

MARK 14:3-9 PUTTING JESUS FIRST

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as 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. ⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume?" ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. ⁶ "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

The religious leaders, the disciples, the people – no one anointed God's Anointed One except for this nameless woman. And for her efforts she was roundly criticized. "What a waste," they said. "At least that money should have been used to help the poor," they spiritualized. What they missed was the significance of both the One standing before them and the time to which they had come. The anointing had two meanings. First, it was the physical demonstration that Jesus was the Anointed One. Second, the last act of devotion given to a loved one by the family before his burial was to anoint his body. In this one act, the woman showed her recognition of Jesus' identity, proclaimed him to be the Anointed One (Messiah/Christ) and indicated the immediacy of his death. Her eyes were on Jesus.

In contrast, the eyes of the disciples were on the world. Does Jesus' rebuke mean that we are to ignore the poor and solely adore him? Obviously, the second half of the Great Commandment demands that we care for the poor, but we must remember that the context of our care must be found in the first half; love the Lord your God with all your heart, and mind and soul. Altruistic good works are to be performed in obedience to God and in the name of Jesus. In short, our good works must demonstrate to the world that Jesus is Lord and that God is loving and just. Good works in any other context only bring attention to the doer of the works. The proper ordering for the Christian life is God first, others second and me third.

**Lord Jesus, strengthen me so that I will always hold you first in my life.
May you be the motivation for and direction of all that I say, do and think.
Amen.**