Mark 14:1-11 (PM)

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[0:00] So the reading was Mark 14, 1 to 25. I'm just, I'm just going to focus on verses 1 to 11. Let me start with the big picture first. So Mark's gospel, story about Jesus, you can break that up into sections. And the section after the reading today is called the Passion Narrative. Passion from the Latin word passio, meaning suffering. And it's a great name for the next text, for the next passage, because the rest of 14 and 15 is a pretty hard read. Jesus is unjustly arrested, he's mocked, he's beaten, he's betrayed, he's denied, and ultimately he's crucified. The Passion Narrative officially starts in verse 26. So our reading today is like a hinge into the Passion Narrative. And it's a wonderful hinge, because before we get the darkness of the Passion, before we hear about a lot of people rejecting Jesus, we read about a woman who honors him. Mark is saying, before you see what evil looks like, let me show you what love looks like. And the reason Mark structures it like this is because what she does is so extravagant, so wonderful. It scandalizes everything that happens afterwards. Before the darkness of chapter 15, there's this beacon. It shows us what devotion looks like, and it shows us how dark the darkness is that follows. So that's how it fits into the big story of Mark. Now let's zoom in on verses 1 to 11. I want to point out something about the structure, which is really, really cool. So one of the ways Mark sort of elevates the story about this woman who did this really amazing thing is by something called, using something called the Marken Sandwich, which we talked about a few weeks ago, I think. So he loves these things, Marken Sandwich. It's a literary technique that Mark uses to highlight something. And you can see it if you actually look at the structure of 1 to 11. So you see there on the screen, one, treachery, the treachery of the chief priests and scribes. And then you have this amazing act of devotion, and then you have treachery again. It's like this little envelope. So treachery, treachery, it's like the bread of the sandwich, and the thing in the middle is like the meat of the sandwich. That's the important part. That's where

Mark wants to focus on. If you're a more visual person, here's something that Chris Lane made up for us. Here we go. Where's that image? Coming up. Any second. Any second. There it is.
Isn't that brilliant? I did notice this morning that there was mayonnaise and bacon on this sandwich, which I feel like is not kosher. So I'll talk to Chris about that afterwards. But there you go.
You see that? Treachery, treachery. I'm not making this up. This is a thing he uses all through Mark's gospel to bring our attention to something in particular, which is the anointing of Jesus. This thing that this woman did. So let's jump into that. Here's how we're going to tackle verses 1 to 11. I'm going to talk about the beginning, top piece of bread. I'm going to talk about the end, the bottom piece of bread. And then I'm going to talk about the piece in the middle. So let's talk about the bread first. First, the top slice of bread, the plot to kill Jesus. It reminds you of this passage, 14, 1 to 2. Now, it was now two days before the Passover of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him. For they said, not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people. So first thing, we're hearing about this, this something called the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. If you're not familiar with these things, let me just give you kind of like the elevator pitch here. So there were these festivals that celebrated the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt. So the Jews were slaves in Egypt for a long time. They were mistreated. God rose up this leader, Moses, who went to Pharaoh and said, let my people go. And the Pharaoh wasn't into it. So God sent a series of plagues, of judgments on them, frogs and boils and stuff. Pharaoh still said no. God sent a final plague, death. Death visited every house in
[4:34] Egypt except the homes of the Israelites. Death passed over the Israelite homes. Hence, Passover, the name of the festival. As a result of these deaths, Pharaoh changed his mind and he said, okay, you guys can go. And the Hebrew people had to get out really, really quickly. So they're packing their stuff and they're making food for the journey and they made bread and the bread

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didn't have time to rise.

And so it was like this flat bread. It was unleavened bread. And God said, I want you to keep eating that unleavened bread periodically as a reminder of this rescue and the time in the wilderness. So that's a really, really important Old Testament story. And what it is, is it's a small rescue, a local rescue, which points to Jesus' really big rescue. So that's a little info on the feast.

Back to our story. So in Jesus' time, 2,000 years ago, these festivals were pilgrimage festivals, which means you couldn't just sort of celebrate them in your local town. You had to take a big journey into Jerusalem with everybody else. So you had around 200,000 Jews heading into Jerusalem.

That's the time of our story. So you got 200,000 Jews squeezed into Jerusalem and they're feeling very nationalistic, which is why the Sanhedrin is saying, look, we shouldn't kill Jesus during the feast because he's a very popular guy and it could cause problems. It could be a riot. It could be drama.

[6:05] You know, let's be, let's be smart about this. So the chief priests, I mean, they're a piece of work, aren't they? I mean, even from our tiny little window into their world here, you see there's such callousness about them. I mean, they're talking about killing a guy and talking about this really beautiful festival, kind of like in the same sentence. Let's not kill Jesus during the Passover because there's lots of visitors in town and it could be trouble. It's like saying, let's not kill Will Gray during the first part of the church service because there's like kids present and it'll upset the children, but we should kill him afterwards in the car park or something because then there won't be so much trouble. I mean, the Passover remembered God's terrible judgment on Egypt and God's grace in freeing his people. And they just sort of talked about that and murder all at the same time.

I mean, these were the guys that were supposed to lead people to God. That's the job description. But clearly their, their main interest was self-preservation. They just wanted to maintain their positions and Jesus was rocking the boat. So they, they just decided they were going to take him out. They were supposed to be the guys, the clever ones. They were supposed to be the guys that really onto it. And it's a caution to us, I think. You know, the knowledge of God or theological scholarship, it doesn't protect us from betraying Christ. I think that's one of the warnings of this passage. Let's keep going. That's the top piece of bread. Bottom piece of bread now. Judas betrays Jesus.

You can imagine the priests could not believe their luck when Judas waltzes through the door. It's, let's remember this passage here. Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, 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. It's just one of the darkest lines in the Bible. This betrayal of Christ brought the chief priests joy. Let's talk about Judas for a moment. I think in some circles, he's often mistakenly cast as like this victim of circumstance or the kind of the pawn of others more powerful than him. But I mean, here we see him, I think, with great clarity. He was a sovereign moral agent. He chose freely to betray Christ. We don't know his motivation. Probably money. Luckily, he thought this whole Jesus thing was going nowhere, so he was just going to like cash out. We don't know for sure. But what's so shocking about it, though, is when you think about everything he went through with Jesus? Everything he saw, everything he heard, Jesus inviting him into his life, into his crew. He was one of the twelve, for goodness sake. I mean, the betrayal is staggering.

And there's a warning here for us as well. You know, having a high profile in your church does not protect you from betraying Christ either. So, that's that. Let's talk about the big picture again. It was talked about verses one to two, top slice of bread, the story of the evil priests, talked about the bottom slice of bread, the story of the personal betrayal, and now we have the meat of the sandwich. This picture of outrageous, beautiful, wonderful devotion. So, that's verses three to nine.

[9:57] Let's get into it. You remember the story. This woman anoints Jesus' head with oil while he's at a dinner party. And there's three things that stick out about the story, I think. Three things. First, is the extravagance of the act. Two, the explosion of criticism. And three, Christ's defense of her.

Let's talk about this quickly. First, the extravagance of the act. So, a woman comes in with a jar of nard, norad, and she breaks it, pours it on his head. Now, when it says nard, I think some of you hear lard or lorad. I think so, right? It's not. Nard and lard are different. So, lard poured on your head.

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That's not a thing. It's a horrible thing. Nard, that's pretty good. So, nard was this oil that was extracted from this root in India. It's very, very expensive. And it says here, I think it's worth 300 denarii. It's a little bit short of an annual wage. Probably the most expensive thing this woman owned. Like the family nest egg, in case things went sideways. So, it wasn't like, you know, it wasn't like a really nice bottle of wine you have lying around the house that you're saving for a special occasion. It's not like that. It's better than that. Did I ever tell you guys a story about the really nice bottle of wine I had? Did I tell everyone that story? No? Okay, really quickly.
So, that's a great story. So, I go to my friend's birthday party in Indiana. He's money. He's just money. And he flies me down there. And it's a great party. And as I'm leaving, he says, do you want to take a bottle of wine with you? And I'm just like, oh, I don't know if I want to. Because I've only got carry-on luggage and I'd have to check the bag. You can't just put the wine in carry-on luggage. And I'm thinking, it's going to cost me 25 bucks to check the bag. Is it worth it? I say to him, just casually, how much is a bottle of wine worth? He says, oh, probably if you bought it at a restaurant, probably like $1,400. And I said, do you know what? Do you know what? If it helps you, I'll take it off your hands. I'll take it off your hands. I remember I brought it home. I think it was literally the most expensive thing in my home when it came back. But nothing, like nothing like this.
[12:25] It wasn't like annual wage expensive. It was like nice watch expensive, you know. All right, back to the story. So if you went to a dinner party in the Achenarist, it wouldn't have been unusual for somebody to drop a little bit of nice oil on your head or something to make the place smell nice. But she broke open the family treasure. She poured the whole bottle on Jesus' head anointed him. Outrageous, outrageous display of devotion there. I mean, she was just all in, you know. She was an all-in follower of Jesus. She wasn't thinking, I'll follow Jesus as long as it doesn't eat into my leisure time. I'll follow Jesus as long as it doesn't impact my finances. I'll follow him as long as it doesn't, like, you know, make me look foolish in front of people, which it did. She was all in. I mean, she puts the shame everyone else around her, I think.

I mean, this is the act of a person whose whole life is given to Jesus. It's wonderful. I find it very challenging. I want to add this, though. What she did wasn't a thoughtless, emotional thing.
Jesus says about her, she anointed my body beforehand for burial. That's what Jesus said.
She anointed my body beforehand for burial. Now, this is interesting. This is interesting. You ready? This is interesting. Most of the scholars that you read will say she didn't really understand what she was doing. And I don't know why they say that. There is nothing in the text that makes us think she didn't understand what she was doing. The plain reading of the passage suggests she knew what she was doing. It was customary practice. If somebody had died, you anointed the body. I think she knew what she was going on. I mean, Jesus had repeatedly said, I'm going to die, I'm going to die, I'm going to die, I'm going to die. And it seems that she listened. I think she listened. James and John, remember these guys, they're like, blah, blah, blah, blah. We just want the best seats. Peter's like, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It's not going to happen. It's not going to happen. But she listened to his words and was anointing him for burial. I mean, it wouldn't be the first time in Mark that a complete outsider got it when the people at the center of the story didn't get it.
[15:14] I mean, some of the best things said about Christ, like the centurion, it's blind Bartimaeus, you know. I think she knew what she was doing. I love her. I love her. I think she's wonderful.

Jesus rightfully says in verse 9, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her. Don't forget about it, Jesus says.
She's an example to us. She did something not caring about the social cost to her devotion, which came very quickly. So we have this beautiful act of devotion. It's not understood by those around her. In fact, the response is, as we said, it's an explosion of criticism, which brings us to point two about this explosion of criticism. What a waste, they say. We could have given that money to the poor.
Here's the thing, man. From John's gospel, we know that those words came from Judas, who we know actually would steal from the community purse. So I think we can take his critique with a grain of salt. Yeah. I'll also add this.
Perhaps we have seen people demonstrably worship Jesus, and we have felt some feelings about that. We've felt things about that. They're standing beside us, in front of us, behind us.
[16:48] And sometimes some people, some of us maybe, we find this kind of public display of worship and devotion a bit distasteful. Some people find it a bit embarrassing. It makes them feel awkward.

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And you might even judge people for that. You know, you might, in your mind, I mean, you don't say anything out loud, but in your mind you're thinking, ooh, they're a bit emotional.
They're a bit needy, aren't they? They're a bit needy. A bit needy. Or perhaps these displays of kind of really sort of over-the-top worship make us feel uncomfortable because they shine a bit of a light in our own hearts, which maybe they've got a bit dull.
Anyway, our responses to other people worshiping, you know, sometimes that has to be something we need to repent of, I think. Okay, moving on. The extravagance of the act, explosion of criticism, and then Christ's defense of her. And I love this so much. Christ jumps to her defense. And forgive me, I'm going to speak a bit devotionally about this part. Christ says a number of important things in his defense. He says first, leave her alone. Isn't that brilliant? Leave her alone. What she's done is beautiful. You can imagine the scene. Christ putting himself between the woman and the attackers. I mean, what a thing to have Christ defend you, especially when you're being shamed.
You know, shame is an awful thing. We experience it for a number of different reasons. But whatever the reason, you know, sometimes people carry it for years. And we don't listen to the voice of Christ who would defend us. You can carry shame and you can hear these accusing voices saying you're a bit too emotional or you're dirty or you're whatever. It can be your own tape recorder in our own heads saying these things to us. Useless, dirty, immoral, whatever it is.
[18:56] Folks, know that Christ has forgiven you and he loves you and he stands between you and the accuser. And he says, leave her alone. He says to you, leave him alone. You don't need to carry shame. Let the words of Christ defend you.

Jesus also says this. He says, leave her alone. And then he says, you'll always have the poor with you and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you won't always have me. What's all that mean? Well, it's first, obviously it's not saying don't worry about poor people because he's preaching on the importance of caring for the poor.
When he's simply saying something amazing is happening right now and don't miss it. That's it. The other thing Jesus says, the final thing he says, and it's a little bit of a phrase that we can sort of easily just sort of go over quite quickly, pass over quite quickly.
He says, she did what she could. Isn't that great? She did what she could. This is a very important line for us in church land. What does God expect from you?
In terms of your service to him. He expects what we can do. He doesn't expect more from you than that. But what can you do? That's what he expects.
[20:10] What are you able to do? That's what he expects from you. What can you do for Jesus? Could be something quite small. Could be something very big. Whatever it is, Christ says it's a beautiful thing.

Do you remember, Will talked about it actually. It was great. There's this unnamed widow a few chapters ago. And she's in the temple. And she's, you know, the woman who put the two coins in the thing. So she's surrounded by the religious elite and the wealthy and the important.
She dropped these two coins in. Very unimpressive. But of everything happening that day in the temple, Christ says her act was the only thing worthy of attention.
So we have these two women who gave very differently. One a year's wages. One just a couple of coins. Two cents. And yet these were gifts that were treasured by Jesus.
Friends, I hope you hear this. God requires nothing more from you than what you are able to give. I hope that's a relief. It's a relief to me. I have certain limitations, you know.
[21:17] I just have to be cool with that. Like I'm good at some things. I'm not good at those other things. Which means I... It's wrong of me to be jealous of my pastor friends who run mega churches and are really, I don't know, good at other pastory stuff.

It's wrong for you to be jealous of other people in the church who you feel like have gifts that you wish you had. We don't blame God for our limitations. We don't have to do that.
I mean, the widow, she might have wished she could give more, but God singled her out in history and said he did what she was able to do. Whatever you do for Christ, whatever it is, big, small, it's a beautiful thing.
Let me finish up here really quickly. So we have the story of betrayal and treachery, all driven by self-interest. And then right in the middle, this outrageous devotional act.
It's brilliant. All the sensible people in the room that day. Who are they? Forgotten.
[22:22] It's been 2,000 years since that happened, and we've had kings and queens and warriors and scientists and soldiers and artists, brilliant people. Their names are buried in history. Their

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stories are buried in history.

No one talks about them. But she is remembered. She is rightfully remembered, and it's wonderful. It's a great reminder to us. She's a great example for us. Let's honor Christ with all that he has given us.
Amen.

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