

# Break Your Bottle

April 2 – Mark 14:3-9; Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-11

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Day 92 – 273 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Jesus was anointed with perfume in Bethany. Bethany is just outside of Jerusalem, the place where His enemies were scheming His death. But before He went to Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples enjoyed a meal with good friends in the home of Simon the leper (whom He had healed). Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were there. Martha was serving, of course, and Simon and Lazarus were reclining at the table with Jesus and the others. But, once again, it was Mary's actions that stopped the party.

Evidently, Mary had saved an expensive bottle of perfume, perhaps for this occasion. Instead of using the perfume for herself, she broke it and used it to anoint Jesus' head and feet. Immediately, the smell wafted through the room and caught everyone's attention.

Judas, who had been embezzling money from Jesus and the disciples, chided Mary for such extravagant waste. Though he feigned concern for the poor, in truth he was angry at Mary for cheating him of an opportunity to enrich himself. He was also insinuating that pouring the perfume on Jesus was careless.

Jesus interrupted the dispute by saying that Mary had done a good deed, even preparing His body for burial, a subtle hint that He would soon be killed. "You will always have the poor with you," He said, "but you will not always have Me" (Jn. 12:8). He was not implying that we shouldn't care for the poor. Rather He was stating that His time on earth was soon ending.

The story ended with Jesus' enemies arriving on the scene. Jerusalem was not far away, and their spies had reported that Jesus was within reach. What's interesting is that they were not just there for Jesus. They intended to kill Lazarus too. Because Lazarus was raised from the dead, people were believing in Jesus. Thus, in their eyes, Lazarus was just as much a threat to their authority as Jesus was.

## Daily Reflection

Simon hosted Jesus in his home. Martha served Jesus a meal. Lazarus not only spent time at the table in Jesus' presence, but also his resurrected life was a testimony of the goodness of God and the arrival of the Messiah. Mary worshiped Jesus by anointing Him and wiping His feet with her hair. As hair is the glory of woman (1 Cor. 11:15), Mary laid down her glory at His feet.

Our spiritual enemy hates all of this. He used Judas and the religious leaders to stop it. He cannot stand it when Jesus is glorified or exalted. In the end, of course, Satan will use these traitors to seize and kill the Lord.

But the point of the story is that **Christ is worthy of any sacrifice we can make on His behalf.** For Simon, it was hospitality and inconvenience, as he opened his home for the Lord. For Martha, it was service, as she worked hard preparing the meal. For Lazarus, it was time with Jesus, as well as the threat to his life for exhibiting the glory of God. For Mary, it was both her most prized possession and her body (hair).

What is it that you are sacrificing (or have sacrificed) for the sake of Christ? What "costly perfume" has God been calling you to sacrifice for His sake that you have refused?

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**Nothing we have — whether it's time, treasure, or talents — is worth more than our Savior. He is worthy of all the honor we can bestow and more. Break your bottle of costly perfume and worship Him.**

# Unmet Expectations

## Today in Your Reading

Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, what we refer to as Palm Sunday (as people laid palm branches before Him). While it may take several weeks to cover everything that occurred in His final days, this event is the beginning of the last week of Jesus' life on earth. Jerusalem was the headquarters for His enemies, and they had been waiting for the perfect time to seize and destroy Him. That moment had come. But we will save that discussion for another day.

Did you notice that the gospel writers mentioned a donkey in the story? They did not want us to miss the significance of this detail. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion (a nickname for Jerusalem). Shout in triumph, O Jerusalem. Behold, your King is coming to you. He is just and endowed with salvation. Humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." *Zechariah 9:9*

The donkey was the key. Jesus had been to Jerusalem many times, but He had walked into the city every time, until now. This time He rode a donkey. Why? It was a signal. He was fulfilling prophecy and identifying Himself as the Messiah, the promised King who was to come, and Kings don't walk into cities.

The crowds were aware of the symbolism. That's why they shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" The word *hosanna* means "save us." They were shouting, "Save us! Save us!" The problem is that they believed He was coming to save them from the Romans when He was there to save them from their sins.

This misunderstanding explains why Jesus was crying. The Jews "did not recognize the time of their visitation" (*Lk. 19:41-44*). They had the right person but the wrong purpose. He also

foresaw the fall of the city (referring to 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem to put down a revolt).

When Jesus arrived at the Temple, He was angered by what He saw, businessmen abusing the sacrificial system to make money. Instead of a house of prayer, they had made it a house of profit. The Lord was disappointed in His people. **They fell short of His expectations.**

## Daily Reflection

This event was bittersweet. The Son of God and Savior of His people had arrived, yet within a week they would deliver Him up to be crucified. Why? **Jesus did not meet their expectations.** He didn't do what they thought He should do. When He didn't fulfill their expectations, they dismissed Him as a phony.

We do the same today. **We impose our expectations on the Lord, and when He doesn't perform, we are disappointed.** We dismiss and even despise Him. But is God supposed to meet our demands? Does He exist to fulfill our will and wishes? Or is it the other way around?

**By imposing our expectations on the Lord, we are attempting to conform Him into our image.** Instead, we are to surrender to His will and be conformed into His image.

Have you ever been guilty of imposing your expectations on the Lord? Have you ever been disappointed when He "failed" you somehow? What do these expectations communicate?

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# Our Purpose and Passion

April 4 – John 12:20-50

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Day 94 – 271 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Jesus gave His last public discourse. After today, He will only address His disciples. Thus, what He had to say is very important since they were His final words to the people.

His message was triggered by a visit from some Greeks who had traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (v.20). While that may seem insignificant, it is not. Remember, since the Jews (as a nation) did not accept Jesus as their Messiah, God allowed a hardening of their hearts to occur, during which they will miss out on the blessings of the gospel (v.37-41). As a result, the message of salvation will be extended to Gentile nations (v.32).

Within His discourse, Jesus revealed that the time had come for His death (v.23). From the beginning, He had said that His time had not yet come, but now it was here. He even hinted at the way in which He would die when He said that He would be lifted up, referring to His crucifixion (v.32, 33). The reality of His death was troubling to Him (v.27), yet the results of His death and subsequent resurrection were worth the trouble. In fact, He said that it would bear much fruit (v.24) and overthrow and judge “the ruler of this world” (v.31; Gen. 3:15).

In His final hours, as He had done His entire life and ministry, **Jesus glorified His Father**. No matter how difficult it would be to bear the weight of the world’s sin on the cross, **He wanted to do His Father’s will** (v.27, 28). Everything that Jesus did and said, He did because it was the Father’s purpose (v.49, 50).

Before He finished, Jesus offered salvation one last time, saying, “I did not come into this world to judge it but to save it” (v.36, 47). The next time He would come, it would be to judge the world (v.48). Though Jesus was so transparent and real in this moment, most of the people did not comprehend what He was saying.

## Daily Reflection

How refreshing and challenging it is to read that **Jesus always did the will of the Father and spoke the Father’s words**. In other words, He glorified the Father in everything He did. I find this refreshing because of the simplicity of living with a singular purpose, to glorify God. But I also find this challenging because I regularly fall short of glorifying God.

**Although glorifying God is our purpose (1 Cor. 10:31) and should be our passion**, glorifying God is easier said than done. While we may desire to glorify God in all our actions and words, we regularly glorify other things. Instead of living to please God, we often seek to please others, even when their expectations are contrary to God’s. In such cases, we are glorifying them, giving more weight to what they think than what God thinks. Also, instead of reflecting glory to God, we readily glorify ourselves. **Thus, our purpose and passion often fall prey to our pandering and pride.**

However, Jesus said, “He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world (compared to our love for Him) will keep it. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, My servant will be also” (v.25, 26).

What about you? Is glorifying God your singular purpose and overwhelming passion? Are you seeking to do the Father’s will and to speak the Father’s words? If a stranger was tasked with watching and listening to you for a year, what would he determine about your purpose and passion? Whom would he say you most honor and glorify through your actions and words?

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# Mountains and Mercy

April 5 – Mark 11:12-26; Matthew 21:18-22; Luke 19:45-48

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Day 95 – 270 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

We read, for a second time, about Jesus cleansing the Temple. Why? As you may have noticed already, the gospel writers do not always align chronologically. In this case, Matthew recorded that Jesus cleansed the Temple upon His arrival in Jerusalem, while Mark recorded Jesus cleansing the Temple the next day. Therefore, to be true to the reading of Scripture, the chronological Bible divides this story into two days.

Even though this may be confusing, Mark did not want us to miss the connection between Jesus cleansing the Temple and cursing the fig tree. In fact, he enclosed (or sandwiched) the Temple incident between the two parts about the fig tree (v.12-14, 21).

What exactly was the connection between the Temple and tree? Several days ago, we read Jesus' parable of the fig tree (Lk. 13:6-9). It was a symbol of Israel's hardened hearts. Like the fruitless tree with pretty leaves, the people looked good (religious) but exhibited no fruit. Mark's evidence for this truth was the presence of the corrupt businessmen in the Temple. Furthermore, within a week, God's people would condemn and crucify their Messiah. Thus, when Jesus cursed the tree, it was symbolic of His passing judgment on the nation (Mk. 11:14).

The disciples did not pick up on the symbolism at the time, of course. They were more amazed at the fact that the tree withered at Jesus' command. Thus, Jesus used the opportunity to teach about faith and prayer. **With faith, Jesus said, we can move mountains**, believing that what we pray for will occur (Heb. 11:1, 6). Of course, that faith is not a confidence in ourselves or our ability; rather it is confidence in God and His promises (Mk. 11:22). This passage does not insinuate a "name it and claim it" approach to prayer. Remember, our prayers should be grounded in the will and word of God (Jn. 15:7). It's not meant to fulfill our wishes.

However, Jesus said that there is one deterrent to faith and prayer — unforgiveness (v.25, 26). If we hold a grudge or harbor an unforgiving spirit towards someone, we cannot expect for God to answer our prayers. Since He has forgiven us of our offenses against Him, we should freely extend forgiveness towards others. **If we are unwilling to show grace or mercy to others, how can we expect to receive grace or mercy ourselves?**

## Daily Reflection

Consider your prayer life. Have you been faithful to pray, and have you prayed in faith? What "mountains" have you seen God move?

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We can always be confident that God will keep His promises. Therefore, to pray according to His will and word is to trust in His promises. What are some promises that we can pray?

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**We cannot expect mercy if we are not willing to extend mercy to others. Whom have you not forgiven? Move that mountain today.**

# The Rock Will Win

April 6 – Mark 11:27-12:12; Matthew 21:23-46; Luke 20:1-18

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Day 96 – 269 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Jesus had another encounter with the religious leaders. They were looking for an opportunity to destroy Him, so they began to ask Him a series of trick questions. However, Jesus knew their motives and instead of falling into their trap, He exposed their evil intentions.

Today's trick question was, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who is the one who gave you this authority?" "These things" refers to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His subsequent cleansing of the Temple. Certainly, the chief priests and scribes would've condemned Jesus for whatever answer He gave, so He asked them a trick question about John the Baptist. Knowing the hearts and thoughts of men, Jesus turned their plans against them.

Then, Jesus followed His question with a parable about the vine-growers. The man who planted the vineyard in the story was God, and the vine-growers to whom He rented the field were the religious leaders. At harvest time, the owner sent servants (Old Testament prophets) to collect part of the produce, but the vine-growers either beat them or killed them. When the owner sent his son, the vine-growers planned to eliminate him too. Jesus was exposing the evil intentions of those seeking to kill Him.

Usually, Jesus' parables were difficult to understand, but this time the religious leaders got the message loud and clear. They were in trouble. God, the owner of the vineyard, would destroy the vine-growers for their actions and give the vineyard to others, referring to the Gentiles. His enemies were appalled by this news and even more determined to kill Jesus.

Finally, Jesus showed everyone that their plans were predicted in *Psalm 118:22*, "The stone which the builders rejected became the chief corner stone." The Jews believed this psalm to be about the Messiah, so Jesus' warning was clear. He was the Messiah, and the Jews would

reject Him, yet His suffering and death would be the foundation for God's redemptive plan. He also warned that, like a clay pot, whoever falls on Him would be crushed, or whomever the rock fell upon would be destroyed. Simply put, **both His enemies and those who reject Jesus will be defeated. Ultimately, the rock will win.**

## Daily Reflection

This confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders is reassuring. It is reassuring to know that Jesus' enemies will not prevail. Even though they will eliminate Jesus (temporarily), God will use their actions for good, our salvation.

Take a minute to read *Psalm 2*. What similarities do you see between it and our passage?

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We often believe that we are wiser than God. We are tempted to think that we know best and, though God has said one thing, we do another. But, in the end, God always foils our pride, reveals our lack of wisdom, and brings us to the end of ourselves.

Have you ever tested God, thinking that you are wiser than Him? Have you ever tried to justify sinful actions by your shortsighted reasoning? What was the result?

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# The Wedding Party

April 7 – Matthew 22:1-14

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Day 97 – 268 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

Jesus told the parable of the wedding feast. This story was a continuation of His answer to the chief priests and scribes who were seeking to kill Jesus (*Matt. 21:23-46*). It was His way of passing judgment on the Jews as a whole and the religious leaders specifically.

The King in the story is God. He had prepared a feast for the wedding of His Son (Jesus), a foreshadowing of heaven. God's servants (prophets, apostles) invited His people (Jews, Israel) to come to the feast, but they refused. Though their refusal was offensive, the King (God) was patient and merciful, inviting them a second time. Still, they were either apathetic or aggressive towards the King's servants, paying them no attention or mistreating them.

The King (God) was enraged and ordered the destruction of His people, for "they were not worthy to attend the feast" (v.7, 8). Here is a prophecy regarding 70 AD, when the Roman Emperor Titus ordered the destruction of Jerusalem and the subjugation of the Jews, which was a temporary judgment of God's people. However, the greater judgment is that He allowed a hardening of their hearts to occur and then extended salvation to the Gentiles (non-Jews). Thus, the King told His servants to go to the highways and invite everyone else to the wedding feast (v.9).

But when the King came to the feast and looked over the guests (a hint at the final judgment), He noticed one who was not dressed for the wedding. Like today, there was a dress code for weddings. In some cases, wedding clothes were provided for the guests. This man refused to wear what was provided. He refused the dress code requirements of the King. Therefore, he was disrespectful to both the King and His Son. When the King asked the man why he did not wear the proper attire, he had nothing to say. Thus, the King arrested him and threw him out into the darkness (a symbol of hell).

While this seems harsh, we must remember that those who are in Christ are clothed in His righteousness, not their own (*2 Cor. 5:17, 21; Phil. 3:9*). This intruder was attempting to force his way into heaven without the righteousness of Christ. Like the Pharisees, he was relying upon his own merits to earn God's favor.

## Daily Reflection

Jesus ended the parable with a mysterious statement, "**For many are called but few are chosen**" (v.14). We must consider the context of the parable to understand its meaning.

Another word for *called* is invited. From the parable we see that all people are invited to attend the wedding feast in heaven. However, many people will reject the invitation. Some will even attempt to force their way into heaven, rejecting the righteousness of Christ and relying instead on their own self-righteousness.

Not only will those people be disappointed, they will also discover that **there is only one way to attend the wedding feast, by receiving the offer of salvation through God's Son, Jesus Christ.** Those who have put their faith in Him for the forgiveness of their sins will inherit eternal life. **They are the chosen, dressed in white, ready for the wedding feast of the King's Son.**

Are you one of the chosen? How can you know? In light of the parable, do you have a fear or respect for God, the King? Do you love and honor His Son? Have you accepted His gracious gift of salvation and put your faith in Him? Have you exchanged your rottenness for His righteousness? **If so, then you are properly dressed and ready for the wedding feast!**

If you cannot affirm the list above, then I have bad news. You are the one not prepared for the wedding. Don't miss this opportunity to surrender your life to Christ and clothe yourself with His righteousness. Then, you will be ready for that great party, and I will meet you there!



# Any More Questions?

April 8 – Matthew 22:15-40; Mark 12:13-34; Luke 20:20-40

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Day 98 – 267 Days to Go

## Today in Your Reading

The Jewish leaders tried to trap Jesus with difficult questions. They were hoping He would say something that would be blasphemous or heretical, perhaps even something political, anything that they might use against Him. Instead, they instantly regretted their approach.

First, the Pharisees and Herodians teamed up to trick Jesus. Pharisees were experts in the Jewish law, and Herodians were a political group that supported and promoted the rule of King Herod. Their question was more political in nature, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" If Jesus said no, then they could report Him to the Romans as a revolutionary. If Jesus said yes, they could condemn Him for being in favor of Roman oppression.

Jesus perceived their hypocrisy (*Mk. 12:15*) and stunned them all with His answer. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (*v.17*). In other words, Jesus legitimized the rule of the Romans and their taxes. But Jesus challenged these men not to allow taxation to undermine their duties and obligations to God.

Second, the Sadducees (priests) questioned Jesus about the resurrection, which was ironic because they did not believe in the resurrection (*v.18*). They posed a ridiculous scenario (a woman with seven husbands) and asked Jesus to give a ruling. In heaven, whose wife will she be, they asked. Their question revealed their ignorance, Jesus said, for the resurrection was real, for "God is a God of the living not the dead," (*v.26, 27*) and marriage will not exist in heaven (*v.25*). The only way to know these things is for Jesus to have first-hand knowledge of heaven, which He does.

Finally, a lawyer asked Jesus which was the greatest of the commandments. Even the religious leaders did not agree on this issue, so they were wanting to entangle Jesus in the

debate. But, again, He amazed them with His answer. Instead of picking one, Jesus summarized the law. "Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor as yourself" (*v.30, 31*). In essence, Jesus legitimized and categorized them all. "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (*Matt. 22:40*).

## Daily Reflection

At that point, "No one else ventured to ask Jesus any more questions" (*v.34*). They learned their lesson and waited for another opportunity. They were not going to trap Him with something that He said wrong. Instead, they were going to have to pervert something that He said right. We will discover their evil plan at another time.

While we could study each question and answer individually, let's step back and look at the lesson of the entire passage. What do we learn? **The wisdom of men is foolishness compared to the wisdom of God.** Rather than admit that Jesus was right, and they were wrong, they pridefully clung to their distorted thinking.

Take a minute to read *Romans 11:33-36*, *1 Corinthians 1:25*, and *1 Corinthians 3:19*. What truths did you find?

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Have you ever questioned God or thought that you knew better than Him? What happened?

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