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She Did What She Could

Mark 14:1-9

You are one of the disciples of Jesus. You have just entered a home to enjoy a meal. Jesus, along with His followers had been invited by the owner. There are dozens of people at this meal. You take your place among the other disciples. Everyone at the table are men. Servants, both men and women, bring out the food and drink in the traditional order. This is not the first time you have been to one of these. Every time Jesus had been invited to a meal, the whole group of disciples joined Him, including you. Many times, there were groups of people outside the room or courtyard watching. **Everyone wanted to see Jesus.** All of a sudden, a woman walked into the room and went straight to Jesus. You could tell she was not one of the servants. This woman broke open a flask of spikenard, a very costly oil, and began to anoint Jesus. All four gospel writers include an account like this. Matthew (26:6-13) and Mark (14:3-9) repeat the same account. Luke (7:36-50) gives very different details, a different time and an unnamed place. It appears that what Luke records is a different event altogether. What John (12:1-8) records could be the same event as the one in Matthew and Mark, yet someone could argue that it was a separate event. Whether there was one, two, three or more of these events that happened where Jesus was anointed by a woman at a meal with a large gathering of people, I will leave it to you to decide. What is important are the lessons we are to learn.

In **Luke's account** Jesus and His disciples are at **Simon the Pharisee's house**. "*A woman in the city who was a sinner*" (7:37) came in weeping. She stood behind Jesus and washed His feet with her **tears**, wiped His feet with her **hair** and repeatedly **kissed** His feet. She then poured the fragrant oil on Jesus' feet. This woman is called a sinner because everyone in the city knew about her life. She was an outcast, filthy, not welcomed in the community by anyone. Simon the Pharisee confirmed this. He said if Jesus was a prophet, He "*would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner*" (7:39). Jesus took this opportunity to teach Simon the Pharisee an important lesson about His mission. Jesus told of a creditor who had two debtors. One debtor owed the man \$200,000. The other owed the man \$20,000. Both debtors were flat broke. They could not repay their debt. The creditor had compassion on them both and forgave all their debt. Then Jesus asked Simon, which debtor would love the compassionate creditor more? Simon the Pharisee was smart. He said that the one who was forgiven more would love more.

Jesus looked at the sinful woman and then at Simon the Pharisee. Then Jesus pointed out **Simon the Pharisee's sinful attitude**. Simon did not give Jesus any water to

wash His feet when He entered his house, yet this woman washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Simon did not greet Jesus with the customary kiss on the cheek, yet this woman continually kissed His feet. Simon did not give Jesus the customary oil to freshen up His forehead and face, yet this woman anointed His feet with a very expensive fragrant oil. Because she demonstrated her great love for Jesus with meaningful actions, Jesus forgave all her sins. Jesus turned to the woman and told her in front of everyone, “*Your sins are forgiven*” (7:48). “*Your faith has saved you. Go in peace*” (7:50). We are not told how the meal went after that. If Simon the Pharisee remained arrogant and prideful, it was probably a quiet meal if Jesus and His disciples decided to stay around. If Simon the Pharisee humbled himself and sought Jesus’ forgiveness, the meal would continue with joy and more interesting discussions.

Yes, the whole city knew this was a sinful woman. More important though, is this woman herself knew she was a sinner. **She also recognized that Jesus was the only righteous person on earth.** She demonstrated her love for Jesus in front of everyone, even before Jesus died for her sins and rose from the dead. Because of her great love for Jesus and her willingness to show it, she was completely forgiven. She left that room cleansed and whole. How sinful are you? How much forgiveness do you need? Your answers will be seen by Jesus in how much you love Him.

In **John’s gospel** this meal and event happened **six days before the Passover** (12:1). Jesus is in **Bethany** with Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. John writes, “*There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him*” (12:2). Where is “*there*” and who are “*they*”? If you did not have the gospels of Matthew and Mark to refer to, the answer would probably be, “*there*” is the home of Lazarus and “*they*” are the women in the house. When you read Matthew, Mark and John’s account together, you might think they are writing about the same event. Although Matthew and Mark place this meal at the home of Simon the leper and the time of the meal is closer to the Passover. Again, I will let you decide. I was not there. What is important are the lessons we learn.

John named the woman who anointed Jesus. It was Mary. Though there are many women named Mary, we assume she is the sister of Martha and Lazarus since they are both mentioned in this narrative. Mary used a pound of spikenard. She also anointed Jesus’ feet and wiped His feet with her hair. There is no tears mentioned here and no kissing of the feet here. John probably wants us to connect this anointing of Jesus’ feet with Jesus washing the disciples’ feet in the next chapter (13:1-17), showing the importance of loving one another. Do we love each other enough to wash each other’s smelly, dirty feet? I hope a little body odor does not prevent us

from doing the will of God. When Mary anointed Jesus' feet, "*the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil*" (12:3). John singles out **Judas Iscariot** who happened to be Simon's son as the one objecting to the extravagant use of the oil. Could Simon the leper, that Matthew and Mark mention also be the father of Judas Iscariot? We are not given these details to know the answer. Judas Iscariot asked, "*Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?*" This sounds like a very righteous statement, but John makes sure that we do not think too highly of Judas Iscariot. Judas was not concerned for the poor. He was concerned about his own greed. You see, Judas was the treasurer for Jesus and the disciples. That means he took care of their money box. He was also a thief. He helped himself to the funds in the money box. An additional three hundred denarii would go a long way if he could get his hands on it.

Jesus told Judas Iscariot to let Mary alone. Her act of anointing His feet was the right act of preparing Jesus for burial. No one was thinking that Jesus was going to die, especially Mary. **Jesus knew that He would die soon** and there would not be sufficient time after His death and before His resurrection for a proper anointing of His body. Mary did what she could. Her anointing of Jesus would be sufficient for His burial. Jesus concluded by saying, "*The poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always*" (12:8). There are always opportunities to help poor people because there are always poor people. They are never ending in this world. But when you have a onetime opportunity to help someone special, like Jesus, follow the Holy Spirit. **John specifically named Mary and Judas Iscariot** because he does not want us to miss their contrasting characters. Mary's action was selfless. Judas was selfish. Mary was loyal, especially after the way she acted at her brother's graveside before Jesus raised him from the dead (John 11:32-33). Judas was a thief. Mary was compassionate. Judas was bitter. Mary believed Jesus. Judas was full of doubt. Mary gave everything. Judas would lose everything.

Now for **Matthew and Mark**. In both, Jesus and His disciples are in **Bethany** at the home of **Simon the leper**. It is our assumption that Simon the leper has been cured of his leprosy, yet he is still known as Simon the leper. As Jesus "*sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. The she broke the flask and poured it on His head*" (Mark 14:3). Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah which both mean "the anointed one." In the past, kings were anointed with oil to show that they had been selected by God to rule their kingdom. This anointing of Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Mark is by an unnamed woman. Each time Jesus is anointed, it is done with spikenard, a very rare and expensive oil. Each time the man complained "*why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor*" (14:4-5). When we always

compare the cost of one action to the value of another action, whether we would do either or not, we may miss an opportunity to glorify God. Would the disciple actually give the full value of the spikenard to the poor if they were given it for their ministry? Once when the disciples had the opportunity to help the hungry, they complained of the cost. When a great multitude came to Jesus, Jesus asked Philip, *“Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”* (John 6:5). Philip responded, *“Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little”* (6:7). It is my guess that Jesus would not ask them to do something they did not have the money to do.

Jesus told those who were sharply criticizing this woman for anointing Him, *“Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial”* (14:6-8). Maybe this was done once. Maybe it was done twice. First His feet were anointed. Now Jesus’ head is anointed. How many times and in how many ways has Jesus told His disciples about His coming death and burial and they still did not get it. This woman, **she did what she could**. She did not consider the cost or she would not have done it. She just did what she could. Because she did what she could, Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her”* (14:9). And Matthew and Mark do not even give her name.

Do you know who does remember her name? Jesus does! Jesus knows her name. All that Jesus expected this woman to do was to do what she could. And she did not really understand the significance of what she did while she did it. Jesus sees the significance of everything people do. What He expects of us is to do what we can. Don’t wait to understand the significance of your actions before you do them. You may miss the opportunity. I do not think we can truly understand the significance of our actions this side of heaven. We are simply to do what we can. So, do it!

Questions to ask yourself:

God is leaning you to do something. What is it? What is keeping you from doing it?

Actions to take: Read and think on Proverbs 3:5-8 / Romans 12:2 / 1 Peter 4:2.

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