

No good deed, they say, goes unpunished. Here in Mark 14, we see a woman who does a *beautiful thing* to Jesus, as He puts it. Yet she is scolded, with much anger, for her good deed.

The scene before us is taking place in the house of Simon. Not Simon Peter, Simon the leper. Possibly a Pharisee, and one whose leprosy Jesus may have healed. Jesus is here in the house reclining to eat the meal. It is two days before He will be handed over to Pilate to be crucified.

In walks a woman with a flask of ointment. This is not your nickel and dime stuff. It comes from far-away lands. It is very expensive. One entire year's salary. She breaks the flask and pours it over Jesus' head. Can you picture the reaction of Simon and the others? They stop their conversations in mid-sentence. They stare at this woman and at Jesus in disbelief. And a hot, burning anger grabs hold of them.

They are indignant it says. They cannot be consoled. The ointment cannot be put back into the flask. What's done is done. And what's done is a horrible waste. How dare she do this! Maybe on a king's head, maybe. But on Jesus? Far better to have sold the ointment and given the money to the poor than to waste it on Him.

But now it's Jesus' turn to scold them. "*Leave her alone,*" He tells them, "*You always have the poor with you...but you will not always have Me.*" And then He says these beautiful words, "*She has anointed My body beforehand for burial.*"

Who does that? Who anoints a body for burial while the body is still living? Only this woman as far as we know. But does she know what she is doing? Does she know that Jesus will soon be dead? Is she aware that she is, as He says, anointing His body beforehand for burial? Because isn't it entirely possible that she is simply showing her love for Jesus?

We do that. We may not show our love by giving Jesus an entire year's salary. But we do break open our flasks, too, our piggy banks, and we do beautiful things to Jesus. Every little thing done for Jesus is beautiful. And yet, what this woman does here stands out. "*Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world,*" says Jesus, "*what she has done will be told in memory of her.*"

Wow! That's quite a statement. When you and I break open our flasks and put our money in the offering plate out of love for Jesus, will the whole world take notice? Will we be remembered in the same way as this woman?

That is not why the woman does this. She does not have, as her goal, to be remembered. And certainly not by the whole world. The key words of Jesus here are these: "*Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed.*" Not the Law, the Gospel. She does not break her flask out of a sense of duty, like perhaps we do at times; not really out of a cheerful heart, but more because we're supposed to.

It is true that our giving shows our faith if our giving is in response to the Gospel. Well then, this woman must have an incredible faith! One entire year's salary worth of ointment of faith poured out on Jesus' head!

This woman believes what the twelve disciples did not, that Jesus would be killed. He said this at different times. His disciples did not get it. This woman does, for she comes to prepare Jesus' body for burial. But she also believes that Jesus will die as a criminal. Because a criminal's body, crucified by the Romans, cannot be properly anointed for burial. When the criminal dies, the authorities are in charge of the body. And such bodies are not even buried by the soldiers, but are left on a garbage dump to be eaten by wild dogs.

And there's more. This woman believes not only Jesus' words that He will be killed, but also that on the Third Day He will be raised to life. And thus, she will not have access to His body once His body is resurrected. The time to anoint His body, therefore, is now. Here in the house of Simon. And so, out of love for Jesus, and because she takes Jesus at His word believing that He will die a criminal and be raised on the Third Day, she pours out her ointment on His head to anoint His body beforehand for burial.

*"Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed...what she has done will be told"* - because her very actions proclaim the Gospel. She believes in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection beforehand. What she does is a witness to His death and resurrection before Simon and all the rest, and before these things even take place.

Pouring out the contents of her flask over Jesus is small, in her eyes, compared to how Jesus would pour out His blood for her. And friend, that same flask of Jesus' body was pierced for you so that what He poured out for her, He also poured out for you.

With her ointment on His head, Jesus would have been truly fragrant and sweet-smelling. But for you, with Jesus' blood poured out and covering you in your baptism, you are, to God, a fragrant and sweet-smelling child of His. Your God does not smell the filth of your sin, nor mine. He smells only what Jesus did for you. He died a criminal in your place because under the Law, you and I are the criminals. But no more. Jesus took your place under the Law

To some – to the world, and to the devil, Jesus wasted His blood by pouring it out for you. But not to Jesus. He did not waste Himself for you even as the woman did not see it as a waste to pour her ointment out upon Him.

And think of this, what Jesus poured out for you, and over you in your baptism, prepares your body, beforehand, for burial. That day may be many years from now, or it may be sooner than we realize. It matters not. Jesus anointed you in your baptism with His blood, with His Spirit, to prepare your body and soul for burial. And so, you have no fear of the grave. Your sins are forgiven. Each and every one of you is forgiven. Jesus' blood testifies to this truth. Truly, He has done a beautiful thing for you. Amen.