

Worship at all Cost

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

I started the year out last week by talking about this being a new year where we run after God, we pursue Christ, we seek to know Him more than any year ever before.

That this be a time where we pursue Christ, forgetting what lies behind, and striving forward to knowing Him. The verse that we mentioned just kind of at the beginning was out of Philippians chapter 3.

Here it is, Philippians 3 verse 12. Paul says, Not that I have already obtained this, and you remember what this stands for, it's the knowledge of God. Not that I know everything about God, not that I fully understand Him, or that I'm already perfect, amen.

But I press on to make it, that is the knowledge of Christ my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. And so what I wanted to do is just like, that's more than one week, right?

[1 : 24] We need to spend just a few more weeks really unpacking this idea and challenging us with this. And a series that was one sermon that now may be three called Abide.

But hey, that's the good thing here, is we just go as the Spirit leads, and He wants this to be a longer series. I'm okay with that, are you? We'll get over it, because it's going to be anyways, all right? And you wouldn't go against the Spirit anyway.

So anyways, and then we'll start the series we talked about at the beginning of the service in the book of Exodus. And here's why I think we should spend some more time talking about this.

There's a USA Today article about New Year's resolutions and how they've made a shift over the past few years. Here's what the article said, quote, At the end of each year, we take stock of who we are.

We think about our diets and exercise routines. We wonder if we're frugal enough, ambitious enough, whether we read enough books or spend enough time wisely. We question if we're in the right job or in the right relationship.

[2 : 26] We try to imagine how we can better enjoy our lives. But in the last couple of years, particularly, many are thinking less about waistlines and paychecks and more about how the things we do matter in the wider world.

A Marist poll out last week found, quote, Being a better person is now the most popular New Year's resolution, marking a shift.

I know, yes, wow. You must know a lot of people, and that shocks you. It's the most popular New Year's resolution marking a shift from the previous decade in which losing weight was number one.

So I share that with you because what's on people's mind is, I want to be better. I want to be a better person. I want to be a better father. I want to be a better friend. I want to be whatever. And this is actually a trap that I believe Christians can fall into.

And we begin to think, yeah, I want to be a better Christian. I want to do better things for God. And I want to warn you of that trap. I want to warn you of that danger, that that is actually not how Christians should think.

[3 : 41] We shouldn't enter a New Year saying, I want to be a better Christian. We should actually think differently. And we'll talk about that here in just a moment. So let's get to our passage, Mark chapter 14.

Mark chapter 14, verse 1, if you're able to stand, please do so just as you were seated. So Mark 14, verse 1, and this will be where we put our attention this evening.

Now, it was two days before the Passover, and the feast of unleavened bread, and the chief priests and scribes were seeking how to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

For they said, not during the 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 reclined at table, a woman came to him with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

Now, there were some who said to themselves indignantly, why was this ointment wasted like that? It could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor.

[4 : 50] 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.

This is God's word. Let's pray. Help us learn tonight, God, what you would have us learn. Help us see the beauty of adoring and worshiping you.

Help us, like the Apostle Paul that we've said repeatedly now, to forget what lies behind and to strive forward to know you more, to set our aim and our focus, the preoccupation of our life on Jesus and him alone.

[6 : 06] And I pray this in Jesus' name. And God's people said, amen. You can be seated. Faith family, you're playing Monopoly wrong. That was the article, title of an article, describing how the game of Monopoly is actually supposed to take less than an hour to play.

And yet, for most people, it takes forever. Amen? Like, it's the game that never ends. For example, one game of Monopoly for a group of four Pittsburgh college students lasted five days.

Anybody want to guess what the longest Monopoly game ever played is? Years? No? Ten days, higher than that. Seventy days.

Are you nuts? Like, don't you have something better to do with your life? Seventy days. That's the longest game of Monopoly ever played. Right? Now, while most of us have never played a game of Monopoly that long, I guarantee you, you play for over an hour, sometimes multiple hours, like four. It never seems to end. And why is that the case, you're asking? Why? Why is this the case that Monopoly takes so long? And the answer is this. You don't read the rules, you num-nums.

[7 : 25] You don't read the rules. Most people play the game of Monopoly the wrong way. Let me give you just a few examples. For instance, buying property. Most of you play the game that when somebody lands on a property space, that person can either buy it or not buy it.

If they choose not to buy it, what do you do? You move on to the next player. Wrong. According to the rules, quote, In other words, every time anybody lands on a property, somebody owns it before the next play.

Aren't you glad you came to church? Free parking. Do you claim community chest money every time you land on free parking? You sinners.

Stop doing that. According to the rules, quote, A player landing on free parking does not receive any money, property, or reward of any kind.

It is a resting place, close quote. Or what about going to jail? Did you know that while in jail, you should be collecting rent on your properties? The rule states, quote, Even though in jail, you may buy and sell property, houses, hotels, and collect rent, close quote.

[8 : 50] The only penalty for going to jail is you lose how many turns? Three. That's right. So in other words, being in jail, in the game of Monopoly, by the way, being in jail is actually a good thing because you can avoid paying people their rent while collecting it.

I mean, the things that you learn from your pastor. Pastor, I hope you appreciate, like, Pastor Appreciation Month should be every month for the wisdom that I give you.

You say, what's this all about? Let me ask you. Here's the question I want to ask you tonight. Have you ever had a time when you realized you were playing the game wrong? Have you ever had a time when you realized you were playing the game wrong?

Maybe it wasn't a board game. Maybe for you it was a recipe. You just couldn't get it to turn out right. And somebody had to show you how you were cooking it wrong. Maybe you were driving somewhere, and then you discovered that you were driving the wrong way.

I'm sure this has happened to some of you. You won't admit it, but you've been putting together a chair or a bookshelf. And about halfway, you realize, wait a minute, that's not how this thing goes.

Or maybe, like me, this happened in my life.

[10:01] I was really into fitness and exercise. And then I began to understand, oh my gosh, I'm doing things wrong. And I began to have to rethink the way I did fitness. Listen, most of us at some point have discovered that we're going the wrong way.

A high school football player shared a video of him tackling his own teammate. So here it is. Well, the other player made a great interception, but he ran the wrong direction. So there he goes. You see his own guy chasing him down here.

He tackled him at the 10. Someone on the sidelines right there is just losing it. It's all fun and games, so you get tackled by your own teammate, right? Here's the point. It's one thing to run the wrong way.

It's one thing to be driving the wrong way, to play a board game the wrong way, to build a bookshelf the wrong way. It's entirely another to approach God the wrong way.

It's an entirely another thing to be approaching the Christian life the wrong way. And this is the argument I'm making in this short series, namely this.

[11:01] Notice it on the screen. Most of the time as Christians, we focus on doing for God rather than being with God. And that is not how the Christian life is lived.

It's not a focus on doing for God. It's a focus on being with God. Or we might say it this way in light of last week's message. We focus on bearing fruit. I got to be better.

I want to be a better Christian. I want to do better in this area of my life rather than abiding in Jesus. Let's go back to what we learned last week quickly before we jump to Mark 14.

Look here at John chapter 15 and verse 4. Did you hear that?

Unless it does what? Abides in the vine. Neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

[12:04] Why does it have to be this way? Because apart from me, everybody say it, you can do nothing. I mean, could Jesus be any more clear?

The focus of our life is not to bear fruit. It's not to be better. The focus of our life is to abide, to pursue, to worship, to love, to know God.

And all I'm going to do tonight in a very, maybe a brief message defined by the way I define brief, I just want to show you someone who got this right. I just want to show you someone here in Mark 14 that understood what it meant to abide.

In fact, listen, listen, Jesus says something of this person that is absolutely mind-blowing. Here's what he says. Look at it here.

Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this person has done will be told in memory.

[13:11] Like what a statement. Are you kidding me? Jesus says wherever the gospel goes in the whole world, her memory, her legacy goes with it.

So let me set up the context. Mark tells us that Mark 14 here is taking place during Passover in verse 1. So I want you to get into your minds. There are thousands, thousands of people that are gathered here.

You've got like a, think you're in downtown Minneapolis and the Vikings are in town, the twins are in town, the Timberwolves in town, the Twin Cities Marathon is there. They moved the state fair to downtown Minneapolis and there's a Taylor Swift concert.

There's a whole lot of people in downtown Minneapolis. Traffic is camel to camel. Everybody's preparing for celebration. That's the imagery that's taking place around Mark 14.

Meanwhile, outside of that really large gathering is a small secretive meeting based on verse 1 and 2. This is a group of religious leaders that have come together and they're debating and trying to figure out how to kill Jesus.

[14:18] Now outside of that large crowd and then a smaller group of the religious leaders just outside of town in a place called Bethany, there's a party. It's a little house party, a little house gathering that's being thrown for Jesus.

And there's someone at this party that becomes the center focus of the event aside from Jesus. Jesus is obviously the center focus of every event no matter what.

Amen. But there is someone else who takes center stage. Who is it? You'd think it'd be Simon the leper. In verse 3, we know that this is Simon's house.

He's the one that's putting on this party. He should be called Simon the former leper because he had leprosy. He doesn't have leprosy anymore. We know that because he's got people over at his house.

This is likely one of the lepers that Jesus healed. And one would think that somebody like Simon would be the focus of the story. I mean, imagine the stories he could tell at this party.

[15:19] He could talk about what it was like to live in isolation. He could talk about how it was like that people would just declare him unclean and he'd shout it back. And yet, he's not the focus of this story. So maybe it's Lazarus.

We know that Lazarus is at this party based on John chapter 12. And you say, well, what's so important about Lazarus? Only that he used to be dead.

I'm not dead. What? Nothing. Here's your ninepence. I'm not dead. Yeah. He says he's not dead.

Yes, he is. I'm not. He isn't. Well, he will be soon. He's very ill. I'm getting better.

No, you're not. I'm sorry. I couldn't help but play that clip. I'm so sorry. Lazarus used to be dead.

Think about all the stories that he could tell about being dead and coming back to life.

And yet, Lazarus is not the focus of the story. Well, maybe it would be the disciples. Think about all the miracles they've seen. I mean, they've seen bread multiplied and water stilled and demons cast out.

[16:17] Surely, one of them would be the focus of the story. But if you scale past the crowds and the religious leaders plotting in secret and the star cast of the disciples and all those aside, Simon and Lazarus, there's one person who becomes center stage.

And we said this, there's one person who gets it right. There's one person that approaches Jesus the right way.

Verse 3. Mary. And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, he's reclining at table, and a woman, we know her as Mary, came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

Mary, I want you to get all that imagery. You've got religious leaders. You've got the crowd. You've got the disciples. You've got people raised from the dead.

And then there's this woman who gets it right. But what's she doing? She's worshipping. She's adoring.

[17:39] She's praising. She's honoring Jesus. And I believe she shows us what abiding looks like. Let me give you three very quick observations from this passage.

First, in Mary, we see worship no matter the cost. Worship, praise, adoration, pursuing Jesus no matter what it costs.

Mary's desire here, her desire to praise Jesus far surpasses her concern for any worldly possessions. What is clear in this passage, in fact, the text even tells us, is that she does something that is very, very costly.

She's got a flask of nard, pure nard, spiked nard. This would have been imported from India, valued at, the text says the disciples say you could have sold it for 300 denarii.

It's probably about a year's worth of salary. I want you to imagine that you've got a year's worth of salary in the bank account and just instantly it's gone because of an act of praise, an act of worship, an act of giving God glory.

[18:49] Most people would save something like this for two things. First, they'd save it for a famine. This would be kind of like your emergency fund, right? And so if a famine came and you were without, you could take something valuable like this and sell it and be able to have something to get you through that hard time.

If not a famine, it was used for a special event in the future, usually a wedding or a funeral. And so in this case, Mary takes it because of Jesus' impending death and breaks it and worships him. And you know how costly this is because of all the reactions in the room. Mary, what are you doing? Why would you waste something so valuable? But the point here is we see that Mary's love for Jesus superseded her need for present or future security.

In other words, everything in this moment pales in comparison to the value of Jesus. Are you with me? Like who cares about the value of nard when I have Jesus in the room?

Like I don't care what this costs. I don't care what I have to lose. I don't care how much this sets me back. I want one thing and that is to worship my Savior in this moment.

[20 : 15] Like I think this, I believe this is a beautiful picture of Philippians 3, that I consider the things of this world rubbish compared to knowing Christ.

And so I ask you tonight this. What is it, whether it be in our lives, our wallets, our future plans, whatever it may be, what is it that you are willing to sacrifice to abide, to adore, to worship Him? Notice it on the screen. To abide in Christ is to be willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to know Him and to worship Him.

As I enter into a new year, listen, this isn't about being better. This isn't about like, you know, turning over a new leaf. This is about what time do I have to sacrifice?

What money do I need to sacrifice? What part of my schedule do I need to sacrifice so that I have time to know God? So that I make sure there is nothing interfering with pursuing and abiding in Christ.

[21 : 20] Mary shows us what abiding looks like because she's focused on worship no matter the cost. And she is willing to sacrifice anything of value in this world to make sure she has time at the feet of Jesus.

Amen? Here's a second observation, verse 4. Mark 14, verse 4 says this. Now there were some who said to themselves, these are the disciples 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 notice, they scolded her. So in other words, Mary's worship is no matter the cost.

And Mary's worship is also no matter the criticism. The disciples here are not favorable to Mary's decision. They rebuke her and it is not gentle.

It is harsh. It is public. It would have been humiliating. It is humiliating. Like everybody in the room is against her decision. I mean, literally, the disciples get all religious and they say, do you know what?

[22 : 30] There could have been more done with that than what you're doing with it. Can you imagine such a statement? We could have sold that and given it to the poor. What's happening here?

Are you with me? Zone in here. The disciples are focused on doing and Mary is focused on being. The disciples are just thinking like, what are better things we could do with that?

And Mary's saying, there's nothing better than worshiping Jesus. Even if you criticize me for it, even if you don't like the way I'm doing it, you need to know that my heart here is simply to worship God. And I think deep down, what the criticism of the disciples to Mary does is actually expose their own lack of devotion. Amen.

Somebody just say, preach, preacher. This will get uncomfortable for a moment. I find that oftentimes our criticism of other people's worship is exposing our lack of.

[23 : 33] Say it again. Our criticism of other people's. I can't believe they like that kind of music. I can't believe they raise their hands. I can't believe they run. Whatever they do.

Remember when David danced in the Old Testament and they criticized him for it. He's like, listen, I'll become more undignified than this. I'm going to dance before God.

I'm not suggesting we bust out the dance. But hey, if the Lord moves, go for it. The point is, is so often we're critical of other people's worship and that simply exposes the lack of our own.

You see, the disciples here are trying to be really religious. Like, right? I mean, we could have given that to the poor. And Jesus will say, listen, you've always got time for that.

But the most important thing is worshiping me. Mary got it right, guys. Y'all got it wrong.

[24 : 29] And so even in the face of criticism, we see Mary's willingness to adore and worship Jesus, to abide in Christ. And I thought about how this is so true in Christian bubbles.

Like parents that get angry because they had one direction they wanted their kids to go in, but they felt like God was calling them somewhere else. Traditionalists in the church.

The good thing is we don't have traditionalists here because we haven't had a lot of time to do things a certain way, right? But we don't do it that way here. Why not?

Why does it always have to be your preference or your tradition? Older adults that get critical of younger Christians. Younger Christians that get critical of older Christians.

You know what? You could just stop and appreciate that there's another brother and sister in Christ that loves God too. So why do we criticize?

[25 : 28] It's because like the disciples, all we see is the external. We see a preference, a style, a skin color, a financial loss. All we see is a broken bottle of nard.

Rather than seeing that as an act of worship to Jesus. I came across this some time ago and I thought it was interesting and really speaks to us.

It's a woman who gives a testimony one day about being at a park and having her heart convicted. Here's what she writes. She took her children to the park to break the routine of summer days only to have her own heart broken.

She was watching her children play on the playground as she noticed a car drive into the parking lot. When the car came to a screeching stop, she noticed that a young, attractive woman jumped out of the car, smiling from ear to ear and hurried quickly to a private picnic table.

The imagination of the mother began to build. Who could she be meeting? She waited to see if anyone would be showing up, but no one ever did. After watching her children for a few moments, she glanced over at the other woman.

[26 : 36] And what she saw broke her heart. The woman was reading her Bible. The one she jumped from the car to meet was the Lord.

And the reason that her heart was broken was that she realized in that moment she no longer had that same kind of enthusiasm. There was a time when the passion was strong.

The love burned bright, but now her affections were gone. You know what I pray never by God's grace happens at Faith Family?

Is that we become a bunch of grumbling disciples rather than a worshipping Mary. When that happens, we're dead.

We're done for. When the passions are no longer there, when the love no longer burns bright, it's why I'm telling you to come into this new year not thinking about being a better Christian, but thinking about abiding in Jesus.

[27 : 46] To be like Mary and to say, I don't care what it costs, what it costs my schedule, what it costs my time, what it costs, whatever. Man, I love Jesus, and I want to know him more. And I want to get to the end of the year, whether it's mountaintops or valleys, I want to get to the end of the year and know Jesus more.

And whatever criticism I get, like if people at Faith Family don't like it, or if the pastor calls me out, or my family thinks I'm weird, I don't care. I'm going to abide in Jesus.

One final observation, and we're done. Verse 6. But Jesus says, Here's the last point.

And that it's worship from a changed heart. Worship from a changed heart. Jesus rebukes the disciples for rebuking Mary.

Amen? Right? Just Jesus says, Cut it off, guys. Forget it. Stop it. Enough. She's, listen, She's approaching me the right way.

[29 : 12] You're not. All you're thinking about is doing. She's thinking about being. Jesus defends her. And of course, Jesus is not against the poor. Of course, Jesus is not against the poor.

But he honors her for realizing there's something more important than doing something for the poor. And that's actually abiding in Jesus. And by the way, don't think for a moment, I'll just take this moment to make clear, that I am not suggesting that our faith does not have works.

Right? Faith without works is dead. My point is, you don't focus on the works. You focus on Jesus. And the vine bears fruit in you.

So let's make no mistake. There is bearing fruit. And there is doing good things. Like for the poor. Or whatever it is that God calls you to. But the preoccupation of your life is not the poor.

It's Jesus. Jesus. That's the right order. That's the right approach here. And Jesus commends Mary for getting this right.

[30 : 17] Notice this on the screen. I love this. Mary's approval from Jesus came through her worship, not her works. It came through her worship, not her works.

That's the gospel. It wasn't what she was doing. It was her heart. It was the adoration and praise that she was showing. Now, one final thing I want to focus on here that we have to kind of connect in this text.

And it's this. How does Mary's devotion, seen in breaking this very expensive jar and pouring it on Jesus' head and worshipping with us, what does that have to do with this statement that as the gospel is proclaimed throughout the whole world, her memory is going to go with it?

Right? That's a big statement. Don't you agree? I mean, as the gospel, here we are, right, in 2024, still talking about her. The message of her life, the memory of her life has gone out as the gospel has gone out.

So how is that the case? What's the connection between what she did and it's going with the gospel? And here's what I believe the point, the connection is.

[31 : 27] Notice it on the screen. It's that Mary's worship is an example of what the gospel will do in the lives of those who receive it. Let me just read it again.

Mary's worship, her act of abiding here, is an example of what the gospel will do in the lives of those who receive it. Or let me say it a different way. Amen?

All right. Let me say it a different way. That the evidence of gospel transformation is not better people, it's broken vessels. Let me say it a different way.

I'll say it 15 different ways until you get it, okay? How do you know the gospel has changed your life? You notice a lot of broken jars in your life.

What do I mean? Acts of worship. Not just a life that's broken. We're talking here in the context of Mark 14. It's not that you're just a better person and you do a lot of good things for God.

[32 : 22] Do you know how much money I give? Do you know how much time I give? Do you know all the good things? No, no, no, no. No, that's not the ultimate sign. The ultimate sign of gospel transformation is you find yourself like Mary, worshipping no matter what.

Why? Because Jesus isn't a religion to follow. He's a person you love. I didn't even write that down. That just came out. That was from the Spirit.

You should have written that down. Jesus is not a religion to follow. He's a person to love. He's the treasure of our life. He is what Paul says.

I don't want anything except to know God. And that's what the gospel does as it goes out. In other words, when the gospel gets a hold of your life, you will not be like religious leaders, all upset because your traditions aren't being followed and the church ought to be structured a different way. And you meet in back rooms and plot and scheme. Rather, when the gospel gets a hold of your heart, you worship like Mary no matter the cost. When the gospel gets a hold of your life, you're not like the gospel.

[33 : 32] You're not like the crowd gathered for Passover, going through all the motions of religious activities, praying all the prayers and saying the Hail Marys and singing the songs and doing all the external things.

No, when the gospel gets a hold of your heart, you worship like Mary no matter the cost. When the gospel gets a hold of your life, you won't be like the disciples, nitpicking every little thing, passing judgment on how other people worship, looking at everything and everyone through the eyes of ministerial criticism.

No, when the gospel gets a hold of your heart, you will like Mary worship no matter the cost. As the gospel goes out, it's going to create a bunch of Marys who love Jesus and want to worship Jesus. Not play Passover games or judgment on everybody in the room, but break whatever needs to be broken to let Jesus know he's the love of your life.

That's what abiding looks like. That's what pursuing Jesus looks like. So why does this legacy of Mary go out as the gospel goes out?

[34 : 44] Because when the gospel grips your heart, you become like her. You become someone that has come to love the one thing more than everything.

And that is your Savior, Jesus Christ. My question is this. Are you approaching Christianity the right way?

Are you focused or consumed by bearing fruit or abiding in the vine? And it's a question you need to answer because it's one thing to play Monopoly wrong.

It's entirely different if you approach God wrong. And at the end of the day, the Christian life is not about doing things for Christ. It is about abiding in Christ.

After all, as a Christian, here's what we know. Do you want to know what we know? Here's what we know. All the doing has already been done. All the doing has already been done.

[35 : 50] So abide, love, worship, and he will produce the fruit.

Because apart from him, we can do nothing. And all God's people said, let's pray. Lord, thank you. Thank you just even for extending this by your spirit a few weeks. I believe we needed to hear this more. To come into the year with the right mindset.

Approaching you and approaching the Christian life the right way. Because it's easy to look back at last year and look at all the things that we feel like we did wrong. And be like, I'm going to be better.

I'm going to try harder. But that's not the right approach. It's not the right focus. The right focus is, I'm going to pursue Jesus more. I'm going to go after him more.

[36 : 45] I'm going to worship him more. And I don't care what it costs. Tonight, I may have to crucify my calendar. I may have to really think about what this pure nard looks like in my life.

This valuable thing that needs to be shattered so that I make sure I have time to worship. That nothing interferes with opportunities and ways to pursue God and to know him more.

So whatever the cost, regardless of criticism, God, change my heart. Change my heart. Change my heart. I don't want to become a stubborn, critical disciple who's nitpicking everything.

I want to be a Mary who, even if misunderstood, gets it right. So I pray that tonight, having last week looked at John 15 and the command to abide, we now see a beautiful picture of it.

One that we can imitate and follow. And we pray, God, that as we think now on the gospel of what Jesus did for us, that it would stir in us those affections, devotion, adoration.

[38 : 06] So guide us now as we take some time to remember that the ultimate doing has been done in the cross of Calvary. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.