

The Gospel According to Mark: Three Texts

Matthew 26:6-13

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

Mark 14:3-9

And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, “Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my

burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

Purple text indicate congruity with Mark. Green text indicate additional detail. Red text indicate incongruity with Mark.

I. Major Takeaways and Analysis

- The Matthew and Mark readings have nearly identical features and seem to be the same historical event.
- Very often when comparing Mark to Matthew, Mark often has more details of the same story. This is likely due to “oral performance”.
- There are also a few details that Mark has that match with John.
- But there are many, many more details that differ between Mark (and Matthew) and John.
- The biggest difference of all is **when this took place in the placement in the relation to the events of the passion week**. Mark (and Matthew) place this **within the passion week after the entry into Jerusalem**. John places this **anointing before Palm Sunday**.
- There is a central detail in John’s anointing that really stands out. “And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.” *This is one of the keys to interpreting the story in light of John’s narrative context.*

II. Five Lessons in Intertextual Interpretation

1. When interpreting an event in multiple Gospels, **it is preferable to chiefly interpret in light of the Gospel you are reading/studying**. So, Mark in light of Mark, etc.
2. We should not dismiss smaller details as “insignificant” details.
3. Not every difficulty can or should be solved by simply asserting that there were “two of...” something. However, it is reasonably clear from the Gospels that **Jesus told the same stories/teachings multiple times in different locations for different people...or even similar things occurred at different times and places**. See Luke 7:39.
4. When considering different details of seemingly the same story, we should always be hesitant to start with the premise one of the writers “blew it”!
5. By observing the above, **what you are doing is being faithful to the text in front of you**. Careful Bible interpreters value the text and seek to read it for all it’s worth.