

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME THREE

STUDY EIGHT

Go Ahead—Break a Vase!

Mark 14:1–9

As in Jesus' day, anything that's over the top will be criticized, judged, and resented. I challenge that mentality. I believe there are times our Lord smiles and shouts, "Go ahead! Break a vase!"

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

Most of the time, we keep a close eye on our expenses. We stick to the budget, pay off the credit card on time, and save a little every month. Knowing we have cash in the bank for a rainy day—which always strikes without warning—gives us a sense of security.

Sometimes, though, it's appropriate to throw caution to the wind . . . and spend!

A young man falls in love, and he wants to ask his sweetheart to marry him. He visits a jewelry store and sees a beautiful diamond ring that he knows will delight her. But he's a student, and the ring costs more than he'll make in a year at his part-time job. So what does he do? He sells his car to buy the ring!

Some might think he's foolish. A car is more practical than a fancy ring. What will the newlyweds do for transportation after they're married? Wouldn't buying a cheaper ring be smarter? No, not to him. There's no better way for him to show the extent of his love than with an extravagant gift. For years to come, whenever the young woman sees the ring sparkling on her finger, she'll be reminded how cherished she is.

A similar act of love is on display in the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study. Just days before Jesus' crucifixion, a woman expresses her devotion to Jesus in the most extravagant way. She seems to be the only one in the room who truly appreciates the incomparable worth of Jesus. Her amazing act offers profound insight that can help us demonstrate our devotion to Christ in an unreserved way.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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Mark 14:1–9



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. (Hebrews 4:16)

As you open the Word, prayerfully approach the throne of grace and express your awe of God's magnificence, His rich mercy, and His abundant grace.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We approach the final days of our great Savior's life on earth with a sense of reverence. We know what lay ahead for Jesus, even though those with Him at the time couldn't see beyond the excitement of Passover.

The festive spirit of this one-day celebration drew Jews from all over Israel and beyond to commemorate their release from slavery in Egypt and their birth as a nation (Exodus 12). Following Passover was the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Before this feast, Jewish families cleaned their houses of any speck of yeast to symbolize purification of their hearts and their devotion to God. Singing and dancing broke out all around the city with trumpets blaring and fires lighting the sky as hundreds of thousands of people crowded into Jerusalem.

While pilgrims filled the city, Jesus was about two miles away in Bethany, sharing a meal with friends.



Observation: A Woman Broke a Jar and Anointed Jesus

Observe this scene with care.¹ Take time to notice how Mark selected each word and constructed each sentence. Enter the room as if you could see the lamps flickering on the table, smell the spices in the food, and feel the air hanging thickly around you.

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The Enemies of Jesus—Mark 14:1–2

Read [Mark 14:1–2](#). These verses begin another Markan “sandwich”: the plot (Mark 14:1–2), the anointing (14:3–9), and the betrayal (14:10–11). Mark intentionally set the scene in Bethany against this dark backdrop. What contrast was Mark making by doing this? What was happening in secret in Jerusalem?

The Friends of Jesus—Mark 14:3–9

Jesus’ anointing forms the middle of Mark’s thematic sandwich. Mark placed it out of sequence: the anointing happened before the plot he had just described. In fact, Jesus and His friends were in Bethany at this supper six days before the Passover celebration (John 12:1). Read [Mark 14:3 and John 12:1–3](#). Jesus and His disciples were at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. Who else was present?

What unexpectedly happened as Jesus was reclining at the table? How did Mark and John describe the value of the beautiful alabaster jar and its contents? What did the woman do after she broke open the vessel?

Read [Mark 14:4–5 and John 12:4–6](#). How did some of those at the table respond? Who did John say was the one who objected most to the woman’s extravagant offering? Why do you think his identity is significant?

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Mark 14:1–9

How did Jesus respond in *Mark 14:6–9* and *John 12:7–11*?

He didn't feel uneasy. He understood Mary. He knew it was the most expensive thing she'd ever had in her possession, which touched Him even deeper. But some of those present missed it altogether. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Mary's Extravagance

The religious leaders were done debating Jesus. All their schemes to publicly shame Jesus had backfired. Killing Him was their only way to get rid of Him—but not during Passover. Why were they concerned about the people rioting? How would you describe the atmosphere in Jerusalem?

In those days, no one gathered in a group and began to lead an insurrection. You'd be killed on the spot, which is why Pilate had moved from his lovely home at Caesarea by the Sea to live temporarily in Jerusalem with the guards he brought with him to watch over the city, lest these Jews get out of hand. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Using your Bible-study resources, determine the cost of Mary's perfume in today's terms.

Mary's perfume may have been a family heirloom given to her to enjoy throughout her life. It likely would have been a most prized possession. As the bottle gave up its exquisite contents, the oil infused Jesus' skin with a sublime scent usually known only to nobles and kings.

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What message do you think Mary was communicating to Jesus by anointing Him with perfume? For insight, read about the uses of *perfume* in the online *Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

Jesus interpreted Mary's actions as anointing His "body for burial ahead of time" (Mark 14:8). Whether or not Mary understood the full meaning of her actions, she gave herself in total devotion to her Lord with a gift worthy of Him. What principles about worship and devotion do Mary's actions model?

What shortsighted, even sinful, perspectives may have prompted those who were "indignant" at Mary and "scolded her harshly" (Mark 14:4–5)? What was Judas' true motive?

She's going to pour it on Him while He's still alive, just as you and I would do for one whom we love who is dying. We don't wait until we have the eulogy to say the words. We tell this person while living because he or she wants to hear it. "Such extravagance," says Jesus, "is to be praised." Her extravagance reveals that she alone understood Jesus' incomparable worth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Breaking Vases . . . Extravagance on Display

Correlate *1 Kings 6:14–38* with our passage in Mark. What similar themes emerge when you compare Solomon's sumptuous adornments in the temple with Mary's breaking of the alabaster jar?

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The temple was built with such intricate accuracy that the stones were put into place by simply sliding them. They were quarried elsewhere and shaped so that they slipped into place perfectly. This wonder of the world emerged and God was pleased. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Mary's anointing of Jesus with costly perfume was the third time she appeared in Scripture (see [Luke 10:38–42](#) and [John 11:31–32](#)). All three times, we find Mary close to Jesus. What does Mary's example teach about the heart of a true disciple?

What an expensive, what an extravagant expression of her worship! And you would think those reclining around the table would have said, "What a wonderful, wonderful expression of your love, Mary! How marvelous is this!" —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Go Ahead—Break a Vase!

Let's respond to God's Word by welcoming the many ways the Holy Spirit might be prompting us to obey the biblical principles you've received. Pastor Chuck challenges us to remember three things as we seek to internalize this Bible passage.

First, *there are certain times when extravagance is absolutely appropriate*. What specific insights has the Holy Spirit communicated to your heart through this principle?

Second, *if you can explain it, it probably isn't extravagant enough*. What have Mary's posture and her silence taught you? How can you imitate her heart posture?

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You know what stands out to me in the story as much as anything? Mary's silence. Not once does she say, "You don't understand." She doesn't waste her breath. You know why? Because these people who have this mentality aren't convinced and won't be. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Third, *never miss an occasion to break a vase*. Have you been thinking about expressing your love for the Lord in an extravagant way? Do you sense the Lord prompting you to honor a spouse or a loved one in a special way? Why not go ahead and break a vase?

The scent of Mary's perfume must have clung to Jesus for many days, comforting Him through the humiliation of His arrest and trials and the pain of His beatings and crucifixion. Jesus' giving Himself on the cross was the most extravagant gesture of love the world has ever seen. He broke the alabaster jar of His own body and spilled His priceless blood for us. What can you give in return? Your heart, your soul, and your eternal worship. There's no sweeter fragrance to Jesus!



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, what a moment of soul-searching! I can smell that perfume—Mary's act of devotion, gratitude, and pure worship. Cleanse my heart from envy and resentment. Help me to promptly obey whenever I see Jesus' smile and hear His shout, "Go ahead—break a vase!" In the name of Your Son, whose body You broke to give me eternal life, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](https://www.insight.org/how-does-pastor-chuck-swindoll-study-the-bible)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).

For the 2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Insight for Living
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This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features evenly spaced horizontal blue lines across its entire surface, providing a guide for letter height and placement. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.