

Life Group Questions

March 10th, 2024

A Misunderstood Anointing for Burial – Pastor Brody Loewen – **Mark 14:1-11**

Thank you for your dedication to lead the Life Group. **Please review the questions, selecting any you believe will be most helpful for your group and adapting as needed.** You don't need to go through everything. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your group so that your discussion will build everyone up to love God and each other more.

Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups,

We're now in our Easter series, going from Jesus' anointing in Mark 14 to Jesus' resurrection in Mark 16.

As a heads up, I know many Life Groups will be taking a break during spring break (March 18 to 29). For the week leading up to Easter (Passion Week), I'll be sharing a Lord's Supper activity instead of the regular questions.

As we prepare to celebrate Easter, I pray we can appreciate what Jesus has done for us *and* share the Good News with people around us. Keep praying for God to show you who He wants you to invite to our Easter services, too.

Also, it's Prayer Summit on Wednesday, Mar. 13. Please encourage your Life Group to come and join together to pray for the church family, the people of the city and the world.

For this sermon series, I'll be sharing the questions first with background and commentary afterward. There is always so much depth to God's Word and I can only share so much, but I hope what I do share can help you appreciate the Bible more!

Pastor Jonathan Hsieh
jhsieh@willingdon.org

Question List



1. Who honors Jesus and who doesn't? Why?



2. What did Jesus do for you?



3. What would it look like to lavishly give to Jesus?

Opening Question

When have you felt unappreciated? How did you feel?

I'm sure we've all felt unappreciated. We've all had bosses who didn't appreciate the effort we put into our work, so you get passed over for a raise. We've spent hours writing that paper only to be given a bad grade. Or we put thought and effort into a gift or gesture, only to be met with a super fake smile and an "Oh... thanks so muuuuuch." So many parents say to their children, "If you only knew how much I do for you!" And I'm sure lots of husbands and wives feel the same about their spouses.

At one church I worked at, there were many times I planned a hangout. It would be either at my home or church. I bought lots of snacks and drinks. I prepped activities like NERF guns, board games, and video games. I promoted it during service and sent so many messages. Some people said they would come, and I was excited. But when the night came nobody showed up! I sat alone at home or church just waiting. This actually happened a few times to me. It was so discouraging I cried. Why wouldn't anyone come? Am I unlikable?

It's incredibly demoralizing when we're unappreciated. You've probably had some of these thoughts:

- What a waste! I should have spent that time/money/effort on someone/something else!
- I'm so stupid. Why did I think they would ever like it? Ugh, when will I learn?
- Wow. That was terrible. You know what? Next time I'm not even going to try.
- Let's see how they like it when I give them a taste of their own medicine.
- I'm so done with this person/job. I want to go where I'm appreciated.

When have you felt appreciated? How did it feel?

I hope we've all felt appreciated before! I appreciate all of you being a part of our church's Life Group ministry. It wouldn't be the same without you!

Maybe someone tells us how much our efforts mattered to them. "You are a lifesaver! I couldn't have done it without you!" "Your workmanship is the best I've ever seen!" "I'm so thankful God brought you into my life!" "Your food was incredible! You perfectly blended pesto, alfredo, Bolognese, and bechamel into an ultra-sauce!"

Maybe some of these come to mind:

- I *do* have something to offer.
- I can't wait to for the next opportunity to do it again.
- I'm so relieved! I thought they wouldn't like it.
- Thank you, God, for giving me this ability and opportunity to help someone.

In this week's sermon, a woman goes out of her way to show appreciation to Jesus. At first, she's attacked by Jesus' disciples, but Jesus appreciates it a lot.

Questions



1. Who honors Jesus and who doesn't? Why?

Chief Priests and Scribes. The religious leaders should be preparing for one of the biggest celebrations of the year. Instead, they're planning to kill the Son of God. They accused Jesus of blaspheming (Mark 2:7). Blaspheming is from the Greek word βλασφημέω (blas-fay-meh-o), meaning "to speak in a disrespectful way that demeans, denigrates, maligns" (BDAG). If you disrespect or misrepresent God, you got yourself a blasphemy. The punishment for blasphemy is public stoning (Leviticus 24:13-16). They didn't hesitate to stone Stephen (Acts 8:54-60), but since Jesus was popular, they wanted to do it "by stealth." They're more worried about "**an uproar from the people**" than God.

Simon the Leper. We know a few times Jesus was invited over for a meal. Thrice He was invited by a Pharisee, but it seems they wanted to find fault with Him (Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-40; 14:1-6).

On the other hand, Simon is one of the people who seems to want to spend time with Jesus. Two others include Matthew/Levi the tax collector who invited lots of other people to meet Jesus (Mark 2:13-17) and Jesus inviting Himself to Zacchaeus' house which changed Zacchaeus' life (Luke 19:1-10).

If Simon is like Levi and Zacchaeus, he wants to honor Jesus out of gratitude.

The Woman. Check out "**The Anointing**" in the Background and Commentary to get a better understanding of what she did.

We don't know her motivation, but if she's like the other women who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8), she's grateful for what Jesus did. Jesus raised Mary's brother from the dead and forgave the "sinful" woman, probably a prostitute. Mary couldn't resurrect her brother and the "sinful" woman couldn't clean herself from her sins. Jesus did something for them that (A) they desperately needed and that (B) nobody else could do for them.

Whatever He did for her meant so much that she spent a year's salary to say thanks! And she didn't give it to Jesus because she was commanded. She decided on her own to go all out.

I bet Jesus must have had a smile on His face because He called her gift a "**beautiful thing for me**", acknowledged she "**has done what she could**", and said her story will be proclaimed alongside the good news about Jesus.

Some (disciples). (Matthew 26:8) They insult the woman's gesture. Imagine spending a year's salary to honor Jesus, only for His crew to say you've **wasted** your money and then **scold** you? Ouch!!!!

They've messed up. **First**, they didn't think about the woman's motivation. True, she could have given money to the poor, but her focus was Jesus. **Second**, they didn't think about Jesus. Their action would make sense if Jesus said, "Hey lady, this is stupid. You should have given money to the poor!" But Jesus enjoyed being anointed. If they loved God, they would understand what He wants. **Third**, they were total jerks. She wasn't trying to mess with Jesus. Even if her actions were misguided, they should have redirected her with compassion and love (Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

It may seem they had a good motive, especially since people were taught to be generous to the poor during Passover (Mishnah Pesachim, 10.1), but their actions neither loved God nor loved people. They were focused on their idea of what ministry should be.

Judas. He only pretended to care about the poor. He embezzled from the funds (John 12:6). Perhaps he realized being a disciple wasn't sufficiently lucrative, so he found another way to profit off Jesus. First-time readers of the Bible should already see where things are going. The religious leaders are looking for a way to secretly arrest and kill Jesus. Now Judas is helping them find a way to make it happen.

♥ 2. What did Jesus do for you?

What strikes me is that nobody told her to do this. No Bible verse says, "Go empty your savings to buy perfume to dump on Jesus' head." She must have thought, "I'm so thankful for Jesus. What is something I can do to show Him my appreciation?" Whatever Jesus did for her, she was overflowing with gratitude.

I think we can learn a little by looking at other women who also bought expensive perfume to anoint Jesus.

One was a "sinner", possibly a prostitute. She washed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped with her hair, then kissed and anointed them (Luke 7:36-38) because Jesus forgave her sins. She couldn't help but love Jesus however she could (Luke 7:47-48). Jesus' forgiveness meant more than money or her dignity.

The other woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. She "anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair" (John 12:3), because Jesus raised her brother from the dead (John 12:1). Jesus gave her brother life, so giving him a year's salary of perfume was nothing in comparison.

Think of what Jesus has done for you.

God is righteous and holy, but we have all rebelled against Him and deserve punishment (Romans 6:23). We couldn't save ourselves or do good to make up for our evil. But Jesus still loved us so much that He took on our punishment by dying on the cross (Romans 5:6-8). Jesus takes our guilt and gives us His innocence, so we won't be punished. He gives us the right to be children of God (John 1:12). He gives us the Holy Spirit who does a ton for us (<https://www.gotquestions.org/what-does-the-Holy-Spirit-do.html>). He gives us eternal life (John 17:1-3). He gives us the community of believers to love, encourage, and support one another. And eventually, Jesus will take us to be with Him forever (John 14:1-3). That's a lot! And this list isn't even exhaustive.

What's something Jesus has done that you appreciate?

🤝 3. What would it look like to lavishly give to Jesus?

This time while reading the passage, one line stood out: "She has done what she could". Her ridiculously expensive gift was what she could give. Earlier in Mark, Jesus praises a woman who gives "two small copper coins, which make a penny" (Mark 12:42). But to Jesus, she's "put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box" (Mark 12:43) because she gave all she could.

We see this pattern all over the Bible. King Solomon sacrificed 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep (2 Chronicles 7:5) while a widow gave a small flour cake (1 Kings 17:13-15). God accepted both.

Let others inspire you... Something I love about being with other Christians is just seeing the ways people give to God. Use the money God gave you to fund ministries in the church or take a lonely person out for lunch. Use sports to share the Gospel on the court. Use your artistic skills to create poems, paintings, or photos to tell others about God's goodness. Open your home to welcome neighbors or host groups. Apply your trade doing pro-bono work for people in need. Serve in children's

ministry, parking duty, or welcome center (<https://willingdon.org/stories/serving-at-willingdon/>). Welcome people during Sunday service or in the café. Contribute to whatever ministry you participate in, whether it's UNITE, New Horizons, International Language Ministries, or Life Group.

If you're stumped, you can ask others in your Life Group to let you know how God has equipped you.

...but don't compare! Inspiring is good, comparison is bad. Sometimes we may be tempted to look at others and think we could never do what they do, so our contribution doesn't matter or that Jesus appreciates it less. Or we see many people *not* serving or giving so we think we don't need to, either. Be like the woman in the story. Do what you can. Do what God has prepared you for (Matthew 25:14-30).

Don't worry too much about results. The woman unknowingly took a step to prepare Jesus for His looming execution and Jesus appreciated it. The Bible is filled with people who served God without realizing the true meaning of their actions.

Background and Commentary

Passover

Origin. The Passover celebrated God delivering the Israelites from Egypt.

God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, but Pharaoh refused. In response, God sent 10 plagues against the Egyptians. For the last one, God threatened "every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle" (Exodus 11:4-5).

Before God killed the firstborn, He told the Israelites how to be safe (Exodus 12). They needed to prepare a lamb without defect in a specific way for a meal. "Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it ... The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt." (Exodus 12:7, 13). Instead of God killing the Israelites' firstborn sons, an innocent lamb died instead.

Every year the Israelites recreated this event to remember what God did.

Foreshadowing and Fulfilment. Although the Israelites didn't know, the Passover looked forward to Jesus. They sacrificed a lamb to save their firstborn sons from God's punishment for the Egyptians. God sacrificed His Son to save us from God's punishment for our sins.

Paul writes that "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). John the Baptist called Jesus the lamb of God (John 1:29) without defect (1 Peter 1:19). When John sees Jesus, he sees "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Revelation 5:6). Jesus' blood frees us from eternal death (Romans 6:23) and sets us free from slavery to sin (Romans 8:2).

Instead of celebrating Passover, Christians have the Lord's Supper to celebrate Jesus' sacrifice to save His people from sin (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Excitement. There were three festivals when Jewish people were supposed to go to Jerusalem.

Exodus 23:14–17

“Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days ... for in it you came out of Egypt. ... You shall keep the **Feast of Harvest**, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the **Feast of Ingathering** at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD.

The Meal

Jesus and his crew are at **Simon the leper’s house**. Leprosy is a medical condition caused by Mycobacterium leprae, but back then it was a catch-all term for skin diseases. God commanded that people with skin diseases had to stay away from others.

Leviticus 13:45–46

“The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

It sounds cruel, but skin diseases are contagious and could easily lead to an outbreak. Without antibiotics or bacta tanks, an entire village or city could be left disfigured, paralyzed, or dead.

Since Simon invited Jesus to his home, Jesus probably Jesus healed Simon.

When we think of Jesus eating, we often think Da Vinci’s Last Supper. The KJV says Jesus “sat at meat.” The word is κατάκειμαι (kat-ak-i-mahee), which would be a fun thing to yell to summon your family to dinner. It means “to **recline** (on a couch) for the purpose of dining, recline for a meal, dine” (BDAG).



The Mishnah states “Even the poorest of Jews should not eat the meal on Passover night until he **reclines on his left side**, as free and wealthy people recline when they eat.” (Mishnah Pesachim 10.1).

Jesus could easily wash His disciples’ feet because they were sticking out (John 13). I remember reading about the disciple who “lying on Jesus’ breast saith until him, Lord, who is it?” (John 13:25, KJV). I had a hard time picturing a guy sitting in a chair next to Jesus, bending over and putting his head on Jesus’ chest to ask a question. But if they’re lying down next to each other, that makes sense.

The Anointing

Although pouring stuff on heads seems weird outside a youth event, it was customary (Luke 7:46).

‘You anoint my head’: what does Psalm 23 tell us about welcome? <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/bible-articles/you-anoint-my-head-what-does-psalm-23-tell-us-about-welcome>

Anointing someone's head with oil in Bible times was a courtesy, refreshing them after a hot and dusty walk. The oil would have been perfumed with fragrant herbs and spices. It was a sign of welcome and respect. Anointing wouldn't have been a routine thing, practised when a neighbour popped round for a chat or to borrow some flour. It was for formal occasions, like a gathering of elders or teachers – or a banquet. It was a way of saying, ‘We are honoured by your presence here.’

In Psalm 23, David wrote: “You prepare a table before me ... you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows” (Psalm 23:5).

What stands out is that the host isn’t anointing Jesus, but the woman.

The woman brings an **alabaster flask**. What’s alabaster? “Chemically, alabaster is a crystalline calcium carbonate or calcite.” (The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land). It’s a type of soft stone, popular for carving into containers or used for architecture. Check out this alabastron from the National Museums Liverpool (<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/artifact/alabastron-perfume-vase-57>). Pliny the Elder wrote, “Unguent keep best in boxes of alabaster” (*The Natural History*, XIII.3.19).

The bride in Song of Solomon describes her lover “His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. His legs are **alabaster** columns, set on bases of gold...” (Song of Solomon 5:14-15). Guys, set your leg day goal to “alabaster.”

The container’s filled with **pure nard**. Nard is also referenced in Song of Solomon (1:12; 4:13). Pliny the Elder wrote that nard “holds the principle place among our unguents” and “has a musty smell, too, very much like that of the Cyperus, with a sharp, acrid taste” (*The Natural History* XII.26). Mark notes this is pure because nard could be mixed with “pseudo-nard, which is found growing everywhere” (*The Natural History* XII.26). This woman brings Jesus the best of the best.

When I think of fancy perfumes, I think of something like Chanel No 5, going at \$330 for a 200 ml bottle (<https://www.thebay.com/product/chanel-eau-de-parfum-spray-0600001369123.html>). The woman’s perfume was worth more than **300 denarii**. One denarius was a day’s wages for the average laborer. Jewish people took Sabbaths off, so 300 denarii was roughly a year’s wages. Minimum wage in BC is \$16.75. Working 40 hours a week for 50 weeks earns about \$33,500. Imagine a bottle of perfume that costs over \$30,000! A teen boy could buy over 4,000 cans of Axe Body Spray, enough for one school year.

The woman **broke the flask**, so she can’t give some to Jesus and take the rest home. These jars, “when used for anointing the dead, were often purposely broken and left in the tomb.” (Stein, *Mark*).

When Mary anointed Jesus, she took almost ¾ pound of perfume worth over 300 denarii. Likely this woman brought a similar amount. I bet people on the street could smell the nard.

The Response

Some disciples (Matthew 26:8) ask why **was ointment wasted like that** and **scolded her**.

God commanded His people to be generous to the poor.

Deuteronomy 15:11

For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’

Not just open your hand, but open *wide* your hand. Rabbis taught to be extra generous during Passover.

Michnah Pesachim 10.1

And the distributors of charity should not give a poor person less than four cups of wine for the Festival meal of Passover night. And this halakha applies even if the poor person is one of the poorest members of society and receives his food from the charity plate.

And Jesus often ministers to the poor. He preaches good news to the poor (Matthew 11:5). He heals the sick, paralyzed, blind, deaf, mute, and leprous who were usually poor because they couldn't work. He tells people to invite the poor to their banquets (Luke 14:12-14) and a rich man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor (Mark 10:21).

In a way, it makes sense the disciples would be concerned about doing something to serve the poor.

It must have been very discouraging for the woman. Imagine putting yourself in possible financial risk to show appreciation to Jesus, only to have His disciples tell you you're wrong.

The Greek word for scolded is ἐμβριμάομαι (em-brim-ah'-om-ahee), meaning "As an expr. of anger and displeasure in" and "scold, censure" (BDAG). I can imagine them getting up and surrounding her, waving their arms as they angrily mansplain how she should have used her money.

Jesus told them to **leave her alone**. The Greek word for trouble is κόπος (kop-os), meaning "a state of discomfort or distress, trouble, difficulty, a transferred sense of κόπος='beating'" (BDAG). They're emotionally beating her up! I picture her smile turning into fear.

He asks why they **trouble her**. Their actions make sense to them, but not to Jesus. There's some wordplay here. They "kop-os" her, but what she did was καλός (kal-os), meaning "pert. to being in accordance at a high level w. the purpose of someth. or someone, good, useful" (BDAG). They thought she **wasted** the perfume, but her action was beautiful. It was perfect and Jesus loved it.

The disciples didn't know they **will not always have** Jesus. Jesus would soon be betrayed, arrested, and executed. When Jesus is physically gone, they can't enjoy Jesus' bodily presence. Then they can bless Jesus by serving the poor (Matthew 25:31-46). But now is still time to enjoy Him (Mark 2:18-20).

Jesus acknowledges the woman's **done what she could**. Her service is proportionate to her ability. She's not being compared to anyone else.

People **anointed** bodies **for burial**. Chances are the woman doesn't realize Jesus is dying soon, but Jesus knows (Mark 10:32-34). Since Jesus knows what's coming, He appreciates it at an even deeper level than the woman understands.

Choose Your Next Step

What next step will you commit to for the upcoming week (and beyond)?

Closing Prayer

A closing prayer is an effective way to point people back to our Loving Father as they seek to apply their new learnings throughout the week. Ask group members to share what they sense God calling them to. Pray for each other and commit to continue to do so during the week as people step out in obedience to God's leading.