

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 14:1-11

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week we'll be reading Mark chapter 14, and today we'll read from verse 1 to verse 11.

Mark 14 records Jesus and His disciples eating the Passover feast, then proceeding to the Garden of Gethsemane. There, Jesus prayed fervently, knowing He would be betrayed by Judas and arrested by the Jewish chief priests, scribes, and elders. This entire event took place during the week of Passover. The establishment of Passover is recorded in Exodus 12:1-13, where they select a lamb on the tenth day of the first month and slaughter it on the evening of the fourteenth day, smearing its blood on the doorposts and the lintel of the houses. That night, the Israelites ate the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

According to the typology, Jesus is the Passover Lamb and had to be crucified on the day of Passover which is the fourteenth day of the first month, fulfilling the redemption. After the establishment of Passover in Exodus, each year's date was determined by the Jewish priests through the observation of the lunar cycle and the testimony of two witnesses presented to the council of Jewish priests. Following this method, during the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry, that year's Passover fell on a Friday. On the tenth day of the first month, which was Monday, they selected the lamb. According to the Gospel of Mark, it was on that Monday of that week that Jesus cleansed the temple. It was on that day that Jesus was chosen as the Passover Lamb. According to the typology, Jesus had to be crucified on the fourteenth day, a Friday.

This presents a challenge: if Jesus is the Passover Lamb, how did He eat the Passover meal with His disciples? This question troubled me for many years. With the help of Brother Christian Chen, I found a satisfactory answer, and this answer happens to fall on a pair of seemingly contradictory verses on the surface, namely the date

when Mary anointed the Lord with fragrant oil. Before delving into today's passage, let's address this issue.

The anointing of Jesus by Mary is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and John. Matthew's account does not provide a date, but Mark 14:1 tells us it occurred two days before Passover. However, John 12:1-11 places it six days before Passover. This discrepancy is apparent: was Mary's anointing two days before or six days before Passover? If we believe that the Bible does not err, the Holy Spirit must have arranged it in such a way for a special purpose. It is precisely because of this apparent contradiction that some earnest scholars are prompted to delve deeper into why there are such different accounts.

John wrote his Gospel around AD 90, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. By then, the Jews had been scattered among the nations, and the Jewish council and synagogue no longer pose difficulties for the church. Therefore, John used the Passover established by the traditional Jewish calendar. In AD 30, this fell on a Friday. So, the day Mary anointed Jesus was six days before the Passover, counting back, it falls exactly on a Sunday. That day was also when Jesus had just come to Bethany from Jericho, and while Jesus was feasting in Bethany, Mary seized the opportunity to anoint Him with the fragrant oil.

Conversely, Mark was written at least thirty years earlier, around AD 60. At that time, the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees were still active and often caused trouble for the church. Among the Jews, there were the Essenes, a devout group whose lifestyle and conduct scholars did not appreciate until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran in 1947. The Essenes strictly adhered to God's word and were dissatisfied with the corruption in the priesthood, thus distancing themselves from the practices of the priests. They followed a different Passover from the Jewish establishment, based on the solar calendar, which had 52 weeks or 364 days. According to Genesis 1, they considered the first day, when God said, "Let there be light," as Sunday. On the fourth day, God set the luminaries in the heavens to divide the day from the night and to establish seasons; they therefore designated the fourth day as the beginning of the year. If the first day is Sunday, then the fourth day is Wednesday. In their calendar, a year consists of exactly 52 weeks, so the first

day of the year always falls on a Wednesday, and the fourteenth day of the first month falls precisely on a Tuesday. Many of Jesus' disciples were Essenes, so Jesus chose the Essene Passover, which falls on Tuesday, to share the Passover feast with His disciples. Therefore, Mark records the Essene Passover, which is on Tuesday. Thus, in the Gospel of Mark, it is mentioned that it was two days before the Passover, which happens to be on Sunday, when Mary anointed Jesus with oil.

With this explanation, Mark's and John's accounts align perfectly. One records the traditional Passover, the other the Essene Passover. This not only resolves the apparent contradiction in the text but also reconciles the challenge of Jesus being the Passover Lamb. Jesus observed the Essene Passover with His disciples before the traditional Passover, setting up the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal, from which our Sunday communion tradition originates. With this understanding, let's now read Mark 14:1.

Verse 1: "After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death."

As we discussed, according to Mark's Gospel, the Passover should have been on a Tuesday that week, according to the calendar of the Essenes, with the fourteenth day of their first month falling on a Tuesday. Following the Passover, there is a week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread, during which the Jews eat unleavened bread for seven consecutive days. Leaven in the Bible symbolizes sin, and seven is a complete number, signifying a lifetime of striving for a sinless existence. Of course, humans cannot achieve this, but Jesus Christ, as the Passover Lamb, has already borne the punishment for our sins. Thus, if we acknowledge our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Here we see the chief priests and scribes plotting during this holy period to arrest and even kill Jesus.

Verse 2: "But they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people.'"

During the Passover, many Jews from all over the world would gather in Jerusalem, causing the population of Jerusalem to swell significantly. Historian Josephus estimated that at least three million people came to Jerusalem for the feast. With so many Jews congregating, Roman authorities feared that they might unite in rebellion against Roman rule, so they intensified their control over the Jews during this time. The chief priests, in collusion with Roman authorities to enjoy privileges, were also afraid that arresting Jesus during this period would incite a riot among the people because the fame of Jesus' preaching, casting out demons, and healing diseases had already spread throughout Judea. If they openly arrested Jesus, it would undoubtedly lead to a popular uprising. Although human calculations suggested not killing Jesus during the feast, God's decree was for Jesus to become the Passover Lamb during the Passover and be crucified during this festival, completing the redemption. Ultimately, we see that God's will must be fulfilled.

Verse 3: "And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head."

Two days before the Passover, on Sunday, Jesus came from Jericho to Bethany and sat at the table in the house of Simon the leper. Simon, who had been cleansed by Jesus, held a banquet at home to express his gratitude and invited Jesus to dine. In the Old Testament, leprosy was seen as a consequence of betraying God. From a spiritual perspective, we are all lepers because we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Yet, by believing in Jesus, we are cleansed of our spiritual leprosy. Simon, who had been a leper, held a banquet at home and invited Jesus, which was a gathering of thanksgiving and joy.

Then a woman, Mary of Bethany, brought an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. This oil, extracted from the roots of the spike plant, was extremely precious and was stored in an alabaster flask. At that time, the flask had no lid but had a long neck that was sealed. To use the oil, one had to break the neck of the flask to pour out the oil, and once broken, the oil could not be preserved. Therefore,

women would only break the flask and pour out the oil at the most important moments in their lives, usually when they got married, to use such precious oil.

Mary broke the flask and poured the oil on Jesus' head. John's Gospel in chapter 12, verse 3, also records Mary anointing Jesus' feet with oil and wiping them with her hair. In 1 Corinthians 11:15, we see that hair is a woman's glory. Mary used her own glory to wipe Jesus' feet, and John 12:3 says the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. If someone loves the Lord and sacrifices everything for Him, the fragrance of that love will fill the entire house. At this Thanksgiving banquet, we see a sister who loves the Lord, sacrificing everything for Him, which is a beautiful scene and should be present in every church.

Verses 4-5: "But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, 'Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they criticized her sharply."

Mark says there were some who were indignant, being polite by not naming names. John, however, directly points out that it was Judas Iscariot, who was about to betray Jesus, who led the complaint, saying, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." Three hundred denarii is a considerable amount of money, equivalent to a year's wages. We see that this oil was indeed valuable. In Judas's estimation, it was wasteful for Mary to pour such expensive oil on Jesus. He thought Mary's love for Jesus was excessive, believing that pouring oil worth a year's wages on Jesus was wasteful, suggesting it could have been sold to feed 300 people for a day. At first glance, this argument seems somewhat reasonable, leading some of the other disciples to join Judas in criticizing Mary, resulting in their anger toward her.

Dear brothers and sisters, have you ever been like Judas? When you see someone in the church loving the Lord and sacrificing themselves for Him, do you feel they are too extreme? Are they irrational, too impulsive, too emotional? When you prioritize economic efficiency, advocate pragmatism, and criticize others' sacrifices, it reveals that you have never truly loved the Lord, nor have you truly understood His value. Mary was not only a sister who loved the Lord but also, as Luke 10:38-42

tells us, one who often sat at Jesus' feet listening to His word and was praised by Jesus: she has chosen the best part. She truly understood the value of Jesus and knew she had to seize the opportunity to offer everything for Him. At Jesus' banquet, she seized this best opportunity.

Verse 6: "But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me.'"

Jesus immediately spoke up for Mary: "Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? What she has done for me is a good work." Judas thought it was a waste, but Jesus considered it a good deed. The Greek word for "good" here is "KALOS," meaning attractively good and inspiring to others. It's something very appealing, drawing others to admire it. Unlike another Greek word for "good," "AGATHOS," which refers to moral goodness that often requires a challenging process and might not be as attractive. KALOS represents a very attractive goodness, just like in Song of Solomon 1:4, "Draw me away! We will run after you." When someone is drawn to the Lord and loves the Lord, that love is contagious, inspiring others to follow the Lord eagerly. The most feared situation in the church is when no one loves the Lord. When everyone is good at reasoning but lacks love for the Lord, the church becomes filled with controversies, and there's no vitality in following the Lord's path. Jesus said, Mary disregarded everything and poured the fragrant oil on the Lord's body; this was a good work.

Verse 7: "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always."

Whether in ancient times or in modern society, there are always poor people around us. Helping the poor can be done anytime, but we do not always have Jesus with us. Jesus said, "But you do not always have me." Dear brothers and sisters, we must understand that when our hearts are moved by God to offer ourselves to the Lord, it is precious and the most important thing in our lives, which must take

precedence in our lives. This is the most important guidance of the Holy Spirit in your life. Do not underestimate this calling or ignore it; follow it immediately.

Verse 8: "She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial."

Jesus said Mary did what she could, anointing His body beforehand for burial. By this time, Jesus had made it clear to His disciples at least three times that He must die and rise again on the third day. The disciples seemed not to understand because to them, seeing Jesus cast out demons, heal the sick, and raise the dead, Jesus was so powerful. How could He suffer? How could He die? Therefore, they did not understand Jesus' words. But Mary understood. Not only did she understand, but she also seized the opportunity to anoint the Lord with costly oil in advance for His burial. Unlike the other women who came with spices to anoint Jesus' body on the morning of His resurrection when Jesus had already risen, those women prepared the spices but couldn't anoint Jesus' body. Mary of Bethany did not need to go to the tomb on the morning of the resurrection because she knew that Jesus would rise again, and there would be no more opportunity to anoint Him after His resurrection.

Verse 9: "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

This statement by Jesus is indeed a great commendation for Mary. Jesus told His disciples, and every saint afterward, that wherever the gospel is preached, regardless of where or to whom, they should speak of what Mary did as a memorial. We know the gospel we understand is how Jesus died for us on the cross, bore our sins, and rose again on the third day, so that we may be justified. This is the gospel for everyone, and by receiving the gospel, we receive all the benefits of what Jesus has done for us. But if you preach the gospel only on one side, which is what Jesus has done for us, Jesus said, you have not preached enough because you have only preached half. You must also add what Mary did for Jesus, how she seized the

opportunity, and how she gave herself completely. Therefore, if you want to preach the complete gospel, you must not only preach how the Lord loved us and sacrificed His precious life for us and completed our redemption, but also how each saved person should love the Lord, and how they should offer themselves completely to the Lord, as a memorial to Mary.

Verse 10: "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver."

Here we see Mark's account full of tension. On the one hand, he first recorded how Mary, disregarding everything, loved the Lord and poured costly oil on Jesus. On the other hand, he also recorded Judas betraying the Lord. He thought Mary's act was wasteful, claiming to help the poor, but actually, he loved money. So, in John 12:6, it directly says that he said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief and had the money box and used to take what was put in it. Judas was a greedy person, he was a thief, yet Jesus made Judas in charge of their money box. Of course, Jesus knew that Judas was stealing money. Jesus was indeed special; He appointed someone who would steal money to manage the money. Perhaps Jesus hoped that one day Judas would realize in his conscience when stealing money, perhaps he could repent, but unfortunately, Judas remained stubborn from beginning to end. Judas then went to the chief priests to betray Jesus.

Verse 11: "So when they heard that, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So, he sought how he might conveniently betray Him."

Judas went to the chief priests to betray Jesus, and when the priests heard it, they were very glad. They had been wanting to get rid of Jesus, but couldn't find the right opportunity. Now, having someone who followed Jesus as an inside informant was perfect for them. Because of Jesus' reputation, wherever Jesus went, many Jews followed. They did not want to cause a disturbance among the Jews by arresting Jesus, as this would damage their relationship with the Roman authorities. Now,

with an insider, they could find the right time and place to arrest Jesus. When they heard this, of course, they were very pleased and promised to give Judas money. Matthew 26:15 tells us they gave him thirty pieces of silver. Each silver coin should have been the weight of a shekel, so they gave him thirty shekels of silver. According to Exodus 21:32, when an ox gores a male or female slave, they must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master, so thirty shekels of silver is the value of a slave. In Judas' estimation, Jesus' value was that of a slave, thirty shekels of silver. But in Mary's estimation, she was willing to pour costly oil worth three hundred denarii on Jesus. In Mary's estimation, Jesus was extremely precious. Dear brothers and sisters, what is your estimation of Jesus?

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for presenting these two contrasting examples before us: one willing to spend everything for You; and the other treating You as a slave and selling You for thirty shekels of silver. Lord, have mercy on us; too often, we do not recognize Your true value, and we overlook what You have done for us. Help us to have a subjective experience of You and be willing, like Mary, to offer our best to You. Help us not only to recognize Your value but also to seize opportunities, feel Your presence, and be willing to love You and follow You regardless of the cost. Bless our daily lives to be approved and remembered by You. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.