankful for what you have learned in your study of that precious Book, the Bible? _____.

"Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." 1 Peter 5:7 "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17

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