



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 14: 1-11

Mark

"The Anointing at Bethany"

TRANSCRIPT

John, and we are beginning, I'm sorry. I said Hebrews this morning in the first service. What's going on? Well, we do have some connection with John, as you'll see. But anyways, Mark. And chapter 14. We're beginning in verses 1 through 11. So, you have turned to John. Turn back to Mark and follow along with me as I read, beginning with verse 1 of chapter 14.

Now the feast of the Passover and Unleavened Bread was two days off; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; for they were saying, "Not during the festival, lest there might be a riot of the people."

While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

And Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we pray?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the great privilege that we have this morning to come together and to study the Scriptures. And as we do so, we are minded of this great act of worship performed by this woman on behalf of Your Son, and reminded of what is important to You. And that is that we love You with our whole heart, and that we worship You, and that we be Your servants. Help us to be that way, father. Help us to have our hearts set on Your son. Help us to tear every idol from the throne in our hearts. Your throne, and place all of our affection upon You. We pray that You'd bless us this morning to that end, and that You would give us a good understanding of what we are to do, reminding us of who You are, father, that You are our creator and that Your Son is our redeemer, and that Your Spirit is the one who has brought us to Yourself. Father, we have so much to be thankful for and so much to be grateful for to You. And we pray that You would move within our hearts to make us the kind of people we ought to be, the kind of people that we see this woman to be. So we pray You'd bless us to that end.

Father, we pray You'd bless us not only spiritually. We do pray that Lord, not only for this time, but in the other classes that do meet, and for the time that we will meet again this evening, as we remember our Lord, that You would bless that time, and bless us spiritually in that way. But also Lord, bless us in the material things of life. We need them. You know that, and You know all of our needs, and You promised to provide our daily bread. We pray that You would do that, and that You would meet the needs of each and every one of us.

We pray, Lord, that You would give energy and discipline to the men who make provision for their families. In difficult days, when work is demanded of those who seek to provide for their family, give them strength and provide for them. And for those who are not able to do that, who are unemployed, we pray that You would make provision for them and ultimately provide them with work. Bless those who have sickness, and we pray that You give healing and that You give encouragement.

We pray for our nation, Lord, and we pray that You would bless it. Bless our leaders with wisdom as they seek to govern this land. May they govern it wisely, and may freedom be preserved, and freedom be expanded. And we pray for prosperity. But mainly, Lord, we pray that You'd bless spiritually. Because with spiritual blessing comes the other. There's nothing more important than the spiritual blessing. What does it profit a man if he gains the world and loses his soul? It profits nothing. So, we pray that many would come to faith and that You might use us to that end. And we pray that You'd bless us now as we consider the Scriptures and pray that You'd transform us as we read of these events before us in Mark 14, and pray that You would sanctify us. And may we be a people that represent well Your Son and Your grace to a world that is dark. Prepare our hearts as we sing our final hymn, that we will be ready for the study of Scripture, and may the Spirit of God teach us. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] 300 years ago, a book was written by Henry Scougal entitled "The Life of God in the Soul of Man." Scougal was a rather remarkable man who died rather young at the age of 27. But his book had a significant effect on a number of people for some generations. It was a book that was not written for publication. In fact, it was a personal letter that he had written to a friend to be of spiritual encouragement to him. But, it was privately circulated among friends and then among a wider circle of people and became very popular. And so, it was put into print.

It was one of George Whitfield's favorite books, put in his hands by John Wesley. And in it, there is this line: "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love." The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.

How do we measure the worth of a person's life? Well, often times, we do it in terms of money. In fact, we will sometimes ask of a person: how much is he worth? And what we mean by that is: how much money does he have? We place value on him accordingly. That's a typical question in a materialistic age and says much about what we as a society value. The objects of our love influence and shape our lives so that our lives do tend to have the worth, do tend to have the excellency of the objects that we love, of the things that we place our affections upon.

So, I suppose it's a proper thing for us to ask: what is it that is the object of our love? What do we value? Now, that question is not directly asked in our passage, but it certainly is an issue that comes up, because in our passage, Mark sets before us two people who had completely different objects of love. One loved things, the things of this world; the other didn't. One loved money, and the other didn't. One sought to please self, and the other sought to please Christ, the object of her love.

They are familiar characters to us. One is Judas, the disciple of our Lord; and the other is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. It was Mary, you'll remember, who angered her sister Martha when she left the household chores to sit quietly as a student at our Lord's feet. She was devoted to Christ, and evidently had that tendency to annoy people with her devotion to Christ.

Because she does it again here in the passage that we consider this morning when she quietly worships the Lord at great cost to herself. Now, Mary's name is not mentioned in the passage. You perhaps noticed that. We know it from John's account of this same incident recorded in John chapter 12. And according to John, the anointing occurred six days before the Passover, which put it on the Saturday evening before Palm Sunday, or the Sunday in which the Lord made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

But Mark is not following the chronology of events. Instead, he puts the event here in order to develop a theme, in order to develop a connection between the Lord's rebuke of the disciples which occurs in this incident, and Judas' decision to betray the Lord. Evidently, there's some connection between the two. Evidently, Judas came to the conclusion or made the decision to betray the Lord in some way because of the rebuke that he and the others received in the incident that we are going to consider.

And by inserting the incident between the plotting of the priests and the betrayal of Judas, Mark certainly does highlight the treachery of their act; and at the same time, the beauty of hers. That's how the passage opens, with the chief priests and the scribes plotting the Lord's death two days before the Passover.

This begins the last major section of Mark's gospel, what is called the Passion narrative, which records the events in our Lord's life of the agony in the garden, the arrest, and the trial of our Lord, His crucifixion, all of which conclude triumphantly with His resurrection on Easter morning.

And it's fitting that these events should occur at the time of Passover. The annual feast commemorating Israel's delivering from Egypt when the angel of death passed over the houses of the Hebrews who had the blood of the Passover lambs sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses. It's fitting I say because as Jewish households were making preparation for their Passover feasts and the slaughter of the Passover lambs, the Jewish leaders were making preparation to slay the true Passover lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a problem, however, and that was the people. Multitudes had filled Jerusalem. In fact, it's estimated that the population of Jerusalem doubled at Passover from 25,000 to 50,000. In fact, some people estimated much higher than that. Close to a million people filling the city. And the majority of these people were enthusiastic about Jesus. Many believed Him to be a prophet. Many believed Him to be the Messiah that was promised in the Old Testament.

And so, the leaders knew that. They knew the excitement that the crowd had for the Lord, and so they were very concerned about them, afraid of the people, and afraid that if they arrested the Lord openly, that that might provoke a riot. And so, they concluded that it would be much wiser to wait and to arrest the Lord after the feast of the Passover when the pilgrims had left, and when the city was much quieter.

That was their plan. But God had a different plan, a different schedule. His providence always overrules the plans of men. Unexpected help from one of the Lord's own disciples would come to them at the height of the feast. When the city was filled with people, it would be an offer that they couldn't refuse and would compel them to crucify our Lord publically, crucify him before Jews and Gentiles alike.

The result of that is, as Paul says in Romans 3, that God would display Him publically as a propitiation in demonstrate His righteousness. It was God's plan to have Him crucified in public. It was their plan to have Him put away quietly and privately. But in a public declaration the Lord was making at the cross, He was declaring His glory. He was declaring His holiness, and He wanted it seen by the world that He is just, and that He is loving toward the sinner.

And so, what we see here is what we see throughout the Scripture so often. As the psalmist puts it: God would cause their wrath to praise Him. He overrules the plans of men. He overrules the objections of men, as we will see in the passage that

follows. He's sovereign, and that gives us a great deal of comfort, that He's in control of the events, working them for our good.

Now, it's against this background of plotting and treachery that the example of Mary stands out. It's interesting to me how on more than one occasion, really throughout the Bible, but you see it very much in the gospels, how the Lord, or rather how the Lord will use the example of a quiet woman to show what truly pleases Him. And usually, in contrast to hard and self-righteous men.

Mary certainly does that. It happened in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper. John tells us that Lazarus was there along with his sister, Martha, which may indicate that the dinner was given in honor of the Lord for raising Lazarus from the dead. And given by this man, Simon, the leper whom we know nothing of other than that, but which would suggest to us that he was a man who had been healed of leprosy by the Lord.

And so, what we have here is a dinner that is given in honor of the Lord, in thanksgiving for all the love and the mercy that He had shown to these people. It was during the dinner, Mark writes, that a woman approached the Lord with an alabaster vial of costly perfume of pure nard.

Nard was a perfume made of aromatic herbs that were grown in the Himalayas between Tibet and India. And so, it was an exotic commodity carried from great distances over the ancient trade routes. And Mark stresses the value of it by describing it as pure. It hadn't been mixed with inferior substances to stretch it out or expand it or make more of it. It was pure. And because of that, it was costly perfume. In fact, in verse 5, its value is estimated at over 300 denarii.

Now, in those days, a workman's wage was 1 denarius a day. So, 300 would be roughly a year's wages, in the neighborhood of what? \$10,000.00, \$15,000.00, \$20,000.00 dollars maybe in today's currency. A great deal of money.

And with it, she anointed the Lord by breaking the narrow neck of the vial, which itself, an alabaster vial was very expensive. But she broke that and then poured the perfume over our Lord's head.

And John adds some details that are not found in Mark. He states that she anointed the Lord's feet, and then wiped them with her hair. So, she anointed Him from head to foot, and the fragrance of the perfume, He says, was so strong that it

filled the house, suggesting that this was a large bottle of costly perfume. It was a very generous gift.

And in that act, Mary was illustrating that her life was completely devoted to the Lord. Along with the perfume, she was pouring out her soul to Christ. Donald Grey Barnhouse calls this act "the perfume of a soul." But, in Mary's mind, as costly as it was, as expensive as it was, there was no cost too great for the Lord. What was perfume, what was money, what was time, what were these things? What were these commodities but things to be used for our Lord in His service and in praise of Him, in honor of Him. And so, she devoted what she had to Him. It was merely the crowning act in her life that was a life characterized by devotion to Him.

Three times, we see Mary in the gospels. The first, we have already mentioned. It's in Luke chapter 10 where she sat at the Lord's feet to be taught. The next time is in John 11 at the grave of her brother Lazarus, where she knelt at the Lord's feet. And then here, where she anoints His feet and wipes His feet with her hair. Her great ambition in life was to be at the Lord's feet, to be devoted to Him, to be pleasing to Him, to be in submission to Him.

Now, I don't believe in women preachers, but I'm not sure that a man ever preached a greater sermon than this silent sermon of Mary. And her unspoken text was Mark chapter 12 and verse 30. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart."

She did. That's the greatest commandment, and it's to be our chief ambition in life, and it's as we do that, as we make Him our goal and Him our ambition, and as we let go of this life and the things of this life, that we really begin to live life. It's as we break the bottle of the things that are most precious to us and give them to the Lord, that life becomes most profitable to us.

Now, we live in a day of great frustration, of emotional stress and psychological disturbances. Not 15 years ago, Martin Gross wrote a book entitled "The Psychological Society." And I think that describes very well the society in which we live. And unfortunately, it describes to a great extent, the church itself. And the past 20 years or so, Christian counselors and counseling clinics have mushroomed. Seminaries have psychiatrists on their faculties.

My point in mentioning that is not to criticize all of that. I think that there are times where Christians need to seek professional counseling. But it does point out

something that's rather disturbing, and that is that the church is in a crisis. Things are not as they should be.

Now, I know that we live in a fast-paced, high-pressure society. It's a good thing that we have Labor Day. In fact, we could use more than one Labor Day, I think, throughout the year. The American workforce is stressed out. Men are forced to work longer hours. So are women who are in the workforce. And when people get home from work, there are less leisure hours to work. There are all kinds of responsibilities at home that must be taken care of. And so, I think a great deal of that can account for the difficulties that Christians face. It's hard to control those kind of constraints that are put on our time.

But it may also be that many Christians are seeking their happiness in the world rather than in Christ, pursuing the world's goals rather than God's goals, thinking according to the world's standards rather than thinking according to the standards of Scripture.

There's clearly a crisis in the church, and we see that in the fact that Christians are promised peace. It's one of the things that we are promised. Paul mentions this in Philippians chapter 4. You find it elsewhere in the psalms and throughout the Scriptures, but we're promised peace. "Be anxious for nothing," he says in Philippians 4. "The peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." And yet, many Christians are not enjoying peace.

Now, if that fits you, and I think it does fit all of us to some degree or another, then we need to look at Mary. There was no one in that room on that evening that was more at peace than she was. And what had she done? She had poured out all of her savings, all of her possessions, contained in that one little bottle, and she had poured them all out in one brief moment of worship upon the Lord. And yet, she wasn't anxious. She was full of joy. She was full of peace.

Because she wasn't tied to this world. She was tied to our Lord. And so, she offered everything to Him. It was a marvelous offering of worship and praise to the Lord, one that was deserving of great praise.

And yet, not everyone was favorably impressed by her offering. It was quickly answered with a wave of criticism. What a waste, the disciples began saying. John identifies Judas as the one who made the complaint against Mary. He was



particular exercised over what she had done. He was a man who knew the value of things. The disciples had made Judas the treasurer of the group. John tells us that he is the one who kept the money box. A man who understood the value of things. In fact, he's the one who calculated the value of the perfume at over 300 denarii. In fact, he did it very quickly, within moments of the anointing. He knew how much she had spent.

So, he was obviously a man with an eye for money. In fact, he could only see her act in terms of money. And in his estimation, it was a complete waste. And to justify his complaint, he says that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. You have to admit that upon reading that, at least at first blush, it does seem to make some sense. It certainly seems more practical to help the poor than pour out perfume, than to waste money like that. I think of all of the hungry children in Jerusalem that could have been fed with that money. Or I think of all the homeless families that could've been helped with what amounted to a year's wage.

It's a plausible criticism, at least on the surface, but there was nothing genuine in it. It was all mercenary. John tells us that Judas was a thief, that he was stealing from the money box. And so, he was exercised over Mary's generous gift not because of the poor. He didn't care about them. He cared only about himself, and he saw money that could've gone into his pocket going instead to the Lord.

The object of Judas' love was money, and it influenced his life. But Judas wasn't the only one who was angry. Very easy to focus on Judas and say, "That's typical of Judas. He's just that kind of man that would do that." But the reality is: he wasn't the only one that was making his complaint known. All of the disciples were joining in this criticism, and their motives may have been more noble than Judas'. They may have had reacted out of a sense of righteous indignation and felt that this was truly an act of wasteful extravagance on her part.

They were wrong, as the Lord will state, but their reaction is a reminder of something that's very important for us to realize. And that is that the life that is poured out for Christ, the life that is fully dedicated to Him is going to be criticized. It's going to be criticized by the world, and we would expect that. But it's also going to be criticized by those who are closest to us. These were not members of the world that were criticizing Mary. These were her closest friends. These were people who had close fellowship with her, had been in the house of Mary and Martha and

Lazarus, had fellowshiped often with them, and they're the ones that are her main critics.

As I said, that's to be expected. Bishop Ryle writes, "If someone devotes time, money, and affection to the pursuit of worldly things, they do not blame him. If he gives himself up to the service of money, pleasure, or politics, they find no fault. But if the same person devotes himself and all he has to Christ, they can scarcely find words to words to express their sense of his folly. 'He is beside himself. He's out of his mind. He is a fanatic.' We can expect that. Because to many, a life that is devoted to God is a wasted life."

Take the experience of Martin Luther, for example. He was the son of Hans Luther who was a silver miner and a man who'd really done quite well and made some money, but he wanted his son to have it even better in life than he did. And so, he sent him to the University of Erfurt to study law in the hopes that he would become a lawyer, make a lot of money, and support him and his wife in their old age. Things went along very well.

Luther looked to have a very good future in law until the year 1505, when he was returning home for spring break, and was caught in a violent thunderstorm. Lightning was flashing, thunder was rolling, and Luther became terrified by it all. And in a moment of terror, he cried out, "St. Anne, help me. I will become a monk."

There's some question as to whether he needed to keep that vow, because it was made under some duress. But Luther was true to his word, and he'd made the vow, and he decided to keep it, and he decided to leave law school and go off to the monastery.

And when his father heard what he was going to do, he became enraged. And he said to him, "You're throwing away your life for this. We had great plans for you. We'd hoped that you'd be a lawyer and that you'd do well for yourself, and you'd be able to support us in our old age." He was very distressed over the decision that his son had made. And Luther's friends were as well. Those friends of his that he had from law school sought to dissuade him, change his mind, and even followed him all the way to the gates of the monastery.

And while he was not a believer at that time, he was certainly under the providential guidance of God. But, to his friends, to his family, he was throwing away his life. Here's a man with a great future in law, and he's wasting it all.

That's typical of many men, many women who have devoted their lives to the Lord. You see it in the life of Paul. No different. He makes a statement in 2 Corinthians 5:9 that caught my attention some time ago. It's one of those statements I think that you read a number of times. And it doesn't grab you at all. And then one day, you read it, and it really jumps out at you. It did that with me. It's a simple statement. He says, "We have as our ambition whether it home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." He wants to be pleasing to the Lord.

But as you think about what he's saying, that is his goal in life. His whole ambition in life was not to make money. It was not to obtain position. It was simply to please Christ, something that people in the world can't see, can't touch, can't put their hands on. That was his great ambition in life. And people thought he was a fool. Paul had given up a brilliant career as a Jewish lawyer. He was a man with connections. He knew Gamaliel. He was his prized student. He was a rising star in Judaism, and he turned away from all of that to serve a crucified Messiah, one who'd been treated as a criminal, one who was gone.

They called him a fool. That's what Paul tells the Corinthians. He says, "We are fools for Christ's sake." And we can be assured that if we pour out our life for the Lord, if we really dedicate our lives to Him and we live for Him, that the world is going to think the same of us.

Well, it did with Mary. And for her devotion, she was criticized. What a waste. What excess. How impractical. And the criticisms that she received were very severe. Mark uses a particularly strong word to express the disciples' displeasure. They were scolding her, my translation reads. But it's a word that was also used of the snorting of horses. So, you can just imagine these disciples around Mary like so many horses snorting at her. It's strong criticism.

They were really scolding her. And yet, what's Mary's response? Well, she says nothing in her own defense. Maybe she doesn't speak because she was taken aback by it all. And after all, that is, as I said, a plausible criticism. Why don't you give that money to the poor? What are you doing pouring it out like that? She's perhaps thinking, "I hadn't even thought of neglecting the poor. All I want to do is honor the Lord." And maybe she's taken back by this, doesn't feel that she's adequate to answer the criticisms that are being directed against her, and so she's silent, she says nothing to her critics.

But she didn't need to. Because the Lord quickly took up her defense. "Let her alone," He says. "Why do you bother her? She has done a good thing," a good deed, "to Me." Well, obviously she did a good deed, but wouldn't it have been a good deed to give to the poor and to help the poor? Yes, of course it would be. But well, wouldn't it be even a better deed to bless the poor and the hungry children than it would be to simply pour out expensive perfume? And the Lord says to that, "No, it would not." And what He's saying in making that statement is that it is more important to worship Him than it is to help men.

Now, why is that? How can that be? After all, if someone came and poured expensive cologne on me or expensive perfume on you, I wouldn't think that that was a good thing that they had done. I don't think you would either. I think you'd say it'd be much better to use that in a practical way to feed the poor. And yet, our Lord says, not in His case.

In His case, this was the right thing to do, the best thing to do. And the reason for that is He is unique. He's not like us. He's the Godman. He is God, God's Son, the second person of the Trinity. He is the creator of heaven and earth, and He is the redeemer of sinners. And because of that, He deserved this act of worship.

That's the word that was used by one of the commentators as I was studying through this. He writes, "He deserved it." A simple way of putting it, but it cuts right to the point. It says it all. He deserved that worship because of who He was. You and I don't deserve that, but He did, because He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And Mary, she understood that. She knew He deserved that adoration, and she was glad to give it to Him. That's what she did. As our Lord said, she has done a good deed to Me. It tells us something about good deeds. We can know what a good deed is if it honors the Lord. That's a good thing. She did that.

And further, He says, in verse 8, "She has done what she could." Now, that is a great word of praise. That's all God calls us to do. Not to do more than we've been gifted to do, not to do more than we have the ability to do. We don't need to get worried and anxious about whether we're doing enough because we're not writing books, or we're not preaching sermons, or we're not doing this or that. God calls us to do simply what He has gifted us to do, and called us to do. And for some, He's called to perform great works of service. Others, He has not.

I was listening to Dr. Johnson's sermon this morning coming over before the 8:30 service. And if you listen to it, you remember that he was preaching out of Matthew 25 and the parable of the talents. There were the three servants, and the first two were honored, and the first had been given five talents; the second had been given two talents. And He was very pleased with them. He was pleased with them not because they had excellent business acumen, because they were insightful on making good investments, and they'd given Him a great return for His money. He was pleased with them because they were faithful with what He had given them. And as Dr. Johnson pointed out, the touchstone and the basis of reward is not the amount that we do, but the faithfulness with which we discharge the gifts that He's given us.

Now, that's a great encouragement. What is important is what you use with what you've been given, that you apply it to the Lord faithfully. It's not how much you produce. Ultimately, that's God's work anyway. Are you faithful with what He has given you? And He's given us all something.

And that's what Mary did. She didn't write out a psalm and sing it to Him. As far as we know, she doesn't have any gift with words. We don't see her saying a great deal. But she used what she had. She used it to honor Christ. Not in a discernibly practical way. She didn't add a wing to the church. She didn't do anything like that. She didn't help the poor with her offering. She worshiped the Lord out of love for Him and devotion to who He is, and that pleased the Lord greatly. She could not have done a better thing. Had she given her money to the poor, it wouldn't have been as great a thing as she did.

Now, of course, none of this should be taken to suggest that there's a conflict between worshipping the Lord and helping the poor. And we shouldn't conclude from what our Lord is saying here that He was showing any disregard for the poor. All one needs to do is look at His life and look at His ministry, and you see throughout His ministry, He had been helping the poor, He'd been helping those in physical need, even when they weren't particularly grateful for what He did. Even when there was a great deal of selfishness on their part. And yet, that was our Lord.

And of course, we are commanded to help those in need. So, we are to do that, and there's no conflict here. But what the Lord is saying is: devotion to Him is the higher good. It's the highest good. And the Lord puts that in perspective for the disciples in verse 7, where He explains: the poor, you always have with you, " and

whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me." In other words, they were to take the opportunity to serve Him when they had that opportunity. That's what Mary did.

Time was short. In a few days, He would be arrested, He'd be put on trial, and He'd be crucified. And knowing that, she seized the opportunity to do the greatest thing that she could do, with what she had. She worshiped Him, and she worshiped Him at great cost to herself.

It was an act of self-denial. And a heart like that is the most tender heart, the most giving heart. And the kind of heart that will move a person to help the poor and to help those who are in need. We are not going to completely erase poverty. The Lord tells us that. He says the poor, you always have with you. And one thing that has been clearly demonstrated in the 20th century is that governments cannot erase poverty. But I think a careful study of history will show that where the gospel takes root, where the Bible is taught the clearest, societies flourish and poverty declines. The countries which embraced the Reformation flourished economically, and they became kinder societies. Calvinistic Holland and England became a refuge for those who were oppressed. It became a refuge for the Jewish people from Spain and from Portugal who were under persecution. And those countries prospered.

The reason for that is the gospel changes hearts. And when hearts are changed, society is changed. You see that in the great awakening in both England and America. England was in terrible shape socially, economically, and the revivals of Whitfield and Wesley changed that nation greatly. When the hearts of men are changed, societies are changed. Because when men come to Christ, Christ becomes the object of their love, and their lives become like His. And so, loving Christ, worshiping Christ, while it may seem like a wasted life, is really the most practical life of all. It has the greatest effect. Well, that was Mary's choice, to worship our Lord.

But her act of devotion was not a mere expression of sentimentality. In verse 8, the Lord makes it clear that she was making a profound statement in what she did. In anointing Him, she had anointed His body, He says, before the burial. This was something that the disciples struggled with all through our Lord's ministry. On many occasions He had told them that He was going to die, that He was going to be crucified. And they never could quite get it.

But Mary did. She understood these things. She had entered into our Lord's mind more fully than they had. She had a deeper understanding of the cross that was awaiting Him than the disciples did. That really shouldn't surprise us. Some commentators dispute that. They think that she didn't quite know what was going on. But I think that's wrong. I think she had a clear understanding of this, and that's what our Lord is saying. And that shouldn't surprise us because where do we find Mary? Well, she was the one who sat the Lord's feet to learn.

William Hendriksen said Mary of Bethany was perhaps the best listener Jesus ever had. It's one of the things that characterized her. She was a listener of the Lord, and that's how she entered into His mind, and that's how you and I enter into the mind of the Lord, and that's how we learn His ways. We do that by listening to Him, by giving our attention to Him, by seeking Him out and seeking Him through the word, and through prayer.

Because Mary was that kind of person, she realized that that evening might be the last opportunity that she had to show kindness to the Lord who had showed abundant kindness to her. And so, she decided to anoint Him while He was still alive, while He could still enjoy the blessing of her worship and her adoration, and be encouraged by her as He went to the cross.

So, she did that at that time, rather than wait until His burial. It was her knowledge of His death, and of who He was, who would die for her, what He would do in dying for her that explains her devotion. And, at the same time, it's the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples that explains their lack of devotion, explains their criticism of the Lord. They really didn't understand the sinfulness of sin and the greatness of grace. That, I think, is the key to devotion to the Lord.

Earlier in our Lord's ministry, we have an illustration, a beautiful illustration of that. It's out of Luke's gospel in chapter 7, one that I'm sure you're familiar with. And it's very similar to this because it also took place in the home of a man named Simon, but this Simon was a Pharisee. He invited the Lord to come and have dinner at his house. And yet, he showed very little respect for the Lord. He didn't obey the custom of washing the Lord's feet.

And yet, as the Lord was reclining there at table and eating, a woman comes in. She was a sinful woman. Probably a prostitute. She comes in and she begins to weep over His dusty feet. Then she begins to wash those feet with her tears and wipe

them with her hair. And, as she was doing this, the Pharisee Simon begins to complain in his heart. This all proves to him that Jesus is no one special, because He obviously doesn't know what kind of person this woman is who's touching Him, that she's a sinful woman.

And so, the Lord shows Simon just who He is by answering his thoughts. He says to Simon in effect, "Yes Simon, I know exactly who she is. She is a very sinful woman, but a woman who's been forgiven much. Because she's been forgiven much, she loves much." Then He says to Simon, "He who is forgiven little loves little."

Now, no one who is forgiven is forgiven little. But what He's saying is: the man who is self-righteous and doesn't appreciate the sinfulness of sin doesn't appreciate forgiveness and doesn't understand the grace of God. And that was Simon's problem. He was a self-righteous man who did not understand the sinfulness of sin. And because of that, he loved little.

Well, Mary had an understanding of God's grace, and the measure of God's grace and His love is demonstrated in the cross, where God would make in just a few days from this time, a public declaration to the world, not a quiet, silent secret statement of it, but a public declaration before Jew and Gentile alike of His love for sinners. And she understood that, and she was devoted to Him because of her great love for Him.

And so, in verse 9, against the criticism of these men, the Lord says of Mary's act of devotion: "Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her." And that's what we're doing. Here, some 2,000 years later, we are honoring what she did as has been done throughout the centuries by countless sermons and preachers honoring what Mary did. She would be remembered and honored for this great act of devotion.

But in contrast to Mary and how she would be remembered is Judas and how he would be remembered. Verse 10. " Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve," one of the most privileged men of all history, one of the twelve. Mark is underscoring that for us. "Went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them." Now, he was a man who had great spiritual privilege. Who can compare with Judas? Walked with the Lord for some three, three and a half years. Sat at His feet, heard the Lord teach more than Mary did. Participated in the ministry, was given



ability to cast out demons and do miracles. He did those kind of things. Even Judas. A man of great privilege. A man who had received nothing from the Lord but kindness.

Nothing but kindness from the Lord, and what does he do? This. Betrays the Lord. Because unlike Mary, he had not listened to the Lord with faith. He had not received the goodness of God with thanksgiving. Privilege is great. Privilege is important. But privilege isn't enough. It must be answered with faith.

And so, Judas goes off and he cuts a deal with the chief priest to betray the Lord in exchange for, wouldn't you know it, for money. Matthew gives us the sum as 30 pieces of silver. That's a cheap price. If you asked Judas: what's the worth and the excellency of Jesus' soul? He would've said, "30 pieces of silver." It's cheap. It's cheap to Judas, but it wasn't cheap to Mary. He was worth all that she had and more. There was no price you could put upon the value of the Lord to her.

So, who was the more excellent of the two souls? Who was the one we honor? It's the one who had the excellent object of love, the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary, she gave for Christ. She spent for Christ. Judas, he took for Christ because he loved self. And so, he joins forces with the enemy.

And now, the enemy was very happy, very delighted, as the text says, because they have a man on the inside. A man who can give us the secrets of our Lord's doings and goings, and help them carry out their carefully crafted plot to destroy the Lord, to destroy him. The Son of God.

So you have to ask yourself: is that really possible? Can man destroy God? It's what they're plotting to do. Man destroy God. Read the psalm. Psalm 2. God sits in the heavens and laughs at His enemies. Isaiah 40. The Lord sits on the vault of the earth and all of the inhabitants of the earth are like grasshoppers to Him. And they are going to destroy God?

Well, who killed Christ? Was it the Jews? Was it the Romans? Pilate? Caiaphas? Judas? Well, it's true. They had a hand in it. Peter says that. He says on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 that Jesus was nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men. They had their hand in it. But he also says He was delivered up to those godless men by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. In other words, His Father killed Him.

That's the testimony of Isaiah. Isaiah 53 in verse 10. "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief." His Father slew His only begotten Son for us, for sinful men and women. God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, while we were rebels, while we were against the Lord God, at that time, Christ, he says, died for us.

Judas, of course, was guilty. The Jews, the Romans were guilty. We can say that we are guilty because our sins were laid upon Him. But ultimately, the cross was the Father's work of love, and the Father's work of salvation.

And Mary must have had some understanding of that, a deep understanding of it. And that accounts for her devotion. If you're like me, and I had more time to consider this throughout the week than you did in this brief hour together. But if perhaps you too have listened and thought about Mary and thought: how does one get that kind of devotion? How does one have the kind of devotion that the apostles had where the chief end of their life, their whole goal in life, was to be pleasing to the Lord? How does one have that kind of devotion?

I think the answer to that question must be that we must begin with the cross. That's where we have to go to get that kind of devotion. And to do that, we must do what Mary did. Sit at our Lord's feet, learn from Him, give time to fellowship with the Lord through study, through prayer. It's a lifelong endeavor. But it only occurs through the study of the Word of God, through prayer, through faithfulness as we experience the experiences of life and see the hand of God and learn of Him, and learn about Him. Do that, and ask Him to grant that we might know Him better and love Him more.

In the words of William Cooper's hymn, "The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be, help me to tear it from Thy throne, and worship only Thee." Well, the Lord promises to do that if we seek Him. In Hebrews 11 verse 6, the author writes, "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

So, seek Him. Make it your chief ambition in life to please Him. There's nothing more important for you, for any of us, than to seek, to live a life that's pleasing to Him. The worth and excellency of a soul is measured by the object of its love. There's nothing more practical for us than to make Him the object of our love. And there is nothing more pleasing to the Lord Himself than doing that.

So seek the Lord and He will reward you, as the author of Hebrews promises. But the author of Hebrews also says that without faith, it is impossible to please Him. You must first believe in Him, recognize your lost condition, recognize your need of a Savior and trust in Christ. He is the Savior. He is the one who poured out His life for sinners, who died in the place of sinners and bore the wrath of God in their place so that all who believe in Him would be saved.

So if you've never believed in Christ, believe in Him. Trust in Him. Receive in Him the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. And then seek to live a life like Mary, like Paul: one who has as its chief object, to please Him. May God help you to do that. Help all of us to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for that which You have taught us in this passage, and reminded us of, and shown us in the life of this woman who says nothing, makes no explanation of her actions, simply does what is obviously an act of devotion to Christ. Help us to be that kind of person. Help us to be people who pour out our lives for Him, to see that in this life there is nothing more important than seeking to please Him, to please You, to please our Triune God. Give us that affection for You. Make Your son the object of our love. Change our hearts. Pray if there be any attendance who do not know Christ as Savior. We pray that You would bring them to the conviction of their sin, their need of a Savior, and cause them to trust in Him. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.