

The Good, the Bad, and the Betrayer

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Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[0:00] If you have your copy of the Scriptures, I want you to open up to the Gospel of Mark chapter 14. And we're going to look this morning at the first 11 verses in Mark chapter 14.

Last week we covered all of chapter 13 in one big swoop, okay? And so this week we're going to slow it down a little bit and cover 11 verses. If you guys want to stand with me as you turn there in your Bibles, I'm going to begin reading in verse 1 of Mark chapter 14.

Mark writes, It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him.

For they said, Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people. And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment and pure nard, very costly.

And she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor.

[1:12] And they scolded her. But Jesus said, Leave her alone. Why did you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing for me. For you always have the poor with you.

And whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money.

And he sought an opportunity to betray him. Father, I ask you to send your spirit right now. Take your word. And illumine our minds to understand it and our hearts to receive it.

It's in Jesus' name I ask this. Amen. Now that we have gotten to chapter 14 of this gospel, things are going to begin to move pretty quickly toward the cross.

[2:21] Mark is going to rush us there. He's going to tell us the important, the main events that occur between now, where we are today, and the day of Christ's crucifixion.

But things are moving fairly rapidly at this point, which causes the verses that we read today, the passage that we read today, to stand out for one primary reason.

I want you to take a look real quickly at verse 1, because Mark gives us a hint of when these things are taking place. He says it was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Now originally, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were two separate events that were celebrated very close together. So that the Passover, of course, is a celebration of God's delivering the people out of Egypt, and specifically of the last plague that God visited upon the Egyptians.

Because if you'll remember, God commanded the Israelites to every home to slaughter a lamb, and to place the lamb's blood on the doorposts around the doorframe. And as the angel of death passed through Egypt, he would pass over the houses of those who had the blood spread upon their door, and no harm would come to them.

[3:35] But for those who did not have the blood spread upon their door, for the Egyptians, the firstborn in every one of those homes would die that night, as judgment upon Pharaoh and all of Egypt.

And so every year, this was the big feast. This was the main celebration in Israel. The people would stream from all over, as we've talked about in past weeks.

That's why the city is so full of people. That's why Jesus and his disciples have come at this point in time and made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, because of the Passover. But there was another feast that was held immediately following the Passover, which was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was connected to the Passover, because it was a celebration of God's protection and preserving of the people as they were in the wilderness, as he provided food for them and bread for them in the wilderness.

So they have these two celebrations that were so close together and so closely related in the Old Testament that they kind of got forged together in the actual celebration of them. So Mark tells us that it's two days before the beginning of these festivals.

Passover had become sort of the large beginning to a week-long celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Mark says we're two days before the beginning of that feast.

[4:54] We're two days before the Passover, which means that if the Passover occurred on Friday, and I think that it did, if the Passover occurred on Friday of this year, and Jesus was crucified on Friday of this year, it means that we are right now on Wednesday.

Now, that's strange, because the story that Mark tells in verses 3 through 9 about the woman who anoints Jesus' feet, that story, that event, actually took place several days earlier, or a few days earlier.

In fact, I want you to hold your place in Mark chapter 14, and I want you to turn over to the Gospel of John chapter 12. John chapter 12. Just hold your place in Mark and turn over to John, because I want you to see this.

And then we're going to come back to Mark, and we're going to ask, so then why does Mark tell the story the way that he tells the story? Why does he do that? Okay? In John chapter 12, verse 1, this is what we're told. So, six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

They gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table. And Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment, made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair.

[6:09] This is the same story. There are some different details that John adds that Mark doesn't have. So, for instance, John tells us who it was. Mark doesn't tell us that it was Mary that anointed Jesus.

John tells us that Mary anointed Jesus' feet. Mark says Jesus' head, but it was common to anoint both the head and the feet. They just each give separate details of the story. That's not strange. If you and I witnessed the exact same event, and then we were asked separately to describe what we saw, we would probably each pick out different details of what we saw. And if you were to take both of our accounts and put them together, then we would get a fuller picture of what happened. Well, that's all we do with the Gospels occasionally, is when we get a story in two different Gospels, we get different details in each Gospel. So that in John, we learn that it's Mary. In John, we learn that she anointed Jesus' feet.

In Mark, we don't know who it is, but in Mark, we know that she also anointed Jesus' head. Okay? So we just sort of combine all these things. But what's strange is that John tells us explicitly that this event occurred six days before the Passover.

[7:13] So that when you come to Mark's account, Mark begins this chapter by telling us something about the religious leaders, the chief priests and the scribes. And what they are doing takes place two days before the Passover.

And then Mark sort of rewinds and records for us this event that occurs six days before the Passover. And then in verse 10, it's almost like he's back on track with the timeline that he started in verse 1 because we're dealing with Judas and Judas' impending betrayal of Jesus.

Now, that's not uncommon. I've told you before that especially with Matthew and Mark and Luke, that they're not concerned to write a modern, strictly chronological type of biography.

That's not what the gospel writers are concerned with doing. There is a sort of broad chronological order to those gospels so that you have Jesus' ministry in Galilee described and then the final week of Jesus' life described.

And that's obviously chronological. You want the bulk of his ministry to be described here and then the last week described here. And Matthew and Luke have stories about his birth at the beginning and then his ministry and then the last week.

[8:20] So there's a broad chronological order. But when you start to look at all of the individual stories, they were not necessarily concerned to always put those in chronological order because sometimes they arranged them in an order so that we will see a comparison or a contrast between two or three stories that are side by side.

That was very, very common in ancient writings. You can't come to the gospel of Mark and say, well, either Mark or John got the timing of this wrong. You can't do that because Mark is not concerned with when this event happened.

He doesn't say anything about when Jesus' head and feet were anointed. He simply tells us where it happened. So you have to ask yourself, if Mark begins to tell us about something that happened two days before the Passover, and then he tells another story that seems disconnected and unrelated in the next few verses, and then he comes back to that timeline a few verses later, why did he do that?

Why not just skip this story altogether, tell about the religious leaders plotting, and then tell about Judas joining with the religious leaders? Because that's kind of smoother, isn't it? If you were writing a story, is that how you would tell it?

You would kind of keep these things together. It's much more smooth storytelling. Why does Mark drop this particular story where he drops it? Why here?

[9:44] Because I think that Mark intends for us to see the contrast between the woman who anoints Jesus' feet, between Mary and the religious leaders of Israel, and even Judas himself as one of the twelve.

And so this is what I want to do. It's very simple what we're going to do this morning, okay? I want to look at each of these main participants in Mark's story this morning, the religious leaders, Mary, and then Judas and the disciples.

And I want us to try to see the contrasts that Mark brings out in them. So let's take a look first at these religious leaders. It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him. For they said, not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people. Now the fact that they want to arrest him and the fact that they want to kill him are not new.

That's not a new development in the story at all. In fact, you can just turn back a page or two in your Bible and look in chapter 12, verse 12. It says in chapter 12, verse 12, that they, the religious leaders, were seeking to arrest him.

[10:56] They've been trying to get at Jesus since chapter 2 of the Gospel of Mark. They've been confronting Jesus in one way or another since very early in this Gospel. And as we have seen, that tension, the confrontations between Jesus and religious leaders have only grown in intensity and frequency throughout the Gospel of Mark.

So it's not new when we read that they want to arrest him and kill him. They've been wanting to do that for quite a while. What's new is that they have a new tactic. It says that they're going to do it by stealth.

In other words, they're going to do it secretly in a way that everyone will not know exactly what's going on. And there's a good reason for that. In verse that we read in chapter 12, verse 12, They were seeking to arrest him, says next, but they feared the people for they perceived that he had told a parable against them.

They were afraid of the people. They know that the people are supporters of Jesus. The people cheer Jesus on when he directly confronts the Pharisees and when he criticizes the other religious leaders.

The people cheer him on. So they cannot just march up to Jesus as he's teaching in the middle of the temple and arrest him right there. They're afraid of a riot. They're in a sticky situation.

[12:12] And we've seen them in this sticky situation, especially in the last three or four chapters. We've seen them as they've been plotting and scheming. And the problem all along has been the people.

The people. They have tried to ask Jesus clever questions so that he might answer it in a way that would turn the people against him. And yet Jesus has been able to get out of all those little tests and those little tricks that they've tried.

So now, new tactic. We can't get the people to turn against him just yet. So instead, what we're going to try to do is we're going to try to do this secretly. We're not going to arrest him publicly. We've got to come up with a plan. We've got to do it by stealth. And they say explicitly in verse 2, not during the feast. So not while everybody is gathered together for the feast and for the celebration, lest there be an uproar from the people.

So they seem to have a plan to wait until things have died down, wait until the crowds have dispersed somewhat after the feast is over, and then they will arrest Jesus secretly and quietly.

[13:13] That's their plan. Now, these people are not difficult to figure out. They're not complicated at all. They are opposed to Jesus. They are opposed to everything he teaches and everything that he stands for.

And there are lots of people in the world who are this way. There are lots of people in the world who are opposed to who Jesus is, to the claims that Jesus makes, and to the work of Christ's people in the world.

There are a lot of people like that, and we don't have a great deal of difficulty spotting them. It's not complicated. They're very easy to see. What's not easy to see are the people who are more like Judas.

Because after Mark interjects this story in verses 3 through 9, he comes back to the plot of these religious leaders, and they finally gain an advantage on Jesus.

So they were going to wait until the end of the feast, and take care of it secretly and quietly. But now they have a way to do it secretly and quietly still, but they don't have to wait as long. They don't have to wait until the feast is over.

[14:18] Take a look at verse 10. Then Judas Iscariot, and this is an important note that Mark adds, who was one of the twelve? We know that.

He's been listed. Mark's already listed him along with the other disciples. We know that he's one of the twelve. Mark highlights that. He doesn't have to say Judas, who is one of the twelve, in order for people who have been reading through the Gospel of Mark to know who Judas is.

We know who he is. So Mark is not giving us information so that we will know something new. He's giving us a bit of information so we'll hold in our mind. This is one of the twelve.

This is not one of the religious leaders. This is not a stranger. This is a close, close associate of Jesus. Keep that in mind. We'll see how that plays out in just a minute.

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were glad. Glad because now they don't have to wait. They promised to give him money, and now all they have to do, Mark says, is to seek an opportunity upon which Judas can betray him.

[15:24] We know how these things are going to work out. We're going to see that in the coming weeks, how he betrays him in the middle of the night. After Jesus has been praying in the garden, we know they're going to carry out this stealthy secret plan in the middle.

We know all that. We know that. But what we need to ask is, what separates Judas from the rest of the disciples? Because Mark says he's one of the twelve.

What distinguishes him from the others? Because up until this point, there's not a whole lot of indication other than Mark telling us things that are going to come in the future.

But there's not a whole lot of indication from the things that Judas actually does and says that he is going to betray Jesus. He does not, so far to this point, look a whole lot different from the other disciples.

He doesn't. That's something that Mark brings out in this story about the woman who anoints Jesus' head and feet with oil. So let's look at that story. And we're going to see a contrast between the disciples of Jesus and this woman.

[16:31] It says that while Jesus was at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, now we don't know who Simon the leper is, we don't know if he's somebody who was formerly a leper that Jesus healed, we don't know anything about him, just what he's called.

In the house of Simon the leper, and as Jesus was reclining at table, so he's having a meal, a woman, who we know as Mary, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment and pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

Now, pay attention to verse 4, how it's worded. It says, There were some who said to themselves indignantly, Why was the ointment wasted like that?

This ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor. Mark says that the disciples, some of the disciples said this to themselves, whether that means that they were thinking it in their minds or mumbling it quietly on the side to one another, we don't know.

But what they did not do was announce this openly to everyone. What they did not do is say, Hey, what are you doing? We could sell that, get 300 denarii, and give the money to the poor.

[17:42] We could do that. I mean, that's a lot of money. I mean, a denarii is roughly equal to a day's wages for a normal day laborer. So we're talking about almost a full year's worth of salary for the average person.

It's an expensive car for us. It's something very valuable. It would take a long time to earn it. And she just breaks it open and pours it all out on Jesus?

What is she thinking? What could she possibly be thinking? So they're saying, either in their own minds or quietly to one another, We could have sold this stuff, got a lot of money, give it to the poor. That's what they're saying secretly to themselves. Now, if you turn back again to John chapter 12, You'll see that that statement is said out loud by someone.

Chapter 12, verse 4, But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, He was about to betray him, said, Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?

[18:46] So what they're all thinking quietly, Judas says out loud. Now, Mark doesn't even bother to tell us that Judas said that out loud.

Because at this point, in verses 3 through 9, Mark doesn't want to single him out too much for us.

The point here in Mark is that there's not a whole lot of difference between Judas and the other disciples outwardly. And even in the Gospel of John, Judas only verbalizes what everyone else in the room is thinking.

So he doesn't say something that is shocking to everyone else and the rest of the disciples would go, Whoa, man, what's wrong with you? He just says exactly what they're all thinking. This is a frightening thing.

Because up until we see Judas betray Jesus, the other disciples had no real way of distinguishing between him and themselves. That's frightening.

I'll tell you why it's frightening. Because in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus says that on the judgment day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord. And then they'll list all the things that they've done for him.

[19:54] And then he will say to them, Depart from me. I never knew you. But outwardly, they've done all sorts of things for Christ. Outwardly, they would have appeared to be a devoted servant of Jesus.

And yet at the end of it all, Jesus says, I never knew you. The frightening thing is that it's difficult to tell the difference between Judas and the other disciples at this point.

Ultimately, there's a distinction made between them. But at this point, it's very difficult to tell the difference between them. Because they are all consumed with a very sort of man-centered religious approach.

Notice what they're saying here. They're saying, we could have given this money to the poor. That sounds like a good thing. Who wouldn't want to give money to the poor? Who wouldn't want to do that?

I mean, the Bible commands us over and over to care for widows and orphans and to care for the poor. So who wouldn't want to do that? In fact, it was a tradition at the time of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

[21:01] It was a tradition to go out and intentionally give extra money to the poor who were there in the city to care for them during this religious festival. So they're not even coming out of left field with anything.

They're just saying, aren't we supposed to be giving things to the poor around this time? It would be like us saying, it's Christmas time. Shouldn't we want to share with the less fortunate around? Isn't that what we try to do at Christmas time?

Shouldn't we think of others at Christmas time? That's what they're saying. It's Passover time. Come on, Jesus. Why is she wasting our money when we could be giving it away to the poor? It sounds like a good thing. And usually it is. Unless, of course, you place the doing of a good thing above the honoring of Jesus.

See, what separates this woman from the disciples, from the religious leaders, and from the betrayer himself is that she has not come to Jesus focused on other things.

[22:04] She has not come to Jesus with a man-centered worldview. She has come to Jesus focused solely upon him. I mean, just look at what she does.

In the middle of verse 3, it says, A woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard very costly. You would, anytime you had an ointment or an oil that was worth a lot of money, you kept it in an alabaster flask.

That's the way that you stored your very valuable perfumes during these days. These things were meant to be used very sparingly at very special occasions. So at a wedding, or at a feast, or at some other religious event, these things were to be kept for those particular kinds of uses.

For the anointing of the dead when they needed to be buried, which Jesus mentions here. These are to be used very sparingly at special occasions, and yet what does she do? It says that she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

She didn't remove the top. It wasn't necessary to break the flask to pour out the oil. That's not necessary, by the way. She didn't have to break it. It's not like it's hermetically sealed off and you can't get to the stuff inside of it.

[23:22] I mean, they poured it in. Obviously, they can pour it out. She chooses not to take the lid off. Instead, she just breaks the neck off of it. So you can't conserve it now.

You can't keep it now. It has to all be used or else go to waste. And so she breaks it off, intending to pour it all out. She pours every last drop of it that she can get out onto his head, and we know from John, onto his feet, which causes them, of course, to react in the way that we've seen.

But look at what Jesus says to their reaction in verse 6. Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. And then here's his explanation.

You always have the poor. You can give to them whenever you want. You will not always have me. I'm not going to be here forever physically on the earth.

I'm not going to be here forever. Not only am I going to die, but even after I'm raised from the dead, I'm going to ascend into heaven. And they don't know it, but it will be, at least from our perspective, at least 2,000 years before he comes back physically.

[24:31] So when he says, you will not always have me here, he means it. He's not physically present among us. We cannot anoint his head with oil. We can't do it. We can't wipe his feet with our hair. We're incapable of doing it.

Jesus says, I'm not always going to be here. She's done whatever she can right now in the moment to honor me in the most extravagant way that she can. Now there are probably some religious and theological overtones to what she's doing here.

Jesus is recognized by his disciples as the Messiah and as the king from the line of David. The Messiah means the anointed one and the kings would have been anointed by pouring oil over their heads.

And so there's no doubt some religious significance. There's no doubt that this woman, Mary, recognizes the full extent, at least as much as she's able to, of who Christ is, what his great worth and value are.

She understands that. She gets that. And while I think the disciples have an intellectual understanding of some of these things, they've acknowledged that he's the Messiah so far.

[25:39] Peter has confessed, you are the Christ. That's the word, Messiah. They know that he's from the line of David. They have seen that, heard that, acknowledged that. They know the same things that this woman knows about Jesus.

And yet she acts in a way that accords with what she knows about him. They, on the other hand, do not. What is most striking about this story is the fact that the disciples are focused on the good to the exclusion of Jesus.

They're focused on the good to the exclusion of honoring Christ. Whereas Mary is focused on Christ to the exclusion of all else.

That is a vital distinction that we recognize. Some of these disciples, 11 of these disciples, will in the end prove to be genuine followers of Christ.

And will in the end, not here, depart from me, I never knew you. But at this point in time, it would have been difficult for us to pick out who was who if we didn't have the Bible to tell us who's who.

[26:48] Over and over, the Bible tells us, the New Testament tells us, that we ought to test ourselves to see if we're in the faith. The letter of 1 John was written entirely for the purposes of giving us assurance that we have real, genuine faith.

But the only way to have assurance is to pass all the tests that John lays out for genuine and authentic faith in Christ throughout his letter. So that there is this current running through the New Testament of demonstrate, show that you have real faith.

It's not that all of the things that you do are going to earn you eternal life. It's not that the things that you do are going to earn you a right standing before God. But the things that you do will be evidence that you either have or have not trusted in Him.

That you either do or do not have eternal life waiting for you. And if we were really honest, a lot of times we're much like the disciples here.

And outsiders reading the story of our lives would have a very difficult time distinguishing between us and the Judases around us.

[27:59] A very, very difficult time. The model for us in this passage is a woman that Mark doesn't even bother to name, who seems to not even notice everyone else around her and is willing to pour out what for her is the most valuable possession that she had.

She is willing to give up everything for one simple little act of anointing the head and feet of Jesus. There's no reason for her to think that what she is doing will have any significance beyond this dinner table.

Why would it? Nobody talks about the anointing that somebody gave them when they were guests in someone's house three years ago. That would be like us remembering and saying, Man, I remember, gosh, four years ago when I was at so-and-so's house.

They were just so kind and nice to me. We don't usually do that. We just kind of move on with life and things don't stand out to us. There's no reason for her to think that what she's doing will be in any way remembered or is in any way significant beyond the moment.

And yet Jesus says in verse 9 that wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her. And there's a reason for that.

[29:20] The reason for that is what we do for Christ, no matter how insignificant it may seem at the moment, what we do for Christ when He is first and when He is central bears eternal, everlasting fruit.

And whatever other good we might do that we might ought to do like caring for the poor, we ought to do that. But whatever good we might do does not bear eternal fruit unless it is aimed first and foremost at the honor and glory and exaltation of Jesus.

She's not remembered because she spent so much money. She's not remembered because she was willing to walk into a room full of men that would have been uncomfortable for a woman. She's remembered because she honored Christ before all else.

While 11 other genuine followers of Jesus stood by and griped and complained. Who are we most like most of the time? It's doubtful that any of us in here, at least as Jesus describes these religious leaders, would fit the pattern of the religious leaders here.

I doubt that any of you in here, although I could be wrong, I doubt that any of you in here are secretly, quietly plotting ways to destroy the works of the kingdom and bring reproach upon the name of Christ.

[30:38] I doubt that. I hope not. It could be, but I doubt it. I know most of you. So most of us probably wouldn't say, well, I identify with these priests and scribes because that's really what I'm trying to accomplish

here .

It may be that some of us identify more with Jesus, not because we intend to betray Him, but because in the end there may be some here who would hear depart from me and I never knew you. it is very likely that there are many of us here who to the world are indistinguishable from Judas and the disciples.

And that I hope and I pray that there would be more and more of us in here who would be willing to lose everything and to spend everything that we have and to lay everything down, not to be known, not to do great things, but just to honor Jesus.

Because in the end, that's the only thing that lasts after all. Let's pray.