

Sermon outline and notes:

© Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

July 18, 2010

Mark 14:1-9 “Do What You Can for Jesus”

Intro. Now we come to the longest chapter in the Gospel of Mark. The time has come for Jesus to be delivered up to die for our sins. He is about to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (53:7). While thousands of Passover pilgrims were preparing for the joys of the feast, Jesus was preparing for the ordeal of His trial and crucifixion. Here in chapter 14 we see that Mary anoints Him, Judas betrays Him, the Sanhedrin arrests & condemns Him to death, and Peter denies Him. As we come into the shadow of the cross, the reverent heart realizes we are on holy ground.

Vv.1-2 give an important background for our main text. The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to take Jesus into custody “by trickery,” that is, “by surprise” and away from the crowds “...and kill him.” The plan to kill Jesus was not new. But we may well believe, however, that the leaders were now more determined than ever to destroy Jesus. Their envy had been increased by the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:45-53), by the triumphal entry’s effects upon the crowds (Mark 11:1-11), by the cleansing of the temple (11:15-18, 27-28), and by the woes pronounced against the scribes and Pharisees (12:38-40; cf. Matt. 23). However, they had a problem. Though they passionately desired to destroy Jesus, they did not know how to do this without creating more trouble for themselves, as v.2 indicates. The plotters realized that Jesus had many friends and adherents, especially among the thousands of Galileans attending the Passover. So they decide to wait patiently until the people had returned to their homes. Then, when it was all safe, they would kill Jesus! Or so they thought. “Not at the Festival,” said the plotters. “At the Festival,” said the Almighty. Later we shall see that the plan of God overruled the plans of man.

Since the feast of the Passover was “two days off,” (v.1a) it must have been Tuesday when Christ’s enemies held their meeting for the purpose of plotting how to bring about the arrest and death of Jesus. But as we compare the parallel account in John 12, there we read that the event of vv.3-9 took place 6 days before the Passover.¹ So why does Mark go back a few days to tell of this event? He tells the story of love to contrast it with the treachery of Judas and the hatred of the leaders. The ugliness of their sins makes the beauty of her sacrifice even more meaningful.

So let’s see what lessons we can learn from our story. The first lesson is this:

I. SHOW YOUR LOVE WITH GIFTS

In *The Five Love Languages*, Dr. Gary Chapman points out that there are at least 5 ways you can express your love to someone. You can give words of affirmation. You can serve them. You can spend quality time with them. You can show affection to them. And here in our text we see that you can show your love by giving gifts. There were two gifts that were lovingly bestowed upon Jesus in our story today. Here we see two kinds of gifts that we can give today. For example, we can:

¹ Some believe these are two different anointings. To anoint a person as a mark of honor and respect was far more common in our Lord’s time than we suppose. However, the close similarity of the language used at the anointing described by John and here in Mark makes that unlikely.

A. Give a Meal – Do you realize that one of the best gifts you can give is to invite someone over for a meal? In v.3 we read, “And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table....” Evidently Simon the leper hosted Jesus & His disciples for a meal. The idea readily suggests itself that the supper was prompted by love for the Lord. Oh, how grateful Simon must have been unto Jesus for his healing! But John’s gospel tells us that Lazarus was there, & his sister Martha was serving (John 12:2). Martha shows her love for Jesus by her service to Him in preparing & serving the supper. Lazarus & his sisters were so grateful that he was restored back to life & to his family. What a testimony meeting could have taken place that night! Simon could have told of the time when his body was full of leprosy, and he was exiled from his family, forced to live outside of town. But Jesus healed him, and now he has not only been healed, but he is back with this family, all because of Jesus! And Lazarus could have said, “What Jesus did for me was an even greater miracle! I was dead for 4 days, but Jesus raised me back to life!” So we see Simon, Lazarus, & Martha showing their love for the Lord by providing a meal.

I want to encourage you to offer the gift of a meal some time. It is not necessarily to feed the hungry, but to provide a great fellowship opportunity. There will be times when you will only invite family or close friends. But we should also consider inviting new church members, & those who are not yet believers in the Lord.

But secondly, we see another important gift of love. You see, according to John’s gospel (11:2; 12:3), Mary, the sister of Lazarus & Martha, was also there.² She had a different way of showing her love that some can do:

B. Give Costly Gifts – In the last of v.3 we read, “a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head.” Notice what she has brought as a gift of love for her Lord. The perfume had been extracted from pure spikenard, imported from India. It was costly also because, according to John’s gospel (12:3), it was not less than a Roman pound (twelve ounces)! Only the wealthy could afford such perfume, especially in such a large quantity. By the way, we see here that some of the followers of Jesus were wealthy. Having wealth, and following Jesus, is not necessarily in conflict. Some people can have wealth without loving wealth more than Jesus. And some people understand why God has blessed them with wealth, and they use much of their wealth for the Kingdom of God.

Then, according to v.3, she took the flask of perfumed oil, broke it open, and then poured it out over His head. This reminds me of Psa. 23:5, “You anoint my head with oil.” Jesus implies in v.8 that she also anointed His body. Furthermore, John’s gospel indicates that she anointed His feet and wiped His feet with her hair (12:3). Why did she do this? Along with the perfume, Mary poured out her heart in love, gratitude, and devotion! As she saw Lazarus sitting there at the table beside Jesus, she is filled with love for restoring Lazarus to them.

So we see that Mary, Martha, & Simon were showing their love for Jesus. Isn’t that much of what the Christian faith is about? Jesus said that the greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, & strength. Showing your love for God is the most important thing you can do. And we see from this story that one of the best ways you show love for the Lord is by giving and making sacrifices for the Lord. You will have the attitude of the Psalmist, “How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?” (Psalm 116:12). What have you done to show your love for Jesus openly? Martha showed her love by serving Jesus. Simon & Mary showed their love by giving gifts to Jesus. What have you done this past week?

² Some believe it was Mary Magdalene. But she may have been the one who anointed Jesus on a previous occasion, as recorded in Luke 7:36-50.

In contrast to the gifts of love by some of His followers, we also see another lesson:

II. DON'T BE DETERED FROM SHOWING LOVE

As soon as Mary so lavishly showed her love for Jesus, the critics started their attack. In v.4 we read, "But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, 'Why was this fragrant oil wasted?'" We see that several disciples were indignant at what happened here. But John tells us that it was Judas, the treasurer, who voiced the strongest objection. He quickly calculated the value of the perfume, and according to v.5, it was worth more than three hundred denarii (cf. John 12:5). Think of it: almost a year's wages gone to waste, enough to feed no less than three hundred families for one whole day, and have something left! And now all was lost. What a shame! It sounded so pious for Judas to talk about the poor, but in reality he wanted to pilfer some of that money for himself! (John 12:4-6). He looked at everything from a material point of view.

So in the last of v.5 says, "they criticized her sharply." Poor Mary! Almost wherever she looks, she meets angry glances, shocked disapproval. Even her own sister had criticized her some time back (Luke 10:38-42).

The spirit of these narrow-minded fault-finders is all too common today. Their followers and successors are found in every part of Christ's visible church. There is never any lack of people who decry what they call "extremes" in religion, and are incessantly recommending what they term "moderation" in the service of Christ. If someone devotes time, money and affection to the pursuit of worldly things, they do not blame him. But if the same person devotes himself and all he has to Christ, they call him a "fanatic" or "extremist." That's because they view money given to church and to missions as a waste. They think that going to church every Sunday is a waste of time. They would say of reading God's Word, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." If a young man accepts God's call to preach, the world will often say, "What a waste of talent." If a church builds a new building, you just watch and listen to people criticize such "waste."

Brethren, the question of Judas is far more fitting when asked of *non-believers*. The real waste is the time and money spent on earthly things that have no eternal value. And think about the millions of people who waste money on alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, gambling, and other such things.

How should we respond to such criticisms of loving devotion & service to Jesus? The fact that others misunderstand and criticize us should not keep us from showing our love to Christ. Don't worry if family, friends, & even other Christians criticize you for what you do for Jesus. Don't be deterred by their criticism. I want to tell you two reasons why. First:

- Jesus Will Defend You – He defended Mary. He says in v.6, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me." Don't criticize the work & devotion of someone else, especially a fellow believer, or you will find Jesus rebuking you. Then in v.7 Jesus points out that the issue of helping the poor was not valid in this case. He says, "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always." It is not that the Master was unconcerned about the poor; far from it. But there would be many other opportunities to tend to the needs of the poor, for there will always be poor people. But the opportunity to show love and honor to Jesus in His earthly life was almost over.

Application: Jesus is not with us in bodily presence, so we need to speak up when a fellow believer is being criticized like we see here.

- The Critics Are Not Your Judge. Jesus is! Paul said in Romans 14:4, “Who are you to judge another’s servant?” Then he said in v.10, “But why do you judge your brother? ... For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” No matter what others may say about our worship and service, the most important thing is that we please the Lord. Our concern should be His approval alone. Now this leads to my final point. When you are criticized for showing love for Jesus, don’t pay attention to the critics. Instead;

III. LET JESUS MOTIVATE YOUR LOVE

Let us observe how highly our Lord esteems any service done to Himself.

A. He Praises Any Good Work for Him – In the last of v.6 He says, “Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me.” The Greek word translated “good” carries the meaning of good in the sense of “beautiful,” pleasing to the eye. And such it was indeed: unique in its thoughtfulness, regal in its lavishness, and marvelous in its timeliness. The Bible says that we are created in Christ unto good works (Eph. 2:10).

Notice the ways in which what we do is a good and beautiful work:

1. When We Do it for Jesus – Again, in the last of v.6 Jesus says, “She has done a good work for Me.” Christ implies that anything that is “for” Him, that is to say, directed towards Him under the impulse of simple love to Him, is a “good work”; and the converse follows, that nothing which is not in reference to Him deserves the title. There are many working in community organizations, doing good works, at least in the world’s eyes. But if they are not doing it for Jesus sake, and in His name, it will not be regarded as a good work in eternity.

Make sure that you do your good works because you love Jesus, and Jesus will regard it as a good work indeed.

2. When We Do What We Can –Jesus said in v.8 of Mary, “She has done what she could.” Years ago after my grandmother died, Cheryl & I were walking in the cemetery where she was buried. Then we came across her mother’s tombstone which said, “She hath done what she could.” That seems humorous at the time that someone would have that put on a tombstone. It was like, “She didn’t do much, but she hath done what she could.” But now I know where that came from. It was a quotation of v.8! Mary could not do many things. Perhaps she wasn’t good at cooking & serving a meal. But she did do what she could. But Christ would not have said that if she had taken a stinky spoonful out of the box of ointment, and dribbled that, in slow and half-grudging drops, on His head and feet. It was because she gave *all* that she could that made her work so admirable.

The question is not how much have I done, or given, but could I have done or given more? The Christian life is to be ruled by the great law of self-sacrifice, as the only adequate expression of our recognition of His great Sacrifice for us. I’m wondering today if those who are God’s people are really doing all they could do. How much more could you have given today? Teacher, how much more could you have done in preparing for your lesson today? Committee worker, have you done all that you could for Jesus? Have you left anything undone? Few of us are doing all that we can for the Savior.

3. When We Take Advantage of Opportune Moments – Jesus justified her actions in the last of v.8 by saying, “She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.” As some see it, Jesus is saying that Mary, without realizing it herself, had anointed Jesus for His impending death and burial. Mary may not have known that her Master’s death was so close at hand. On the other

hand, the fact should not be overlooked that Mary of Bethany was perhaps the best listener Jesus ever had. The woman who now anointed Jesus was the same one who had previously been sitting at His feet (Luke 10:39). Is it not probable that she sensed that Jesus was about to die, & thought, “This may well be the last opportunity I shall ever get to anoint His body for burial. So I shall do it now.” This viewpoint must not be ruled out. Mary had a spiritual discernment which was sadly lacking even in the apostles at this particular time. Here in the shadow of His suffering there was one who understood.

So we see in our text that Jesus not praises any good work done for Him, but furthermore:

B. He Promises to Reward Good Works – Jesus said in v.9, “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.” Jesus was soon to make the astounding prediction, “And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations” (13:10). But before Jesus makes the announcement about worldwide gospel preaching, He now solemnly promises that wherever the joyful story travels, the deed of Mary will march hand in hand with it. The memory of Mary’s noble act must be kept alive. The Lord’s prediction has certainly been fulfilled, and is being fulfilled again this very day!

Is not the real lesson here that God takes infinitely keen delight in rewarding the faithfulness of those who love and honor him? He is indeed “the Rewarder of those who diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Do you realize that God never forgets what you do for Him? What you do for the world will soon be forgotten. But what you do for Jesus will be remembered for eternity! Oh, it may not be noticed or recognized by fellow believers. But all that really matters is that Jesus knows. So let us work on, remembering that His eye is on us and that all we do is noted in His book. Let us take no notice of what people say or think of us because of our Christian faith. The praise of Christ at the last day will more than compensate for all we suffer in this world from unkind tongues.

Furthermore, there is implied here the significance and the long-term impact of the work which Christ accepts. Little did Mary know at the time that her deed would have such a lasting impact. What an inspiration she has been to the Church ever since!

A Sunday School teacher named Edward Kimball thought he didn’t have much impact as a Christian. In 1858, he at least was able to lead a shoe clerk to Christ. The clerk, Dwight L. Moody, became an evangelist, and in 1879 Moody awakened an evangelistic zeal in the heart of F. B. Meyer, the pastor of a small church in New England. Meyer, preaching on a college campus, won a student named J. Wilbur Chapman to Christ. While Chapman was engaged in YMCA work, he employed a former baseball player named Billy Sunday to help with evangelistic meetings. Sunday held a series of services in Charlotte, North Carolina, where a group of local men were so enthused by the meetings that they planned another campaign. This time they brought preacher Mordecai F. Ham to town. During one of his meetings, a young man named Billy Graham yielded his life to Christ. Since then, millions have heard the gospel through Graham’s meetings. You see, Edward Kimball started a ripple effect back in 1858 that continues to this very day.³

Even so, when you work for Jesus, and when God is involved, your work can indeed have lasting impact. That boy or girl in your Sunday School class, or Vacation Bible School class, may turn out to be one of the great Christians of their generation. And you were the one who helped guide him or her down the right path.

So then, let us take care of the part which is under our control, and that is the motive & effort. And Jesus Christ will take care of the part that is beyond our control, and that is the results.

³ Based on an Internet article by Bill Dunn. Courtesy of Croft M. Pentz.

And we shall be as much astonished when we to heaven as poor Mary. This reminds me of the question in Matthew 25:37, “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You?”

Conclusion: Jesus died on the cross for you. What have you done for Him? Have you done what you could? You can't win every soul to Christ, but you can win some soul to Christ. You can't single handedly serve in all the ministries of this church, but you can have a part in serving in some ministry of this church. You may not be able to teach a S.S. class, but can you sing in the choir? What will you do to show your love for Jesus? Will you serve Him in some way? Will you give generously to support His work? May this story motivate you to show your love for Jesus this week!

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 4/29/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

For further study, compare sources from Mt. 26:6-13; John 12:1-8.