

Mark: 14:3–9

From Catena Aurea:

3. And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.

4. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

5. For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

6. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.

7. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

8. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.

9. Verily I say unto, Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

THEOPHYLACT. But although the four Evangelists record the anointing by a woman, there were two women and not one; one described by John, the sister of Lazarus; it was she who six days before the Passover anointed the feet of Jesus; another described by the other three Evangelists. Nay, if you examine, you will find three; for one is described by John, another by Luke, a third by the other two. For that one described by Luke is said to be a sinner and to have come to Jesus during the time of His preaching; but this other described by Matthew and Mark is said to have come at the time of the Passion, nor did she confess that she had been a sinner.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Evan. ii. 79) I however think that nothing else can be meant, but that the sinner who then came to the feet of Jesus was no other than the same Mary who did this twice; once, as Luke relates it, when coming for the first time with humility and tears she merited the remission of her sins. For John also relates this, when he began to speak of the raising of Lazarus before He came to Bethany, saying, It

was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. (John 11:2) But what she again did at Bethany is another act, unrecorded by Luke, but mentioned in the same way by the other three Evangelists. In that therefore Matthew and Mark say that the head of the Lord was anointed by the woman, whilst John says the feet, we must understand that both the head and the feet were anointed by the woman. Unless because Mark has said that she broke the box in order to anoint His head, any one is so fond of cavilling as to deny that, because the box was broken, any could remain to anoint the feet of the Lord. But a man of a more pious spirit will contend that it was not broken so as to pour out the whole, or else that the feet were anointed before it was broken, so that there remained in the unbroken box enough to anoint the head.

THEOPHYLACT. Or as is said in Greek, of pistis nard, that is, faithful, because the ointment of the nard was made faithfully and without counterfeit. (Matt. 26:2)

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Evan. ii. 78) It may appear to be a contradiction, that Matthew and Mark after mentioning two days and the Passover, (John 12:1) add afterwards that Jesus was in Bethany, where that precious ointment is mentioned; whilst John, just before he speaks of the anointing, says, that Jesus came into Bethany six days before the feast. But those persons who are troubled by this, are not aware that Matthew and Mark do not place that anointing in Bethany immediately after that two days of which he foretold, but by way of recapitulation at the time when there were yet six days to the Passover.

THEOPHYLACT. Or else, it appears to be aptly implied that many disciples murmured against the woman, because they had often heard our Lord talking of alms. Judas, however, was indignant, but not with the same feeling, but on account of his love of money, and filthy gain; wherefore John also records him alone, as accusing the woman with a fraudulent intent. But he says, They murmured against her, meaning that they troubled her with reproaches, and hard words. Then our Lord reproves His disciples, for throwing obstacles against the wish of the woman. Wherefore it goes on: And Jesus said, Let her alone, why trouble ye her? For after she had brought her gift, they wished to prevent her purpose by their reproaches.

ORIGEN. (in Matt. 35.) For they were grieved at the waste of the ointment, which might be sold for a large sum and given to the poor. This however ought not to have been, for it was right that it should be poured over the head of Christ, with a holy and fitting stream; wherefore it goes on, She hath wrought a good work on me. And so effectual is the praise of this good work, that it ought to excite all of us to fill the head of the Lord with sweet smelling and rich offerings, that of us it may be said that we have done a good work over the head of the Lord. For we always have with us, as long as we remain in this life, the poor

who have need of the care of those who have made progress in the word, and are enriched in the wisdom of God; they are not however able always day and night to have with them the Son of God, that is, the Word and Wisdom of God. For it goes on: For ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good; but me ye have not always.

THEOPHYLACT. For she is come aforehand as though led by God to anoint my body, as a sign of my approaching burial; by which He confounds the traitor, as if He said, With what conscience canst thou confound the woman, who anoints my body to the burial, and dost not confound thyself, who wilt deliver me to death? But the Lord makes a double prophecy; one that the Gospel shall be preached over the whole world, another that the deed of the woman shall be praised. Wherefore it goes on: Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

14:3a A Woman Came with an Alabaster Jar of Ointment

14:3b Of Pure Nard, Very Costly

Why Nard?

Jerome: This woman is outside the temple and carries with her a jar of ointment containing nard, genuine nard, from which she has prepared the ointment. This is why the faithful are called “genuine” or pure nard. The church, gathered from the nations, is offering the Savior the abounding faith of believers. The alabaster jar which had been sealed is broken that all may receive its perfume. Homilies of Saint Jerome, Homily 84.

14:3c She Broke the Jar

Without Breaking, the Fragrance Is Held Within.

Jerome: Just as the grain of wheat, unless it falls into the ground and dies, does not bring forth any fruit, so, also, unless the alabaster jar be broken, we cannot spread its fragrance. Homilies of St. Jerome, Homily 84.

14:3d She Poured It Over His Head

Baptismal Anointing Anticipated.

Jerome: This woman has a very special message for you who are about to be baptized. She broke her alabaster jar that Christ may make you “christs,” his anointed. Hear what it says in the Cantic of Canticles: “Your name spoken is a spreading perfume, therefore the maidens love you. We will follow you eagerly in the fragrance of your perfume!” Homilies of St. Jerome, Homily 84.

14:4 Why Wasted?

Sharing the Perfume with the Whole World.

Jerome: To him [Judas], it seemed to be wasting the ointment because the jar is broken, but, for us, it was a great good because the perfume spread throughout the world. Why are you indignant, Judas, because the alabaster jar is broken? God, who made you and all the nations, is blessing us with that precious perfume. You wanted to keep the perfume sealed up so that it would not reach others. Homilies of Saint Jerome, Homily 84.

14:5 It Might Have Been Sold and Given to the Poor

In Defense of the Poor.

Origen: The traitor Judas, who in appearance championed the cause of the poor, said with indignation, “This ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” But in reality he “was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it.” If, then, any one in our time who has the money box of the church speaks like Judas as if speaking for the

poor, but steals what is placed there, let there be assigned to him the same portion along with Judas.
Commentary on Matthew 11.9.

14:6 A Beautiful Thing

Between Beauty and Need.

Jerome: When the apostles pleaded that the ointment was being wasted, they were rebuked by the voice of the Lord. Christ did not need the ointment, nor do martyrs need the light of candles. Yet that woman freely poured out the ointment in honor of Christ, and her heart's devotion was accepted.... Hence throughout the whole Eastern Church, even when there are no relics of the martyrs, whenever the gospel is to be read the candles are lighted although the dawn may be reddening the sky, not of course to scatter the darkness, but by way of evidencing our joy. Against Vigilantius 7.

14:7 You Always Have the Poor with You, and Whenever You Will, You Can Do Good to Them

14:8 Anointed My Body Beforehand for Burying

14:9 In Memory of Her

Who Remembers Her?

Chrysostom: The Persians, the Indians, Scythians, Thracians, Samaritians, the race of the Moors and the inhabitants of the British isles celebrate a deed, performed in a private family in Judea by a woman who had been a sinner. The Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 80.2.