

On Being Remembered

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Bible Text: Mark 14:1-11

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Please turn in your Bibles now, if you would, to the gospel of Mark and the 14th chapter, Mark chapter 14 verses one through 11.

Hear God's Word.

Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people." While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.

But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? "For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her.

But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.¹

May God be pleased to bless to us the reading of his Word.

¹ Mark 14:1-11

Let us pray together.

Father, we thank you for your Word and we pray that you would be pleased from your throne in heaven to reach down into our hearts, to open our hearts that we might respond as you would have us to this your Word on this day as we are gathered before you in worship we pray in the good name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

In our seminary chapel at RPTS the procedure is very simple. The president of the seminary who usually leads the chapel services asks the student body and the staff and faculty if there are any prayer requests. We sing a psalm. The president prays and answers those prayer requests in prayer and we hear a 20 minute sermon and then sing another psalm and then we are off back to class.

During the time of those prayer requests we often hear something like this. "I have a good friend by the name of Bill. He is suffering from pancreatic cancer. The prognosis is not good. Would you please pray that God would undertake for Bill and heal his mortal body. But, more importantly, would you pray that God would change his heart. Bill does not know the Lord."

And then we have other prayer requests that a young man in this past week, "My grandmother just died and I have been asked to speak at the funeral. She knows the Lord and we are grateful."

And isn't this how we approach these times of death and near death? The person who does not embrace Christ we are in some agony, the person who does embrace Christ we rejoice.

In our text this morning we find a woman who comes to Jesus and it seems she embraces Christ and not only simply embraces him, but I think embraces him in his death, burial and resurrection. And the Lord commends her and commends her in that she has prepared him for his burial.

How is it with you this morning and how is it that you will be remembered? Will you be remembered as one who embraces the death, burial and resurrection of Christ or as some others, as one who fails to embrace that death, burial and resurrection?

The point this morning is simple, friends, be remembered as someone who embraces Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Be remembered as someone who does embrace the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

We see in our text, first of all, those who reject Christ and strenuously reject the Savior. Look at verses one and two in Mark 14.

Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and

kill Him; for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people."²

Here were the religious leaders among the Jewish people, the chief priests, the chief administrators of the ceremonial worship, the chief administrators of the sacrifices within the temple that pointed to Jesus Christ. And the scribes, those who were trained in the Word of God, who studied the Word of God and understood—at least intellectually—the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah and they were conspiring together to have that one Jesus who was affirmed as the Messiah by many miracles. They were having in their own hearts a desire to kill him. And the text says they were desirous to seize him by stealth, by deceit to kill him. And this little idea of deceit carries some significance. Jesus had earlier spoken of it when he said it was deceit and such evil coming out of the heart of an individual that defiles the individual. It is not what is put in. It is not what you eat, but what comes out of the heart. And one of those issues was the deceit and the hatred and animosity that ends in murder.

And so these religious leaders, those who were trained in the Word of God had in their hearts this evil of deceit and murder and desiring to do away with the Savior. And none other than one of the disciples was in league with them. Look at verses 10 and 11 in Mark's chapter 14. "Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them."³

Yes, he had in his own heart that evil of deceit and the desire to betray the Lord, the Lord whom he had followed, the Lord whom he had preached. Yes, Judas was a preacher and he was sent out as the disciples were sent out two by two. And the disciples preached Christ and they performed miracles and Judas was among them. And when the disciples came back they reported to Jesus how the demons were subject to them, that Judas was among them. And yet the good news of the gospel did not sink down into his heart because his heart was full of that evil of deceit and he conspired, as it were, with the chief priests and the scribes to murder this Jesus.

And so on the one hand you see this great evil, the perpetration of this great evil in the hearts of the chief priests and the scribe and, yes, one of the disciples, even Judas. And on the other hand you see the good in this woman who comes to Jesus.

Verse three. "While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head."⁴

This woman comes. Some suppose she is Mary, but I think that is probably not the case. Jesus is in Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, but he is in a different home now. The text tells us he is in the house of Simon the leper. Bethany was a place of retreat for Jesus just a short distance from Jerusalem. And now Jesus is in another home,

² Mark 14:1-2

³ Mark 14:10

⁴ Matthew 14:3

the home of Simon the leper and this is a man whom Jesus likely had healed of leprosy. And it is interesting and significant that the text does tell us it is Simon the leper. Of course the chief priests and the scribes wouldn't have gone down to the house of Simon the leper. They would have never defiled themselves by going into the house of an individual like this. Oh, no. They would retain their ceremonial purity as it were. But Jesus was known as going into the homes of sinners. And so he is found on this day in the home of Simon the leper. And he is reclining at the table, feasting and eating in this house and along comes this woman, it says in verse three, "with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard,"⁵ a little vial, an alabaster vial.

Alabaster was translucent, probably white like glass, a fragile vile and in it this perfume, costly perfume of pure nard the text tells us. The perfume nard was extracted from the roots of the spikenard plant and it is sometimes called spikenard. And spikenard, the plant spikenard is found in the Himalayan mountains in Nepal and India and China a good distance from Palestine. And the perfume was manufactured by crushing the roots of the spikenard plant and distilling the oil from the roots of the spikenard plant. And it was a very fragrant perfume and very likeable. The distilling process and the transportation getting it to other areas out of the Himalayan mountains proved to be costly and, hence, at least in part the cost of the perfume. Normally the perfume was mixed with olive oil, pure olive oil so it could be used as an ointment. And it was sometimes used as an ointment to put on the bodies of those who had died in preparation for burial.

But in this case the text tells us it was costly perfume of pure nard. Apparently it was not mixed with the olive oil, but it was a vile of pure nard and the woman breaks the vile, probably breaks the neck of the bottle and pours the costly perfume and the odor of it permeates the house and over the head of Jesus.

And Jesus says in verse six, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me."⁶

You may remember the lawyer who came to Jesus and said to Jesus, "Good Teacher, Good Teacher."⁷

Jesus responded and said, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good [but] God alone."⁸

And Jesus in this little interaction gives us an indication of the meaning of the word "good." Really the word "good" means to be godlike and Jesus here in this story says that the woman has done a good deed to me, a good thing. "She is a godly woman. She has done a good thing to me. Her heart is good and she has reached out to me in a good deed," quite different than the evil of the chief priests and the scribes and the evil of Judas. Here was a woman who had done a good thing for Jesus.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mark 14:6

⁷ Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18

⁸ Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19

But the disciples in the house are annoyed and the others who are around the table with Jesus they are greatly annoyed.

Look at verse four. “But some were indignantly remarking to one another, ‘Why has this perfume been wasted?’”⁹ What a waste.

It kind of reminds me of a situation in the household. Mom buys or dad buys mom some perfume for Mother’s Day or for birthday and little Sally thinks, “Wow, that’s great stuff that perfume. I would like to see what that’s like.” And the little vial of costly perfume, oh, little Sally just wants a drop or two, but oops, there it goes, spilled. What a waste. Isn’t that the response? What a waste.

And here are the disciples. Matthew indicates it is the disciples. What a waste.

“Woman, why have you wasted these things like this?”

And then the text goes on. “‘For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they were scolding her.”¹⁰

“What’s wrong with you, woman?”

Three hundred denarii, that was the value of the perfume.

A legionnaire in the Roman armies would make 300 denarii in a year. That was a soldier’s wage. A centurion who would be over 1000 would make 300 denarii in a month and that was considered good wages. And so this was, perhaps, for someone who was of a little less status more than a year’s wages.

And so the disciples are more than a little annoyed.

Verse five again, “For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.”¹¹

Oh, here we go. The specter of social good raises its head. Of course the poor, “What’s the wrong with you, woman? We could have helped and aided the poor here.”

And isn’t this often the case when apparently money is squandered that the rebuttal is, “Well, what’s the difficulty here? We could have preserved this capital and helped the poor.”

And there are those who indicate that they wish government would give more to support the poor, but unfortunately when you look at those who often are criticizing, “Why isn’t government doing more to feed the poor?” when you examine their own financial

⁹ Mark 14:4

¹⁰ Mark 14:5

¹¹ Ibid.

statements, they are the ones who personally are giving very little of their own income to charitable causes. And so it goes.

“‘For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they were scolding her.”¹²

But now notice the response of Jesus. Verse seven. “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me.”¹³

Remember this. The poor are always with you. And you can give help to them whenever you wish. You don’t need a special occasion in order to be charitable. You don’t need a special occasion in which you can grumble a little bit about waste in order to think about what might be done charitably. That is for you and me, too, isn’t it? The charitable giving ought to be on a regular basis because those who are in need are always with us. And you know as well as I do in the congregation there are those who are in need week to week, month to month. And those of you who extended yourselves to bring in a meal, to offer time and help with child care, to do tasks like this are remembered well in those situations. The poor and the needy are always present.

But Jesus also turns the emphasis in the conversation as we look at verse seven. “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me.”¹⁴ And you have to think about this in the context of what is happening in the gospel of Mark and in the context of the lives of the disciples.

We are here in the middle of Passion Week. It is Wednesday. You will notice in verse one of chapter 14. “Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away.”¹⁵ And the way the Jewish folk numbered the days was this. A part of a day was equal to a day so a part of Wednesday and a part of Thursday was two days. And so they are right upon the Passover. And they are not only right upon the Passover, but on the Friday after the Passover Jesus goes to the cross. And Jesus knows he is going to the cross. And he is willingly headed for the cross. And the woman has done a good thing, a good thing for him.

As you get up on a higher perspective and look at this story you realize that the plans and the purposes of God are being played out, that the chief priests and the scribes are the instrument to take Jesus to the cross. And Jesus, having been anointed now for burial is willingly headed to the cross. And God’s purposes are being played out. And we begin to catch the significance of the words, “you do not always have me, you do not always have me, because in a few short days I will be taken from your midst through the cross.”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mark 14:7

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mark 14:1

And so Jesus answers the social concerns by turning the tide slightly and the emphasis back to his main mission. Oh, yes, the poor you must care for, but don't forget the main emphasis of the Savior.

And it appears the woman does not forget the main emphasis. Look at verse eight now. "She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial."¹⁶

And when you think of that word "burial" you must also think death. And when you think death and burial with regard to Jesus Christ you must also think resurrection. Those three things go together. They are bound together in the gospel. The death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, this is the gospel.

And do you remember how the apostle Paul put it, that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"?¹⁷ And, yes, he was buried and on the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures.¹⁸

And so burial is always affixed to death on one side and to resurrection on the other side. It is kind of like the idea of conversion. When you read in the gospels about repentance. "Repent therefore and return that your sins may be forgiven." It is not just repentance that Peter is talking about. True repentance means a turning away from sin and a turning to Christ in faith. And so repentance and faith are two sides of a coin. They always go together and you must remember that. And so it is with burial. It is death, burial and resurrection. The Christ even is taken as one.

And then you might ask the question, "Well, what about the woman? Does she really understand these things?"

Well, let me direct your attention back just a little bit in the book of Mark to the eighth chapter, to Mark chapter eight and verse 31. Look at what Jesus does in Mark chapter eight and verse 31. "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."¹⁹ The death, burial and resurrection, Jesus plainly taught that this would be the case.

And verse 32 says, "He was stating the matter plainly."²⁰

And so the disciples had heard the message of the death, burial and resurrection. And others had heard the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And when you go back to Mark chapter 14 verse eight, "She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial,"²¹ you might also ask the question,

¹⁶ Mark 14:8

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:3

¹⁸ See 1 Corinthians 15:4

¹⁹ Mark 8:31

²⁰ Mark 8:32

“Well, did this woman understand these things?”

I suspect that she did. Think about Simeon who came into the temple and when Jesus was brought as a babe into the temple by Mary and Joseph Simeon rejoices at seeing the Savior and he goes so far as to say to Mary, “Your own soul will be pierced,”²² a reference, it seems, to the death of the babe. He had come into the world for no other purpose than to live a perfect life, to be a perfect sacrifice and to die on that cross for the sins of people like you and me.

And then there was Anna the prophetess 84 years old in the temple looking for the Savior. And when she saw Jesus with Mary and Joseph she rejoices in the Lord her Savior. She understood these things. And I think there is every probability here that we have an instance where this woman comes and breaks the alabaster vile over the head of Jesus and pours out this beautiful perfume and the ointment and the odor of it spreads and permeates the house that, yes, she understands that Jesus is headed to the cross and she embraces Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection.

And what does Jesus say then with regard to this woman?

Verse nine. “Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”²³

And we remember her today, do we not? We remember her as a woman who loved Jesus, who embraced Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. And wherever the gospel is preached this woman is remembered and we know the story well. We know the story well.

There is another character in this story that is remembered, too, Judas the betrayer, in the providence of God an instrument to take Jesus to the cross. But he does not embrace the death, burial and resurrection of the Savior.

And so there we have it again, that contrast, the good woman and the evil perpetrator. And the woman is remembered for embracing Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection.

How will you be remembered, friend? How will you be remembered when you shuffle off this mortal coil, whether because of age or infirmity or as a youngster because of an accident, how will you be remembered? Will you be remembered as someone who embraced Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection?

Several years ago I was called upon to speak at a funeral for a woman whose husband died. The woman often came to our congregation. The husband was an unbeliever. The elders in our congregation wondered how it was going to handle the situation. I preached

²¹ Mark 14:8

²² See Luke 2:35

²³ Mark 14:9

the gospel at this funeral. And the man, we will call him Joe, at the end of the funeral sermon I simply said, “Joe made his decision.” Everyone knew what I meant.

How is it with you? Do you embrace Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection? And will you be remembered as one who does so?

Friends, be remembered as someone who embraces the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for your Word. Be pleased to open our hearts, to give us grace and faith that we might—each one of us, young or old, senior citizen or youngster—truly embrace Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection. Grant that that would be the case so that when we in your providence, in your timing are taken from this life and pass into the next we might be remembered by those in this world and by the Savior in the next as those who embrace the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Grant it we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.