

5021

SILVER STAR BIBLE SCHOOL 1994

Sunday Afternoon Exhortation

Speaker: Bro. J. Ullman

Reading: Mark 14:1-25

Our daily readings are now, once again taking us through the gospel of Mark. The four gospel narratives are all unique; we know that only too well. They are unique in that each is diverse in many respects from the others, and yet together, they form one account in which there are no contradictions. We sometimes refer to the four gospels as an example of 'unity in diversity', and that is really quite true. Mark's gospel for some reason or other, not necessarily amongst the brotherhood, is very often underrated, because it is the smallest, and yet, Mark's gospel conveys to us, aspects of the Lord's life and ministry, that are not always included in the other accounts. And even though it is small in relative relationship to the other gospel narratives, it is certainly a gospel account in which every word counts. It is interesting to note that in the Oxford bible, Luke's gospel narrative is the longest, in my bible it amounts to 48 pages. Matthew is the second longest with 46 pages, John is next with 36 pages, and Mark is the smallest with 29 pages, so that the length of Mark's record is only 60% of Luke's which is the longest. And yet, as is the golden rule of inspired scripture, not a single word is wasted.

The incident that is recorded in the first 9 verses of this 14th chapter that we have read this afternoon, is also found in Matthew and John and it is omitted in Luke's account. Luke is very busy recording other details that are not found in Mark's account. Of these 9 verses are especially applicable to us this afternoon, as we gather together around the emblems, which represent the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, because in Mark's account, as you will have observed, during the course of our reading this afternoon, we read this remarkable account concerning a very special sacrifice that was made on the part of Mary. And immediately after that, we are introduced to the emblems of the bread and the wine. There must be a reason for that. We're going to try and see what that is.

In verse 3 of Mark chapter 14, it says, 'And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head'. So the scene here is Bethany and the house is of Simon the leper. John chapter 12 and verse 1, tells us that Lazarus was there; Mary and Martha also being present. This of course, has given rise to some speculation, in the opinion of most I feel, it is generally regarded that this was indeed, a situation in which, as Bro. Mansfield suggests in Guide Book to the New Testament, that Simon the leper, may have in all probability been Martha's husband, but that he had died, and that Martha had now inherited the house. There has to be some relationship with Simon the leper. The woman in verse 3 is not known, but

she is identified by John as being Mary, that is the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and we learn that she comes to the Lord with an alabaster box of ointment, of spikenard, very precious. Notice what the margin renders it-pure nard or liquid nard. That was in its most pure form. It was not in an adulterated form which would have been very common in those days, because of the tremendous value and the tremendous price that one would pay for anything of that nature. This was pure spikenard. Now, what was spikenard? Well, spikenard came from some of the mountain areas in India, some authorities claim that it was only grown in the Himalayas in areas between 11,000 and 17,000 feet, and it would not grow anywhere else, only there. In its original form it came as a liquid, as it obviously was here. And although some claim that it had medicinal qualities, its main value lay in its perfume. It was very, very rare and it was especially rare in such places as Judeah where it would have been incredibly expensive. And yet, Mary we learn, had procured 12 to 14 ounces of this precious commodity, a little under a 1/2 a kilo. John 12 verse 3 gives us the weight and that would amount to 14 ounces. We are told here that it was very precious; it was the costliest anointing oil known to the ancient world. There was nothing that you could get for this purpose that was more expensive. No oil that anyone could purchase would anywhere near reach the value of spikenard.

According to the parable in Matthew 20, the hire of a labourer was reckoned at a penny a day, which makes the value of the box of spikenard, the equivalent of a year's wages. Just imagine, in today's terms, we would have to make the value somewhere around a figure of about \$20,000. That's what Mary paid for it in today's money. It was an astonishing sum. Mary must have given her all, her absolute all to purchase this ointment. And the Lord brings that out in due course in these verses, that in itself is really the key to what we should understand from this incident. The spirit of giving of herself, the spirit of sacrifice which was shortly to be drawn to the attention of the twelve, in the form of the bread and the wine. It says that she 'brake' the box and 'poured' it on His head. And the word to 'brake' there is a word that indicates to 'break in pieces by crushing', and in view of the fact that she was to anoint Him for His burial, is there possibly some connection in this action, with Genesis 3:15, and the crushing of the head of the serpent? The gaining of the victory over sin?

She poured it on His head, it says in verse 3, and only John adds that she anointed the feet of the Lord (we'll see something of that in a moment.) So that in a figure, she anointed Him from head to toe with this almost priceless ointment, and in regard to this action, it is not without significance, that 4 different words are used in the Greek text for what she did. In Matthew 26:7 a word was used which means 'to pour down upon'; in Matthew 26:12 a word is used in relation to liquids, 'to pour determinedly and firmly'; in Mark 14:8 a word is used which means 'to rub with ointment', in other words the implication being to make sure that it goes where it must go. And the fourth word is found in John 12:3 which means 'to anoint especially for a festal reason'. Now, why did Mary anoint the Lord in this way? Well, in verse 8 the Lord tells us, 'she had come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying', and surely this is one of the most touching and moving incidents in the whole of the Lord's ministry, and one which would have given Him a pleasure that we cannot comprehend. He was so used to the 'knocks' and

the 'criticisms' and the 'persecutions' the 'trials' the 'tribulations' the extent of concentration needed on the mind of the Father, to overcome sin that Isaiah says that 'though He was but 33 years and a 1/2 that His visage was marred more than any man's in the struggle to overcome sin'. This was one of the few bright delights the Lord knew, and yet while this was happening, let us just cast our eyes back to verse 1 and verse 2, 'After two days was the feast of the passover and of unleavened bread: the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by craft, and put Him to death. But they said, Not on a feast day least there be an uproar of the people'. And while that is happening and while those evil men were plotting the Lord's death, here is Mary anointing Him to the burial. She knew, she knew what was happening, and she understood the significance of what was happening.

In Psalm 133 and verse 2, dealing with the anointing of the high priest, we read that 'the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down the beard, even Aaron's beard', note that Aaron there is specifically singled out as high priest. Not all the other priests but Aaron the high priest, and we read there that 'it went down to the skirts of his garments'. And the word 'skirt' is literally 'mouth' and mostly it is used literally for the mouth in the Old Testament Hebrew bible. It is also used in other ways; Joseph refers to the 'mouth of the sacks of his brethren', a mirror is the same word. In Exodus 28 verse 32 the word is 3 times rendered 'hole' in relation to the robe of the ephod worn by the high priest, and again the word occurs 3 times in Exodus 39 and verse 23 in regard to the same garment. Now it's interesting that in the writings of Moses, that Aaron's sons were sprinkled with a holy anointing oil, but Aaron was anointed upon his head and sprinkled, all of which shows that the high priest was to be totally anointed from head to feet and the anointing symbolized the Spirit power of Yahweh and Yahweh's word. So that, there we learn the lesson, that the high priest, having a greater need, because they had a greater responsibility than anyone else, needed to be immersed in the Spirit of Yahweh, that he might manifest Yahweh and fully perform God's will. And this is precisely what Mary is signifying in her anointing of the Lord. We don't know to what extent Mary understood what was soon to come to pass, but that she understood the fundamentals of it, there is little doubt indeed, because her action and the astonishing extent of her sacrifice, a price beyond anyone in those days, save the extremely wealthy, of which we have no reason to think that she was one, is nothing short of awesome. No one else thought to do what Mary did. NO ONE! None of the brethren who were there and who were about to pass into the upper room to partake of the Last Supper with the Lord. She was anointing the Lord Jesus Christ as High Priest. There were of course, those present among the Lord's disciples, who could not take this. They could not understand what they regarded as such a waste. They could not accept what Mary had done, eventually of course, all came to understand the significance of it all, all that is but one, and that was Judas Iscariot. By the time the reality of all these things was really coming to bear upon the minds of the others, Judas Iscariot was rightfully dead, in fact, for Judas, this act on the part of Mary, was the last straw.

We know that he kept the bag; we know that he was a thief, and we know that when it came to watching Mary do this, he was very, very angry, and he went straight out. In

Matthew 26:14 we have that stated. That was the last straw, it was as though Judas was saying, 'I am going to suffer financial loss through this foolish act of a foolish woman'. But, what was the Lord's reaction to this virulent criticism of what she had done? Look at verse 6, 'Jesus said, Let her alone, why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me'. You know, numerous versions render it, 'She hath done a beautiful thing to me', and in other versions you will read the Lord saying, 'Why are you bothering her; Why are you bothering her, she hath done a beautiful thing to me'. You see, the Lord appreciated her perception; He appreciated her understanding, and He appreciated the depth of her sacrifice.

Now, from our consideration of the consecration of the high priest, as he was about to be inducted into his office as high priest, we can understand what the Lord meant by these graceful and exquisite words of commendation to Mary. Here was the Lord, about to go forth to die, to declare the righteousness of God, and to provide the means of salvation for the human race, and then to rise and to ascend to the right hand of His Father, and there to take up His office as High Priest on the part of Yahweh's true servants. And you know, Paul says in Hebrews, that He was not a High Priest upon earth, and so the Lord took up His office as High Priest, when clothed in the glory of divine nature, He ascended into the presence of His Father, there to sit at His right hand as High Priest and mediator on behalf of His people.

No wonder the Lord said, recognizing the mind of Mary, and giving full appreciation to it, that He said, 'She has done a beautiful thing to Me'. And all of that to which we have spoken today, has really been designed to bring us to this point, the very essence of our exhortation. The Lord's simple and yet utterly profound comment which comes now in verse 8, 'She hath done what she could. She has come afore time to anoint Me to the burying'. She hath done what she could, and we ask ourselves the question, 'Does the Lord ever ask more than this of any man or any woman?' She hath done what she could, but before we are quick to say, 'but, we have done what we could, we need to examine ourselves very, very carefully, as we shall see the need for that in just a moment, when we look a little closer at that expression.

What had Mary done? She had perceived the Lord's eminent death and remembered many of the things that He had taught her. She prepared Him for His death and that which was to follow, because if she was anointing Him for His burial, that meant also that she was anointing Him with the resurrection in view. It means that she was probably familiar with Psalm 16 which taught that the Messiah and the Redeemer of Israel was to be a man, who would die; who would be placed in the tomb; who would be raised from the dead, and who would ascend to the glory of divine nature. She was probably familiar with Psalm 110 which represents the Lord Jesus Christ as a priest forever with divine nature, after the order of Melchizadek. And if she was aware of that she would be aware of verse 1 of that Psalm, 'Yahweh said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool', and to act upon all of this, she had somehow obtained the ointment which had cost her \$20,000, and had gladly given it all. As the last kind thing, a most significant thing to be done to the Lord, before His death. She hath done what she could!

But, do you know those words should be literally understood as meaning, she have given everything she has within her grasp, all that she possesses. Now, that's a little different isn't it? And it takes Mary's action quite a lot further, doesn't it? She hath given everything she has within her grasp, all that she possesses. Do we do that? Even when perhaps we feel that we are doing fairly well in the truth, a lot of bible study, a lot of attention to the affairs of the ecclesia, do we do that? You see, it's no wonder that the Lord says in verse 9 of this 14th chapter of Mark, 'Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she has done, shall be spoken for a memorial of her'. You see, what she had really done was to offer herself as a burnt offering. She had given EVERYTHING she had, like the burnt offering. You see, those words in verse 9, those wonderful words of commendation, just imagine the Lord saying that of anyone here today, that wherever this gospel is preached this also that she hath done will be spoken of a memorial of her. It does not necessarily mean that the Lord is profoundly impressed with a donation of \$20,000. to the ecclesial fund. It means that He knew why Mary did what she did. He knew the extent of her sacrifice, He understood her motive, He was thrilled at her perception and her understanding and that was what moved the Lord to utter the words that are recorded in verse 9.

You see, the Lord could see the mind of Mary. The Lord had filled her life with joy and hope. He had filled her mind with the light of the truth. He would give His life so she could find life ever-lasting, so she gave Him everything. She 'hath done what she could', or she hath given everything she has within her grasp, all that she possesses. And that attitude is not really common in these days in which we now live. Not a really common attitude at all, whether in the world or in the ecclesia. You know, brethren and sisters, in these days in which we are now living, we believe, immediately preceding the coming of the Lord, we live in a world of mediocrity, a world of mediocrity. And the word 'mediocre' is a word that means something that is very average or ordinary in quality. And in this world today in which we live, NOTHING IS REALLY IMPORTANT ANYMORE as far as true values are concerned. The only thing that matters to most people is getting on in the world, acquiring as much wealth as possible, having as much time for personal enjoyment and luxurious living. So far as important issues are concerned, it is a world where almost anything is good enough. And that same spirit is abroad within the ecclesial world today. You know, if you read some of our Christadelphian literature of a hundred years ago, or even further back, you'll read some wonderful things, which reflect the spirit of the brotherhood in those times, those early generations of the truth. I well remember reading one of the old magazines going back over a hundred years, and there they use to list the baptisms, which in those days were taking place at a furious rate, partly because the placing of God was upon the work. And the blessing of God was upon the work because of the vigour and enthusiasm and the keenness with which the brethren and sisters of Christ set about their responsibilities, fulfilling their responsibilities to Christ. And some of that is shown in the way in which they wrote about these things, and you know, invariably, they would put where the person had come from in their religious affiliation. So you'd read, 'On February 15th, Tom Jones, ex Methodist, etc.' and you might read, 'Frieda Smith, ex Anglican or

Episcopalian. And you know, in one of those old magazines, I once read this statement concerning a baptism, that had been inserted by the recording brother of that ecclesia, over a 100 years ago, and when he had written the piece on the baptism, you do know what he added to that? He added these words, 'Another jewel washed out of the mud of Gentilism'; they are beautiful words, another jewel washed out of the mud of Gentilism, doesn't that reflect a spirit, doesn't that reflect an attitude and disposition of love for Christ, love for the Father, love for the truth?

You see, what we need today is the spirit of Mary, just before the Lord was to introduce the bread and the wine as the symbols of His own impending sacrifice, we need to re- invigorate ourselves with a spirit of total commitment, to our Lord and our Master and our Saviour and our King. We need a perception of a Mary, the understanding of a Mary, the warmth of a Mary, the deep love of a Mary, the total dedication of a Mary, who was prepared to give 'everything she had within her grasp, to the honour of her Lord'.

It is interesting that in Mark chapter 14 and verse 31, all the disciples thought that they could handle the situation whatever it might be, but as chapter 14 and verse 30, 'Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter answered and spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in anywise. Likewise also said they all.' I don't doubt Peter's words in that sense, when he was in the right disposition, remember in the garden he drew his sword and he used it. Peter and the others, they would have died for the Lord, but would they have understood what they were dying for? Did they have a real grasp and a real understanding of the Lord's mission as it was drawing to an end upon earth, in the last final culmination of Him putting to death, the flesh, to show that only God is Righteous? So then, in verse 31, there are the words of Peter and the others, 'If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in anywise', they thought they could handle the situation, but look at the words in verse 50, 'And they all forsook him, and fled'. They all forsook Him and fled, and you know, brethren and sisters, the word there rendered 'forsook' is exactly the same word that occurs in verse 6, of which the Lord used in relation to Mary, when He said, 'Let her alone'. He said to the disciples, 'Let Mary alone' because she's done a beautiful thing to me. Don't find fault with what she's done, but now, what do we find? Under pressure, under pressure in verse 50, the disciples leave alone the Lord and forsake Him and they fled. The Lord had told the disciples to leave Mary alone, because what she was doing was right, and it was beautiful, and it was a great sacrifice which we cannot measure or understand the depth of it, and now the brethren forsake or leave the Lord alone, for an entirely different motive.

And of course, that means for us, brethren and sisters, that we forsake the Lord, when we run away from Him. We forsake the Lord when we try to avoid our responsibilities and our obligations to Him, or when we accept mediocrity, when we accept mediocrity as the standard of our service to our Lord and King. You know, in Revelation chapter 2 and verse 4, remember how the ecclesia at Ephesus was slowly dying? Remember what was wrong with them? 'I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love', and the word 'left' is again, exactly the same word as used by the Lord in

relation to Mary. They had left the wrong things. They had left the wrong things, so the ecclesia at Ephesus, had done what the disciples had done that fateful night when they forsook the Lord. In other words, at Ephesus, they thought that a mediocre attitude, a very average, a very ordinary attitude, in their own lives, in their families, in their ecclesia, would be good enough to please the Lord, and to cause Him to say of them, which He had said of Mary, 'she hath wrought a good work'.

We do not wish to be found at the Lord's coming, with such an attitude, that anything that we offer should be good enough and should be acceptable to the Lord. You know, we don't always think sufficiently, with deep concentration, upon the things that we do in our service to our Lord. We should think more carefully because we don't always realize what we are doing. We've always got to ask ourselves, will our thoughts, will our actions, will our activities, will our words, be pleasing and acceptable to the One whom we serve, to the One to whom we are espoused? And is it not remarkable, that after that wonderful incident, recorded here in Mark chapter 14, we also find the same in Matthew's account, immediately after this incident of Mary's selfless sacrifice, we are introduced to the emblems of the bread and the wine, which are now on the table before us, and of which we shall shortly partake. And at that stage, the disciples did not understand what was happening. In Mark 14 and verse 22, 'And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' And you know, while that was happening, if we go over to Luke's account, in Luke chapter 22 and verse 20, we read of the Lord taking the cup, after supper, 'this cup is the new covenant in my blood' (just like we read in Mark's account) but now look down to verse 24. While the Lord is doing this for the disciples, 'there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest', and just before that incident and that outburst among the disciples, who really thought that the kingdom was about to soon appear, and that they were all going to occupy high positions in the kingdom, and they are wondering and lobbying back and forth amongst themselves, as to who was going to be the greatest, when the Lord became King over the restored kingdom of Israel, and took out again and sat upon the throne of David, who would be his first lieutenant? Who would be the one who would stand closest to Him? Who would be the greatest?

That's what they were thinking, but you know, not long before this, if we go back to Luke again, in chapter 21, at the beginning of Luke chapter 21, when He has just concluded his tirade against the enemies of the truth, in verse 1 it says 'that He looked up and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury'. Here was all the money. The money going in, in such an ostentatious way, that everyone was suppose to see it. But look at verse 2, 'And He saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites', now, the mite was the smallest unit of currency then known in that part of the world, and 2 of those units, 2 mites, was the smallest contribution that was allowable to the temple service. You couldn't give less than that. That was the minimum that was accepted. What does the Lord say in verse 3, 'Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath

cast in more than they all', there, you see, that is the reverse of Mary's situation financially, but the result is the same. Mary has spent \$20,000. on the spikenard to anoint her Lord for His burying, and for that which was to follow afterwards, His resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, taking up His office as High Priest, on behalf of God's people. Here is a woman with only 2 mites. She doesn't have \$20,000. She has 2 mites. And what does the Lord say in verse 4, 'For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had'. She had done the same as Mary, she had given her all!

And so, there is that wonderful incident in Mark 14, concerning Mary. Mary, who understood so much, who sacrificed so much, who comprehended so beautifully those things concerning the mission of our Lord. And so the Lord said of her, 'She hath given everything within her grasp, all that she possesses' and may it be, brethren and sisters, that we will so rejuvenate our own understanding and conception of these things. The purpose of the Lord's mission, what He has done for us, and what we have committed ourselves to do for Him, that we renew our commitment to Him, that we see the truth in our lives as a living reality, so that the Lord may say of us, at His coming, what He said of Mary, 'that she hath done what she could'. What He wants is our hearts. He wants our minds. He wants our lives, because to give Him those things, is to give what in return will produce, the greatest gift that any could ever contemplate, the glory and the wonder of a divine inheritance with the Lord Jesus Christ, to live and reign with Him, over the kingdom, and to be with Him, in the perfection of divine nature, throughout all eternity, for the ages of the ages. Let us renew our commitment. Let us give Him our hearts. Let us give Him our minds. Let us give Him our lives. Let us give Him our all.