

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.

1. The Passover

Locate the description of the Passover and feast of unleavened bread in the Bible, and note its salient features. The lamb, the sacrifice, the blood – they all point to ... what?! I mean, whom?!

2. By stealth (v.1)

Consider the conniving hypocrisy and cowardly slyness with which the religious authorities behave. Aren't they dreadful?! But are we so completely innocent? Is there hypocrisy in our lives? What were the intentions of the religious leaders?

3. In the house of Simon the leper

Why do you think Mark sandwiches this account of Jesus' anointing in between v.1-2 and v.10-11? Note the similarity (what is it) between the latter short passages? Compare and contrast the motives of all the various players in v.1-11. What about our motives? For our ambitions? For our decisions? For our relationships?

4. A beautiful thing (v.6)

Why was the anointing of Jesus a beautiful thing? What 'beautiful thing' does Christ require of us? What does this mean in practice?

5. The poor (v.7)

Are you shocked by Jesus' apparent (?) disregard for the poor? Explain! What should our attitude be to the poor, and does it conflict with our attitude to Christ?

6. Anointed for burial (v.8)

Presumably the woman didn't have Jesus' burial in mind, but this is how Jesus interprets her anointing of him. Furthermore, she will be remembered always for this act of devotion (v.9). By his interpretation Jesus links devotion to himself with devotion to his death. This sounds completely bizarre to those who don't understand the gospel. Why is devotion to Christ equivalent to devotion to his death? And what is the connection between this, and the proclamation of the gospel (v.9)? How devoted are we to the proclamation of the gospel?