

Deliverance From Being a Scrooge

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Deliverance

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I don't know about you, but I almost went Bapto-Costal on that choir piece. I wanted to get up off the pew and my Baptist just wouldn't let me. But tonight at both 4 and 6 o'clock, there's an entire hour of just incredible gospel themes through music. Let me invite you here in person, those of you online, it is going to be absolutely a divine evening, no pun with the title.

So let me invite you tonight, it is going to be absolutely fabulous but this morning, let me encourage you to open your Bibles to two very specific places within the gospels. Mark 14 is going to be our primary text today but we're also going to spend a brief amount of time in Luke 10, and for those of you who are here with us today as guests or visitors, maybe you're here for the holiday season, maybe you're new to our community, or maybe you've been here for a while but it's the first time that you've stopped in, I want to invite you to somewhat, shall we say, the ending of a series through the gospel of Mark. The gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels, only 16 chapters in length. Today we find ourselves in chapter 14 and, yes, it is the story of the life, the ministry, most importantly the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It contains biographies of numerous individuals both men and woman old and young, who at the words and the simple touch of Jesus their lives in eternity were never the same. But one of the things that we've noticed is throughout the entire text there's this theme of deliverance, that Jesus Christ desires to deliver us. And I know for some of us that's a word that's a little bit unfamiliar, it simply means to be set free, it means to have whatever is shackling us or has us in bonds to be removed, it can even mean to be in a situation that is undesirable and to be relieved of that into one that is desirable.

Today, we come to chapter 14 of the gospel of Mark, a very familiar story, and I want to talk about being delivered from being a Scrooge. Now we all know the name Ebenezer Scrooge, and we know that he came to light in the mid 19th century thanks to the pen of Dickens, with the famous story known as "The Christmas Carol." It's a story of a miserly man by the name of Scrooge, a man who it seems like everything that came out of his mouth was just dire and disdain. He had no encouragement for those that were around him, and as the story says, even was willing to make his right-hand man work on Christmas day. He was not interested in others, he was not interested in helping, in fact, he was a creditor that loved to raise the interest rates. Well, then on Christmas Eve, as

Dickens' story writes, he was visited by three individuals, the one from Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas future. The past was dire and depressing. The present was even more so. But then it was the ghost of Christmas future that really got his attention for there in that famous story was this man by the name of Scrooge who had a tombstone placed and a funeral that nobody attended. He had a life that was celebrated upon its death because nobody had to be under the burden of his life anymore.

As the story is written, he awakes that night to a renewed lease on life. He went from being miserly to being generous. He went from being dire to being celebratory. He had a new lease on life not because he put aside his miserlyness, that's what we think about Scrooge, is he realized he did not want to live a life of regret. Ladies and gentlemen, we've talked about a whole lot of things of deliverance through the gospel of Mark but this may be one of the toughest ones. How do we get set free from a life of regret? How can we walk through these days and walk one day into eternity able to look back and say without regret? It was regret that got Scrooge's attention, today may Mark 14 get ours.

Beginning in verse 3, it says,

3 And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. 4 And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. 6 And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. 7 For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. 8 She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. 9 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

Now before we get into the specifics of the text, just kind of one of those textual reminders oftentimes within the gospel of Mark, the chronology is not as critical as the message. In the parallel passage to this incredible event in the latter days of the life of Jesus Christ is found in John 12. There in John 12 there are specifics that are given that are not necessarily found here in Mark 14 but we discover that the story happens within the last two weeks of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and here is this woman, as it says there, of Bethany, this is Mary who was the sister to Martha and to whom we know as Lazarus, that family dynamic is going to come into play in just a moment very profoundly, but I want to walk through those aspects that got Scrooge's attention maybe not in the same order so that hopefully the Lord will get ours today.

Let's begin with the future. If we're going to walk in a life without regret, then we have to be future-minded, we have to be forward-thinking of what do we desire our future to look like. Now one of the most ominous and most difficult things that people have to do in life

is to either write an obituary and/or give some type of message at a memorial and/or funeral service. You see, for hundreds if not thousands of families, I've had the opportunity to walk alongside of them as they prepared eulogies, as they prepared poems, as they wrote that which would be published in the paper, and we know how difficult it is. How do you take a life that has been lived and how do you summarize it in just a few paragraphs? How do you summarize it in just 10-12 minutes vocal presentation? How about this one, how do you summarize it in an epitaph, a simple phrase or statement that oftentimes is ingrained in granite, graven in for generations to see? How do you boil down decades of life to just a few words?

But can we look at what Jesus said about this lady? Look in verse 8, this was her epitaph, "She hath done what she could." Now I don't know about you but I'd take that on mine. I mean, think about that statement, she hath done what she could. Jesus Christ made the statement that does not base it upon one's material wealth because if you have more, you can do more, if you have little, you can do less, but you did what you could. It doesn't describe her level of talent compared to somebody else. Oftentimes we say, "I don't have what they have. I don't possess what they possess." But according to Jesus, she did what she could. You know, oftentimes we quote from the great parable that when we see Jesus face-to-face, we want him to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and there's nothing wrong with that but I'd take this. How would you like to stare into the face of God face-to-face one day and for him to look at you and say, "You did all that you could"? To me, that would be a picture of a life without regret because those of us who have less, wish we could do more, some of those that have a lot wonder if we've done enough, but when Jesus says you did all you could, that, to me, is a picture, a statement of life without regret.

So how does this lady by the name of Mary, how does she get to that place, how do we get to that place? Let's go back to her past by going forward a few pages to the gospel of Luke. In the gospel of Luke 10, we're not going to go to the famous passage in John where her brother Lazarus is raised from the dead, we're going to go to where we first encounter these two sisters by the name of Mary and Martha, and today is not a commentary on one's behavior versus the other, I want you to see a very intriguing statement that is made about Mary. Beginning in verse 38 of Luke 10, the first encounter that we have recorded of Jesus' interaction with this young lady, it says, "Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet," listen to this next statement, "and heard his word." That's what I want you to focus on. You see, we talk about this aspect of the future of being in a place where we have no regrets, then whatever timeframe we have between then and that culmination, we have to realize what she did. She heard his word and you and I, believe it or not, actually have an advantage on Mary. You see, to hear his word, Zacchaeus had to climb up in a sycamore tree, to hear his word the multitudes had to go out into the wilderness for days at a time in the gospel accounts, but for you and I to hear his word, it is literally as convenient as taking a Bible and opening it up.

You know, I've heard people say before, "I just wish I could hear the voice of God." The casual response is, "Okay, then read the Bible out loud and you are." In other words, you and I have access to what she had access to. You see, oftentimes we look at these characters in the Bible and say, "Man, she did what she could. I'm no Mary." But what did she have access to? Actually, technically less than you and I have access to and we see these characters and we put them on a pedestal and we say, "Well, if I just had at my disposal what Mary had, then maybe I could live a life of no regret." But you actually do possess what Mary possessed even at a greater quantitative volume. What does this mean? That means that every single one of us today can get to the point either today or days ahead where we can say, "I do not have any regrets."

So let's go to her present, back to Mark 14. What was it that took place in her life, what needs to take place in our life to, shall I say, bridge that gap between hearing the word of God and being told by God he or she has done what he or she could? I think there's three qualities that we see in her life displayed here in Mark 14 and the first one is this, that she was fearless. Now we talked some weeks ago about being delivered from fear in 2 Timothy 1:7 that says that the Lord has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and love and of a sound mind. But I want you to go back to verse 3, "And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper." Does that strike you odd? Because Simon was a leper that had been delivered from his leprosy, but did you notice that the description and the stigma still stuck? You know, one of the greatest fears that leads to a life of regret is the fear of what other people might think if we do or don't do something. Think about this situation. For Mary to do what Mary did at the head and the feet of Jesus, she had to go into somebody's home where most assuredly somebody would say, "I can't believe she's going there. Does she know what he's known for? Does she realize how this will hurt her reputation?" In fact, so many times and I think unfortunately, what we know as social media has exasperated this, that because we have so many opinions that are out there and being voiced to us, oftentimes the Lord has spoken to us and we don't follow because what might people think of us, or we do something we should not do because we don't want people to think ill of us. How many of us, and I'm not looking for a confession of admission, would agree that most of our regrets in life are because we did something or didn't do something based on what we perceived somebody else might think about what we did or didn't do? And yet she was willing to go into Simon the leper's house in spite of what people may or may not think.

But there is a second thing that she was fearless about. Notice when it gets into verse 5, it says, "For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence." There's this commentary on what she does based on verse 4, there were those there "that had indignation." Now this is where John 12 comes in handy for the sake of reference. There are 12 possibilities on who it could have been that spoke these words. I'll give you one guess, his name is Judas. The Bible says in John 12 it was Judas that spoke up and said, "Could this not be used a different way?" You see, sometimes we live a life of regret because we're fearful of what people think or don't think about us, sometimes it's because we're fearful based on what they've said to us. He actually communicated to her, "This is a bad decision. Do not follow through with what you're about to do." But go back to Luke 10. She heard the word of God. I've got news for you, we have an entire culture today

that the moment you speak up for what is biblical truth, they shout out, "How dare you!" How many times do you look back on a conversation, how many times do you look back on something and say, "I wish I would have spoken up"? In some cases, it's I wish I wouldn't have spoken up, sometimes because of a fear, a concern of what people thought or didn't think, and sometimes it's because of something somebody said.

But what do we find in Mary? She was absolutely focused. Notice what it says in this passage, it says that even though she goes to Simon the leper's house in verse 3, "as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head." Here's what I find fascinating: there were a great number of people in the house that night. We know it was Simon the leper's house. We don't know how much family he had, if everybody was in attendance. We know that all the apostles were there. We know there were some critics of Jesus there. I'm just going to say roughly two dozen people were in the house. I'm guessing at that, I don't know, and there's no record that she focused on anybody but Jesus. Do you see that? She ignored the verbiage of Judas. She ignored the dire looks that those outside and the inside of the house might have given her. She had one absolute focus, "How do I worship? How do I adore? How do I pay attention to Jesus Christ?" You want to live a life without regret, if you'll just stop right there, you'll be just fine because if he in his word has spoken it, it doesn't matter what anybody else has said about it. It doesn't matter what they think about it, or how they look at you about it.

She focused simply on Jesus but more importantly, notice how Jesus responds in verse 6, "Let her alone." And Jesus is going to make a very uncomfortable series of statements that I'm going to clear up real quick. "Why trouble you her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." Why is that important? Because Jesus Christ recognized something that most in our culture can't and even some within the church can't, that the message of salvation, the message of being brought to life out of the death of sin, is more important than even receiving clothes, food or shelter. He said, "You will always have the poor with you." I've got news for those up in DC, we can give all the money in the world and Jesus said you're always going to have them. But what is he saying, is he saying we shouldn't help? Absolutely not. Is he saying we shouldn't be benevolent? Don't even let that pass your mind. Here's what Jesus is saying that is so relevant to this time in our culture: if you feed people, you clothe people, and you shelter people, and that's all you do, all you've done is made them pretty for hell. That's all you've done.

Jesus says what makes this so important is that she pictured salvation. Giving a cup of cold water, giving clothes, giving shelter, is a wonderful thing to do but absent from the gospel, it's cruel and unusual punishment. We have a whole world today that says, "I feel better because I gave. I feel better because I went." But how often does it stop short? You see, a life of regret, we all wish we could give more, right? We all wish we could do more. She did all she could because she was focused on the message of salvation. Oftentimes we say, "I wish I would have given, I wish I would have done more," hear me

clearly: with whatever you've done, with whatever you've given, if you've done it for the purpose of people hearing that they can be saved through Jesus Christ, then you have done what you could.

You see, she wasn't just fearless, she was focused on the message that was most important and, finally, she was faithful. Now we go back up to verse 3. There's this famous alabaster box. It says, "being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head." The account in John will go into greater length and say literally she covered the entirety of his body because it was preparing for his burial. It's interesting about this alabaster box. They get upset because 300 pence in those days was the equivalent of one year's worth of wages. Now some of you have more commas in your income statement than others do, but I want you to make this personal for just a moment. I want you to think as we come to the end of the year how much in your life through this calendar year will be received financially. Now everybody in the room has a different number, right? But you understand that your number is the number she had. She came with the amount of money that you would have to work an entire year for to accumulate. Now it doesn't matter how many commas you've got in your income statement, that's a lot of money, is it not? Because it's a lot to us because of who and where we are in life.

Why is this such a display of faithfulness? Because it's more than just a year's income, over the sake of time, that can be reestablished, it's why this money was set aside. Have you ever thought about it? It's the fact that Mary had gone to Dave Ramsey and had her six months of living expenses set aside? No. Why is it that she would have a year's worth of income set aside in a box? Let's go back to that family dynamic. Remember, there's Mary, there's Martha, there's Lazarus. We don't hear of anybody else, do we? We don't hear of her mom, her dad, we don't hear of any other siblings. Most importantly, what do we not hear of? A husband. Do you know that in biblical days if you want to read through the book of Deuteronomy you can get the specifics therein, that when a young lady was betrothed or espoused to a young man, the family would put aside a dowry, a year's worth of wages not to buy the guy off but more importantly according to Scripture, so that that first year he didn't have to work, they could establish their home, they could establish their family. You understand that there is a very distinct possibility that Jesus Christ was so important in her life she said, "I would rather give attention to you than even be married," because at that point, she wouldn't have the resources to do so. But then there's the other side of the proverbial script. You see, in John 19 when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus bury Jesus, do you remember what the Bible says about the ointment? It was worth, you guessed it, one year's wages.

So it's possible that she was saying, "I'm willing to pay attention to you rather than have the bliss of marriage," or it's even possible where she was saying that, "Your burial and resurrection is even more important than if I have a pauper's funeral." Either way, can we agree that is an act of faithfulness? That Jesus Christ was more important to her than any aspect of life because technically I think we'd all agree that our marriage and our death are two of the most significant things that happen in our lives, and either one you want to

pick, she was willing to sacrifice. But here's the beautiful picture, go back up to verse 3, "being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious," next statement, "she brake the box." Now you may not see the significance there but let me illustrate it for you. Go back to the ability of people to talk us in or out of things, go back to when we hear the latest rumor or whatever it may be. You see, if she had just simply taken the top off and started to pour, I can just hear Judas go, "Now hold on, Mary! Why don't you put that back on, let's talk about this for a moment." Or I can just hear somebody walking by going, "What is she doing?" You see, when you open the top, you have the ability to dispense a little bit here, a little bit there, and then to put it back on, but when it says that she broke the box, it meant she wasn't going back.

You see, a life of regret is when you get to that point where you wish you had broken the box. A life without regrets when Jesus says he or she has done what they could, can I boil it down to a very simple analysis? It's because she broke the box. She was willing to say, "I'm not going to let anybody talk me in or out. I'm not going to let the culture dictate it. I know that what Jesus Christ in our context has done for me is more important than anything anybody else will do, so I'm going to break the box for him."

Let me conclude with this. How many times does our faithfulness to the Lord get stifled because of what somebody says to us? How oftentimes does our faithfulness to the Lord get stifled because of what others might think of us? And here's what we do: we open it up on Sunday and we put that cap back on Monday. What happened? She broke the box and what did the Lord say? She has done what she could. There's a lot of things that the Lord may or may not say to each and every one of us one day when we face him, but how good would it be to hear, "You did what you could"? The only way that happens is you've got to break the box.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed, maybe today when you hear the story of Mary's faithfulness, you realize that you've never even opened the box, you've lived a life that has been surrounded by your desires, your intents, your purposes, and your goals, and maybe today you realize the Spirit of God got ahold of the word of God in your life and you realize how desperate you need Jesus. You know, the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and maybe that's you today. Understand when the Bible says that it doesn't say whoever passes a course, it doesn't say who passes a test, who jumps through the hoops, it just says call on the name of the Lord. And so maybe today whether in person or online or on the radio, maybe you're that person today saying, "I need to be saved. I need Jesus." Can I encourage you just to have a conversation with him. You don't have to have it out loud, you don't have to say the same phrases that maybe I or somebody else would say, but maybe you're crying out to Jesus and it would go a little something like this. "God, today I realize, I realize I've got a sin problem. I've been places I shouldn't have been. I've done things I shouldn't have done. I've said things I shouldn't have said and, God, I have thought things I shouldn't have thought and, God, I realize that your word says the results or the wages of my sin is death but it also says the gift of life is through Jesus Christ and, God, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that as we sang earlier and all through this season, he

came on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that when they nailed him to his cross, Lord, as he endured the pain and the suffering, it was because of my sin and my rebellion and, God, today I believe that three days later when they discovered that the tomb was empty, that Jesus Christ alone makes it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues and the problems of life but there's one thing that today I can say without question, I know that I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. The best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who for the very first time cried out to be saved. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and sing together and let me encourage you just to step out and step forward. This isn't a time of condemnation, it's a time of celebration. We'd love to pray with you, we'd love to just hear your story. But maybe today you say, "You know what, pastor? I had that conversation years ago." Some of you would say even decades ago. And though I'm not here to drum up a list of regrets, the question simply is what's the box that needs to be broken? What's the box in your life that you need to turn over to the Lord, not just pulling the cap out until somebody shouts something loud? What needs to be broken so that he has all of you?

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of response, thank you that you were willing to give all of yourself for us. Lord, I pray today that we may be willing to return the favor. Whatever decision you've laid upon our heart, whatever it is that we need to do, may we simply hear what you've said and follow. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.