

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Mark 14:1.

There was an old-time Bible commentator named Graham Scroggie who once wrote that you could cut the Bible wherever you want, and it would bleed; his point being, of course, that the focal point of the Bible is the cross. In the Old Testament, it was predictive, it was types and shadows and anticipatory kinds of statements, prophecies. In the New Testament, you find the cross, and then the rest of it just kind of looks back, at every turn, to what the Lord has done. Oswald Chambers, years ago, wrote, "All of heaven is interested in the cross. All of hell is terribly afraid of it. Only human beings are pretty much able to ignore its meaning all together." Well maybe so. But the gospel writers didn't ignore it. In fact, if you add up all of the gospel chapters, literally 35% of the gospels is dedicated to that week that led up to, and then that which followed, that week of the cross. Paul didn't discount it. Every letter that he wrote, he mentioned it. "I'm determined not to know anything among you except the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). To the Galatians, he said (6:14), "I don't want to boast in anything but the cross of Jesus, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I've been crucified to the world." I read somewhere once that the church should be cross-cultural; it should be focused on the cross. And certainly that's the case. When you're a new believer, and you come, and you get baptized (we're going to have baptism here in a few weeks), Paul said it's a picture of the cross. "You were buried with Him through baptism to death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, you will be raised to newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Get into the fellowship of the saints as you get saved, you have communion, you look back to the cross, and it reminds you. Paul said to the Corinthians, "As often as you eat and drink of this cup and of this bread, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Well this morning, as we continue in Mark, we find ourselves in Passover Week, in Passion Week. It had begun back there in chapter 11, and Mark, like the other gospel writers, kind of slowly walks us through the events of that week. But it ends up at Calvary. And Mark 13 was delivered by Jesus on Tuesday evening, as He left the Temple area for good and was caused by His comments (in leaving) to the men who were excited about how the Temple was looking, and Jesus talked about

its future. We spent a few weeks in chapter 13, interrupted by Christmas and New Years as well.

But this morning, we are still there at Tuesday, as Mark gives us the story of what had taken place a few days earlier, which led Judas to go out and make a deal for Jesus' betrayal. But we're going to look at the first eleven verses this morning - two days before the cross, and looking ahead and then looking back. It is a good story to the fact that Jesus brings out the best and the worst in people. And you find two lives heading in very opposite directions.

Verse 1 says this, "After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death. But they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people.' " Passover, as you know, started way back when God delivered Israel out of Egypt. It was the tenth plague; it was a judgment from God upon the idolatry of the Egyptians and their defiance; it was an angel of death passing through the land, and the firstborn male in every family dying unless there was blood (the blood of a lamb that had been slain without spot or blemish) found on the doorposts or on the lintels of your house. And those who believed in that promise of God, that He would pass over, put the blood there and did what He said, and they were delivered. It's a beautiful picture, obviously, of Jesus taking us and passing us over from death to life. He's our Passover. But it was one of those three feasts that the Jews celebrated (weeklong feasts) with Pentecost and Tabernacles. If you lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem, you had to come for those feasts for that week to Jerusalem to worship and to bring your offerings - Passover, on the religious calendar. And it changed. There's a secular calendar, a historical calendar, and then there's a religious calendar. When Passover was established, God said, "This will be the first day of the month" when it came to your religious ways. And so in March or April, the 14th of the first month, there's a Passover day and then seven days of Unleavened Bread that follow. And everyone longed to come to Jerusalem. In fact, Josephus says there might have been two million people in town this year that Jesus came to die. I mean, the place was overrun with folks, swarming absolutely everywhere, and it was two days before the Passover. It was late Tuesday, maybe early Wednesday since the Jewish day starts with sundown. And so, it is getting close. And the Sanhedrin had met to confirm their intentions to kill Jesus. They wanted to avoid the crowds. They were hoping that maybe, when everyone left town, that that would be a good time. Matthew 26:3 tells us that they had had a meeting at Caiaphas' house. And Caiaphas

was the fellow that the Romans had appointed to be a fellow that they would deal with when it came to the Jews. Annas was really the proper one in line of Aaron. But he - well, they were both very corrupt - had been set aside; the Romans didn't like him, and so they had chosen Caiaphas.

The plot to kill Jesus had been floating around for several years. You can go back to chapter 3 of Mark, and they were already talking about it - after Jesus healed that man with the withered hand in the Temple, you remember, on the Sabbath. They said, "We've got to kill Him." It happened again in chapter 12, when the Lord told that parable of the wicked vineyard men keepers and how the Lord knew that Israel was being led by wicked religious rulers, and the scribes and Pharisees recognized He was speaking about them. They had recently seen Him cleanse the Temple and overturn their money tables, and their profit dropped. He had been confronted by them all day on this Tuesday, and they hadn't really gotten anywhere with Him. They'd been embarrassed. And so they were angry, they felt threatened, and they very much were jealous of Jesus' success, as Herod and Pilate realized. But they did want Him out, just not (verse 2) according to their understanding, not during the Feast Day. A lot of Galileans in town. They were brawlers, trouble makers. And they feared the people. They should have been fearing the Lord.

Now, we are told by Matthew (four days earlier, as we shall see) and by John that Judas had come on that day to make a deal (four days earlier than this). Matthew tells us about it in Matthew 26, that he went to the priests and said, "What are you willing to give me, that I might deliver Him to you?" And they came to an agreement they would pay him thirty pieces of silver. And then it says, "From that time forth, he sought opportunity to betray the Lord" (verse 16). So, that's how that happened, and that's the story before us because it is now two days out, and these men are still waiting to hear from Judas. But they wouldn't have to wait much longer. So, beginning in verse 3, the Lord takes us back four days; and Mark does, and I think he does for a couple of reasons. Number one - he wants to explain to us (since this is now the planning of the Passover, which begins in verse 12) why Jesus is hiding the whereabouts of the dinner meeting from Judas. Judas had gone out that week before (on a Friday), had sought to betray the Lord, had made the deal, and now was looking for an opportunity. But we find the night that he went out explained to us here, beginning in verse 3. And we know that it's a look back because John, in chapter 12:1, said, "It was six days before the Passover." And so we are at two days before the Passover, and then there's a look back, and

Mark takes us kind of backwards, if you will. And I think he does that to show us not only the distinction between Mary's love for Jesus and Judas' wickedness and his sin, but also to explain to us how, on this coming-up-to-Thursday morning and the plans for the Passover, that Judas had gone out and said, "I'll look for a chance." And it won't be until the dinner, the last supper dinner that Thursday night (going into Friday), that Jesus said, "Go do what you do quickly. Get going. Now is your time. Now is your chance. Go." And the folks, when he got there, were ready to move and within a couple of hours were able to mobilize a thousand people, soldiers and all, to come and get Jesus at Gethsemane.

So, here's the look back. And we read, in verse 3, "And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head." This dinner was held, notice, at Bethany. It is that place right over the top of the Mount of Olives. It is in the house of Simon the leper. I guess we should say Simon the ex-leper because no one's going to be eating at the leper's house. But this is a dinner that Jesus came to the week before the cross. And, like I said, you can read about it in Matthew 26 and John 12. And it seemed to be a dinner of tremendous celebration. I mean, Simon had been cleaned by the Lord. Mary and Martha were there. Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead, was there. They also lived in the area in Bethany. Martha was cooking dinner, as you might suspect. She seemed to be the cook in the family. And, if you add to this group Jesus and His twelve apostles, there were at least seventeen people here on that Friday night before Passion Week. Like I said, we know the date because John tells us in chapter 12. And I was thinking what a cool dinner this must have been. You could have said to Simon, "So what does it feel like to have leprosy?" And he would have said to you, "Oh, it's awful! One day I looked in the mirror, and my ear had come off. I lost feelings in my toes. I lost two fingers on my left hand. No one would speak to me. I'd always have to be yelling, 'Unclean!' The loneliness was horrendous. It just ravages your body. You don't know what to expect next. Everyone's rejecting you. And then, one day, Jesus touched me, and the minute He did, my eyebrows came back, and my feeling came back to my fingers, and I hugged my family. And, man, it was the best day of my life!" And then Lazarus, across the table, said, "Well that's nothin', man. I was dead!" It's the old one-upmanship, you know? Poor man's healed of leprosy and thinks he has a story to tell, he's got a guy who thinks he has a better story to tell. "Yeah, I was relaxing in Abraham's bosom with King David. And then I heard my name yelled, 'Lazarus!' I think I heard it twice. Next thing I know, I'm looking at the world through a veil that they put

across my face, looking out a tomb, and there're my sisters - all smiley. And I'm back here. Great." ('Great' was said with a disappointing tone). It must have been a cool dinner - no more festive occasion, no more thanksgiving.

And notice, it was as He was sitting at dinner that we read, here in verse 3, (reclining is really the word for sat), that they witnessed this remarkable action of a woman there (now, Mark doesn't mention Mary by name; John does, in chapter 12:3), that she gets up from the table, and she comes back with this alabaster flask. The description, at least from commentators, is this is the most expensive kind of storing of precious oils that you could buy. They're usually made of marble. They are handmade. It was, I'm sure, a family heirloom. And there, in it, was pure spikenard, a very precious, if you will, oil. And John tells us that Mary broke this little alabaster flask, maybe at the thin part of the neck, and then she took the oil, and she poured it on Jesus' head and His feet, and she wiped His feet with her hair. Now this isn't at all like that story that you might remember, there in Luke 7, which sounds a little bit familiar. It was much earlier. It was at someone else's house. It was a prostitute from the street, you might remember. But she kind of did the same thing. She came and, this time, with her tears and wiped His feet. Mary, though, came to do something very unusual. She was led by the Spirit to believe that it was time to prepare the Lord for His death which is, to me, a very interesting thing that she would understand that. Mary is only seen three times in the New Testament, and every time you see her, she is at Jesus' feet. In Luke 10 at the dinner at her house, Martha, remember, was cooking and complaining in the kitchen. It says that Mary sat at Jesus' feet. When her brother, Lazarus, died, it was Mary (in John 11) who fell down at Jesus' feet. And here you find her again at His feet. Like I said, this spikenard is Indian perfume. It is expensive. Judas, in playing the role of Judas (as he always did, the crook), valued that which she poured out at a year's salary. So let's say you make \$50,000 a year. Mary, in two minutes, pours out \$50,000 worth of really good perfume all over Jesus. I mean, the house must have smelled great, don't you think? And without warning she comes to the Lord, and she comes to worship with the best she has to offer, and she has a tremendous sensitivity to who Jesus is. In the midst of all of these pictures - of the argument of the apostles and their not understanding first from second coming, and all trying to jockey for position - there's this wonderful woman who just seems to have listened and heard. And in so doing, she lays out for us the kind of worship that God looks for. But first, the reaction of man before we get the reaction of the Lord.

So we read, in verse 4, "But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, 'Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they criticized her sharply." Now we are told, in John 12, that it was Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, the one who would betray Him, who said these words. But John writes (12:6), "This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it" (for himself). So Judas voiced his opinion based on Judas' attitude of gain. But notice what Mark writes. There were others who joined in the attitude. We read, "But there were some," and then it was they who said, and "they," verse 5, "criticized her sharply." So Judas was the hypocrite, but he influenced others. John called him a "*kleptes*." That's where we get the word "kleptomaniac" from. He's a thief who was pretty good at what he did. Judas showed up with a calculator in his hand. He knew the price of everything and the value of nothing. And as he implies, Mary, he said, was foolish and wasteful, and everyone else agreed, or at least some of them seemed to agree. It was customary, I think we mentioned last week, during the Passover, to give to the poor. It was something that was just done. So they murmured against her. "Murmured" is a tough word in Greek because it literally means to snort like a horse. Angry horse. These saints and one "ain't" questioning her motive and her heart and criticizing what the Lord will say was a wonderful act of goodness. I'm glad there aren't any critical saints around any longer. (Laughing)

But here, look, Mary is moved under a couple of impulses. Number one, she loves the Lord. She's always at His feet, always serving Him. And I think that she reveals something that you don't find in anyone else, at least at this point, because she was pretty sure she had heard He was going to die, and she acted upon it and knew He needed to be anointed to do so. (She was) the only one who was listening. When He said, "I'll die," everyone said, "No. You're going to live." Everyone was shocked. I think Mary knew. I think Mary understood it. In fact, you won't find Mary at the cross - not this one. And the reason is pretty simple. I think she believed that He was going to rise. I think she saw through all of these things, and the Lord seems to say that about her as well. I don't know if she was ready for these remarks that cut her like a knife. But remember I said to you, you only find Mary three times in the Bible - all three times that you see her, though, she's misunderstood by others. As she puts herself at Jesus' feet, she's falsely accused. When she sits at Jesus' feet when He's over for dinner, it's Martha yelling out of the kitchen, "My sister won't help me! She's just sittin' there. Look at me. I'm covered in flour from head to toe. You want to eat today, you'd better help me."

And Mary's just.....and Jesus said, "She's picked the best part." Lazarus dies, she goes falling on her face in front of Jesus, in tears. But they saw her going out of the house, and, rather than seeing her come to Jesus, they said, "Oh, look, she's going to weep at the grave." And they always misunderstood her intentions. And now here, when she gives the most expensive thing she owns, with a conviction that this is what the Lord would want her to do. And she's misread again. Even those who claim to know the Lord are judging her. And they were led by covetous Judas with his heart of judgment. So Judas was wicked in his perception, but everybody else should have known better. Right? These are people that are on the same page with the Lord. It is certainly not uncommon that when you go to serve the Lord that people begin to misunderstand your motives or to question who and why you're doing what you're doing. Jesus said, in Matthew 7:3, "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and don't consider the telephone pole in your own?" All right. That's not exactly the way it says. It says "plank" (Laughing) - that's the NJV, the New Jack Version - but the "plank" is this big, old log. And there seems to be a lot of that, unfortunately, going on when you try to do that. We could do well to major more in graciousness.

I remember when I first started playing golf years ago, and I went to take lessons from a man who had a place to hit golf balls in his golf shop. And I would always hit them right outside the lane into his golf bags he was trying to sell. It wasn't a pleasant experience for either one of us. But he said to me, after a couple of weeks, "I've got some golf clubs you could buy. You should get these." And then he said, "They're more forgiving." And I thought - what does that mean? (Laughing) And he said, "Well, they're really big, and they have a bigger sweet spot. So you're more liable to hit it straight even when you don't hit it right." And I thought about that, and it stuck with me. You know, we could use some Christians with bigger sweet spots.

But, man, I'm telling you. Mary didn't have many friends in the house. They seemed to all just turn on her immediately. So, the opinions of others - of Mary's good deed - were vocalized by the enemy of the Lord but picked up by the friends of God. And, in her willingness to serve the Lord, she finds herself the object of ridicule and scorn. And so we read "they criticized her," they snorted at her like an angry horse. They were not very kind in their assessment.

Verse 6 says, "But Jesus said, 'Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you

wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.' " I love the fact Jesus just steps up and says, "Hey, leave her alone! She's done a good work." The word is "*kalos*." It means good or beautiful. Jesus' assessment very different than the folks around Mary. He calls what she did (in worship) beautiful. Beautiful. What she did was beautiful. You know, you can never serve God but that He doesn't know your heart. And sometimes I think you have to not worry too much about what other people think. Just let your concern be, "What does the Lord think of me?" Because here there's a house full of critics, and then there's Jesus who sees the beauty in Mary's heart, even as He sees the wickedness in Judas' heart or the misunderstanding in the hearts of those who were making rash judgments about her. Love is the beautifying agent to worship. Wherever you turn in the Bible, it'll make your singing and your service and your sacrifice - large or small - acceptable. If it's done out of love. And the Lord says of Mary, "It's beautiful what she did." He recognized her heart. "As to your complaints that we could feed the poor or give the money to the poor, you'll always have the opportunity to do that. The poor you'll always have with you." It's Deuteronomy 15:11 - years and years earlier - where the LORD said, "The poor will never cease from the land." So, if you really are concerned about the poor - and certainly Judas was not - His point was you always have the opportunity to serve Him. But her service is very timely, it's very time-framed, if you will. She can't wait two weeks to do this. "I'll be dead and risen." She has to come now. And to put Him first is the order of worship that God is looking for. If, in your worship, the Lord is first, then it's acceptable. You go back to Matthew 25 (which is part of that chapter 13 here that we studied), and Jesus said, "If I'm hungry, and you feed Me, if I'm thirsty, and you give Me to drink," and then He goes on with a whole long list, and they say, "Well, when did we do that to You?" And He said, "Whenever you see the least of these, you've done it for Me." In other words, "If I'm the reason you're feeding the poor and clothing the naked and visiting those in prison, then it's acceptable." Then that love for the Lord is acceptable because He's involved. And He says of her, "She's done what she could." Literally, "She's given everything she has." Like I said, this could have been a \$50,000 bottle of perfume, and she was all in, wasn't she? She gave it her all. She loved the Lord. This was more valuable - her love for Jesus - than the bottle that she held in her hand. It's interesting.

Jesus' answer, in verse 7, seems to say that (and address the fact) so often we have no trouble dreaming exalted dreams of what we would do if given the chance. "Oh, if I had that much money.... oh, if I had a bottle of perfume, I'd give it to Jesus, too!" We're always filling our heads with applause for ourselves because this is what we would do if we were given the chance. And Jesus literally says, "Well, you've got the poor with you. Just go serve them." In other words, rather than just dreaming about what you might do if you were in a position, why not just do what you can? Because He adds, in verse 8, "She's done what she could. Go do what you can." Right? Do what you can. The fragrance that honors the Lord and refreshes others comes from lives who don't just think about it, they do it. They're driven by love. Mary let down her hair - the glory of every Jewish woman - and she declared that the glory that she had was available for His honor. And it's not limited by cost or what other people think. Mary was only interested in what Jesus had to say. So, it's one thing to say in your heart, "I could help if I had the chance." It's another thing to go help because you do have the opportunity - at some level, in some way. She's done what she could. What have you done? Are you doing all that you can, or are you just dreaming about it?

Well Jesus says very clearly, in verse 8, " 'She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.' " And I really think that Mary, having sat at Jesus' feet for hours on end, paying attention, realized what Jesus had come to do. I truly am convinced that she had listened this past year to Jesus speaking about His death and had led her to think about this costly oil at home, and, "This might be a really good time to use it." She might have been the only one, literally, who had listened enough to hear Him say He's going to die, and act accordingly. And you might say, "Why only her?" and my answer would be she sat at His feet a lot. I remember reading a story in one of Barnhouse's sermons where he said that a man came up to him and said, "I wish I knew the Bible like you," and he said, "You'll never know it reading the paper." His point was you want to get close to Jesus, you've got to put yourself there.

So, Mary acts in love. She understands the sorrow that lies ahead. She comes to stand with Jesus out of love. She has understanding that (it appears to me) no one else has. And perhaps the resurrection of her brother had given her hope that Jesus would rise. But, like I said, you don't find Mary at the cross or at the tomb. This Mary was standing on resurrection ground. I think she just knew. She just knew that this was going to work out.

Well, as a result of her love - even though the people didn't think it was so wise - Jesus gives her this lasting honor (in verse 9) of saying that, " 'Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.' " And, like I said, Matthew covers it, John covers it, Mark covers it as well. Two thousand years later, we are on another continent, in another culture, with a different language, and we're talking about her. You want your worship to last? Let it be driven by love. And then it doesn't fade away.

Well here's the deal, and here's why the Lord has Mark tell us the story. Verse 10, "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him." And this happened on Friday. And when we get to verse 12, where we're at late Wednesday night-Thursday morning, when the Lord begins to prepare for the Passover, it is the secrecy with which He does it that keeps Judas in the dark. But Judas has already made a deal. This was the last straw, this dinner on that Friday night; this \$50,000 that he might have had in the bag, where he could have made use of it himself. But now it wasn't available to him any longer.

We read in Luke 22:3 these words, "Then Satan entered Judas, who was numbered among the twelve." It does appear that this night when he made that choice - Satan completely got to fill Judas' life. Oh, he was there all along, but Judas now becomes a demon-possessed Judas, if you will. And he goes out, and he makes a quick deal for a quick buck. The psalmist would write in Psalm 41:9, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me," speaking of the betrayal. And so, from this dinner on that Friday night at Simon the leper's house, out they would go, and Judas would pursue a gain. He would get thirty pieces of silver - not a lot of money, a month's salary. In the Old Testament, thirty pieces of silver, by the way, was worth far less. It was a fine that you would have to pay if your ox hurt another person's slave. And that would be the fee. For Judas, it was perfectly fulfilling of Zechariah's prophecy that he would sell Him out for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13). So, that happened on Friday.

But notice, we started in verse 1 with two days out - Thursday (Wednesday night - Thursday morning); but then this look back, if you will, to see how Judas got to that point. And we read here that Judas was looking for an opportunity, verse 11, how he might betray the Lord. Luke 22:6 says, "So he promised and sought

opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude." Their agreement was, "Look, if you can find Him alone somewhere, if you can get Him on His own somewhere," and Jesus will head for this Garden, where everyone knows that He always went - Judas was very well aware of it. And He sends Judas out for dinner, knowing full well they're going over there next, and Judas is getting his opportunity. But until then Judas only has a deal. He's got money coming. He's possessed by the devil. This last straw was this dinner, on that Friday night a few days earlier, that would turn his heart and set this whole thing in motion.

So Jesus brings out the best and the worst - such love from those who came to know Him and believed His Word; such wickedness from folks like Judas who knew enough to believe, who had seen more than most and yet have decided that they refuse to listen. Mary is an example of wonderful worship. And Judas is the guy that should warn everybody that you can pretend to be around, and no one will know you but God. You'll be able to fool the whole church, probably. You just won't be able to fool Him. One's name is spoken of with holiness and godliness (verse 9), with acclaim, and used by the Lord as a true example. The other one's name is so despised, I don't think anybody will ever name their kids that again. "What's your boy's name?" "Judas." "No, that's a bad name. You don't want to use that." The best and the worst. What's God bringing out in you?

Well, next time we will start on Thursday's preparation for the Passover and see what the Lord, who is always in charge - and by the way, Mark covers very little of the last supper; in fact, except for John, everyone just kind of blows through it in fifteen or twenty verses; but Mark's focus is very simply this - Jesus is in charge at every point. He's the Servant who doesn't give up the authority. So we'll take a look at that in the next couple of weeks.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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