

Mark 14:1-31

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Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening. Tonight we're looking at the Gospel of Mark, chapter 14, verses 1 through 31.

I'll read it in just a minute, but as you're turning there, let me give a little brief introduction. So in 1997, MasterCard began a memorable series of advertisements entitled Priceless.

The ad campaign is run in 98 countries and 46 languages over the past 17 years with many variations on the same theme. Maybe you recognize it already, but here's one.

There's a picture of a one-year-old playing with a cardboard box. And it says this, most popular toy for toddler, \$500. Goodness, did you realize that?

Most popular toy for toddler, cost \$500. Most popular stuffed animal for a toddler, \$350. Most popular picture book for a toddler, \$60. Watching her play with a cardboard box instead, priceless.

[1 : 1 0] Then there's one with a dad bringing his son to a baseball game. Two tickets, \$28. Hot dog, soda, and popcorn, \$18. An autographed baseball, \$45. Having a real conversation with an 11-year-old son, priceless.

Now, all these ads end in the same way, right? There are some things money can't buy. For everything else, there's MasterCard. Now, all joking aside, what is priceless to you?

What's something that you would never trade, never sell, and never give away just to a random person?

Or even to a close friend? What's something that you hope to keep with you for the rest of your life? Now, maybe it's a physical thing.

Maybe it's a book of photos or memories. Maybe it's a handwritten note or series of notes from someone significant in your life. Maybe it's a painting or an antique or a family heirloom passed down from one generation to another.

[2 : 1 7] Maybe it's an experience or a memory that you would only share with someone that you deeply trust and respect. Maybe you've received such a precious, priceless gift.

Maybe someone else has shared something with you or given something to you that's truly priceless. In tonight's passage, we see two people who do something totally unexpected.

They give a priceless gift to someone else. So let me read Mark 14. It's a bit of a long passage, but we're reading verse 1 through 31.

We're going to focus in on two parts of it. So Mark 14, beginning 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, Jesus, how to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

For they said, not during the feast, but 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 the table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly.

- [3 : 31] 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, a year's wages, and given to the poor.
- 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. Then Judas Iscariot, who is one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him, in order to betray Jesus to them.
- And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him. And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?
- [4 : 49] And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. And wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, The teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?
- And he will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. There, prepare for us. And the disciples set out and went to the city, and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.
- And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And as they were reclining a table and eating, Jesus said, Truly I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.
- They began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one after another, Is it I? He said to them, It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.
- For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him. But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been better for that man if he had never been born.
- [5 : 50] And as they were eating, he took bread. And after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them and said, Take. This is my body.
- And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.
- Truly I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, You will all fall away.
- For it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter said to him, Even though they all fall away, I will not.
- And Jesus said to him, Truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times. But he said emphatically, If I must die with you, I will not deny you.
- [6 : 55] And they all said the same. This passage is actually a pretty dark passage. It begins with people plotting to kill Jesus.
- And then talks about one of his disciples who makes an agreement to hand him over for some money. And then Jesus is telling his disciples that one of them, one of the twelve, those who had been closest to him for his earthly ministry, one of them would betray him.

And in the end, he says, You're all going to leave me alone. You're all going to fall away. But in the midst of this passage, in the midst of a pretty dark passage, there's two points of light that we might say.

We see two people who do something totally unexpected. They give a priceless gift. They pour out their most precious possession in an act of lavish generosity.

So first we see a woman who pours out an alabaster jar of costly ointment, perfume, on Jesus. And then we see Jesus symbolically preparing to pour out his body and his blood, his very life for his disciples.

[8 : 22] Now in the structure of the passage, both of these acts of lavish generosity are surrounded on both sides by acts that are self-serving and self-seeking.

So verse 1 and 2 describes the plot to kill Jesus. Verse 3 through 9 describes the woman pouring out her treasure on Jesus. And then verses 10 and 11 describe Judas who agrees to betray Jesus for some money.

And then verse 17 through 21, Jesus says one of his disciples will betray him. And then Jesus symbolically gives his disciples his body and his blood demonstrating what he's going to do for them.

And then right afterwards he says, you're all going to fall away. So in the midst of this, of these dark moments of failure, of human failure, I want to focus in on these two unexpected acts of generosity and then ask what we can learn from each of them.

So first, let's look at the woman. In verses 3 through 9, she pours out her most precious possession on Jesus. Now, what she does here is totally unexpected. Jesus is at somebody's house reclining at the table probably after a meal with his disciples and a woman enters.

[9 : 45] Now, in John chapter 12, we learn that this woman is Mary. But here in Mark, she's left unnamed. There's also a similar story in Luke chapter 7, but several of the details in that story are different.

So, there's probably two different occasions going on. So, we're just going to focus on this story right now. But if you want, you can compare it with the one in Matthew and in John because this story appears in both Matthew and John.

Now, in that culture, women were not supposed to interrupt a group of men who were talking unless they were coming in to serve food. That was the cultural expectation.

But this woman doesn't follow the cultural expectation. She comes in and she comes right to Jesus and she breaks open this jar and pours it out on his head and all over.

It's just, it's just, Mark describes it as an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard very costly worth 300 denarii.

[10 : 50] That's a year's wages. One denarii was a day's wages. So, 300, that's about a year. So, I don't know what you think a year's wages is. Say, 40,000 bucks, 50,000 bucks, whatever you want to call the median wage.

Probably, this would have been a family heirloom passed down from one generation to another. The most valuable thing that this woman owned. If she was a widow, it would have been her savings account and her insurance policy all rolled into one.

The thing that, if everything goes downhill, you can sell this and you'll survive. And she breaks the jar and she pours it out all over Jesus' body.

Which meant she didn't just pour out a couple drops and then close the lid. She broke it, which meant you couldn't close it ever again.

It was broken and poured out and gone. It's an act of total, irreversible, lavish generosity and devotion toward Jesus.

[12 : 04] Now, the disciples are a little weirded out. And probably you would be too if this happened to you. You know, imagine if after church some of us decide to go out for pizza.

Sometimes we do that. Occasionally. Right? And while we're sitting in the booth waiting for our pizza to come, somebody comes in and gives you a \$50,000 check. And everybody else sees exactly what it says on the check.

Or, they pour out this bottle of perfume worth \$50,000. And, you all know what it is.

I mean, I'd be sort of embarrassed. I wouldn't know what to do. I mean, I might be thinking what the disciples are thinking. You know, wouldn't it be more responsible to give that money to the poor?

I mean, really? Especially to just pour it out and waste it. I mean, do I really deserve that? Do I really deserve \$50,000 more than everybody else who's sitting next to me at the table?

[13 : 09] Isn't this sort of awkward? Now, there's some truth to what they're saying. Jesus acknowledged it in verse 7. He says, you will always have the poor with you.

Whenever you want, you can do good for them. And that's not a dismissive remark. He's actually quoting from Deuteronomy 15, which says, where God said to the Israelites, the poor you will always have among you.

Therefore, I command you, open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and the poor in your land. So Jesus says here and in many other places, not only can we help the poor, we should love people around us who are poor.

We should love our neighbors as ourselves, which means we should be as easy to meet our neighbors' needs as we are to meet our own. So that's the truth in their objection.

But there are two problems with their objection. Now the first is their attitude. They're not only puzzled by something that they don't fully understand, they are angry and judgmental.

[14 : 17] They scold her, sort of like a naughty child. And if you carry this argument to its logical extreme, you could use it as an objection to any gift to anyone beyond bare necessities.

How can you give anyone a gift that you don't really need when some people in the world are starving? How can you eat pizza when you could eat plain rice every day and you would still survive?

survive? Maybe you'd lose a year or two off your life because of iron deficiency or something. Right? But depending on how far you go with that statement, it can be used in a way that's incredibly guilt-inducing and crippling.

And that is not God's intention. God's intention is for people to share in the joy that he takes in showing mercy and generosity. When God made the world, he didn't only make it useful and functional, he also made it beautiful.

And he made us so that in enjoying his beauty that we might be motivated to extend it, even sacrificially, to others. So that's the first problem.

[15 : 31] But the second problem is that they fail to perceive the unsurpassed beauty of Jesus. Jesus says she's done a beautiful thing. He doesn't just say be nice to her, be polite to her, don't be rude to her.

She was trying to do her best. She was trying to make a nice gesture. Maybe she didn't really think it through. Maybe she was just being emotional, you know, but you should be kind to her.

No! He says she understands something that you don't. What she did was absolutely appropriate. She anointed me because she realized that I'm the Messiah, the King of Israel, and the Son of God.

she poured out her most precious treasure on me because there's no one else in the world more worthy of such a gift. You see, if somebody came up to you and gave you that \$50,000 check, and other people made some objections, and you said, well, hey, you'll always have poor people to give it to, but you won't always have me, that would be very arrogant.

Right? I mean, if you've got that amount of money, there's at least an obligation to give some of it away to help other people and not use it all on yourself. But Jesus is saying, I'm not just an ordinary human being.

[17 : 05] I'm the one who is, I'm the king. I'm the one who is more worthy of your devotion and of everything in the world. I'm the one who's made everything in the world. And the woman saw that.

She saw that there was something about Jesus that attracted her and that motivated her to pour out her most precious treasure on him. Because you see, what the woman does with her costly ointment is a picture of what Jesus is preparing to do with his very own body and blood, his life.

She breaks it and pours it out. And the same words, the same concepts are used later in this passage in the second example of a lavish gift.

Verses 23-25, says, as they were eating, Jesus took bread and after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them and said, take this is my body. And he took a cup and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and they all drank of it and he said to them, this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.

people said, now the context in which Jesus said these words was a Passover meal. I don't know if you've ever had the opportunity to visit a Passover meal or experience a Passover meal.

[18 : 33] Passover happens once a year in the spring. And according to the Old Testament, every head of household was required to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

Passover. Many times the whole family would go as well. People would gather together, they'd eat a meal together as sort of a big extended family in somebody's house, remembering how God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and looking forward to the day when the Messiah would come and establish God's kingdom on earth in its fullness.

And there was an established routine to the meal. And if you visit a Jewish Passover meal, many of these things, you will still experience them.

If you have the opportunity to visit one. So the host of the meal would break bread, unleavened bread, to remember that when they were leaving Egypt they were in a hurry.

They didn't have time to wait for the yeast to make the bread rise, so they ate unleavened bread. So that's why they would always eat unleavened bread throughout Passover. The host of the meal would break the bread, pronounce a blessing over it, and share with everyone at the table, remembering God's provision for his people.

[19 : 43] when they left Egypt and through the wilderness. And then during the meal they would share four cups of wine or grape juice, thanking God for bringing them into the promised land where they could enjoy, where they could have freedom and joy, and looking forward to the day when the Messiah would return.

bread. They would eat unleavened bread, they'd eat bitter herbs, remembering the bitterness of their slavery, and they'd eat a roast lamb, remembering the night when God had told the Israelites to kill a lamb for each family and to put the blood on their doorposts.

And he said, when I see the blood, I will pass over you. When the destroying angel comes, he will see the blood and pass over you, and you will be safe.

So the whole routine of the meal emphasized remembrance of what God had done in the past in the Exodus, and also anticipation of what God would do in the future, when he would come again and lead them to this ultimate freedom.

Now in the middle of this meal, with a very established routine that was followed pretty much the same way each year, Jesus does something completely off the script, completely unexpected.

[21 : 08] He takes the bread, he blesses it, thanks God for it, he breaks it, and gave it. All that's normal. And then he says, take, this is my body.

And then he takes the cup of wine, and gives thanks, and gave it to them, and he says, this is my blood. Do you realize how shocking those words would be in the context of a Jewish Passover meal?

Maybe you've gotten used to hearing them at communion services, so they feel like some of the verses in the Bible that are most familiar to you, but do you realize how shocking that would be for Jesus to say, this Passover meal is about me?

What he was saying, symbolically, was, I am the true Passover lamb, whose body will be broken, and blood will be poured out, to save you from God's judgment.

He's saying, I'm the redeemer, I've come to pay the price to buy you out of slavery, by giving my very own life in your place. He's saying, my blood is the sign and the seal of a new covenant, a new relationship, a new arrangement between God and his people.

[22 : 34] When Moses instituted the covenant at Mount Sinai, he sprinkled blood on the people. It was a sign that the covenant was signed and sealed. Jesus said, I'm here to set up a new covenant, a new basis on which people can relate to God, through the sacrifice that I am about to make.

I'm here to fulfill what the Passover was always pointing forward to, the day of the Messiah. Now, Jesus' actions were symbolic.

He was pointing forward to what he would do on the cross, when his body would be broken and his blood would be poured out. So, Jesus pours out his life for his disciples in this act.

Now, the woman poured out her most precious treasure on Jesus because she saw that Jesus was surpassingly worthy.

worthy. But Jesus, when Jesus poured out his blood for the disciples, he poured out his blood not because he saw that we were worthy.

[23 : 58] Right? That's why right before and right after he does this, he says, one of you is going to betray me and you're all going to abandon me. And they say, oh, no, no, no, I certainly wouldn't.

And Jesus says, oh, yes, you will, even before the night's out. You're going to fail. But he says, but I'm not going to the cross.

I'm not giving my life for you because you're worthy. I'm giving my life because I love you. Because I've called you to belong to me.

Jesus poured out his most precious treasure on people who would betray him, deny him, abandon him, crucify him.

He knew it very well. You see, in his great love, this is the heart of this passage, in his great love, Jesus lavished his most precious treasure, his very own self, his body and his blood on us.

[25 : 06] Romans 5, 8 says, God demonstrates his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 1 Timothy chapter 1 says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Jesus poured out everything for us so that we could become his priceless treasure.

A possession that he will never sell or trade or lose because he's paid for us such a great price.

Ephesians 1 says, in Jesus Christ, we have redemption. That means we have freedom from bondage through his blood.

The forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. 1 Peter 1 says, you were ransomed not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 15] Do you ever wonder, does God really love me? How could he love me? Someone so small and insignificant, someone guilty of sin and full of shame.

Remember this, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loved you and gave himself for you. every time that you take communion, remember that.

Jesus gave his life for you. He says, this is my body, broken for you.

This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for many, for everyone who would believe and put their trust in him. you see, Jesus poured out his life for us so that we might become his treasure.

And so that he might become our greatest treasure. What's your most priceless possession? What are the things that you would never want to lose, would never want to sell, would never want to trade?

[27 : 38] may it be Jesus because he gave his life for us. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we see in the act of this woman a picture of what our devotion to you ought to look like because you are the worthy lamb of God, the king of all kings, and the lord of all lords, the son of God, the one and only.

And yet, Lord, so often we treasure so many other things. we thank you that you were devoted to us, that you came and poured out your life even unto death.

While we were still sinners, you died for us. Lord, would you impress upon our hearts the depth of your love for us?

Lord, would you speak to us tonight as we prepare to receive the lord's supper together, that you gave your body and your blood that we might become your treasure, and that you might become our greatest treasure, for you are worthy.

We pray this in your name. Amen.