

# THE ALABASTER BOX

(Mary Reveals The Spirit of True Devotion)

Mark 14:1-9



- ◆ The Box of Mary
- ◆ The Burial of Jesus
- ◆ The Blessing of Participating

**"She has done what she could."** (Mark 14:8)

**Bill Kirk**

## **“THE ALABASTER BOX”**

**Text:** Mark 14:1-9

**Subject:** “The Spirit of True Devotion”

### **Introduction**

(Our text has an awesome setting in V. 1-3)

1. It was the week of Calvary and the time of Passover.
2. The Passover was the Jewish festival commemorating the time when the Lord protected the homes of the Hebrews (on the night when all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians were killed; Exodus 12:13,23,27)
3. In Verse 1, the Scripture says; “The scribes and priests sought how they might take Jesus and put Him to death.”
4. In Verse 2, “But they said, not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.”

### **In other words**

- ◆ For a long time the religious authorities had been looking for a way to get rid of Jesus.
- ◆ They have now intensified their efforts and must proceed with caution.
- ◆ The Passover Feast brought throngs of people to the Holy City.
- ◆ The chief priests and scribes (or teachers of the law) were two main bodies that made up the Sanhedrin (the Jewish high court).
- ◆ The Jewish high court (V. 2) thinks it too risky to arrest Jesus in the midst of the excitable crowd.
- ◆ Verse 2 says, “Lest there be an uproar (or a riot) of the people.”

### **Their plans miscarried badly**

1. One of Jesus’ disciples (Judas) offered unexpected help. (v.10)
2. The religious leaders changed their minds (and)
3. They decided to activate their evil scheme despite the presence of the crowd at Passover.

### **And then “The Spirit of True Devotion”**

(V.3) “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on His head.”

### **What a setting**

- ◆ It takes place in Bethany (where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead).
- ◆ It takes place in the house of Simon the Leper (during a dinner meal).
- ◆ It takes place with Mary (the sister of Martha and Lazarus).

## Question

**Ask:** Why did Mary break the alabaster box?

**Ask:** Why did Jesus commend Mary for what she did?

**Ask:** And, what does it have to do with me and my life today?

## This Morning – the Box, the Burial and the Blessing

### I. The Box of Mary

(V.3) "There came a woman with an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious; and she broke the box and pour it on His head."

**Question:** What was the alabaster box?

**Answer:** Vases or flasks for holding perfume were made at Alabastrom in Egypt.

- ◆ They were made out of stone from the mountains.
- ◆ They were used to contain the costly ointments.
- ◆ They were vessels with long necks that were broken off when the contents were poured out.

**Question:** What was in Mary's box or vase or flask?

**Answer:** (V. 3) "Ointment of spikenard".

**Question:** What was ointment of spikenard?

**Answer:** The "nard" (or perfume) was made from the root of a plant found in India.

- ◆ It was costly and often mixed with another common herb.
- ◆ It was the oil used by kings, one drop at a time.
- ◆ Because of the hot and dry climate, it was the custom to anoint the head with oil.
- ◆ The regular oil used for anointing the head cost only a mite (the smallest coin in circulation, about a penny).
- ◆ But the oil Mary used, was the oil used by the Kings.
- ◆ It cost 300 denarii per flask or bottle
- ◆ A denarii was the average pay for a day's work.
- ◆ Thus, the bottle of perfume Mary had was worth a whole year's wages.

**Fact:** Mary's act was one of extravagant love and true devotion!

**Question:** What was the reaction to Mary's expression?

**Answer:** The selfish and the stingy began to sneer and growl:

- ◆ The word "murmur" (ENEBOIMONTO) in verse 5 means three things:  
1. To growl                      2. To rebuke                      3. To scold

### **In other words, we discover**

- ◆ The hypocrite will always reveal themselves by the way they respond to the sacrifice of others:

"Who do they think they are?"

"Why do they waste something so expensive?"

"Why do they have to give that much?"

1. The selfish began to growl and scold (but)
2. Jesus began to commend and admire Mary.

(V.6) "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me."

(V. 7) "You'll always have the poor and needy among you."

(V. 8) "She has done what she could."

(V. 9) "Preach around the world and tell everyone in \_\_\_\_\_ this story."  
Your city & state

**Question:** Why does Jesus want this story to sink deep down into my spirit?

**Question:** What does Jesus want me to remember about Mary's love?

### **Four Secrets of Extravagant Love**

#### 1. Extravagant Love is "Individual" Devotion.

- ◆ Mary didn't send a servant; she came herself to minister to Jesus.
- ◆ Simon had a large house to entertain guests.
- ◆ Simon had servants and a servant would ordinarily do the anointing.
- ◆ Mary was not a servant, but one of the heads of the household.
- ◆ Yet Mary's love was not out of custom, tradition or duty, but out of love from the heart.
- ◆ It was personal (between Mary and Jesus). Mary didn't let someone else do her giving for her!

#### 2. Extravagant Love is "Public" Devotion.

- ◆ Mary anointed Jesus in the presence of the assembly.
- ◆ She wasn't ashamed to express her love in public.
- ◆ Mary declares her devotion in the open (without fear of reprisal).
- ◆ She gives in front of man, but not to be seen of man.

#### 3. Extravagant Love Is "Sacrificial" Devotion.

- ◆ Mary could have poured out a flask of the cheaper oil but she didn't.
- ◆ Instead, she pours out the bottle worth the wages from 300 days.
- ◆ Mary expresses her faith in the most meaningful way she can.
- ◆ She gives something tangible to show Jesus that He was deserving of all she had.
- ◆ No leftovers, no tips, no shallow go-through-the-motions stuff, but costly devotion poured out to Jesus.

4. Extravagant Love is “Remembered” Devotion.

- ◆ Jesus said, “What Mary has done will also be told, in memorial of her.” (V.9)
- ◆ A memorial is something to remind us of something.
- ◆ Jesus is saying here, “pure devotion from a heart of love, expressed in a tangible way will never be forgotten by Me.”

**What is Extravagant Love?**

- ◆ It is **individual** (personal) devotion.
- ◆ It is **public** devotion (without reservation).
- ◆ It is **sacrificial** (and costly).
- ◆ It is **remembered** (or noticed by the Lord).

**II. The Burial of Jesus**

**Question:** Why did Mary break her vase? What was the motive?

**Answer:** (V. 8) “She did what she could. She came to anoint my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.”

**The Key Phrase Is**

“She came to anoint my body for burial.”

**In Other Words**

1. The anointing of Jesus points towards His death and burial.
2. Mary has a sense that Jesus is soon to die.
3. She has a spiritual discernment just before the cross.
4. She wants Jesus to know that she understands:

- ◆ The Jews used spices and ointments to wrap up the bodies of their dead before their burial.
- ◆ And Mary teaches us an awesome lesson to live by. What is it?

#1. Opportunities to love, sacrifice, serve and give come and go (and once they are gone, they are gone for good...and)

#2. The poor will always be present for believers to help, but the privilege of ministering to Jesus will not always be available.

**In Other Words**

The box at the time of burial reveals something:

1. If Mary and the disciples are going to minister to Jesus, they must grasp the window of opportunity now, while Jesus is with them.
2. You and I must grasp the window of opportunity when opportunity presents itself to love, give and serve.

### Why?

- ◆ Because our opportunities to serve will pass.
- ◆ The privilege of life and health and activity will pass.
- ◆ Our days are numbered, and if Jesus tarries, one day opportunity will be gone.

### The burial of Jesus convicts me:

1. It tells me that now is the accepted time for no one is promised tomorrow.
2. It tells me that now is the window of opportunity to pour out my life.
3. It tells me that now is the day to seize upon and remember that I won't get a second chance to make up for a wasted life.
4. It tells me that now is the time to prove my faith by my works.

### III. The Blessing of the Story

(V.9) "Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

**Question:** Why did Jesus memorialize Mary's gift? (Three reasons)

1. To teach us that love and faith are revealed by sacrifice. (Repeat)
2. To teach us that Jesus will memorialize, or remember the faith of any believer who sacrifices for Him.
3. To teach us that it is in giving away that you truly receive.

### Jesus said:

"If you keep your life you'll lose it, but if you give away your life, you'll save it."  
(Luke 9:24)

The flesh nature wants to hold on to; the spiritual man wants to give.

**Illustration:** There is a bird in South America called the "Me-Me" bird. The only sound it makes is "Me-Me-Me-Me"

**Illustration:** Two bodies of water are fed by the same Jordan River; the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

- ◆ The Sea of Galilee is full of fish, life and vegetation.
- ◆ The Dead Sea is full of salt and is fruitless and lifeless. (How come?)
- ◆ Because Galilee gives what it receives while the Dead Sea keeps all that it gets.

**Illustration:** When you go to the beach and squeeze sand in your hand; the tighter you squeeze, the smaller the handful of sand becomes.

**Illustration:** The closed hand is the sign of a stingy person; the open hand is the sign of a giving person.

**Illustration:** Tighten your fist really tight and hold it. Now let it loose. **Ask:** Which one feels better? (Imagine your spirit the same way.)

**Illustration:** Look at a farmer with his hand in his pouch for seed to be sown.

- ◆ In order to sow seed, you must let go.
- ◆ If you refuse to sow, then nothing will grow.

### **Why do I want a Mary spirit?**

1. **Because giving destroys envy and covetousness.** (Philippians 2:13)  
 "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."  
 ◆ Selfishness is overcome by living with an open hand.
2. **Because giving brings blessings in abundance.** (Luke 6:38)  
 "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."  
 ◆ Our motive is love (not to get back). God said you reap after you sow.
3. **Because giving enlarges my heart with God.** (Matthew 6:21)  
 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."  
 ◆ Where I put my treasure, my affections will follow.
4. **Because giving proves God's mighty power.** (Malachi 3:8-10)  
 "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."  
 ◆ God blesses a giving spirit and promises to protect you from what would devour your resources.
5. **Because giving on earth bears fruit for eternity.** (Matthew 6:20)  
 "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."  
 ◆ We give what we cannot keep, and gain what we cannot lose.

### **What's the blessing that God has given us?**

- ◆ To participate with Him, follow His example, be willing to sacrifice and give with a joyful spirit!

### **Conclusion**

- ◆ The story is told of Jesus dying and going to heaven.
- ◆ A Seraphim asked Jesus, "What did you do before you returned to heaven?"
- ◆ Jesus responded, "I left all my work with 12 men and the church to follow."
- ◆ "I gave them my name, my power and my ministry."
- ◆ The Seraphim replied, "What if they don't do it?"
- ◆ Jesus replied, "I have no other plan."

Amen!  
Bill Kirk