

# MARK 14:1–11

BROKEN & EMPTIED

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## SETTING || 14:1–2

- As we turn to **Chapter 14** in Mark's Gospel, we are ushered into what has been referred to as the "*Holy of Holies*" in God's Word. This is where Mark records the final moments leading up to the cross of Christ. It's as if he pulls back the curtain so that we see our High Priest and the blood of the Lamb poured out on the altar of God for our forgiveness.
- This chapter begins with a reference to **the Passover** and the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** – which was a cultural celebration that lasted over a week. It was a celebration in which the people remembered and reenacted the pinnacle moment of their rescue from their oppressive slavery in Egypt.
  - You remember the story in Exodus when God unleashed **10 plagues** upon the Egyptians and their false gods. The **tenth** and final plague was when the angel of death passed through the land of Egypt and killed the firstborn son in every home – *except for those homes that were covered with the blood of a sacrificial lamb*. In **Exodus 12**, we hear God giving His people very specific instructions for how to be saved from **the angel of death** who was coming. They were to take an unblemished male lamb (**12:5**), kill it (**12:21**), and then smear the blood over the doorposts of their home (**22**). This way, when the angel of death came to take the life of the firstborn son, he would see the blood on the doorpost and know that death had already come to that home – and so he would "*pass over*" (**23**).
  - Since that time, **during the Passover Feast**, each family would choose an unblemished lamb, kill it, and eat it – and the father would **tell the old, old story** all over again... of how God provided a substitute so that they should not perish.<sup>1</sup> This celebration was one of the greatest pilgrim festivals in Judaism, and so the population in Jerusalem would double (or even triple) during this time as visitors streamed in from all over the Mediterranean world.
- So that's the historical context of this chapter. But not everybody was feeling the holiday spirit this year. After everything that we've just saw unfold in the temple (*all the things that Jesus said and did – like flipping tables*), the religious leaders aren't exactly in the mood for celebrating; they are in the mood for conniving. Scheming. They want Jesus dead, but they don't want to do anything rash with so many people around for fear that it will create a riot and get them in trouble with Rome. So, they plot.
- But they aren't the only people plotting. In **14:10–11**, we see one of Jesus' own followers planning how to betray Jesus. So, our story is surrounded with people plotting together about how to get rid of Jesus.
  - Stop for a moment to think about how outrageous this is. As the people were celebrating their salvation from death, their leaders were seeking the death of their Savior. In this moment that was intended remember what God had done in saving their sons, they were scheming about how to kill the Son of God for what He was doing.<sup>2</sup>

## SIMON THE LEPER || 14:3a

I love it that Jesus was in this man's house. Simon used to be a leper, and so he knew what it was like to be an outsider. He knew what it felt like to be a nobody. He had tasted hopelessness. He'd experienced loss. And, in all of this, he knew what it was like to be set free in Christ. Mark keeps the title of his past attached to him – probably

<sup>1</sup> Think: John 3:16.

<sup>2</sup> As an aside (not the point of this story): how often is this my story? How often do I find myself focused on something that is absolutely opposite of what the moment is for...

- **Thanksgiving** = thinking about what I want for Christmas (e.g., Black Friday) ...

- **All Hallow's Eve** = celebrating darkness and death...

- **Resurrection Sunday** = chocolate bunnies and easter eggs...

- **The Lord's Day** = I'm focused on football...

- **The Word is being preached** = scrolling my phone...

- **Conversations** = I'm focused on what I'm going to say next when they're done talking...

This moment was for celebrating life, and they were plotting death.

to highlight the miracle that Jesus had worked in His life. To call Him “*Simon the Leper*” is to remember who he was – which only serves to highlight what Jesus had done in his life.

We sing songs here at North Center where we remember who we were before Christ...

“*I was a wretch. I remember who I was. I was lost. I was blind. I was running out of time.*”  
~ **Thank You Jesus for the Blood**

“*I once was lost...was blind...*”  
~ **Amazing Grace**

In Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, he told them to “**remember**” who they were before Christ. Don’t forget what God has done for you. You were “**aliens, strangers, having no hope, without God**” (**Eph 2:11–13**). But now...!

### THE UNNAMED WOMAN || 14:3b

Here in Simon’s house, we meet a woman who clearly remembered who she was and what Jesus had done for her. We learn who this woman is when we read this story in the Gospel of John,<sup>3</sup> but Mark doesn’t give us her name – probably because “*who she is*” is not as important as “*what she does*” ... because what she does in Simon’s house is wildly unexpected and totally inappropriate in that culture.

Jesus and His disciples are sitting at Simon’s table with some other guests,<sup>4</sup> when this unnamed woman interrupts the meal. She approaches Jesus, and she’s carrying an expensive jar with over a pound of oil that was worth somewhere around a year’s wages.<sup>5</sup> Mark doesn’t tell us how she came into possession of something so costly. We can speculate, but we don’t know. Regardless, she brings this expensive extremely valuable item with her as she approaches Jesus, and if her uninvited presence wasn’t shocking enough, she adds to the shock value by breaking the alabaster jar and pouring the oil on Jesus’ head.

**Think about this scene!** John tells us that there is “**a pound**” of this fragrant oil in her jar. Most full-sized perfume or cologne bottles that you buy in the store today are sold in **3 oz. bottles**. And all you need is one or two squirts. *I don’t know how many times I’ve told my boys, “You only need two squirts, man!”* After three squirts, the whole room smells like cologne. Four squirts and the whole house is smelling cool “*Cool Breeze*.” Five squirts, and now our pets are starting to die. 😊 She has **A POUND** of this fragrant oil, and she breaks the jar and pours all of it on his head. John says that “**the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.**”<sup>6</sup> I think all of Bethany was probably filled with the fragrance....

It’s easy to read this story and miss the significance of what she did. She took something that was equal to an entire year’s wage and emptied out on Jesus. **What would that be for you?** \$35,000? \$50,000? \$80,000. \$100,000. Imagine holding in your hand something that was worth every dime that you have earned over the past twelve months and pouring it all on Christ!! If I’m honest, sometimes, it can feel like a massive sacrifice just giving back a tithe of what I make... It’s hard to imagine what it would be like to empty all of it on Christ – especially when there are so many other good things I could do with that money. I don’t know how that strikes you, but it enraged some of the people around the table that day.

### THE DINNER GUESTS || 14:4–5

Their question was, “*Why would you waste this on Jesus?*” It could have been used for **this**...it could have been used for **that**...but you wasted all of it on Jesus. The text says that they were “**indignant**” (e.g., *a bull stomping the ground and flaring its nostrils*), and “**they criticized her sharply**” (imperfect tense = ongoing action). They

<sup>3</sup> John 12:3.

<sup>4</sup> See John 12:1–2.

<sup>5</sup> John 12:3.

<sup>6</sup> John 12:3.

criticized her repeatedly. She is worshipping Jesus, and they are criticizing her! She came with a heart that was ready to worship, and they came with hearts that were ready to judge.

**APPLICATION QUESTION:** *What do you do to prepare your heart for the worship gathering on Sunday? I really began to ask this question when I was in my early 20's. I was part of a church that had a lot of things about the Sunday service that drove me nuts! This was the church that God had called me to be part of, but there was so much about the way that things were done – both in the leadership and in the Sunday service that drove me nuts. Like nails on a chalkboard. And I'll never forget this one Sunday, after the worship service was over, one of the high school girls was getting ready to leave, and I overheard you say to the person next to her, "I just love this church!" That's when I began to realize, maybe this isn't as much a "church problem" as it is a "me problem." Our hearts were just in two totally different places. She had come with a heart that was ready to worship, and I had come with a heart that was ready to criticize the worship. How often do our hearts look more like a courtroom where we sit in judgment over others rather than a sanctuary where we fall in worship before Christ? So, the question I began asking myself was, "How am I preparing my heart to enter into the presence of Jesus and join my church family at His feet in worship?"*

## JESUS || 14:6-8

Well, the grumblers have had their chance to talk, and now it's Jesus' turn. They rebuked her, and now He rebukes them. *"She has done a good work for Me... You speak as though you are focused on those who are in need (and that's good), but she is focused on her God. You tell me: which one takes priority in your heart?"*

Church, our world is full of people in need. There always will be.<sup>7</sup> Our city is filled with people in need – everywhere you look. And there are many excellent charity organizations that you can get involved with, but the heart-level question that Jesus addresses here is, *"Who are you focused on?"*

- As you **adopt** children, are you doing it for the sake of the children or for the sake of Christ?
- As you open your home to the **homeless**, are you doing it for their sake or for Christ's sake?
- As you volunteer at CWC, are you doing it for the **mothers**, or are you doing it for the sake of Christ?
- As you serve in your local **church**, are you doing it for the sake of the sheep or for the sake of Christ?
- As you honor your **marriage covenant**, are you doing it for the sake of your spouse or the sake of Christ?

Maybe you say, *"I'm focused on both."* But the reality is that only one of these motives will keep you going when the days get hard and the burden gets too heavy to carry. Yes, we are to minister to the needs of others, but the only way you will ever persevere through the hard times is if the focus of your energy is Christ.

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

*~ 1 Cor 10:31*

You do **orphan care**, not primarily for the sake of the orphans, but for the sake of your God who loves the orphans. You honor your **marriage covenant**, not primarily for the sake of your spouse, but for the sake of your God joined you together. You faithfully serve in your **local church**, not primarily for the sake of the congregation, but for the sake of Christ who purchased the local church with His blood.<sup>8</sup>

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...

*~ Col 3:17*

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,  
knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

*~ Col 3:23-24*

<sup>7</sup> Deut 15:11.

<sup>8</sup> "He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Ps 23:3); "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake" (Ezek 36:22).

You will always have the opportunity to minister to those in need – because there will always be people in need (14:7), but she has a unique opportunity to minister to Me in this moment, and “**she has done what she could**” (14:8). What have you done? You sit here and talk about what **she** could have done, but what are **you** doing? You criticize her gift, but what gift have you brought? She did “*what she could*” ... what are you doing? Here’s a **motto** to live by: **Do what you can, and do it for Jesus.**

### DIVINE TIMING & PURPOSE || 14:8

This scene concludes with Jesus telling everybody what her gift meant to Him. He was days away from being buried in a tomb after giving His life as the sacrificial payment for the sin of the world, and Jesus says that she was anointing His body for burial. As I thought about this story this past week, I asked myself if she knew what she was doing... because the Bible doesn't tell us what her thought process was; it just tells us what she did. Did she know that Jesus was about to die? Did she mean for her act of worship to be taken the way that Jesus did? There are two reasons why I think this might be exactly what she meant by this act of worship: (1) Jesus has been talking about His sacrificial death and resurrection numerous times over the past year (e.g., Mark 10:33–34).<sup>9</sup> (2) She had just witnessed the death and resurrection of her brother Lazarus.<sup>10</sup> This gospel theme of death and resurrection was very real, very personal, and very recent for her.

But whether she knew what her offering meant to Jesus or not...He received it as being a divinely ordained and eternally significant. **Jesus knew what her gift meant – even if she didn't.** Which is to say... we often have no idea how God intends to use the gifts that we bring, but the reality is that your acts of worship to God and your acts of kindness toward those around you go further than you could ever imagine, and they mean more than you might ever know. Your job is not to determine all the ways that your gift might be used and everything that it might accomplish...your job is to do what you can do – for the sake of Christ. What your gifts accomplish is His story to tell, not yours.

### WHEREVER THIS GOSPEL IS PREACHED || 14:9

This act of societal boldness and sacrificial kindness touched Jesus so much that He made a promise that this moment would be memorialized for all time. As this gospel is preached throughout the whole world, what this woman did is being told as a memorial to her. Even today.

As the world around was plotting His death, this unnamed woman was anointing His body for burial. In the house of a leper who had been cleansed and a dead man who had been raised, this woman was worshiping the Savior with all that she had. She gave everything she had to Jesus, and He loved that because He had come to do the same for her.<sup>11</sup>

**CLOSE:** As we prepare to come to the Lord's Table...this story calls us to examine our hearts:

- Why have I come? Why am I here? Have I come to worship my Savior with all that I have, or have I come for some other reason? Is my heart a sanctuary for worship, or does it look more like a courtroom where I sit in judgment over those around me?
- Have I come as a consumer with an expectation of being served and entertained, or have I come with a heart that is so full of love (because I remember who I was before Christ) that my only desire to pour out my worship at His feet? I've not come for the gifts; I have come for the Giver. I'm not here to “get” or to “consume” – I already have Christ. I've already been “blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). What more could I possibly want?
- The Bible says that Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life to purchase you everlasting salvation (Mark 10:45). He came to serve. He came to give. He came to pour out His love until every drop was gone (John 15:3). Why have you come?

<sup>9</sup> Mark 8:31; 9:30–32; 10:32–34.

<sup>10</sup> John 11.

<sup>11</sup> John 13:1; 15:3.

## THE LORD'S TABLE

Why did Jesus praise this woman's lavish gift? Because it mirrored the kind of gift that He had come to give to her.

- She emptied her jar on Christ...
  - He emptied Himself for her.
- Her jar was broken –
  - His body was crushed.
- Her gift cost her much...
  - His gift cost Him everything.

He took on our flesh and blood – so that His body could be broken and so that His blood could be poured out for the sake of our salvation. And when He celebrated this Passover meal, He said this is My body which is broken for you. This is My blood of the New Covenant which is shed for you. So, today, we remember the story of what Jesus did – not in passing over us in death (like He did in Egypt) – but how He took our death by becoming the Lamb that was shed in our place. We remember the breaking and the pouring out that took place on the cross. We drink and we feast on His love and His mercy, and then (by His grace), having been nourished by His life we will seek to live as He lived – and to love as He loved – and to serve as He served – and to pour out our worship for He alone is worthy.