

How Much Does It Cost?

Mark 11:1-11

"How much does it cost?" That was the frequently asked question from the hundreds of Bachajon Indians who stood in line in 1965 to purchase the first ever translation of the New Testament into the Bachajon language. *"How much does it cost?"* It had taken Wycliffe Missionary Marianna Slocum eight years to finish the job, which may seem to be a long time, but it was nearly half the 15 years it took her to translate the NT for the Tzeltal Indians – another tribe deep in the jungles of Mexico. She had started work there in 1943. Two translations of the New Testament in 22 years – not bad work for a single woman from Philadelphia! And once the dedication of this Bachajon Bible was complete, she was heading to her third project high in the Andes mountains of South America. *"How much does it cost?"* Marianna Slocum turned to face the young Indian woman who asked her the question. She was ready to pay for her Bible. Marianna thought for a moment about the question - turned to her and said with deep satisfaction - "Only seventeen ½ pesos". She joyfully gave the woman her Bible.

Marianna Slocum is one of the great heroes of the faith. How much did it cost her to produce those three translations of the Bible? It cost her everything – her whole life. From her biography this account is written of Marianna and her co-laborer, Florence, "For both women the task seems insurmountable. Marianna worked long hours each day, struggling with the complexities of the language, and Florence struggled against the alcohol, filth, superstitions, and the demonic powers of the local witch doctor. And for all their struggles there were so few signs of success." But because of her life of great sacrifice she lived a life of great significance. And so it has always been following Jesus. Whether you are a missionary, a mother or a mailman - the more fully you give yourself to Jesus Christ the more powerfully he uses you and the more joy and fulfillment you will have.

Are you willing to serve the Lord with complete enthusiasm and abandon? How much does it cost? It will cost you everything. But those who embrace the cross--the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus--they will find it is worth everything.

Turn with me to Mark chapter 14: 1-11. In our passage this morning, we will see a contrast between the selfish enemies of Jesus, and a woman who joyfully gave her all to Him. Follow along in your Bibles as I read Mark 14:1-11:

- 1 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.**
- 2 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."**
- 3 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.**
- 4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted?"**
- 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.**
- 6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a**

good work for Me.

7 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.

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."

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them.

11 And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.

A. The Chief Priests Seek to Kill Jesus (1-2)

The chief priests and scribes are looking for a way to arrest Jesus and kill him. Mark has already told us previously that the large crowds that Jesus attracts make the priests and scribes nervous. They see him as a threat to their power, and so they've made the decision already that he needs to be killed. There's a problem, though. It's now only two days before the Passover festival. Large crowds of people are everywhere, many of whom greeted Jesus when he first entered the city on Sunday. If they try to arrest Jesus in front of all those people there is likely to be a riot, and the priests and scribes will end up with a much worse situation. Their only chance is to find a way to arrest him away from the city when he has withdrawn to the countryside with his disciples. The implication is that in order to get him when he's away from the crowds, they need the help of someone who knows where he will be, an insider.

That's how Wednesday of Jesus' last week begins. It ends with Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' disciples, willingly going to the chief priests in order to betray Jesus into their hands. On one side we see greed, murderous intent, lust for power. The high priests are plotting to kill Jesus. On the opposite side we see cold, calculating betrayal. Judas has made up his mind. He's going to deliver Jesus into the hands of his would-be murderers. But behind all of this evil, God is working for good. God is setting the stage for the cross, His greatest act of love and sacrifice.

So maybe that is why as Mark writes about this evil plot, he interrupts the scheming of the Chief Priests to flash back to an event that happened on Saturday in Bethany. It's an event that prepares Jesus for the cross.

B. A Woman Anoints Jesus (3-9)

In verse three Mark shows this powerful contrast between the evil of those who are seeking to kill Jesus, and a woman who shows her love for Jesus. **"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."**

Bethany is kind of a suburb of Jerusalem just a couple miles east of the city. Jesus is in the home of Simon the leper, probably a man whom Jesus had healed, because if he were still a leper, he would not be hosting a dinner party. He would still be an outcast.

1. Her Action - she anoints Jesus with very expensive perfume. (v. 3)

Into the dinner party comes a woman. Mark does not name her, although John tells us it was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Mark only tells us that she has in her hand a very costly alabaster jar filled with an even more expensive perfume of pure nard. We see in verse 5 that the perfume is worth an incredible 300 denarii – a year's wages for a laborer. A full-time minimum wage worker today will earn about \$16,000 a year. We are talking about at least a \$16,000 bottle of perfume. Mark is not exaggerating when he says it was **very costly**. Think about that for a moment. Do you own anything that's worth an entire year's salary? Would you be willing to break it? Would you be willing to give it all in joyful worship and unashamed service to the Lord?

She brought what was probably the most precious possession she and her family had. She brings this costly gift and she gives it **completely to the Lord**. She takes the vial and breaks it and pours all of it on the head of Jesus. Every drop, right on top of his head and it flows down his hair onto his beard. And the room is filled with a beautiful sweet smell.

She demonstrates generosity, extravagance and her complete devotion and faith in Jesus. You would think everyone at the dinner party would be celebrating and worshipping with her.

2. The Disciples' Reaction - They think it is a waste. (vv. 4-5)

But not everyone was happy with this extravagant offering, Mark 14:4-5, **"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."** John tells us it was Judas, the betrayer, who instigated this criticism, but others obviously joined him in chastising her.

What a waste! \$16,000 dollars – dripping onto the floor. Hospitality is one thing – anointing a visitor, washing his feet – sure. But this is absolutely irresponsible. What about the poor? What about the coming Kingdom? What about the budget deficit?

Can you relate to these objections? What she did seems so extreme. – but what the disciples miss – and the woman understands, is the true identity of Jesus. To break the bottle on Peter's head would have indeed have been a waste. To anoint John with this would have been inappropriate – but nothing is ever wasted in service to the Lord. They don't get it.

If I turn the spotlight off the woman and toward myself this morning, then I discover that in my best moments there are times when I seem to be very much like her. I give what I have out of devotion to God, and love for Jesus. But I also discover that there are plenty of times that I seem more like the disciples. I act only out of concern for the church budget, or my own personal finances. I get caught seeing things only in terms of material value, and I fail to see the spiritual dimension of things. There are even times when I discover that I'm more like the chief priests or even Judas, overreacting to a perceived threat, or acting only out of a sense of self-preservation.

Being a Christian isn't all about budgets and bank balances. Being a Christian means sacrifice. There's something beautiful about just giving what you have. Being a Christian means acting out of our loving devotion to Jesus Christ, even if it isn't the

proper thing to do, even if it looks silly or strange, even if it doesn't make good business sense.

Let everything you do be an expression of your love for your Lord. That's what really matters. Jesus shows us that in what He says about the woman.

3. Jesus' Defense of the Woman - It is a beautiful thing (vv. 6-9)

Jesus says: **But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 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."**

The woman's gave Jesus a costly gift and she gave it completely. And as a result receives a tremendous complement from Jesus. First, Jesus says, **she has done a good (Greek: beautiful) thing**. Second, **she has done what she could** – all that was within her resources. Third, **what she has done will always and forever be linked to the gospel**. It is linked to the gospel because her anointing of Jesus is preparation for His burial. Wouldn't you like to receive a complement like that from Jesus?

Jesus shows this woman as example of a true disciple -- Like the widow who dropped her last two coins in the offering she gave it all – and that what Jesus requires.

In the magnificently rich temple in Jerusalem, are the priests and scribes, the spiritually blind. They give nothing for Christ – but only want to take His life. They have no faith. But, in the home of a leper, here is a woman who gives everything to the Lord – she is our model of discipleship. She gave an extravagant gift. And in doing so, she pictures the gospel. God gives an extravagant gift, His only Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus gives an extravagant gift, His very life, on the cross for us.

Mark then returns to where he started this chapter. He is moving us very quickly toward the cross--Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

C. Judas Conspires to Betray Jesus

Mark 14:10-11,

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.

Feeling the loss of so great a sum of money – Judas, the treasurer, has had enough and agrees to betray Jesus. He finds the enemies of Christ in the temple and offers to hand Jesus over to them. They receive him gladly and they promise to pay him for his treacherous deed.

The woman will be forever remembered for preparing Jesus for burial. Judas will be forever remembered for betraying the Lord. How will you be remembered?

And so as we come to the conclusion of this story - the question for us is: "What is Jesus worth to you?" To Mary, He was worth everything that she had. To Judas He was worth 30 pieces of silver. What do you have to give? Really there is only one thing that the Lord requires – **your whole life**. All of it. Completely poured out for Him.

In 1941 Marianna Slocum became engaged to Bill Bently a fellow Wycliffe missionary doing translation work in Mexico. They fell deeply in love. But six days before their wedding he died of an undiagnosed degenerative heart condition. She was devastated. But he had said to her this, "If something should happen to one of us – the other must continue on with the work." And that is what she did. She gave her whole life to serving the Lord on the mission field.

"How much does it cost?" (Slocum's biographer wrote) "This was the oft-repeated question as the Indians stood in line. Seventeen and a half pesos was, of course, the answer to the question they had in mind, but the actual answer could never be given in pesos. Loneliness, illness, unfriendliness, primitive living conditions and the sacrifice of marriage and family all made up the cost of the Bachajon New Testament. It was a heavy price, but one Marianna gladly paid." (*From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, Ruth A. Tucker, 363)

Some asked Marianna about her sacrifices she made as a missionary. And she said, "I never considered any of it a sacrifice but a privilege and a joy."

It may seem like a sacrifice to follow Jesus – but the secret is... that it is really no sacrifice at all – but a huge blessing. Marianna said, "To see people come out of darkness, and witchcraft, and fear of the devil and to be delivered into the marvelous light of Jesus, What more could you ask for?"

Mary of Bethany and Marianna Slocum, they gave what they could. They embraced the sacrifice of the cross and found true joy in serving their Lord. I challenge you today to look at how you are serving Him and how you are loving Him.

Maybe the Lord is calling you to come and be saved. Maybe the Lord is calling you to come and repent of a bad attitude. Maybe He is calling you to come and give Him some extravagant love right now. Listen to His voice! Do what He tells you right now.