

The Road to Calvary: Focus on Jesus  
Mark 14:1-9

Mark 14, the longest chapter in the gospel narrative, ushers in a change of focus. The disciples have witnessed Jesus' ministry of teaching and preaching and healing in Galilee. They walked the streets of Jerusalem with Him. They were there when He rode the donkey, when He overturned the vendor tables in the Temple, when He met the challenges of the Pharisees and exalted the widow's offering. They've sat at His feet on the Mount of Olives as He answered their question about the future, about the destruction of the Temple, about the changes that were coming in the world, and about His return.

Soon they will leave the suburbs and return to the streets of Jerusalem, to the Temple district, and, to the Palace where Pilate will judge and sentence Jesus to death on the cross, a death most of them will watch from afar. The focus of Mark 14 and 15 is the passion of Jesus, His arrest, trial, scourging, and crucifixion. We are clearly on the road to Calvary and the focus is not the far future but the suffering of the Savior in the immediate present. **Focus on Jesus.**

There is much going on in the world today, just as there was then. There are wars and rumors of wars. There are earthquakes and famines. There is disease and pestilence. There is social unrest, cultural decline, spiritual betrayal, and relational violence. There was then. There is now. Mark's audience faced persecution and adversity as they held to the faith. The message of Mark 14 is for us as it was for them. **Focus on Jesus!** You will find the strength and perspective and grace for life in these days when you **focus on Jesus.**

This chapter opens with a group of Jewish leaders who have the wrong focus regarding Jesus. The chief priests and the scribes were focused on Jesus but they were focused on His assassination. They wanted Jesus dead. They wanted Jesus gone. To them He was a threat to both to national security and their personal authority. Jesus taught the people God's truth with the authority of God's Son. And the people listened. His popularity and influence grew. So much did the crowd love Jesus that these schemers delayed their plan lest an uproar occur during the most important religious feast of the Jewish year.

This is the focus on Jesus of an unbelieving world. He is an irritant, an obstacle to their human-centered goal of self-exalting denial of God their Creator. They want Him gone. They want Him dead. They want to be their own authority, their own gods. They want the world to go their way, be focused on their interests. They are focused on assassinating their competition. They seek to kill Jesus.

In the world in which we live, there are three ways to be rid of Jesus. The first is ignorance. Allow no one to hear the truth about Him. Keep the culture ignorant of the Savior. You can do that either by silencing the gospel or by corrupting the gospel. You can prevent people from telling the truth about Jesus or you can change the truth about Jesus and let people believe a lie. You can shut them up or deceive them. Either way, if you want to be rid of Jesus, keep people ignorant.

Another way to assassinate the Savior, both personally and socially, is through indifference. Simply make Jesus irrelevant. Nurture doubt about the veracity of God's word. Raise questions about the

historical integrity of the life of Christ. Instead of humble, God-seeking prayer and worship, encourage churches and church people to focus on secondary issues of social justice and the human condition. Make Jesus just another cog in the wheel. Reduce His importance. Just turn Him into another social stimulant who doesn't matter. If you can't keep people ignorant, make them indifferent. If they must know something about Jesus, convince them what they know doesn't matter so they won't care.

If ignorance and indifference in this world don't rid you of Jesus, go the direct route. Hang Him on a cross and keep Him there. This is the intent of the Jewish leaders as we open chapter 14. **These are those who seek to purge any knowledge of Jesus from their personal and community conscience.** They actively scheme and maneuver the public death of Jesus. They reject Him outright, vocally, loudly, publicly.

The unbelieving world focuses on Jesus to reject Him. But the unbelieving world are not center stage in the opening scene of Mark's passion narrative. Among them comes one whose focus on Jesus is appreciative, loving, devoted, sacrificial, memorable worship.

It is supertime in the house of Simon the Leper. We know little of Simon other than he had been a leper at some time and was, presumably healed and home, for he would not have been allowed to be at home or hosting a dinner if he were still a leper. We do not know if Jesus healed Simon, however, it might make sense that a man healed of leprosy would honor his healer with a celebration dinner.

Whatever Simon's story is, he is not the focus of this event. A woman enters the room. Her presence is somewhat scandalous. Women were not invited to attend such dinners. They were not allowed to interrupt except to serve the food. This woman comes without announcement or invitation and she comes not with focus on the host but on the honored guest. She comes not with food to be served to the crowd but with a single, extravagant gift for the Guest.

Mark does not give us this woman's name. John identifies her as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. She enters the room with an alabaster flask of ointment, a container of rare and expensive perfume. The flask is almost as valuable as the contents, a feature not uncommon today among rare and expensive perfumes.

Shumukh costs 1.3 million dollars. The small bottle is housed in a display in Dubai that is about six feet tall. This incredibly expensive perfume was designed to reflect the "spirit of Dubai." The container features over 3,500 diamonds and 18-carat gold details. The perfume gets a big chunk of its price from the staggeringly expensive materials encasing the fragrance. What's the perfume smell like? According to the company behind the fragrance, the scent includes notes of amber, Turkish rose, sandalwood, and more. Reportedly, this perfume took over three years and 400 trials to formulate. The manufacturer also says the fragrance should last on the skin for more than 12 hours.

This is something of the comparison. The roughly twelve ounces of perfume in this woman's hands costs a year's wages. It is likely that this bottle is a family heirloom, a treasure. The woman enters the room, breaks the seal on the flask, and pours out its aromatic contents on her focus: Jesus.

Notice that in this entire event, she asks nothing of Jesus. She is not negotiating a blessing, seeking a favor, conducting a transaction. She simply brings her treasure, her personal best, and gives it to Jesus. Focusing on Jesus she sought no other opportunity than to honor and serve Him with the best that she had.

There were two reactions to this woman and her actions. Jesus defended her with three assertions. He exalted her gift as a beautiful thing. He compared her gift with that of the others when He said, “She has done what she could.” It was something of a challenge to the other guests. Had they done what they could for Jesus? In the days ahead, would they do what they could for Him, or would they deny and betray and abandon Him? Jesus memorializes this act of true worship when He says, “Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” Today this woman’s faith and devotion has come to our corner of the world and we hear her cry from a distant place long ago, “Focus on Jesus.”

Jesus’ reaction to the woman is gracious exaltation, genuine appreciation. The other reaction is furious indignation. These guys are so mad their nostrils are flaring like raging bulls. They are more concerned about what they label economic waste than the spiritual reality of the moment. They see the flask. They smell the perfume. They run the numbers. They scolded the woman. Another way of understanding that word is that they accosted her. They berated her. They lambasted her. They chewed her up. They bawled her out. They dressed her down. They gave her a whopping helping of what for!

Here they are guests in the home of a man healed of leprosy, sitting at the table with both a miracle and the miracle worker, observing a gracious act of sacrificial love, it is an eternal moment and they miss it. They focus on the temporary, on the values of this world rather than the infinite value of Jesus. I wonder, **how often do we miss the beauty of Christ, the glories and mercies of God, because our focus is on the wrong thing, the worldly thing instead of Jesus?**

That thought leads me to ask this question: **How do we focus on Jesus in our lives?** How do we follow the example of this woman who focused on Jesus? This woman gives us four practices worth considering. **First, make the choice to honor Jesus with the best you have to offer.** It took some reflection and intent to take her family’s greatest treasure and bring it to Jesus. She had to have known Him and understood His value and worth. She had to have loved Him and trusted Him. What makes her sacrifice so memorable is that she saw the value of Jesus as greater than the value of her wealth and she focused on Jesus.

**Second, move your intent into action.** It is one thing to say you love Jesus. It is another thing to love Jesus. I think of a bit of a southernism here. I remember as a child an adult might ask, “Do you love me?” to which we would shake our heads and say yes. The response would then be, “Well child, can I get some loving?” Or “Come love on Gramma, then.” Don’t just say it, do it. Bring your intent out of the realm of theory into the realm of action. This woman didn’t just think Jesus was worthy of a sacrifice, she made the sacrifice. She interrupted the party. She broke the flask. She poured the perfume. She endured the criticism. She received the commendation.

Which brings us to the **third practice of focusing on Jesus, break open the resources with which God**

has entrusted you and make your offering. Treasures in this world are meant for Him. Jesus, on another occasion, taught His disciples,

**Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV) “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”**

Treasures in this world serve their purposes but ultimately it is their heavenly purpose that matters most. Put your worldly treasures to work for your spiritual, eternal benefit. Honor Christ with what you have. We too often sit on this world’s treasures hoping somehow they will benefit us more than the grace and power and promise of Almighty God! Release yourself and your resources to the loving and gracious approval of Christ.

Finally, to focus on Jesus like this woman did, you have to narrow your focus. Discount the value of the gift and elevate the value of the Recipient. Discount the meanness of the world and elevate the affection of Christ. Discount making comparisons with others and elevate your own faithfulness. Don’t let what others do or don’t do become an excuse for your negligence or lack of focus. **You know what you have. You know who Christ is. Do what you can with what you have regardless of what anyone else says or does. Focus on Jesus!**

Want to know what a person really loves in their life? Watch how they use their resources. Check out what they spend their money on. Where do they devote their time? How do they use their talents? Where do the benefits of their choices and actions go?

Jesus serves the One He loves. He gave His life in love for the Father’s glory and in love for those the Father chooses. These are worthy of your love: the Father’s glory, the Son of God, the people of God, the “not-yet” believers to whom we are sent. **Focus on Jesus. Love Him and love what He loves.**

Everyone at the table that day made an offering. Simon offered hospitality. The indignant guests offered vitriol and hypocrisy. The woman offered worship. Jesus offered Himself. Now, the Spirit of God brings each of us to the table. **Where will you focus?** What offering will you make? **Will you focus on Jesus?** Will you let everything else fade into the background and bring your best to Jesus, making an offering worthy of Him? Will you give yourself to Christ?

Or will you walk away from Him, grumbling that the expense is too great, the loss too formidable, the cost too extravagant? Will you sit silently at the table like Simon? Will you dismiss and judge the offerings of others while making no offering of your own, like the indignant guests? Or will you give the best you have to give, doing what you can, like the woman? **Where will you focus this morning?** On yourself? On the world? On Jesus?