

Mark 14:1-11

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Morning, it's really nice to see you all. If you're brand new or newish, my name is Aaron. I'm one of the ministers on staff here.

Our reading was Mark 14, 1 to 25. I am just going to focus on verses 1 to 11. Let's start with a big picture first, very big picture first.

So Mark's gospel, you could break it up into sections. The section after this reading today is called the Passion Narrative. Passion from the Latin word *passio*, meaning suffering, which is a great name for the next section.

Because the rest of 14 and chapter 15 is a difficult read. Jesus is unjustly arrested. He's mocked. He's beaten. He's betrayed.

He is denied. And he's crucified. Passion Narrative officially starts in verse 26. So what we have today, it's like a hinge.

[1 : 03] It's a hinge into the Passion Narrative. And it's a wonderful hinge. Because before we get into the darkness of the Passion, before we hear about a whole lot of people mistreating and rejecting Jesus, we read about a woman who honors him.

Mark is saying, before we see what evil looks like, let me show you what love looks like. And the reason Mark structures it like this is that what she does is so extravagant.

It scandalizes everything that happens afterwards. Before the darkness of chapter 15, there is this beacon.

It shows us what real devotion looks like and how dark the darkness is that follows. So that's how it fits into the big sort of story of Mark's gospel.

Now I want to zoom in on verses 1 to 11, and I want to point out something about the structure of it, because it's really cool. Let me show you something really cool.

[2 : 17] So one of the ways Mark highlights, draws our attention to the story of this woman, is by using something called a Markin Sandwich.

Markin Sandwich. And it's sort of a literary technique he really loves. And you'll see it if you sort of look at the passage there. There are three little episodes in 1 to 11.

You see you've got treachery, and then you've got this amazing act of devotion, and then you have treachery. So treachery is like the bread, and the devotion is like the meat in the sandwich.

That's the really important part. But if you want a more visual, here's a picture that Chris Lane made to illustrate it. Is it going to pop up? Is it going to pop up?

Is it going to pop up? It's a really great... Oh, look at that. Isn't that awesome? Do you see? The bread, the treachery bread, and you've got the woman's devotion in the middle.

[3 : 24] I can see these mayonnaise and bacon now, which is not... It's not kosher, so that's... Okay, so you remind me to talk to Chris about that afterwards, actually.

So Mark uses these techniques to draw our attention to something precious or vital. He uses it quite a lot in Mark's gospel. And in this case, it's the anointing of Jesus, the amazing thing that this woman does.

He doesn't want that lost in us. Let's talk about it now. Here's how we're going to tackle these 11 verses. We'll talk through the beginning, and we'll talk through the end, and then we'll talk about the middle.

Does that make sense? Great. Okay, let's start with the beginning, the top slice of bread, the plot to kill Jesus. And it was two days before the Passover, it says, in the feast of unleavened bread, the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him.

But they said, not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people. So you hear that this is all happening around Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. If you're not familiar with these

stories, here it is in 30 seconds.

[4 : 37] So the feast, they celebrated the liberation of Israel from slavery. So the Jews were slaves in Egypt, and they were mistreated. God rose up a leader. Moses, who went to Pharaoh and said, let my people go.

And Pharaoh was not into it. So God sent a series of plagues, frogs and boils, et cetera. And Pharaoh still said, no, God sent a final plague, death.

Death visited every house of the Egyptians except the homes of the Israelites. Death passed over the Israelites, hence Passover feast. As a result of these deaths, Pharaoh changed his mind.

He said, okay, you can go get out of here. The Hebrew people had to leave very, very quickly. So they packed up their stuff and they're taking food with them. They're making some bread. There wasn't enough time to let the bread rise.

So it was flat. It was unleavened bread. And God said, I want you to keep eating that as a reminder of this time in the wilderness. So it's a very important Old Testament story.

[5 : 37] It's a small rescue, a local rescue that points us to God's big rescue coming down the pipeline. So that's a little info on the feast. Back to our story.

So they had these festivals to celebrate these things, right? These were pilgrimage festivals. It means you couldn't celebrate them locally. You had to go to Jerusalem to participate. So you had around 200,000 Jews heading into Jerusalem at the time of our story, all squeezed into Jerusalem, all feeling very nationalistic, which is why the Sanhedrin are saying, look, we shouldn't kill Jesus during the feasts because he's a popular guy.

Could cause a riot. Everything's a bit tense. Could go sideways. We don't want that. Just think about that for a moment. The chief priests, I mean, they're a piece of work, aren't they?

Even our tiny little window here into their world, you can see such callousness. They're talking about killing a guy and talking about a big religious festival at the same time.

Let's not kill Jesus during the Passover. Lots of visitors in town. Could be trouble. It's like, let's not murder Jeremy, you know, in the first 15 minutes of the service because, like, there's little, I mean, there's kids in the service.

[7 : 02] Let's do it after the kids focus. Let's do it in the car park afterwards. You know, it's like, I mean, the Passover remembered God's terrible judgment on Egypt and God's grace in freeing his people.

And yet they could so casually talk about murder in that context. I mean, they were supposed to lead people to God. That's the job description. But clearly their main interest was self-preservation. They wanted to maintain their position. And Jesus was rocking the boat. He was a threat. Let's kill him. I mean, it's so tragic. They're supposed to be the guys. They're supposed to be the spiritually onto it ones.

This is a great caution to us. Knowledge of God or scholarship. It does not protect us from betraying Christ. That's one of the warnings of this passage, one of the warnings of the story of treachery.

So that's the first piece of sandwich. The bottom piece, so the first piece of bread, the bottom piece of bread now. Judas betrays Christ.

[8 : 10] I imagine the priests could not believe their luck when Judas walked in the door that night. Then Judas Iscariot, one of the 12, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.

And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him. You know, it's just one of the darkest lines in the Bible, isn't it?

You know, the text says, the betrayal of Christ brought the chief priests joy. Let's talk about Judas for a moment. In some circles, he's often, I think, mistakenly cast as a victim of circumstance.

You know, the pawn of other powerful forces. But here, I think we see him with clarity, with great clarity. He is a free, sovereign, moral agent. He chose evil.

We don't know his motivation. Likely it was money, but we don't know for sure. He probably just thought this whole Jesus thing was gonna run its course, was going nowhere. So he just thought, man, I'm just gonna cash out.

[9 : 17] We don't really know for sure. But what's so shocking about it, though, is that when you think about everything Jesus went through with Judas, everything Judas went through with Jesus, everything he saw, everything he heard, Jesus inviting him into his life.

He was one of the 12 when the betrayal is staggering. What's the warning for us here? Folks, having a high profile in your church does not protect you from betraying Christ.

Okay. Big picture again. Verse one and two, it's the story of the priests doing evil. Verses 11 and 12, a story of personal betrayal. And sandwiched in between those two things, this picture of outrageous sacrificial devotion. That's verses three to nine.

This is the woman, the story of the woman who anointed Jesus' head with oil whilst he was at a dinner party. There are three things that stick out to me about this story.

[10:26] Firstly, the extravagance of the act. Two, the explosion of criticism. And three, Christ's defense of her.

Let's go through them quickly. First, the extravagance of the act. This woman comes in with a jar of nard, broke it, poured it.

Now, when it says nard, I think a lot of us hear lard. Lard and nard are different.

Just, it's weird you're not writing this down. This is great stuff. Lard on your head is unpleasant, all right? Nard on the other hand, this is this oil.

It's extracted from this root in India. Very, very expensive. We hear it's worth 300 denarii. It's like a year's wages. Probably the most expensive thing she owned, the family nest egg in case of emergencies.

[11:29] So, folks, this was not like a very nice bottle of wine you have around the house that you're saving for a special occasion. It's not like that.

Did I ever tell you guys a story about when I went to a birthday party in Indiana? Did I ever tell you this story? Yeah, I'll even tell you this story. So, a good friend of mine, he was turning 40, and he'd done well in life, flew me down.

They threw a lot of money at this birthday party, and it was a wonderful weekend. We're packing up. I stayed at his house. We're packing up, and he says to me, hey, there's a bottle of wine left. Do you want to take it home with you? And I'm like, oh.

And I'm thinking, can I be bothered? Like, I'm not much of a drinker, you know? And I just had carry-on luggage, and if I'd have brought the bottle of wine with me, I'd have to check the bag.

That's kind of the rules. So, I casually said, how much is it worth? And thinking, my checked bag is going to cost \$25. And he said, well, at a restaurant, this bottle is probably worth about \$1,400.

[12:33] And I said, you know what? You know what? Let me help you. If it helps you, I'll take it off your hands.

And anyway, I got it home, and it was literally the most expensive thing I owned in my house at the time.

But nothing, this is a true story, nothing, nothing like this perfume. Back to the story. So, the anointing.

So, it wouldn't have been unusual, if you were at a dinner party, for the host to kind of dab a little bit of oil on your head to make people smell nice. That wouldn't have been unusual. But what she did was extravagant.

She broke open the family treasure, poured the whole bottle on Jesus, anointed him with it.

Outrageous. Like an outrageous display of devotion, an outrageous display here.

[13:34] And, you know, I mean, she was all in, wasn't she? I mean, she was an all-in follower of Jesus. She clearly was not thinking, well, I'll follow you, Jesus, as long as it doesn't eat into my leisure time.

I'll follow you, Jesus, as long as it doesn't impact my finances. I'll follow you, Jesus, as long as it doesn't make me look foolish in front of people. She was all in, no conditions.

And she really puts to shame all the other characters. It was an act of a person whose whole life had been given to Jesus. And it's very challenging, isn't it, I think? And I want to add this.

It wasn't just a thoughtless, emotional thing that she did. Jesus says, she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.

Do you know what most scholars say about this? They say, well, she didn't really know what she was doing when she did it. Why? Why?

[14:40] There is nothing in the text that says she didn't understand what she was doing. It was the practice of the day if somebody was gonna die, if somebody had died to anoint their body.

A plain reading of the text suggests that she knew exactly what she was doing. I don't know why they say that. I think she understood what was going on. Remember, Jesus had said, I'm going to die.

He'd said it a lot. I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I'm going to die. James and John were like, I don't know what's going on. We just want the best seats in the house. Peter's like, no, no, no, no. That's silly talk. That's silly talk. It looks like she actually listened to his words. Folks, it's not unusual in the Gospels for the outsider to actually get it and the insiders to be clueless.

And I think that's what happened here. I love her. I think she's wonderful. When Jesus rightfully says in verse nine, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

[15:50] Don't forget it, Jesus says, because she's an example to us. And she doesn't care about the social cost to her devotion, despite the fact that it comes pretty quickly.

Welcome to 2023, you know. So we have this act of beautiful devotion. It's not understood by those around her. In fact, the response is an explosion of criticism.

From those present at the dinner party. We don't know who all was there. Which brings us to the second thing to say about this passage. The explosion of criticism. What a waste.

What a waste, they say. You know, we could have used that money to give to the poor. From John's Gospel, we know those words came from Judas, who liked to dip his hands in the community purse.

So I think we can take that critique with a grain of salt. But... I'll add this. Perhaps you have seen someone demonstrably worship Jesus.

[16:56] And you have had feelings about that. These exuberant acts of devotion, some of us, perhaps, find a bit distasteful, a bit embarrassing, a bit over the top.

You might even be a bit judgy about these folks. Ooh, they're a bit needy. A bit emotional. It's a bit emotional. In church? Goodness sake. Or perhaps what they do makes us uncomfortable because it shines a light on our own hearts, which have become a bit dull.

Our responses to the ways other people worship, particularly if that worship is quite exuberant, well, it's probably... You know, that can be something we need to repent of.

Okay, moving on. The extravagance of this act, the explosion of criticism, and lastly, Christ's defense of her. I really like this.

Christ jumps to her defense. I love it. And forgive me, I just want to speak a bit devotionally about this part. Christ says a number of important things here.

[18:06] First, he says, leave her alone. Leave her alone. She has done a beautiful thing. Imagine the scene.

Christ puts himself between her and her accusers. I mean, what a thing. What a thing to have Christ defend you, especially when you are shamed.

Let me say this. Shame is an awful thing, and they tried to shame her. Shame is an awful thing. Some of us carry it for years, and for whatever reason, we're not listening to the voice of Christ speaking to us about it.

Folks, if you carry shame, perhaps because of sin, and you hear these accusing voices saying, wow, you're awful, you're dirty, you're whatever it is.

Know that Christ has forgiven you, and he stands between you and your accuser. And he says to you, he says to them, leave her alone.

[19:17] He says about you, leave him alone. Friends, you don't need to carry shame. Let the words of Christ defend you. Jesus also says, you will always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them, but you will not always have me.

What's all that mean? Certainly he's not saying, don't worry about the poor. We know that Christ has preached about this, about our concern for the poor. He's simply saying, something amazing is happening right now.

Don't miss it. The other thing Jesus says, and it's a little phrase we can easily sort of miss. He says, she did what she could. She did what she could.

This is very important. What does Christ expect from you? All of you. What does Christ expect from you? In terms of your service to him? He expects what you can do.

No more. No more than you are able to do. What can you do for Jesus? Could be something huge. Could be something small. Whatever it is, Christ says, you have done a beautiful thing.

[20:24] Remember the widow a few chapters ago. Will brought it up this morning. Surrounded by the religious elite, this widow. Surrounded by the wealthy, the important. She drops in two small coins.

From the outside, very unimpressive. But of everything that was happening that day in the temple, Christ says, her act, her act was the only thing worthy of attention.

These two women, both gave very differently. One, a year's wages. One, two small coins. And yet, both were gifts treasured by Jesus.

God requires nothing more from you than what you are able to give or do, which should be a huge relief for us. You know, in church land, when you think about how to serve, it means we don't get jealous towards others who are doing things we wish we could do.

We don't blame God for our limitations. You know, the widow, maybe she wished she could do more, but God singled her out in history for what she was able to do.

[21 : 25] Whatever you're able to do for Christ, big or small, huge or little, it is a beautiful thing to Him. Let me finish up here really quickly.

We have stories of treachery and betrayal. All driven by self-interest. And right in the middle there, outrageous devotion.

All the sensible people in that room on that day, forgotten. 2,000 years later. 2,000 years have gone. And in that time, there have been kings and queens and athletes and soldiers and scientists and warriors and artists, brilliant people completely buried in history that no one ever talks about.

But she is remembered. And I think it's wonderful. She is a great reminder to all of us. Let's honour Christ with all he has given us.

Amen. Amen. To be continued... todaf Wal Have fun with you.