

AM Mark 14:1-9, 43-50 Jesus anointed at Bethany

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[0 : 0 0] and turn with me to the book of Mark, the gospel of Mark, and to chapter 14. I believe in the church Bibles that's page 1025.

Mark 14, and we're going to commence reading 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 kill him. And they're talking here, of course, of Jesus. For they said, not during this feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.

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 300 denarii and given to the poor.

[1 : 1 4] 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.

And if we just turn a page on to verse 43, we're going to read a few verses from 43 onwards as well. And immediately while he was speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

Now the betrayer had given them a sign saying, The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard. And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, Rabbi, and he kissed him.

[2 : 2 9] And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to capture me?

Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled. And they all left him and fled.

Amen. So reads God's word. Well, if you'd turn with me then this morning to that passage we read a few moments ago in Mark. Chapter 14.

And we're going to focus on the first nine verses that we read there. And it's the account that we're looking at this morning. It's the account of the woman anointing Christ with ointment.

Mark 14 is a pivotal chapter really in the apostles' account of the life of Christ. It starts off right at the very beginning, the first couple of verses that we read, with the Jewish leaders plotting to see how they could arrest Christ, how they could kill Christ.

[3 : 4 3] And in a very short space of time, the space of one chapter, or less than one chapter, the verses that we jump forward to read there, we find indeed that their plans are well on the way to completion.

Christ himself is under arrest. Christ. Well, ever since the Lord Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem, and the account of that is in Mark chapter 11, we find that he's been in conflict with the priests there, the chief priests and the scribes.

So in chapter 11 verse 18, we read the chief priests and scribes heard it, that's Jesus' teaching, and they were seeking for a way to destroy him. In chapter 11 verse 27, we read there that the end of the chief priests, at the end of it, that the chief priests and scribes are seeking to challenge Christ's

authority.

And then it goes on into chapter 12. Jesus tells a parable, and we read there in verse 12, that they, that's the scribes and the chief priests and so on, they were seeking to arrest him, for they perceived that he told the parable against them.

And on it goes. So by the time we get to verse 34 of chapter 12, we read that the Jewish leaders no longer dare to ask him any more questions.

[5 : 03] We then have a prolonged passage of teaching, Christ teaching the disciples on the Mount of Olives, that's there in chapter 13. And then we return to the narrative in chapter 14, verse 1 and 2 of the chief priests and the scribes, plotting to kill Christ.

This account though, that we have here in the first nine verses, well the verses 3 through to 9, of the anointing of Christ, it stands in contrast, to the plotting of Christ's enemies against him.

Verses 1 and 2, all about his enemies. Verses 3 to 9 here, we've got a devoted follower of Christ, displaying her love for him. But I think there's more too, because there are also people who are present at this event, people who are there, who see it happening, who are in a sense between these two extremes, the extreme of Christ's enemies, who are seeking to kill him, and the extreme of this devoted follower.

They're not enemies of Christ as such, they're supposed to be his friends, they're supposed to be his disciples. But they don't really understand, and they don't really get and understand this display of devotion to Christ that they witness from this woman.

I think in many ways, the key to this passage, and understanding this passage of scripture, is verse 8, where Christ speaks of the woman, and he says, she has done what she could.

[6 : 39] Because you see, she did what she could, in spite of the cost. What she did was a costly thing. She did what she could, in spite of the criticism, that she received from others.

And she did what she could, in spite of the limitations, of what she herself was able to do. And Jesus commends her. She did what she could.

So this morning, we're going to consider these things, in a bit more detail. This display of love to Christ. And we're going to do this, under three headings. The first heading is going to be, how was this love expressed?

The second is the reaction, of others to this display of love. And then the third heading, that we'll have this morning, is the commendation of Jesus, to this act of love.

Or of this act of love. So firstly then, how was this love expressed? Well, we can imagine the scene. Jesus, we're told, is at the house, of Simon the leper, his friend.

[7 : 39] Now, we don't know a lot, about Simon the leper. It's possible, bearing in mind his name, and bearing in mind, that lepers, would have been isolated, from society, so they wouldn't have been, having you round, for dinner.

It's likely, it's quite possible, that this is a man, who Christ healed, from his leprosy. So we don't know it, but it would make sense, that somebody, who Christ had done, something for like that, would want to, have him round, for a meal.

And as the disciples, and Christ, and presumably their host, Simon, are reclining there, at the meal table, a lady comes in, with this flask of ointment. And she breaks the flask open, and she pours this ointment, over the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, that might seem, a very strange thing, to us. But in the time of Christ, anointing, was a common practice.

People anointed people, as a mark of respect. They, would anoint things, as, marking them out, as being holy.

[8 : 45] So, this was not, an unusual thing. It wouldn't have been strange, for the other people, present at this occasion, to see this happen. The woman anointing Jesus, is showing her love for him.

She's showing her respect, for him. And perhaps unknowingly even, she is marking him out, and indicating his holiness. His holiness.

And you know, if you read on, through the account, running up to Christ's crucifixion, one of the things, that you might notice, is that this is the last thing, this is the last act, of kindness.

The loving act, of kindness, that Christ was to receive, before, he was crucified. Now we're told, verse 3, that this was, an expensive, sacrifice.

The ointment was pure, nard we're told, and very costly. Verse 5, we're told, is worth more than, 300 denarii. So something like, a year's worth of wages, for a typical labourer, in that time.

[9 : 46] So this was expensive. Alabaster jars, of ointment like this, were sometimes, kept as investments. And people would pass them on, to later generations, as investments.

And sometimes, it was used, well, it was often used, as a preparation, of dead bodies. So sometimes, people would, would have the, the jar of an ointment, like this, ready for when, they themselves died.

So that it could be used, as their burial fund, in a sense. They're making provision, for their future burial. Now, whatever the reason was, for this woman, having this jar of ointment, we don't know. But, to use it in this way, we do know, was a cost. It was expensive. It was a clear expression, of her devotion, to Christ. She was giving away, in a sense, of her future.

She was pouring out, the best thing that she had, for Christ. And more than that, she did it publicly. This was a public display, of devotion.

[10 : 47] This was not, a closet believer, hiding away, from public eyes, not witnessing, to Christ. This was a public display, of a believer, who loved her Savior.

And, it wasn't a half-hearted display, display either. It was a whole-hearted display. She broke the flask. Most likely, you had to break this type of flask, to be able to access, the contents.

But, she broke it, and she poured out, the whole contents of it. She didn't decant, part of it, into another jar, to keep for herself, for later. She poured out, the whole thing, over Christ.

This is, whole-hearted devotion. There's no half-measure, here, in this woman's devotion. And that, has to bring us, to a question, doesn't it?

And the question is, what about us? What about in our life? What do we bring, to Christ? Do we bring our, our whole being, to Christ? Do we love Christ, whole-heartedly?

[11 : 49] Do we give generously, to the Lord's work? Whether that be our time, or whether that be our finances. Or do we seek, to hold something back, from the Lord's work?

Do we display our love, for Christ, publicly? Or, you know, if people look at us, would they know, we're a Christian? It's interesting, isn't it? Peter and John, were in front of the, Jewish rulers, in Acts 4, were told there, verse 13 of Acts 4, that the rulers, were astonished, at their bold proclamation, of Christ.

And they noted what? They noted, that they had been, with Jesus. And I wonder, is that, something people, would say of us, when they look at us?

That not only, do we know Christ, but that we've spent, time with Christ, that we're his disciples. disciples. Well, maybe we give our resources, grudgingly, for the Lord's work.

We hide our gospel, good news, out of sight. We don't like to be known, as a Christian. Maybe that's us. But you see, here we've got a display, by this woman, a public display, of her devotion, and love, for her saviour, for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13 : 05] So how do we, display our love, and devotion, to our Lord, and saviour? And then secondly, the reaction, to this display of love.

And there were, we could perhaps say, there were two, main reactions, to it. There was the reaction, of some of the disciples, and there was also, a reaction of Christ. They were told, that some of the disciples, were indignant.

They scold the woman. They weren't happy, about what they're seeing, taking place. They think, she's done a terrible thing. And the basis, for this? Well the basis, was that this ointment, was worth a lot of money.

And they're thinking, this could have been, put to better use. We could have, sold it, and given the money, to the poor. We could have done, something better with this, than pour it over, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we can be generous, in our interpretation, of this. Or we could be, perhaps, realistic, in our interpretation, of this. So a generous interpretation, might be that, some of the disciples, perhaps don't yet, understand who Christ, is.

[14 : 15] And they don't yet, understand what's going, to happen to Christ, and why Christ has come, and what he's doing, in the world. And perhaps, they thought, they had plenty of time, with Christ.

He was a young man still. Perhaps they thought, they had years ahead, of time with Christ. He's still young, he'll be with us, till old age. Perhaps they, didn't yet realize, the full extent, of devotion, that

is due to Christ, if you are a believer.

Perhaps they, genuinely thought, that selling this, this ointment, and, could give help, to poor people. Perhaps that was, a genuine thought. But I think, a little less generous, reading of this, event is, more likely.

In verse 10, we read that, it was after this incident, that Judas, went off to the high priest, to then go, and betray Christ. Now he's not, explicitly named, in verse 4, but I think, the subsequent actions, of Judas, there in verse 10, perhaps tell us, that he was one, of those people, perhaps the leading one, who were indignant, at what this woman, had done.

And there may be, good reason for that too, in Judas's case, because we know, from John 12, that he was in charge, of the disciples money bag. And we also know, that he was a thief.

[15:34] He didn't really, care about the poor, all he cared about, was filling the money bag, with money, so that he could take, his little bit, to line his own pockets, and steal from the funds. But, whether we're being generous, or not, what we do know, is this.

The reaction, of some of the disciples, was sinful. And we might say, out of order. And we could safely say that, because of, how Jesus responded, to it.

Verse 6, his reaction, is effectively, to scold the disciples, isn't it? They scold the woman, but Christ, corrects them, in verse 6, he says, leave her alone, why do you trouble her?

You're doing wrong. Leave her be. And you see, Christ is seeing, the reaction, of the disciples, and he's seeing it, for what it is. It's a, a harsh condemnation, of an act, that they themselves, were not prepared, to replicate.

More than that, it's an act, that they think, shouldn't even, have taken place. You see, it wasn't in their mindset. That was the problem.

[16:44] It wasn't in their mindset. You see, they should have been, displaying a selfless, devotion to Christ. But instead, they criticized, such a display, by somebody else.

It's not in their thinking, that they, themselves, should be doing it. And certainly, if Judas, is anything to go by, there was more interest, here in getting, something for himself, than any interest, in displaying, devotion, and love, for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well again, I wonder, as we think about that, and try and apply that, into our own situation, how many of us, in today's church, do things, more out of, self-fulfillment, or self-gain, than we do, for devotion, to Christ.

Now we could consider, all kinds of different things, in life, couldn't we? But let's just ask one thing.

And that's about, coming to the Lord's house. So when we come to church, why do we do that?

Do we come here, to this place, because we are devoted, to our Saviour? Is that why we come? Do we come, because we want, to glorify God? Do we come, because we want, to be with fellow believers, who are also, glorifying God?

[17:57] Do we come, because we want, to learn more of Christ? Do we want, to learn more about God? We want to learn, more of the work, of the Spirit? Do we come, at every opportunity, that there is?

Because we're urged, to do that aren't we? Hebrews 10.25, don't miss, the opportunities, to gather with, the Lord's people. We get up, perhaps on a Sunday morning, and maybe, we're having some difficulties, in life, whatever it might be.

And maybe, the last thing, we feel like, is going to church. But, do we, make ourselves, do that?

Because we know, that we owe, glory, and worship, to God.

We know, that we owe, a show of devotion, to our Lord, and Savior. Or, I wonder, do we come to church, on a Sunday morning, because of what, we can get out of it?

Because, somehow, we come, because it, we say, somehow, it makes us feel good. And maybe, for a few weeks, well, we're happy to miss, for a few weeks, it's not really a problem, we've got some better things to do, or I didn't get on so well, last week, with a guy who was preaching, so I'll give it a miss, this week.

[19:09] Or maybe we go, because we come with a friend, and the friend's away, this week, so, well, we'll give it a miss, as well. You see, when we see, other people, living lives, of devotion, to Christ, wholehearted, selfless, sacrificial, loving devotion, to Christ, what do we say?

Do we, criticize them, and trouble them, as the disciples did, with this woman? Or do we see them, as an example, to us, in our own lives?

A challenge, perhaps, to urge us on, to do more, in terms of increasing, our devotion, and our love, for our Savior. So, we have the expression, then, of this, love for Christ.

we've got, we've got this, we've got this, reaction, of some of the disciples, and, and the initial, reaction, to it, from the Lord Jesus Christ. But there's more, because Christ goes on, to commend, what has happened.

So, thirdly, then, the commendation, of Jesus, towards this, act of love, that was demonstrated, to him. Starts for us there, in verse six, where Christ says, she has done, a beautiful thing, to me.

[20 : 34] Well, what is that? Well, Christ there, is commending, this work, that the woman, has done. This good work, that the woman, has done. It's a beautiful thing, he says, to have done, to me.

It's a beautiful thing, to anoint somebody, to show your love, and devotion, to them. But, it's more, than just that, because, you could show, your love and devotion, to anybody, in that society, by anointing them.

But, it was more, than that. You see, there's beauty, in all kinds of things, aren't there? There's a beauty, when a man, and a woman, show their love, and devotion, for each other, and get married.

But, you see, when that takes place, what's the object, of the love, and devotion? A man, and a woman, getting married, the object, of the love, and devotion, is each other, isn't it?

The man, loves the woman, the woman, loves the man, and they get married. It's devotion, to each other. But, there's more here, than just that, isn't there?

[21 : 35] You see, how much more beautiful, is a work of devotion, to our Lord Jesus Christ? She's done a beautiful thing, to me, says Christ, to me.

And, you know, this, in a sense, is the pinnacle, it's the mountaintop, of human love, and devotion, isn't it? We can love our children, we can love our wives, and husbands, we can love our families, we can love our friends, but you see, the pinnacle, of love, and devotion, is love, and devotion, towards Christ.

That's the pinnacle, of human love, and devotion. And, Christ goes on, he says, she's done a beautiful thing, to me, who you won't, always have with you.

So, what were the disciples doing? What beautiful things, were they doing, for Christ? I wonder, if you read on, in Mark's gospel, and you read the accounts, of Christ being arrested, you read the accounts, in the same chapter, in fact, of Christ, praying in Gethsemane, you read the account, of Christ being crucified, and I wonder, over the next few days, when all these things, were happening, and in the next hours, indeed, after this event, when they fall asleep, in Gethsemane, when Christ is in such, agony of prayer, and his disciples, fall asleep, and Peter, when he denies Christ, I wonder, did they look back, to just a few hours before, and think, that woman, displayed, remarkable, love and devotion, to Christ, what are we doing, we are letting, down Christ,

Christ, but Christ goes on, doesn't he, verse 8, she has done, what she could, and as I said earlier, I think in many ways, this is a key, verse in this passage, in helping us to understand it, she has done, what she could, you see, there are a lot of things, that she couldn't do, it wasn't her house, so she couldn't, show hospitality, to Christ, her house, she couldn't, she couldn't, answer the accusations, that he was going to face, the false accusations, that he was going to face, she couldn't, prevent the mocking, of the soldiers, that was going to take place, she couldn't stop that, she couldn't, prevent the beatings, that he was going to suffer, she couldn't, prevent the, the splitting up, of his possessions, and the handing out of his possessions amongst the soldiers.

[24 : 23] She couldn't stop that. She couldn't prevent his crucifixion. She wasn't some sort of sharp lawyer who could come in and say, I'm going to defend this man in front of the authorities. She wasn't a powerful politician who could step in and say, Whoa, whoa, whoa, what are we doing here?

Free that man. He's innocent. None of that. She could do none of that. She couldn't intervene and help in any way. But she did what she could.

She did what she could. And what she could do was the most selfless, remarkable, costly, extravagant display of love and devotion that she could make. There was nothing else she could do.

But she did what she could. Well, that raises a question, doesn't it? What about you and I? What about you and I? We all have our talents and abilities, don't we?

Every one of us does. They're God-given. But we all have our limitations too. So the question for us this morning then is, If Christ looked on us, would he say of us, He, she, they, they do what they

can.

[25 : 33] If he looked at our lives and looked over the history of our lives, would he say, They did what they could. Maybe you look at yourself and you look at others.

I think we all do, don't we? And there's a tendency sometimes to feel helpless, isn't there? We feel we're unable to do anything. And we look sometimes at others and we wish we could be like them. If only I could understand the scriptures like so-and-so does. If only I could teach a Bible class like so-and-so does. If only I could preach like this person does or that person does.

If only I could be more hospitable to others. Like Mrs. So-and-so is and Mr. So-and-so is. If only I was better with people. Like the guy who's an evangelist.

And he's so good with people. We know him so well. But if only I could be like that. And then we come to the prayer meeting. And we listen to a brother or sister praying.

[26 : 36] And we say, if only I could pray as eloquently as they do. But you see, we're not called upon by God to envy other people's gifts.

Or even to wish that we could have gifts like them. We're called on to use our own gifts, however small we might think them to be. To use our own gifts to his glory.

Christ commends the woman for doing what she could. He doesn't say, well if only she could have done this or that. Then that would have been wonderful. He doesn't commend her, you see, for doing something that she couldn't do.

And he doesn't criticize her for not doing something that she couldn't do. He commends her because she did what she could. And surely that has to be us too.

Do we do what we can? Because you see, the Lord Jesus Christ, he cherishes whatever it is that we're able to do for him. So we shouldn't be looking at others.

[27 : 43] We should look at ourselves and ask, how can we use the gifts that God has given us to his glory and to his honor? But we may not be able to pray eloquently like Mrs. So-and-so or Jimmy or whatever.

But we can pray. Every one of us can pray, can't we? We may not have the understanding of scriptures of a Jonathan Edwards. If you know who Jonathan Edwards is.

He was a tremendous man from history. But you know, we can know enough of the scriptures for a simple saving faith. And we can strive to know more.

And our simple saving faith is every bit as saving as the saving faith of Jonathan Edwards was.

Unbelievable brain that he had. We might not have the personality and the ease of speech of some men and women who just seem to be natural spreaders of the gospel.

But we can show others Christ in the way that we live. I once heard about somebody who worked in a typing pool. And they were instrumental in the conversion of a friend of mine.

[28 : 55] Our typing pool is something we don't have these days. Those of you who worked in days gone by would know what a typing pool is. But it was where there were people who spent their life typing things up. And they were given text to type up.

Memos to type up. So on. But this friend of mine noticed this one typist who was always working. And when he walked along the corridor past the typing pool.

Clack, clack, clack, clack, clack, clack, clack, clack of the typewriter. She was always working when there were others around who were chatting instead of working. The clattering keys you see were a witness to others.

And she was instrumental in the conversion of my friend. Because he wants to know what it was that drove this woman to always be working when she could be skiving off and having a chat with others.

So the question we have to ask ourselves is how do we show our love and devotion to Christ? You see we have to do what we can.

[30 : 00] What we're able to do. And not find excuses for not doing anything. Just because we feel we can't do anything. We have to do what we can.

And then note too. Christ's commendation of this woman's actions in verse 9. It's interesting isn't it? What does she say? Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world. What she has done will be told in memory of her.

It's an outworking of 1 Samuel 2.30. Those who honour me I will honour. And you know it's absolutely true isn't it? Wherever the gospel goes the good deed of this woman in love and devotion goes as well.

You see that's why this morning here in Dumfries. 2,000 odd years since this event took place. This woman is once again being honoured.

Christ was absolutely right wasn't he? What this woman did is being told today. And it will be told until the end of time.

[31 : 11] Now in verse 8 Christ hints very strongly it is coming death. She's anointed my body beforehand for burial. You see this is a display of faith from a disciple.

This was a display of love from a disciple. For the one who's going to pour out himself. Because Christ was going to pour himself out in love on the cross wasn't he? And he was going to pour himself out in love for her.

And every believer in history. You see the woman poured out her wealth on Christ. In love and devotion. But Christ came willingly to this earth.

And he gave up his wealth. He made himself poor for our sakes. And he made himself poor for our sakes. So that we can gain the riches.

The riches of salvation. And you see if you're not a Christian here this morning. If you don't have a saving faith in Christ as your saviour and Lord.

[32 : 10] Then you too as some of these disciples did. You too might see the act of this woman as foolishness. You perhaps like some of the disciples think the ointment should have been sold.

And the money used to give to the poor. Maybe you think she should have saved it for a rainy day. Or for when she died. And you see if that's you. Here this morning.

Then you're kind of missing the point of what's going on here. And Christ would say to you. Leave her alone. Don't trouble her. See he died so that you don't have to be poor.

You can come in repentance and faith to Christ. And you can do that even this morning. Call on God for forgiveness. Put your faith in Christ. Christ. Because he alone is the one who can make you right with God.

He is who can change you. He changes our lives. When we become Christians. We're changed. And we come to remember then this work of this woman.

[33 : 20] As what it really is. True love and devotion. And we seek to replicate what this woman has done. We seek to love our saviour.

And devote ourselves to our saviour. So as we finish then this morning. We've seen this remarkable expression of love for Christ.

And the question we have to ask ourselves then is. Is how do we show our love for Christ? We've seen reactions to the display of love. And we have to ask how do we react when we see love and devotion to Christ in the lives of others?

Do we react like some of the disciples did in a critical spirit? Oh they're holier than thou. We don't need to do that. Or does it encourage us when we see people devoted to Christ?

Does it drive us on or spur us on to be more devoted in our own lives? Because that's what it should do. And we've seen Christ's commendation then of this act of love.

[34 : 23] And again we have to ask ourselves. Do we just sit back and bemoan what we can't do? Or do we do what we can do for Christ? Well may God grant us the grace to be those who Christ would look on and commend.

May we be those who in spite of the cost, in spite of the criticism for others, in spite of what we might think of as lack of gifts. May we be those that Christ would commend as those who did what they could.

Amen.