

What do you think of Christ?

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- [0 : 0 0] Now we could turn back to the chapter that we read together, the Gospel of Mark and chapter 14.
- Mark, chapter 14. I'd like us to consider the first nine verses together, but perhaps if we were to take a text, we could take the words of verses 3 to 9, I should say, and we can take our text from verse 6.
- But Jesus said, leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.
- Well, as we find ourselves here on the Friday evening of our communion, we could ask many different theological questions.
- There's much that could take up, and no doubt will, take up our conversation. But I would like to begin this evening by asking you a question, a question that might seem to be quite simple, yet the answer of which is quite profound.
- [1 : 2 3] Tonight, as you sit here in this church, what think ye of Christ? What do you think of Christ? Really and truly, in your heart of hearts, what does Jesus mean to you tonight?
- Throughout the scriptures, we see this question being answered many different times and in many different ways. You remember that Thomas, he referred to Jesus as my Lord and my God.
- Simon Peter, when asked, who do you think that I am? He answered, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Much can be said, much can be articulated by words as to what we think of Christ.
- And in the account that we have before us here with Jesus anointing at Bethany, we here see another example of what Christ meant to one of his people.
- But notice the expression of how this person shows what Christ means to her. She doesn't use words.
- [2 : 4 1] She uses actions. And isn't it so true, friend, that often it's actions that do speak louder than words. Words roll off our tongue so easily.
- We're all guilty of this. We'll say that we'll do something and perhaps as we say that and accompany it's plausible what we're saying we're going to do.
- But in actual fact, we never move on to doing that thing that we said we would do. We've all been guilty of that at some point. And so in reality, actions speak louder than words.
- We see this without Lord, do we not? He didn't just say that he was going to send his one and only Son into the world. He didn't just use words to give us hope.
- He actually did this. And so actions truly can speak volumes. And the actions of this woman here tonight, they tell us not only a lot about herself, but about what she thinks of her Savior, how highly she esteems the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [3 : 5 5] These are actions that are so significant that Jesus goes so far as to say that that wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

And that's what's happening here tonight, 2,000 years later. This simple act of faith is here being retold.

But who was this woman? And what exactly was it that she did that is being told as a memorial to her? Why is it that her actions are so significant?

How do such actions speak to you and to me tonight? Well, in terms of context here, we find Jesus in the last days before he finds himself on that cross on Calvary's hill.

He's going through those last moments before he would know what it would be to be forsaken by his Father. And no doubt at this point in time, in his humanity, these realities would truly have been weighing heavily on his heart, on his mind, as he looked ahead as to what was about to take place.

[5 : 17] But yet even although we see in this chapter at this point that a certain measure of normality is retained, here we see Jesus in a house, sitting at a table in the house of Simon the leper.

Now this in itself is quite interesting because a leper in these days was considered to be an outcast in society, in Jewish society. If you were a leper, you would have been deemed to have been unclean.

You wouldn't have been allowed to socialize. You wouldn't have been able to live in a city with the rest of the people in that city, much like what we're seeing today.

Those people who are being affected by that virus are not permitted to come and be with other people. There's nothing new in many ways under the sun.

But here is this leper sitting at a table with many people around him, including Jesus. And so this would indicate to us that this man has in fact been healed of his leprosy.

[6 : 27] And so it could be, it's quite possible, that the meal that we have before us here has been laid on as a token of thanksgiving, as a token of appreciation to the Lord for his goodness.

And so there they are. They're sitting at a table. They're just about to eat, or indeed they're perhaps in the middle of eating when we see this woman interrupting.

She interrupts what's a fairly ordinary meal with an extraordinary act. Let's look at verse 3 together.

A woman, in the middle of verse 3, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

An extraordinary act. But friends, we might want to pause there. We might want to ask ourselves the question, well, who exactly is this woman?

[7 : 40] And in order to answer this question, it's important that we piece together all of the other gospel accounts, the three gospel accounts of this one occasion.

When we do so, from Matthew 26 and John 12, we learn that gathered in the house of Simon is Lazarus, his two sisters, Mary and Martha, and the twelve disciples.

Now, perhaps even some gathered here tonight would say, no, no, no, these are two separate occasions. These are two different women.

But friends, tonight we have to go with the evidence that we have before us here in Scripture. Whenever we're coming to Scripture, we have to interpret Scripture by Scripture.

We have to go with what the Lord gives us and we have to piece it all together to give that bigger picture. The fact is that what takes place in all of these accounts of the gospels, of this extraordinary event, of this woman anointing Jesus, we see that all of these, they take place in a house in Bethany.

[8 : 55] Not only do they take place in a house in Bethany, but we see that this spikenard is used. Not only is this spikenard poured over the head of Jesus, but also there is protests from the disciples.

They protest that this money, as we'll see shortly, this spikenard rather could have been used to help the poor. That is in all of the accounts.

And then in turn we see in all of the accounts that Jesus goes on to rebuke the disciples. And so the likelihood of this coincidentally happening with two different women in two different houses in Bethany, it just doesn't make any sense.

If these were two different accounts, that would mean, would it not, that the disciples had rebuked a woman in front of Jesus for the very same thing that he had already told them not, what he had already rebuked them for before.

Of course, this is not outwith the realms of possibility. We know that. But this is highly unlikely, given the nature of what is happening here.

[10 : 16] But we might say, look at the detail. Here it says, they are in the house of Simon the leper. Elsewhere it says, it is Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

How can it be? They must be two separate locations. Surely there is a clear explanation for this. Could it not be that Simon the leper was perhaps related to Mary, Martha and Lazarus?

Is that not more likely than it being in two different places with two different women with such an extraordinary act taking place?

Some commentators have said that this could have been their father or their brother. But nonetheless, this is an extravagant act.

Just picture the scene. There they are at the table and Mary comes over to where Jesus is. She comes with her flask, with her bottle of spikenard.

[11 : 21] She breaks it and she pours it over his head. This ointment of pure nard, very costly, also known as spikenard, depending which translation you're using, it wasn't like the everyday spikenard that could be bought at the market.

This was a vastly expensive ointment. This was an ointment that was prepared from the roots and the stem of a plant that was native to the Himalaya mountains in India.

It wasn't easy to come by, as it were, and that's what made it so expensive. That's what made it costly. We read that it was worth 300 denarii.

Now this was equivalent, as I'm sure we know, this was equivalent to a whole year's wage. The average British salary, I'm told, is around 30,000 years.

Of course, it's 30,000 pounds, rather. Of course, some people earn a lot more, some people earn a lot less, but that is the national average. So just imagine tonight what we could spend with that money.

[12 : 28] Imagine what you could spend with that money. I'm sure it certainly wouldn't be a bottle of perfume. And if it was, you wouldn't want to use a drop.

And so this was an ointment that was the kind of ointment that would be locked away. It would be locked away in a safe place. It would only be taken out on very special occasions, perhaps a drop or two being used, which is another reason to show us that this must be the one house, the one woman.

Even the jar itself, that had value. Alabastered, it was a fine variety of marble. It was quarried in Egypt, and it would have been carved into this delicate jar, which would have had a long stem, a long neck.

Such a valuable oil, it warranted to be kept in a precious jar. It wasn't just kept in any old earthen vessel. It had to be kept in something that itself was special.

So we might ask ourselves, well, what is Mary doing? Has she here taken leave of her senses? This oil has been got by working so very hard.

[13 : 50] Many hours, no doubt, have been put into toiling so that this oil could be purchased. And here she is, here she is using it in such an extravagant, excessive way.

Yes, we know that in Jewish custom, when guests would come, they would be anointed with oil, but not this much. Certainly not a whole bottle full.

But friend, for me, this was no ordinary dinner companion. This was the Lord Jesus Christ. She didn't care.

She was determined to use every last drop on him without hesitation. Without hesitation, she breaks this alabaster jar, presumably at its neck.

She allows this fragrant oil to flow freely on the head of her beloved. But a drop or two it wouldn't do. For her, Jesus, was worthy of her oil.

[14 : 59] But you know, friend, it wasn't just his head that was anointed. Mary didn't stop there. We see in John's account of what happened that not only did she anoint his head, but she anointed his feet.

She anointed his feet and she wiped his feet with her hair. What a picture. This really meant something.

1 Corinthians 11, it tells us, does it not, that a woman's hair is her glory. And so here we see Mary effectively surrendering her glory to the Lord in this gesture of love.

But why does she do this? Why does she behave in such an extravagant way? Jesus didn't ask for this. Jesus didn't expect to be treated in such a way as he sat down for a meal that night.

Jesus tonight surely doesn't want his followers to follow him in such a way as this. Surely this was even an impulsive act.

[16 : 11] that in the frenzy, if you like, of Jesus there being in front of her very eyes, she lost control of her reason.

She simply couldn't help herself and she didn't realize the economic significance of what she was doing. She knew exactly what she was doing.

just because the disciples were far too busy arguing about who was going to be the greatest in heaven, just because they were so sidetracked, taken up by secondary issues, doesn't mean that she was.

You know friends, we can be so taken up by secondary issues, can we not? It's the Lord's people. We can devote so much time, so much energy, so much of our discussion into that which is not even revealed to us in Scripture.

And yet all the while what do we do? We neglect our Savior who is there before our very eyes.

[17 : 18] What think ye of Christ? Here was a deeply perceptive spiritual woman. Here was a woman that you could call if you like a mother in Israel.

We all know that woman don't we? We've all had that woman in our life at some point, that godly woman that we've looked up to. That humble woman, that discerning woman, that woman whose counsel and company we covet.

That woman who is not sidetracked by the nonsense that we can be so often sidetracked by that woman who has her eyes set firmly upon her Savior.

That's our example tonight. And you know there's a very good reason for this spirituality, for this discernment.

There's a very good reason that every godly man and woman, there's a very good reason that Mary herself is to be found in such a state of true spirituality.

[18 : 32] Where is she? At the feet of Jesus. Often in the company, often at the feet of Jesus. That's what we see in Luke 10.

She's there sitting, soaking up his teaching, his word. In John 11 we read that when she comes to Jesus, she comes to Jesus in her time of sorrow.

She comes following the death of her brother Lazarus and there we find her worshipping at his feet as she anoints him with this oil.

It was a real relationship with Jesus. She knew Jesus and she knew him well because she spent time with him. You know friends, we can have all the head knowledge in the world.

We can pontificate all day long about this, that and the next thing. But do we know Jesus? Do we truly know Jesus?

[19 : 35] So that when eyes are not upon us, that is where we go. That we seek his face to shine on us day after day. That's what really matters to us. Not filling our heads with theology that is good and proper absolutely, undoubtedly, but yet has no bearing on our walk as the Lord's people in this world.

What think ye of Christ? She knew him because she spent time with him. How often do we truly spend time with our Saviour?

This is a challenge. In his word, at a throne of grace, pleading his promises, pleading his presence in our midst.

How often do we do that collectively as the people of the Lord? Perhaps that's what we need to go back to. Perhaps we need to call upon his name with a spirit of earnestness.

Perhaps we need to treat him as one who is living and true, one who cares for us, one who desires after our well-being, not treating him as some sort of abstract concept that is confined to the pages of a book.

[20 : 55] And as she got to know him, no doubt, as she looked into his eyes, she could see something. She could see that sorrow, that anguish that was laid upon him as he reflected on what lay ahead on that cross.

She certainly knew what lay ahead. Whether she saw it in his eyes or not, she knew that he was to be crucified on that cross on Calvary's hill. The disciples were unaware of this, or if they were aware of it, they simply couldn't accept it.

Yes, they knew plenty other things, but this, they couldn't swallow. But this woman did, and she showed this here, did she not?

She knew that it was going to happen. And because of what she knew, of what she believed, Mary's anointing of Jesus was so much more than any customary anointing of a dinner guest.

She wasn't dedicated, as I said, to an idea or a cause or even a religion. Mary here is dedicated to the person of Christ himself.

[22 : 04] She loved him. She loved him dearly and she knew exactly what lay ahead of him. She had that foresight and she wanted to ensure that the body of her saviour would be anointed in preparation for his death.

Do we know really what lays ahead for us as the Lord's people? Do we know what lays ahead for the Lord himself? Here, Mary knew that Jesus was to die.

we know here tonight that Jesus is to return. Any day, we don't know when. Do we believe it?

Do we expect it? Or are we like the disciples? Are we so busy taking up our time with this, that, and the next thing, that we fail to see the real reason of why we are here?

We are making our way to a greater place. do we truly see that? Are we making preparation for that day after day with one eye yes here, but yet another eye on eternity?

[23 : 16] Is that our testimony tonight? Are we like Mary? She had foresight. Friends, let's seek that foresight.

That foresight that yes, enables us to enjoy times such as these around the word of God, but yet the foresight that enables us to see that this is not it, that we are going on to a far greater inheritance.

Jesus himself acknowledges her foresight. Verse 8, she has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for burial.

This was no meaningless, impulsive act. This was no outward show for the praise of her fellow men and women. That's not what this is.

This is the most beautiful act of worship, of love, of devotion. It's as if Mary has peered within the veil of what lay ahead and because of this she doesn't want to hold back.

[24 : 26] Why? Because she knows in her heart that her Saviour is not going to hold back from her. He would be extravagant with his love, with his grace.

To the natural man it would appear that willingly dying such a horrific death is senseless. It's unthinkable.

They would say that it's an unnecessary waste of a life. Yet, friends, the reality is, and let's never, ever, ever lose sight of this. Grace is extravagant.

It's so extravagant. It's more extravagant than anything this world can and ever will try to give you. It's so lavish. And all holy God, just think about it, and all holy God, the one who has inhabited eternity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and perfect union and communion, one with another, condescending, condescending, coming right down to our level, taking to himself bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, the sinless man being born into a sin-sick world, living in a life in the light of the knowledge of what was to come.

that horror of experiencing hell itself, the hell that should have been yours, the hell that certainly should have been mine.

[26 : 12] Yet what do we have to look forward to if we had his tonight? An eternity of sinless bliss. Is that not extravagant love?

love? Also that wretched, undeserving sinner such as Mary, such as you and me, that we will not perish, but we will have everlasting life.

That is extravagant love, but that is our Savior. You see, the reality is, although Mary was here anointing Jesus, what's behind all of this is the very fact that Mary herself had been anointed by Jesus.

He'd anointed Mary with what? He'd anointed Mary with the oil of his spirit. That's what she's saturated in.

That's what every child of God is saturated in tonight, the oil of his spirit, his covenantal love, a love that here stars her up so that she seeks in any which way that she can to reciprocate this love.

[27 : 31] What an example. Don't we feel that we fall so far short when we examine our lives? When we grumble, when we moan when the Lord calls us or someone and the cause of the Lord calls us to do something in his name and we're so unwilling.

Imagine he had been unwilling for us. Where would we be tonight? Where would we stand? Yet not everyone shares in Mary's enthusiasm.

Just look at these disciples complaining that she's used every last drop. We've seen this, have we not? This is the way we are. We lose sight of the bigger picture and we complain.

complaining that she's used every last drop of the spikenard, that it was nothing short of a waste of money. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, verse 4, why was this ointment wasted like that?

For this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor. And they scolded her.

[28 : 47] And of course we can, I suppose, understand their concerns to a degree this ointment could have been sold. The money could be used to help feed the poor.

That is undoubtedly the truth. But for Mary at that very point there was a cause far greater than the poor and the needy and that was her saviour.

She here had her priorities all right. we know there is a time and a place to provide for the poor and needy.

Scripture tells us that. It tells us to love our neighbours as ourselves. To love our neighbour as ourselves. To love our fellow man as ourselves.

That is what we are commanded to do. That is what is expected of us as the Lord's people. But prior to this, before we do this, what do we need to do, we need to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our souls and with all our minds and then our neighbour as ourselves.

[29 : 58] That is the first and the greatest commandment. If that is not there, every single thing that we do in this world, no matter how commendable, it is all in vain.

And so we see here that these disciples have a critical spirit. They have a critical spirit so they are not able to partake of exactly what is happening here.

They are not able to partake of the blessing of seeing their sister in Christ showing such love to her Saviour.

And that is what happens when we have a critical spirit. When we have a bitterness within us, we miss out on the blessing. We are so taken up with something else that we miss out on what is before our eyes.

We miss out on the blessing that perhaps a brother or sister in the Lord has come to profess faith. We miss out on the blessing in a fellowship because we have got something else in our hearts that is clouding our communion with our brethren.

[31 : 07] We know what that is like. But the Lord here makes it clear that she has done a good thing.

They are missing the point. She has done a good thing. Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to 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 done what she could. Not out of duty. Not out of tradition. But out of love.

Unashamed love. Love that doesn't care what anyone else thinks. Love that doesn't stop her by the fear of man.

[32 : 08] Love that makes her and enables her to act boldly for the one who has acted so boldly for her. This for Mary was a matter of the heart.

Jesus was at all and in all and she wanted to give him her all. What an example. I quoted Spurgeon last night and I'll quote him again.

He said this. Let us give our well-beloved the best we have and he will call it beautiful.

Mary's gift was all for him and all for love. What's our gift to the Lord tonight?

what is it that we give to the Lord? By way of reciprocal love? We can never give to him what he's given to us.

[33 : 10] But what is it in our heart that we desire to give over to him? Perhaps tonight you feel that you don't give much, that you are a poor servant of Christ.

You may feel that your love for him is far tonight from being extravagant. In fact, in your own mind, it's really quite meager. Well, friends, be that as it may be.

Be assured. Be assured that there is something you can give. I asked at the beginning, what think ye of Christ?

Well, on the Lord's day you are afforded, are you not, the opportunity to show forth what you think of Christ? Not by words, but by actions, by giving him of your obedience, that is your spikenard.

A spikenard which is so fragrant of the grace of the Spirit of the Lord, having worked in your life. A spikenard very costly that you bring, that has not costed you, but has costed the very one who has given it to you.

[34 : 27] The one who has given to you his righteousness. You come with that. That's what you come with. When Mary anointed Jesus, we see that the fragrance of the oil, no doubt, would have filled the whole room for all to smell, the aroma of that act of love, there for all to know.

You know, that reminds us, does it not, of that beautiful picture in the song, the song of Solomon, chapter 1. Here we see when speaking of her beloved the bride saying, while the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance.

Friends, it's only when he is at the table, when king Jesus is at the table, that our spikenard will send forth its fragrance.

What does that look like? How do we know that that is true? Well, Matthew Henry puts it like this, it's only when our spikenard, our graces are exercised, our hearts are broken by repentance, healed by faith, and inflamed with holy love and desires toward Christ, with joyful expectations of the glory to be revealed.

Joyful expectations of the glory to be revealed. Is that what we're lacking today as a church, as a people? That joyful expectation of the glory that is to be revealed.

[36 : 06] Then the spikenard sends forth the smell thereof. That's what we long for. This church would be filled with the aroma of Christ.

But dear converted friend, you who have not professed yet, perhaps this room will not be filled with the aroma that it could be because you're not allowing that spikenard to go forth.

You're keeping it to yourself. You come with what he's given to you. You come and know the blessing that follows that obedience so that all of us together that we will be granted a glimpse, even a glimpse of the beauty of our beloved.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for the wonders of thy grace, a grace that has touched the hearts of sinners such as we are.

We pray, oh Lord, that we would be mindful not only in these days, but every day, of the words of the hymn writer, amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

[37 : 40] I once was lost, but now I'm found, I'm blind, but now I see that our hearts would bow down and worship and praise and adoration for all that is so bountifully ours in Christ, for the love and the mercy that has been afforded to us in and through the sacrifice of our beloved.

Go with us then, we pray and forgive us, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's conclude our time of worship. Let's sing to God's praise from Psalm 84.

Psalm 84, reading at verse 7 of the Psalm. This is from the Scottish Psalter. So they from strength unwearied go, verse 7, still forward unto strength, until in Zion they appear before the Lord at length.

Lord God of hosts, my prayer hear, O Jacob's God, give ear, see God our shield, look on the face of thine anointed deer, for in thy courts one day excels, a thousand rather in, my God's house will I keep a door, and dwell in tents of sin.

We'll sing down to the end of the psalm now to God's praise. So they from strength unwearied go, still forward unto strength. strength.

[39 : 09] So they from strength unwearied go, still forward unto strength, until in I on they appear before the Lord at land.

Lord God of hosts, my prayer here, O Jacob's God, give ear.

See God, our sheep, look on the face of thy anointed deer.

For in thy course one day excels a thousand rather in.

My God's will I keep adore, and dwell in tents of sin.

[40 : 59] For God the Lord's a sun and shield, in grace and glory give.

And dwell with hope no good from them, that of rightly due live.

O thou that art the Lord of hosts, that man is truly blessed.

If I assure confidence on thee alone the rest.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you now and forevermore.

[42 : 29] Amen.