

4. Meet Jesus: Amidst beauty and betrayal

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to open your Bibles, we're in Mark's Gospel and chapter 14. Mark chapter 14, and that's on page 850.

Mark chapter 14, page 850. And I'll read from verse 1 to verse 11.

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.

[1 : 41] 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. Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray them.

And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

So, from chapter 3, verse 6, the chief priests, the religious establishment, they've wanted Jesus dead.

And all the way through Mark's Gospel, there's been this sort of undercurrent. For example, in chapter 12, they asked Jesus this trick question.

They say, should we pay taxes to Caesar or not? And as we arrive at chapter 14, it's like the intensity of all this, it's coming to a boil.

[2 : 49] Chapter 14, well, it's foreboding. It's full of intrigue, mystery, and betrayal. And as the chief priests, as the chief priests, they plot Jesus' death.

Two people purposefully walk the streets around Jerusalem. They're both determined. They're both focused.

They're both on a mission. One is walking toward Jesus, and the other one is walking away from Jesus.

And friends, this will form the structure of our talk. So, we've got two points. Number one, a woman values Jesus more than money.

And number two, Judas values money more than Jesus. Well, let's first of all, think about the setting for this dramatic series of events.

[3 : 49] Verse 1, well, verse 1 is pregnant with anticipation. And there's two things, friends, to notice in verse 1, if you have a look.

Two things to notice. Number one, Passover is approaching. And number two, there's this plot to kill Jesus. And we'll see it all there. Verse 1 is sort of setting the scene for Jesus' arrest, his trial, and his crucifixion.

Friends, verse 1 is, well, it's like Jesus' death warrant. Have a look. Verse 1, it was now two days before the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread.

And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth. And can you see? Kill him. So, Passover's approaching.

You know, that time when they remembered the liberation from Egypt, from slavery. That time when they'd look back and they'd remember killing a lamb and marking the doorposts so that the Lord would pass over them as he judged Egypt.

[4 : 58] Moses had said in Exodus, chapter 12, verse 14, listen to this, This day shall be for you a memorial day and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations.

So, here's the ingredients of Passover. There's sacrifice. There's blood. There's death. There's judgment. And the good news is there's salvation.

Isn't there? God's people came out of Egypt. And verse 1, friends, Passover, it's just two days away.

Two days away. And tens of thousands of families are converging in on Jerusalem. You could have heard the bleating of the lambs if you listened.

Two days away. Yet Isaiah's words had been waiting for this particular Passover, not for two days, but for over 700 years.

[6 : 01] He was oppressed and afflicted. Yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to slaughter.

And now it's just two days away, friends. And so the scene's set. It's all coming together in God's unfolding plans and purposes.

It's like the air's thick with the plot of death. And then the last two words of verse 1. The religious institution, they have a plan, don't they?

They have a plan for the author of life, the creator of the cosmos. Look at it. The last two words there are verse 1. They want him dead, don't they? They want to kill him.

And there's this woman. She's approaching. She'd obviously heard about Jesus. Well, you would do. He'd been walking around, you know.

[7 : 01] He's been healing the sick, raising the dead, controlling the nature. Everyone knew about him. You know, this isn't like one of the world's made-up religions.

This is all out in the public domain. If you had a webcam, you could have filmed it all. It's going on in the middle of the Roman Empire. And so she knows about Jesus.

And she holds this jaw like a baby in her arms as she arrives outside of Simon's house.

Simon a leper, says Mark. That is, well, Simon, who was a leper, for the dead are raised, the lame walk, and the sick are healed, the unclean are made clean.

Simon a leper, he would have been an outcast, wouldn't he? But then he met Jesus. And like many people who meet Jesus, his life had started afresh.

[8 : 12] New life. And he must have invited Jesus to his home for a meal. And verse 3, Jesus is reclining at table, isn't he? The disciples are gathered around and the door opens.

You could have heard a ping drop. And there she is. All eyes are fixed on her. This woman. A woman. Intruding.

And it's like in July 1982, when an intruder broke in to the Queen's bedroom. He was barefoot, wearing a T-shirt, and he had the audacity, do you remember it?

He had the audacity to ask the Queen for a cigarette. Is that shocking? And this woman, she stands there, it's as shocking as that. Everyone's eyes are popping out.

They're all looking at her. And it's not so much her face they're looking at, but what she's carrying. You know, you'd have thought it was a machine gun, the reaction that it's causing.

[9 : 20] Everyone's asking themselves, where did she get that flask of ointment? How can she afford such a thing? Perhaps it was a family heirloom.

You know, it could have been like an investment tucked away for a rainy day. Something like today, we might have an ISA or something like that.

And this was such a day in her thinking. And so she walks toward Jesus. It's like she's on a mission, and the silence is broken.

Not by her words, but the sound of the flask breaking. She breaks it. She snaps the sealed neck of the flask.

Broken pottery. This isn't a half measure, is it? There's no going back now. And friends, have you come to that point in your own life with Jesus?

[10 : 23] A point of commitment? You know, is that where you are today? Verse 3. 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.

That head, soon to be marred beyond human semblance, says Isaiah. She anoints him. And James Edwards, he says this, from this most unexpected quarter comes an act of sacrificial generosity that supersedes anything reported of Jesus' inner circle of disciples.

C.T. Stood knows this, you should know this by heart if you're a Christian. If Christ Jesus died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

And I wonder how committed we are. He wants our whole lives, doesn't he? Jesus. how much of his own life did he give for us?

How much did he withhold from us? Nothing, did he? Not even a quarter of one percent. He didn't withhold anything.

[11:57] Not his clothes, not his dignity, not his life, not one iota. chapter 10 verse 45. I've come to give my life, says Jesus, as a ransom for many.

And it's not so much what we give, friends, that we need to meditate upon, but what we withhold. Think about this.

He owns everything, doesn't he, Jesus? He owns everything. Everything that we think we own, he actually owns it. It's his. He owns you.

He owns the house that you live in. He owns your bank account. He owns all the time that you have, every minute of it. And he demands, friends, doesn't he, that we use it for him.

Yet we're so begrudging, aren't we? You and me. That's right, we are. That's what sin is, isn't it? That's why in the Lord's Prayer we say, forgive us our debts, our obedience that we withhold.

[13:05] And we look on at this scene with his disciples. Verse 4. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, why was this ointment wasted like that?

For this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor and they scolded her. James Edwards says, the world has never had a problem with religion in moderation. That's true, isn't it? And I wonder how many of us have reached the point in life where we just simply can't contain our love for Jesus.

And we just have to sort of be extravagant like this woman is here. It's a private thing, isn't it, I guess? And Mark chooses not to name this lady and she's not said a word nor does she.

So the disciples snarled at her like dogs snarling as the postman arrives and now it's silent again.

The ointment dripping from his hair and as Jesus takes a breath before he comments on what she's done we can meditate ourselves, friends, can't we?

[14:22] We can think what's just happened in Simon the leper's house. Those who were on the inside they spoke, didn't they, as if they were on the outside. And really it's just the prelude, isn't it?

Soon it's Judas, soon it's Peter, soon they're all deserting him and Jesus lifts his head and looks around. Three years he's been with them.

Three years he taught them with authority, he'd calmed storms, he'd forgiven sin, the dead are raised, the blind see, the lame walk, the unclean are made clean.

Even Simon the leper, he stands there as a testimony. Chapter 10 he told them hadn't he, how they were going to Jerusalem and that he would be delivered over to the chief priests and be condemned to death.

He looks around, the ointment still dripping from his hair. Has it come to this? Think about this, in scolding the woman, they're actually demeaning Jesus, aren't they?

[15:33] Was his life not worth more than a flask of ointment? We esteemed him not, said Isaiah. And the silence is broken, verse 6.

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 of the world, in Glasgow, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

My song is love unknown, my saviour love for me, love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be. But who am I that for my sake my Lord should take for our flesh and die?

We'll sing that shortly. So that was our first point. A woman values Jesus more than money and we'll quickly look now at Judas, who values money, doesn't he, more than Jesus.

[16:50] So if you remember, the woman, she sort of approached from the outside, didn't she? And now in contrast, Jesus is going away from Jesus. He's walking away, isn't he, to the chief priest.

That's the mission he's on. Opposite directions, like ships in the night. And it's like, think about this, it's like their faith is focused on opposite things.

And so listen friends, it's not so much where you've come from, but where you are going, where you're heading. That's the important thing. And where are you heading friend?

Where are you going in life? Judas is scurrying along the cobbled streets, head down. He's as determined as the woman was, but he's making his way to the chief priests. Yes, those chief priests who want Jesus dead. And perhaps it's not just the money that he's after. Perhaps there was a certain element of excitement, you know, like sort of being a double agent in World War II.

[18 : 05] And our secret sins are a little bit like that, isn't it? We play with fire. Judas had rationalised his betrayal and his thinking. And now he's just a short journey away.

Just a few footsteps, just a few words in our sins like that, isn't it? We wouldn't do it if we just thought about the big picture. But the devil's desensitising us all the time, isn't he? He's after us. And we somehow meet with him, listen to his voice, and he offers us something. And so it's not just Judas who's responsible, is it?

It's not just Judas who's responsible for the death of God's Son. But us Christians, we commit treason, don't we? And Jesus takes our place at Calvary.

How awesome is that? What awesome love. And it's all coming together, friends, as Passover approaches.

[19 : 11] Verse 10, then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard of it, they were glad and promised to give him money.

And he sought an opportunity to betray him. So here we are, two journeys. The woman had thought that Jesus was more important than money.

Judas thinks money is more important than Jesus. They travelled in opposite directions. And friends, if you go away from Jesus, the journey you are taking will end up in hell.

Yet if you turn around and come toward Jesus, you'll be with him forever in a new creation. So friends, let's live extravagant lives for Jesus.

Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for this little passage.

[20 : 22] We thank you especially for this woman. and we thank you how she bears testimony today of love focused on your son, Jesus Christ. And truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed, in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

So we pray Father that you give us lives that harmonize with that life, commitment, even though it's costly and maybe the world cannot fully understand it.

So we lift this prayer to you, Father, in Christ's name. Amen.