

Guest Preacher Zach Varnell

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 July 2020

Preacher: Zach Varnell

[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! And just to get to see you, we love hearing what the Lord is doing from afar, but just to get to see you.

And I know I don't see everyone, there's the live stream folks too, but what an absolute joy to celebrate what the Lord is doing, has done, and is continuing to do.

You can open in your Bibles to Mark chapter 14. And I was going to share a little brief testimonial type thing along with Tim and Paige too.

It was August in 2005. I was a freshman at the University of Tennessee. And even though I had grown up in the church and was involved in all kinds of different ministry type things, at that point in my life, I was running away from all things Christianity.

[1 : 26] I was just tired of that life, wanted to do the party lifestyle in college. And yet, my second day on campus, I was invited to an ultimate Frisbee game by this campus ministry, one that I was immediately skeptical of.

But because they played ultimate, I mean, I'll play ultimate with anybody. So I went, and when I walked out onto the intramural fields, one of the first guys I met was Walt Alexander.

I could cry thinking about it. He worked for that campus ministry, Volunteers for Christ. And from that moment, God just worked tremendously in my life through Walt.

And I'm just saying that, I just want to add my voice to say, God is faithful. And even for me, knowing what I know and my experience with Walt, and then getting to be here and seeing God's continued work, not only through Walt, but through you folks who have just committed your lives to this church.

God is faithful. And He is good. And He's worthy of our trust. So, what a joy to do this together. So let's look at Mark chapter 14.

[2 : 43] We're going to read the first 11 verses. This is God's holy word. 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, Him being 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 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. And they scolded her. But Jesus said, leave her alone.

[3 : 58] 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.

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them.

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

[5 : 05] These are powerful verses we're looking at this morning. But before we get into them, I just wanted to start it by asking you a question. You ever missed an opportunity? You ever just left a moment kicking yourself because, ah, it's missed an opportunity?

Well, history is full of examples like that. 1876, Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone and he wanted to commercialize it and offered to sell the patent to Western Union.

And they thought it was ridiculous. They thought the telephone was nothing more than a toy. They said, why would anyone want to use this impractical device when they can send a perfectly clear telegraph to any major city in the U.S.?

Telegraphs are in museums now. Phones are in your pockets. Missed opportunity. You know, the Christian author, theologian J.I. Packer went to be with the Lord this past week.

And a lot of folks have been writing tributes to this man and how he gave his life to helping people just know their God better, more truly, more genuine, have more genuine communion with the Lord.

[6 : 19] And his best book, or his, I guess, most popular book, Knowing God, has just been, you know, people are talking about it like, this is a book that we're going to be reading hundreds of years from now.

But a story that's come out with all these things is when he went to publish the book in 1973, Knowing God, he went to IVP publishers in the U.K.

and told them about this book and they said they didn't want to publish it. What they wanted to do is get him to write a book about the charismatic issue going on in the day.

So he said, well, I'm not going to do that. So he went to someone else and they published the book. Anyway, since then, it sold one and a half million copies and I'm just sure even today, IVP is just, in the U.K. anyway, is kicking themselves for not taking advantage of that.

But it's not just business ventures or investments, isn't it? We can miss opportunities in our own lives. I can't tell you how many opportunities I've missed personally just because of negligence or selfishness or ignorance or whatever it was.

[7 : 25] I asked my wife when I was preparing this message if she had any examples for me. Sometimes I've kind of missed opportunities in our marriage. Thinking she'd say, I'd love to think about it and get back to you.

You know, probably not. And not expecting the 12 that immediately came to her mind. But the highlight, the worst, was our honeymoon. I took a fly rod on our honeymoon.

We went to Acadia National Park, Bar Harbor, Maine. One day, we drove an hour and a half up to Baxter State Park. It's the northern end of the Appalachian Trail. Anybody likes hiking? And I found some water and started fishing and it started to get late.

And Sarah had just finished the last of our supplies, a piece of leftover stale bagel that was in the car. And she approached me and asked if we could leave. She had everything prepared for a steak dinner back at the cabin.

We had an hour and a half drive. It was starting to get dark. And so I say, sure, of course, babe, just one more cast. Now, if you're a fisherman, you probably know where this is going.

[8 : 33] After an hour of more fishing, I finally got back to the car and Sarah wasn't very happy. Missed opportunity to show Sarah I love her more than fishing.

Anyway, something similar is going on in our text this morning. All right, this is an incredible story. This is truly an historic moment.

Jesus makes it clear that it is in verse 9 when he says, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she's done is going to be told in memory of her.

I mean, we're fulfilling that this morning as we talk about her. No other human receives such commendation from Jesus when he erects this memorial for her who did her best, who did what she could to honor him.

It was amazing. And yet, the disciples totally missed it. They missed an opportunity. And I just, as we look at this text, I don't want us to miss it.

[9 : 40] I don't want us to miss what God might be telling us through His Word this morning. Not only her example of what this lady did, but God's Word that He brings to us through this gospel to speak to us and change us by His Spirit.

I think that's the main point this morning. I think what the text is calling us to this morning is to behold and be changed by the glory of Christ. May that be true. May we see Him more clearly this morning and be changed by knowing Him.

So this is what we're going to do. A little bit different. We're going to, actually I have no idea what you guys do every Sunday, so different for me. We're going to walk through this story first and just look at the details. And then we're going to take a look at what we might learn from this story. What the intended effects of this story might be for us. So this text, it's what's called a Markin sandwich. This is a literary device Mark uses throughout his gospel to make a point where a text will begin and end with something similar and then it's what's in the middle that's really the main focus, the main point.

So our text begins verses 1 and 2 and it ends verses 10 and 11 with this growing opposition that Jesus is facing.

[11:06] Look back at 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.

These are the religious leaders, the Jewish religious leaders and they have been set on getting rid of Jesus for a while now.

They hate Jesus. Jesus has thwarted their traps. He's answered their questions. He's taught with authority. He's put these guys who are supposed to have authority, He's put them to shame. And so by this point they are resolved and there is no turning back now. It's just the popularity, His popularity among the people that's holding them back from doing what they're dead set on doing. Verse 1 says that this was during the Passover celebration. It's one of the most important feasts and celebrations of the Jewish people.

[12:16] It was their national holiday. It commemorated God's salvation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. It's what led to their deliverance as a people.

So it's hugely important. A lot of people would pilgrimage to Jerusalem for this celebration. I know it might be hard to imagine given our quarantine season that we're experiencing, but if you could just remember like UT game day, a big game day campus is just packed, Neyland Stadium full, tons and tons of people.

And the point is Jesus had become popular among those people. Maybe not real faith, but these people were very interested in Him and excited about Him. And they thought how appropriate it might be that the Messiah is here on this nationalistic holiday ready to overthrow Roman rule and establish God's people where they ought to be again.

So there was lots of tension in the air. So the religious leaders are afraid of what the people might do if they take Him out.

And so instead, like a stalking, lurking predator, they just wait and they seek an opportunity. But then something very surprising happens in verse 10.

[13:38] Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to them in order to betray Jesus to them.

Someone who is close to Jesus, someone who could make it easy for them to access Jesus, He seeks them out. It is so much better than what they were expecting.

Verse 11 tells us this made them glad. The treachery and betrayal of the Son of God made them glad.

It's one of the most bitter lines in the whole Gospel. So, that's the context of what's going on. Hatred for Jesus, a cheap valuation of His life and a resolve just to get rid of Him.

No matter what it takes. But before we move on, I think it's just so important to pause and remember and ask in this moment, now, who's in control?

[14:49] Because when we, when you see that and you think on that, this hatred and this evil and this plotting against the Son of God, it's grieving. I mean, this is Judas.

This is one of the twelve. This is one who walked with Jesus and knew Jesus. He's named. He's known. He went to betray Jesus.

It's deeply grieving. And yet, in God's glorious sovereignty, what man intends for evil, God intends for good.

He's not out of control. Jesus is not at risk of blindly walking into something He didn't know is full well coming. No one takes His life from Him.

No, no way. He lays it down on His own authority. And so, when we see the suffering and evil and the hate of our world, we have to fight to remember God is in control and He's good.

[16:00] Now, you get a bit of a glimpse of that reality, that control, when you look at the middle of the story, the meat of the sandwich. Verse 3, He was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. right in the middle of this hatred for Jesus, this conspiracy against Jesus, there's a party celebrating Him.

And oh, to be at this party, as I've thought about this, I think the closest thing I can think of to describe this, it would be maybe like a birthday party or a retirement party, where it's the love for this one person is what unites everyone there.

That this one person in a context where you feel totally safe and welcomed and loved. That's the feel of this party. One of joy and bliss.

Simon was the host. It says Simon the leper, but obviously a healed leper. You know, Jewish law would not have allowed anyone with leprosy to hang out with a lot of people.

[17:07] I mean, you think COVID keeps you from hanging out with people? Leprosy is way worse. And yet, there they are. At his house.

A healed leper. And surely, oh, it was Jesus who healed this man. No doubt, Simon was a thankful man. He loved and was grateful for Jesus.

John, the Gospel of John, his account tells us in John chapter 12, who else was there? Lazarus was there. You know, Lazarus, the one whom Jesus raised from the dead.

One whom surely loved Jesus and was grateful for who Jesus was. John also tells us that Martha was there, the hostess of all hostesses. So no doubt, they were throwing down.

It was a feast. Joyful party. Matthew's account tells us that the disciples were there, those who knew and walked closely with and loved Jesus. And I just have to think, if the disciples were there, then Peter was there.

[18:13] And if Peter was there, there is no doubt he was sitting next to Lazarus and was just peppering him with questions. Now what was it like to die and then come back? What did it feel like? What did you see? I mean, come back.

The point is, wonderful, just a wonderful, joyful setting. Notice who's not there. Scribes, chief priests, Pharisees, religious leaders, enemies of Jesus.

None of them are there. This is a joyful, safe setting. It is so far removed from this outside world that hates Jesus and is seeking His death.

This was respite. And then, in comes this woman. Mark keeps her nameless and she comes in and she does this extravagant thing.

So you just picture this moment. So, okay, joyful celebration. You're sure there's lots of, you know, talk and maybe there's laughter and good food being enjoyed and then all of a sudden the room just fills with this intense and wonderful fragrance.

[19:21] A room filled, by the way, with a bunch of men who didn't bathe very often. So if you weren't paying attention yet, you were now. all conversations stop.

Every eye is on this woman. It was profound. It was extravagant. One commentator I read said that Mark just stumbles over himself to make sure we know how expensive this stuff was.

The disciples value it at over 300 denarii. That's like an average year's salary today. So in one single moment, this woman pours out tens of thousands of dollars onto Jesus.

And not only that, but you have to understand in that day, in that socioeconomic setting, there's no way that this is something that this woman could have purchased on her own. She would not have had opportunity to make money like that.

And so no doubt, it was a family heirloom. Something passed down generation from generation, making it worth a lot more than the monetary value alone.

[20:31] But this thing was. It was her financial security. It was her rainy day fund. It was her plan B, and yet she breaks it. She saves none of it.

She exhausts it all on Jesus. Why? Because she loved him.

This was an act of honoring. It was extravagant gratitude. It was a beautiful thing. And yet, immediately, she's criticized.

Verse 4 says, there were some who said to themselves indignantly, why was the ointment wasted like that? This ointment could have been sold and given to the poor, and they scolded her.

It was customary during the Passover celebrations to give to the poor. That was part of the celebrating. So they were angry with her. You missed it.

[21 : 43] What a waste. Now put yourself in her shoes. I mean, you think about the context of this party and who all was there. I don't think this is what she was expecting.

I mean, you ever been in a situation like that where maybe out of your love for someone, your desire to serve somebody, you do something for them, or maybe you buy them a gift thinking like, not only will they like it, but everybody else will think this is such a great idea, only to find out it wasn't appreciated, or maybe you've even made matters worse.

Mike Pluniac, who came down, I think, and has spoken here before. He's one of the pastors in Cornerstone. He told a story not too long ago about when he worked for a lawn crew as a college student, and this lady's house they were working at, she had a bunch of these real nice flowers in her landscaping, but Mike thought that they were weeds, so he took it upon himself to bless this lady by mowing down all of her very nice flowers.

Anyway, the reaction was unexpected for Mike. Jesus, in this moment, Jesus is surrounded by his closest friends.

Those who have been with him and should know him best, how foolish she must have felt when these were the ones who told her, you got it wrong, were scolding her.

[23 : 13] But what the disciples did not realize is that it was they themselves who were totally missing it. And so Jesus speaks. Verse 6, Jesus said, leave her alone.

Why do you trouble her? She's done a beautiful thing to me. This is such an important moment. And I don't want to miss this moment. I want to understand what this moment's all about. Jesus' words, His response here to this woman, His adjusting of His disciples, it's crucial. Not only for them, but for us as we look at this this morning.

So a few points of things we can learn from this. Number one, and what Jesus says, number one, Jesus is worthy of extravagant gratitude. He's worthy of that.

Verse 6, He calls this a beautiful thing. Why? What made it beautiful? What made her action beautiful was the fact that it was motivated by her love for Jesus.

[24 : 23] It wasn't beautiful just because it was so expensive. You know, Jesus, Jesus was not necessarily impressed by really expensive ointment that's made from this root in India, which was hard to get.

That's not what impressed Him, the Maker of all things. That's not what made it beautiful. What made it beautiful was not so much the what she did as the why she did it.

Dane Ortlund in his biography on Jonathan Edwards says, Christian obedience is doing what we love to do.

Out of a heart, alive to the beauty of Christ. It's not a result of forcing our wills, but delighting in Christ.

Christ. I think that's what's happening here. I think she beheld the glory of her Savior and it changed her. And it called her to act.

[25 : 27] What she did was beautiful because it came out of this heart, her heart that was just enamored by who Christ was. Not so that she would earn something from Him, but because she'd already received so much.

I want to be like this woman. I want to follow her example. I want to know Christ and respond to Christ like she does. This woman and what she did, it's an example of what faith in the gospel does to us.

It changes us. It transforms us. It transforms what we value and treasure most. It's like Matthew 13 when Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a man who finds treasure buried, hidden in a field. And in his, which he covers back up and then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and he buys that field. This woman treasured her Savior and then, and then in this moment she just did what she thought was right.

she wasn't expecting to be honored or written down in scripture. She wasn't expecting to earn something. She just followed the inclination of her heart to in that moment get up knowing what she knew, having the means she had.

[27 : 00] Get up and just grab that priceless heirloom and anoint the one she treasures most. The gospel of Mark begins verse 1 the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

And every text throughout the whole book of Mark just helps us see a little more clearly just who this Son of God really is. And this woman gets it.

this woman who is nameless you know Mark's making a point to keep her nameless this woman who is nameless beheld him for who he is and it motivated her to this radical and extravagant gratitude.

The text the point of the text it's less about her it's so much more about the glory of the Savior she loved and yet she's remembered because she got it right.

I want to get it right. I want to be like this this woman the gospel changes what we value most. It defines what we value the good news the gospel the good news of what Jesus has done to rescue us and save us from our sin.

[28 : 24] It changes what we love. We go from loving self and sin to loving the one who freed us from it.

In this moment you know this woman she just had to do something in light of who her Savior was she just had to do something again not to earn from him but because she had received so much. So what motivates us to sacrifice for God like this? Well it's when the Spirit opens our eyes we sang that song earlier open my head full of rocks it's a funny line but God open my eyes to see the beauty and worth of Christ.

John Owen the Puritan writer in *The Glory of Christ* says there's no better way for our healing and deliverance no other way but this alone namely the obtaining a fresh view of the glory of Christ by faith a due contemplation of the glory of Christ will restore and compose the mind it will lift the minds and hearts of believers above all the troubles of this life and is the sovereign antidote that will expel all the poison that is in them which otherwise might perplex and enslave their souls a view of the glory of Christ transforms us.

I think that's what happened with this woman I think that's what this text is calling us to to respond like she did to know him like she did to seek a vision of the glory of Christ like she saw and when we do when we see Christ like that and we love him and we live for him another thing we learn here is no sacrifice we make is a waste James Edwards another commentator on this passage said according to Jesus an act has value according to its motive and intent and that not its material value that is what makes it serviceable in the kingdom of God when one acts this way no gift not even a mere two copper coins is meaningless and no gift not even a year's salary is wasted so I just wanted to ask is there anything you're mindful of this morning any sacrifices you have made or are making that you're mindful of this morning where you're tempted just to wonder if it's worth it you're tempted to wonder if it's a waste or if it's meaningless your sacrifice of your time and your energy and your serving other people maybe your sacrifice of laying down preferences for the sake of unity in the church sacrifice even of you giving your affections to the

[31 : 29] Lord your giftings to the Lord maybe things no one else sees what are you tempted to think is a waste God doesn't see God doesn't care look Jesus knows your heart none of these things is wasted not one not one none of them are meaningless he values he treasures hearts that are full of love for him and when he opens our eyes to to see him as he is I mean we can't help but live for him so let's pray he'd open our eyes to know him more and more secondly sometimes we can miss what's most important so in the disciples response to this woman they didn't appreciate the extravagance of her offering to Jesus they thought her priorities were a bit out of sort she was missing an opportunity to do something so much better sell that stuff and give it to the poor but

Jesus response was no she got it right and in his response what he does is elevates devotion to him above everything else I think that's so important verse 7 Jesus says you will always have the poor with you and whenever you want you can do good for them now notice Jesus doesn't correct the disciples for their desire to help the poor in fact he encourages it thanks for getting that man that could have been bad Jesus encourages them to care for the poor to seek to do good it's not an excuse here to ignore the problems and ills of our world actually it's encouragement to do good but there is a warning the disciples response there's a warning here don't misorder your priorities Jesus said you will not always have me you know in times like these when there's there's just division and social ills and troubles all around this it can be easy to lose sight or dismiss the mission of the church it can be easy to be tempted to change our priorities but

I think our text makes it clear it is not wasteful it is not meaningless to give your life to Jesus and his mission to devote yourself first and foremost to Christ beholding him loving him treasuring him above all things now Jesus gives us the perspective we need he says we'll always have the poor with us poverty will not finally be eradicated till Christ returns returns but that's meant to set our expectations and order our priorities that we might first and foremost prioritize devotion to our savior

but this is what happens when we stoke the fire of our relationship with and communion with Christ it only naturally overflows to doing good in our world that's what James says true religion is but the disciples missed it we can miss it we can get the order wrong so we want to be aware of that and ask

God to help us anchor all of our good deeds and desire to do good in the world anchor that in devotion to Christ love for Christ and prioritizing him lastly I think we also learn from this that we've got daily opportunities to express gratitude for Jesus you know what should the disciples have done what should they have done in this moment they should have jumped to their feet and they should have applauded this woman and they should have run and gotten in line wanting to do the same it should have been their eager desire to say with her yes Lord you are worthy!

of this and so much more how can we hold back anything from you in light of who you are and what you have done for us soon Jesus would be abandoned by all very soon later this very week same week of this story Jesus would die a criminal's death there would be no honoring there would be no anointing of his body then he would be hung on a cross till he was dead bearing the fullness of God's wrath for our sin and so we on this side of the cross and his glorious resurrection knowing what we know about what Christ has done to rescue us how can we not eagerly eagerly desire to do what we can to just do what we can to express our gratitude for our

[37 : 11] Savior who spent all that he might win us you know what that expensive jar of ointment just being totally exhausted points to the blood of Christ shed for you and for me Jesus held nothing back that he might have you so let's don't miss that let's don't miss this opportunity God's given us in his word to call us back to realize just how incredible this gift of life is in his name let's marvel at who he is and notice what's going on here when Jesus says that this woman will be remembered as the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world what's he saying he he's looking beyond the face he's looking out into this future of his message of life and forgiveness and transformation and beauty going out into the world and transforming lives for his glory and his salvation continues today as it's proclaimed by grateful people who have beheld him and been changed by him can you believe that's what we get to do as a church cornerstone church trinity grace church that's what we get to do we get to declare the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light it is such a privilege this text begins and it ends with

Jesus enemies seeking to do him harm lying and waiting for opportunity to do him harm how great a joy it is to be a people who can seek to bring him honor and praise his glorious name let's pray that he would help us not miss those opportunities he gives us all for his glory and the good of his people let's pray father we thank you that you are worthy of our lives our worship our thanksgiving you're worthy of our delight Jesus you are our greatest treasure spirit I pray that you would open our eyes to a greater and greater degree to behold the glory of

God in the face of Jesus Christ and you transform us Lord we count it such a privilege to declare your excellencies once we were not a people but Lord now because of your mercy we are a people we belong to you and it's our eager desire to give you thanks so use us to that end we ask you in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us