

Worshipping with Abandon

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. Mark 14: 3 (Read Mark 14:1-9)

In my Bible study the other morning, I looked at this passage from Mark. A couple of things really stood out to me as I was reading.

Simon the Leper

The first thing I notice is that **Jesus** is at the house of Simon the Leper. We don't know this for certain, but most likely Simon is one of the lepers that Jesus miraculously heals in the Gospels. While he was probably healed physically, most likely some stigma was still associated with him, which would make most people want to avoid him. Do you notice how the text still refers to him as *Simon the Leper*?

How would you like to be forever immortalized as a disease or perhaps a bad character trait you had as a child or adult? I would hate to be introduced as *Jane the Fearful* wherever I went! But what I love is that Jesus didn't let a little thing like a disease or bad name slow him down. No, He went right to Simon's house and had dinner with him. Actually that's very reassuring, isn't it? When I'm feeling like I'm not "good enough" for Jesus to want to spend time with me, I just think of this story or the story of him going to the tax collector Zacchaeus' house, and I realize Jesus accepts me just as I am.

Mary of Bethany

The aspect of this story that just does me in is the woman's response to Jesus. John 12:3 identifies this woman as **Mary of Bethany**, Lazarus and Martha's sister. Some believe that she is the same woman as Mary Magdalene, but we don't know for

certain.

What she leaves no doubt of are her feelings for Jesus.

She takes her alabaster flask of spikenard, breaks it, and pours it on His head. What a lavish, all-in response to Jesus! I had to stop and think about this for a few minutes. First of all, Mary had to have known that she was opening herself up to ridicule and criticism by doing this, and that's exactly what happened. Women were supposed to stay in the background in this culture, and she boldly moves forward and does what the men probably considered to be a brazen act.

To make matters worse for herself, she used a very costly bottle of perfume. Spikenard had to be imported from India, and the cost of it was about a year's salary for a working-class man. Sure enough, she was roundly criticized for not selling the perfume instead and then using the money for the poor.

After reading about her actions, I had to ask myself, **Am I overwhelmed with that kind of love for Jesus that I don't care what others think?** On the contrary, I think that too often I am inhibited by what others may think.

Rather than rebuke Mary, Jesus instead rebukes those who are criticizing her and says that what she has done will be told to others as a memorial to her. And we are still reading about her and her brave act today.

I want to more like Mary in my response to Jesus. And to do that, I'll have to learn to "get over myself." Whether I want to be more bold in how I worship in church or more bold in using my money in ways Jesus wants me to, it certainly gives me something to pray about!

How about you? Please share any thoughts that you have about Mary's act of love and devotion and how free you feel to express your feelings for Jesus.

Pray on!

Jane

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