



Most of us have experienced moments that were so socially awkward that they make us blush every time they come to mind.

My guess is that the moment described in the opening verses of Mark 14 was one of those moments. It would have been awkward for a woman to interrupt a group of men while they were dining, much less show up as an uninvited guest. The young woman's initial thrill of doing something extravagant for Jesus, must have given way to the genuine fear of being rejected and misunderstood. Not only by the men in the room, but maybe even by Jesus himself.

Her heart must have been pounding out of her chest as she made her way through the front gate and made a beeline for the dining room.

I am also guessing—and it is just a guess—that she never intended to break the alabaster jar and spill out its entire contents. As her nerves got the best of her she probably fumbled the jar. It broke. The only place for the contents to spill out was on Jesus' head. Jesus ends up with a perfume bath, and the room wreaks of the overly sweet stench of way too much perfume.

The men in the room were indignant. You can bet they were indignant at the intrusion. They were indignant with the act itself. They couldn't have been happy with heavy sweet pungent musk that was invading their space. And they were, above everything else, indignant at the sheer waste of an expensive bottle of rare perfume.

Jesus has a completely different take on the event. He rebukes those who are rebuking the woman, and declares, "She has done a beautiful thing." It may have been socially awkward. It may have even been a bit over the top. It may not have gone according to plan. But it is hard to miss with extravagant expressions of devotion to Jesus that come from a grateful heart.

#### MULTIPLE ACTS OF VIOLENCE AND TREACHERY (vv. 1-2;10-11)

Mark is careful to paint this beautiful portrait of extravagant love and devotion against the darker background growing opposition to and hatred for Jesus. The opposition to Jesus begins early in Mark's gospel (3:6), metastasizes throughout the gospel, and reaches its peak when Jesus clears the temple (11:18) and tells a very pointed parable that exposes the character and motives of the chief priests and teachers of the law (12:12).

1. Why do you think the religious leaders hated Jesus enough to kill him?

2. What do you think motivated Judas to betray Jesus?
3. What are some of the reasons that people are determined to silence the voice of Jesus today?
4. What are some areas in your life where you tend to turn a deaf ear and do not want to hear the truth of the gospel?
5. What is the tragic result when we fail to hear the gospel?

#### A SINGLE ACT OF LOVE AND BEAUTY (vv. 3-9)

1. What do you think motivated this woman to invade Simon's dinner party and pour a bottle of expensive perfume on Jesus' head?
2. What are some of the things that Jesus has done for us, that might elicit an extravagant response on our part?
3. How do we normally respond to the gracious gifts we have received from Christ?
4. What might it look like if we responded extravagantly?
5. What was the primary objection of those who witnessed this woman's extravagant expression of love for Christ?
6. James tells us that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27)." Nothing is nobler in either the Old or the New Testaments than to care for the poor. How had these men missed the mark with their criticism (remember most of them were Jesus' disciples)?"
7. So when is caring for the poor wrong?
8. What happens when we allow our acts of charity and religious devotion to outstrip our love for Jesus?
9. When Jesus received this act of devotion and in fact sanctioned extravagant acts of devotion to him as taking priority over care for the poor, what was he revealing about ultimate identity?