

# Envy and Adoration

Mark 14:1-11

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## **Introduction:**

There are two things that really get people going—envy and adoration.

- When there is someone who is being honoured and you think they shouldn't be and you become filled with envy, you take every chance you get to bring them down.
- When there is someone that you adore and truly believe ought to be honoured, you do the opposite. You take every opportunity to exalt them and to promote them.

God our Creator has endowed us with a strong sense of justice.

- Isn't it the case that many of the quarrels you get into have to do with someone not giving you what you think you are due?
  - You feel that they are falsely accusing you and not treating you as you ought to be treated—and you set out to defend yourself?
  - Perhaps you feel even that life itself has been unfair to you.
- We have this strong sense of justice, but it becomes perverted because we are unduly self-focused—we become unduly critical of others and of our very circumstances in life—we become bitter and unloving.
  - Our sense of justice becomes entirely unjust.

But to what person does this envy and adoration have their strongest reaction?

- It is to our Lord Jesus Christ who became flesh, truly becoming a man (while yet continuing to be God) and dwelling among us forever?
- We are told in scripture that He is given the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.
  - He is elevated far above all the rest of us.
    - He Himself is the standard for perfection—precisely and entirely what every human ought to be.
    - He Himself is the only human who, by His own virtue, is fully acceptable and righteous in God's sight.
    - He is the only one by whom and through whom anyone else can be made acceptable in God's sight—and that only by Him (not us) taking radical measures to justify us...
      - You know the story of the cross.
      - He had to voluntarily bear the wrath and curse of God in our place so that we could be fully pardoned—and He has to present Himself as our redeemer and mediator if we are to be justified.
      - Not only that, but He has to impart life to us to change us—He has to transform us by the working of the Holy Spirit so that we can live as God's people and eventually be perfected.
- This is very humbling.

- We have to admit that only He can save us and make us acceptable to God.
- It's hard for us to admit that and it is only by the working of His grace that we ever do admit it.
  - Our natural inclination is to think that He does not deserve that much honour and that we deserve a lot more honour.

And so it is that the more we are brought into contact with Jesus, the more we are exposed to Him and the more we learn of His honour and glory,

- the more we either resent Him or respect Him.
  - We envy Him because of the elevated place He has been given...
  - Or we adore Him and want to see Him given the glory and honour that He deserves.
- And these sentiments move us to do all that we can—either to bring Him down or to elevate Him—either to reproach Him or to honour Him.

Today in Mark 14, we have one of Mark's literary sandwiches.

- Do you remember these?
  - Where Mark begins a report, then interrupts himself to bring another report that is somehow related to the first report, and then, after he finishes the second report, he returns to complete the first report.
  - Remember how he did that when he told about Jesus cursing the fig tree.
    - He began with telling how there was a fig tree that had leaves out of season, giving it the appearance of having lots of fruit, and how finding that it did not have fruit, Jesus cursed it...
    - And then He went to the temple, a glorious place that God had appointed as the place in the world where His redemptive mercy was revealed—a place that had the appearance of a fruitful place where forgiveness and eternal life could be found, but instead He found that the courtyard was full of merchants which He proceeded to drive out.
    - Then Mark returned to the fig tree again and showed that when the disciples passed by, the fig tree that Jesus cursed had withered up to the roots in a single day.
      - The two stories showed that Jesus was going to destroy the temple because it had been corrupted. While it had the appearance of being a place where blessing could be found, it was no longer a fruitful place for sinners.
  - So the fig tree was the bread of Mark's literary sandwich—and the driving out of the money changers from the temple was the meat inside the sandwich.
- In the sandwich we are looking today in Mark 14:1-11,
  - Mark begins to tell of how those who envied Christ wanted to destroy Him but could not find a way to get Him because they were afraid of opposition from the crowds that had gone up to Jerusalem for the feast.
  - Then Mark interrupts that report and tells of a woman who anointed Jesus with some very expensive nard to honour Him and how Jesus praises her for this, testifying that she has done what she could.
  - Then Mark returns to tell how the ones who envied Christ were given a way to arrest Him without being detected by the crowds.

- With this sandwich, Mark shows us on the one hand how those who envy Christ do all that they can to bring Him down...
  - And how this woman who truly adores Him does all that she can to honour Him.

Please listen now as I read this passage to you for your edification and worship of God.

- This is the word of God, so reading it and hearing it is an act of worship when we assemble together as our Lord has commanded us.

**Mark 14:1-11:** 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. <sup>2</sup> But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people.” <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, “Why was this fragrant oil wasted? <sup>5</sup> For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they

criticized her sharply. <sup>6</sup> But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. <sup>7</sup> For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. <sup>8</sup> She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. <sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. <sup>11</sup> And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.

Blessed be the Lord our God who has given us His precious word.

Notice how Jesus says of this woman with the nard that “She has done what she could.”

- That is the theme of this sandwich.
  - The chief priests, scribes, and Judas did what they could to destroy Jesus.
  - This woman did what she could to honour Him.
- We see passionate action fuelled by envy of Christ...
  - And within that story we see passionate action fuelled by adoration of Christ.
- We will look at each of these with some applications along the way,
  - And then I will call upon you to consider what your attitude is toward Christ.

### **I. Envy does what it can to bring Christ down to shame.**

A. You see in the narrative that these chief priests and scribes were troubled because they could not bring Him down.

- Verse 1 & 2 tells of their frustration.
  1. Strong language is used to describe their efforts.
    - The second part of verse 1 says that they sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death!
      - The word *sought* here is continuous action—could be translated that they were seeking how they might take Him.
      - They were agonising over this, desperately trying to find a way.

- All the way back in chapter 3 (some two years previous), Mark mentioned that they had been wanting to put Him to death.
    - All this time they had been working at it, but they had not been able to get Him.
    - Sometimes He had kept more to Himself at Jerusalem to avoid the danger, but now it was worse because He was out in the open among the crowds—and had a lot of enthusiastic followers who told of His miracles and His powerful preaching.
2. Verse 2 tells us what stood in their way: **But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people.”**
- An enthusiastic crowd would not likely stand by and watch them arrest Him—they would get in trouble with the Romans for disturbing the peace.
  - And they didn’t really want to stir up a riot anyway—not did they want to turn the people against them.
    - They had pretty much resigned themselves to the fact that it just was not going to work out again this year.
    - But they wanted it more than ever because Jesus was getting bolder—the way He had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey and received praise as if He were the Messiah or something!
      - And the way He had driven out the merchants that these leaders had set up to do business in the temple—piously declaring that His Father’s house was to be a house of prayer.
      - They were the leaders—they knew what ought and ought not be done in the temple!
      - They could not bear to see more people turning to Jesus.
        - He was an upstart who was not promoting them as Israel’s rightful leaders.
        - They were burning with envy!
- B. Consider how nefarious these leaders are.
- There are so many factors that make their sin worse—what our catechisms call aggravations to their sin.
1. First, that they are so bent on destroying Him as we just saw...
    - Here they are, meeting together to figure out a way.
    - They are eager to do wickedness—deliberately planning to do it.
  2. Second, that they have no ground for arresting Him—they are trying to come up with something.
    - They are not after Him because He has committed a crime—it is just that they don’t like Him and are envious.
    - They are deliberately employing trickery—the word is used of fish bait—they are trying to trap Him in some way.
      - This is so unjust. James Edwards says that their plot oozes with intrigue.

3. Third, that they are not just looking to bring Him down a notch. They want to go all the way and kill Him.
  - They are not just looking to whip Him or to put Him in prison or fine Him—they are out for blood—for capital punishment.
4. Fourth, this is made all the worse because it is none other than Jesus Christ the Son of God that they are seeking to destroy.
  - He is their own Messiah, the desire of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and all the prophets.
  - He is the One God has sent to save them, the prophet, priest, and king who has come to reveal God's gracious will, to make atonement for their sins, and to destroy Satan and lead them in righteousness.
  - It is wrong to oppose anyone like they are opposing Him, but how much worse to do this to God's Son.
5. Fifth, their sin is all the more heinous because they are God's appointed leaders of His people.
  - They sit in the seat of Moses, they are the shepherds of God's people, entrusted with the scriptures, the ordinances, the ceremonies, the temple, the covenants and the service.
  - It would be wrong for anyone to do what they are doing, but how much worse the ministers of the Lord God who are numbered with His people Israel according to the flesh.
6. And to add still more to their guilt, they are doing all this scheming and plotting in a time of feasting—the time of the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread.
  - The Passover, the annual celebration of the day that they left Egypt when God killed all the first born in Egypt but spared their sons (passed over them) because they killed a lamb in the place of their sons...
    - It was meant to be a time of thanksgiving to God, of joy in His salvation and deliverance—not a time of intrigue and malicious scheming.
    - It is worse to sin on the Lord's Day than on other days.
  - And the feast of unleavened bread was the day in which they purged the leaven from their dwellings to remind them of how sin must be purged.
    - It was a time for repentance, for brokenness before God—not a time for pride and seeking to kill God's Son!

TRANS> Mark leaves us hanging with these leaders and their frustrated purpose and tells us of the woman who anoints Jesus.

- But we will move on to look at what happens with the chief priests and scribes and their desire to destroy Jesus.
- C. God's time for Christ to be delivered has come, so they are given the opportunity they have been looking for!
- Look at verse 10-11: **Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. <sup>11</sup> And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.**

1. To their great surprise, one of Jesus' own disciples comes to them and offers to lead them to Him so they can arrest Him when the crowds are not around.
  - There was no way for them to get Jesus until the time appointed by the Father.
  - They thought this was not the time, but Jesus, as we have seen, has been telling His disciples all along that on this visit to Jerusalem He would be taken.
2. Now we see yet more of the sin in these men—we are told how glad they were to receive Judas the traitor.
  - This is what made them happy—
    - not the feast of Passover where God's gracious saving work was celebrated and their hope in the Messiah was elevated—
    - but that now they could finally destroy God's Messiah!
3. And here is Judas—one of the twelve—Judas the betrayer, the traitor, the turncoat.
  - Frustrated that the Messiah was not doing what he wanted.
  - Like all of Jesus' disciples, he had come hoping to be elevated in this world to thrones and prosperity,
    - but instead Jesus has been talking about suffering and death for His sake.
  - The other disciples have come to see that He is the Son of God and they believe that He has the words and the blessing of eternal life.
    - They don't understand what He is doing, but they have come to trust Him and to know that salvation is with Him.
    - They have nowhere else to go—He has the words of eternal life.
      - But not Judas. In his mind, the others are idiots to keep on following this Messiah.
      - He may be able to calm the storm and raise the dead, but what kind of kingdom is this kingdom of suffering and death?
        - Judas is moving on. He has had enough of this.
        - He does not regard Jesus as worthy of his time.
          - Like the Jewish leaders, he wants to see Him brought down.

TRANS> See how hard envy works—looking for every opportunity to bring down the one it resents.

- As soon as the opportunity is there, envy seizes it.
- That is the bread of this sandwich.
- Now let's look at the meat that, in this case, is set in contrast.

## **II. Here we learn how adoration stirs us to find ways to honour the one we adore.**

A. Here we have this woman who is as eager to honour the Lord Jesus as His enemies are to destroy Him.

1. Jesus is dining with His disciples at the house of Simon the leper.

- We don't know who this man is—perhaps one whose leprosy Jesus healed and who wanted to show hospitality to Him...
    - Some have wondered if it is the father of Martha and Mary and Lazarus.
    - In any case, he is another disciple of Jesus who lives in Bethany where Jesus was staying with His disciples.
  - Most Biblical exegetes believe that this is the same incident that is recorded in Matthew 26 and probably in John 12... although in John we are told that it was six days before the Passover where Matthew and Mark say it was two.
    - This could easily be reconciled if we notice that what is two days before may not be this anointing, but the plotting of the Jewish leaders and the arrangements with Judas for His betrayal.
      - It really doesn't matter, but if we assume that it is an account of the same event, then we know that the woman is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.
      - I am going to assume that from here on and call her Mary—this action certainly does fit her character as the one who delighted to sit at Jesus' feet and learn of Him.
2. But you see what Mary does.
- She comes in with this oil to where Jesus is reclining at the table—an oil that comes from India that is said to be the real deal.
    - It is described as very costly oil of spikenard—the language indicating that it was genuine nard.
    - The onlookers estimate that it was worth about 300 denarii which is 300 days' wages—a whole year's wages—perhaps \$35,000 in our money.
  - Mary takes this flask of oil—the flask itself was very expensive: made of alabaster—and she breaks it and pours it all out on Jesus.
    - Understand that anointing an honoured guest with oil was a common custom among the Jews at this time, so the action was not odd in that way.
      - Everyone knew that it was a way of showing honour.
    - But what was extraordinary was the way she poured it entirely out upon Him and the cost of the oil—it was likely an heirloom that had been passed down from mother to daughter—perhaps for generations.
      - It likely covered Him from head to toe and filled the room with a delightful aroma.
3. What we may conclude here is that Mary really wanted to honour Jesus!
- She thought Him to be very important and very special.
  - She shows by this action that she cannot do enough to honour Him.
  - She is not focused on how great her act of devotion is—but on how great He is—her act of devotion in her eyes is small—the least she can do.
    - Let's come back to that thought later...

B. But her action brings on some criticism.

1. John tells us that Judas led the way and Matthew tells us that the rest of the disciples joined in, but Mark does not focus on the particular characters as such.
    - His focus is on what they did instead of who they are.
    - And look, they actually became very angry... vs 4-5 say: **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.**
  2. It’s funny (and actually sad) how someone doing something like this makes people so uncomfortable.
    - Is it not very often because we know that we don’t have that kind of devotion?
    - It’s unnerving.
    - We want to say, “If I had that, I’d sell it and give it to the poor.”
      - And the question is, “Would you? Is that really what you’d do?”
      - Or is it just that you know you don’t have devotion like that?
  3. In any case, these critics might have expected Jesus to approve of what they said.
    - They had often had very poor judgment about things—but they remembered how Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all and give to the poor.
      - They thought for sure He would not approve of this.
    - But once again they are surprised.
      - Jesus doesn’t operate by rules that if you have nice things you should sell them or any of that rot.
      - That was what the rich young ruler needed to do—but that is not what Mary needed to do.
        - The rich young rulers’ riches were in the way of his devotion to Jesus, but Mary’s treasure was put into His service by this act.
        - But neither does this mean that you should all go and pour out something expensive for Jesus just to show your love.
- C. Jesus goes all out to defend her! He is delighted with what she has done.
1. She is, perhaps, the only one in the room at this time who truly recognises who He is—the one who is worthy (as He Himself said) to be honoured even as the Father is honoured.
    - The real issue is that the disciples did not think Jesus was worthy of so much honour—yes, they believed that He was the Messiah—
      - but He was, thus far, a little bit of a disappointment—though they would not have said it.
      - They were a little bit disappointed with His kingdom and with how things were going—not bitter like Judas—but not quite as excited as Mary seemed to be.
        - Ever feel that way?
  2. Look at what Jesus says about her:
    - a. verse 6: **But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me.”**



- A good work is a beautiful work, a fine deed... and so it was.
  - Jesus delighted in the sweet aroma—His own creation that He made for us to enjoy—
  - And He delighted in the love and devotion that caused her to pour it out—what He created us to do.
- b. He continues in verse 7-8: **“For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. 8 She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.”**
  - 1) This is the highest praise of all—she has done what she could!
    - Just like the chief priests and Judas who did what they could to destroy Him, she has done what she could to honour Him.
  - 2) She recognised that He was not going to be around much longer.
    - He had told them that He was going to die and she wanted to honour Him while she could—before He was gone.
    - So Jesus takes it as done for His burial... she has seized the opportunity in the short time that the opportunity was there.
      - Envy does not miss its opportunity—neither does loving adoration...
        - because it is on the lookout to honour the one that it adores.
- c. Jesus is so pleased with her doing what she could—to honour Him—that He memorialises what she has done.
  - 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.”**
    - 1) What she has done is a paradigm for the whole church in all ages.
      - Again, not that we are to get oil and pour it out on each other.
      - But that we are look for ways and find ways to honour our Lord.
        - We are to learn of Him so that we adore Him and esteem Him so highly that we want to glorify Him and that we constantly find ways to glorify Him that are appropriate and beautiful.
    - 2) The Bible teaches us that women are not to teach or exercise authority, but to be adorned with good words that characterise women professing godliness.
      - They are to show the glory of Christ by their devotion to Him.
      - And this is indeed what the whole church is to do as the bride of Christ.
      - We are to think so much of Him that nothing is too good for Him.
    - 3) This really comes to a head when we are called to suffer for Him.
      - I just read Andrew Brunson’s book—he is the minister that was in a Turkish prison for over two years because of his faith.

- He struggled for a long time with his whole attitude, but as the Lord worked in his life, he finally got to the place where he was willing to stay in prison if that would further God's purposes and bring glory to Him.
- He came to this place because he came to see that Christ was worthy of that kind of service and sacrifice. He was deserving of it.
- And you see, that is the point.
  - It is not that you have to go and do a bunch of things for God, but that you are to so adore Him, to see His greatness and goodness and beauty—that you lay down your life for His honour.
- A person can do a bunch of sacrificial deeds, but like the Pharisees who feel that they have done something very great instead of like Mary here—
  - feeling like she has not begun to give Him what He deserves.
  - It is a very different attitude.

### **III. So what about you? What is your attitude toward Christ? Envy or adoration?**

#### **A. Do you think He is given more honour than He deserves?**

1. Do you resent the fact that He is the only human being that is acceptable in God's sight?
  - And that no other human being is at all acceptable to God apart from faith in Christ as the one who suffered and died to atone for our sins?
  - And that no one can have eternal life unless they become His disciple?
2. If that is your position, then you are among those who want to bring him down.
  - In your mind, He has been given too high a position.
  - Perhaps you will say that He is not really God.
  - And maybe you will add to that that He was also a sinner even though the Bible teaches that He was holy, undefiled, and separate from sin.
  - You might go even further and say that He was just an ordinary man or even that He did not exist.
    - You won't have Him as He is—exalted and given the name above every name that we all should confess that He is Lord.

#### ➤ But maybe you will say to me, "No, no, I am a true believer.

- "I accept that Jesus is the true Son of God, that He is without sin, and the only one by whom we can be saved."
- That's very good.

#### **B. But I must ask you, are you more like Mary or more like Jesus' disciples at the time that Mary poured out her oil?**

1. Many believers are like the disciples.
  - By their standards, she had done a wasteful thing even though by Jesus' standards it was a beautiful thing.

- J. C. Ryle comments of those who always call for moderation in religion.
    - “If a man devotes his time, money, and affections to the pursuit of worldly things, they will not blame him. If he gives himself up to the service of money, pleasure, or politics, they find no fault. But if the same man devotes himself, and all he has, to Christ, they can scarcely find words to express their sense of his folly—“He is beside himself.” “He is out of his mind.” “He is a fanatic.” “He is an enthusiast.” “He is righteous over-much.” “He is an extreme man.” In short, they regard it as ‘waste.’ ”
  - Ryle is right.
    - A talented capable woman devotes herself to the care of her children and her husband and it is called a waste of her life.
    - A man with ability in law or medicine or business devotes himself to the ministry and he is considered wasting his gifts.
    - A talented musician, athlete, or actress refuses to work on the Lord’s Day or to engage in some immorality associated with their work and they are considered throwing away their lives—and I guess they are, only that they might find them.
    - Someone who refuses to live in a place that has no sound church is called excessive and foolish.
    - A disciple who refuses to watch immoral shows—or spends much time in prayer—or who stands up for the truth about social issues—or one who gives a lot to missions.
      - Is your thought that they have done too much for Christ?
2. If your commitment is lacking, what do you need?
- You need God’s Spirit to revive your soul.
    - You have lost your first love.
    - You have been deceived.
  - Jesus’ disciples did not remain like they were—they became like Mary.
    - They grew in their faith—they learned of Jesus as He was revealed to their souls.
    - Through His word, they began to see more and more how worthy He really is.
    - They saw more fully the depth of His mercy in dying for them and they could no longer think that He was asking too much or that they could give Him more than He deserved.
      - Yes, there will always be struggles, but when your faith grows and you see how worthy Christ is, you come through those struggles and then you march forward in your service to God, pouring out all that you have—even your costliest treasures, for His honour and glory with joy.