

“Final Preparations”
The Gospel According to Mark 14:1-11
December 2nd, 2018

A 6-year old, who was becoming quite knowledgeable about the Bible because of her grandmother’s teaching, asked her grandmother: “Which Virgin was the mother of Jesus? The Virgin Mary or the King James Virgin?”

As the children, the choir, and readers have demonstrated already in today’s service of worship, this is the first Sunday of Advent. The term ‘Advent’ comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means “coming” or “arrival.” Advent is a 4-week preparation for the coming of God the Son, Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah to earth.

Properly, then, we celebrate Jesus’ advent that first Christmas, born to the Virgin Mary in a lowly manger in the Judean town of Bethlehem. Yet, we also do well to prepare for Jesus’ future – and second - advent to earth. Interestingly, that’s what we studied last Sunday morning when we finished **Mark chapter 13, verses 24-37**.

Today, we begin our study of chapter 14 of Mark’s gospel account. As we’ll see, the scene shifts back to the small town of Bethany, some 2 miles outside of Jerusalem. There, in the house of a man known as Simon the leper, we witness a remarkable act of devotion to Jesus by one of His followers. Whether she knew it or not, this woman’s act is also a preparatory event – a step in final preparations for Jesus’ death, which was soon to happen.

Mark 14:1-11:

“After two days it was the Passover and *the Feast* of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. ² But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people.”

³ And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured *it* on His head. ⁴ But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, “Why was this fragrant oil wasted? ⁵ For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they criticized her sharply.

⁶ But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. ⁷ For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. ⁸ She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 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.”

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. ¹¹ And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.”

The preacher began his sermon by saying, “I am not well prepared this week. It has been a terribly busy week, and I just didn’t have much time to prepare my sermon. We’ll have to rely on the Holy Spirit! Next week I’ll try to come prepared.”

In using that illustration, I must also point out that the Spirit of God *is* present in the preparation of every sermon that I prepare. Spontaneity - when it comes to preaching - is more akin to foolishness than it is to faith. Digging into God's Word to develop an expositional message from sacred Scripture that is applicable to the people of God *must* be fueled, guided, and directed by the Holy Spirit. It is the only legitimate method of preparing a message from God's Holy Word.

These 11 verses before us today are segmented into three parts. As such, they make up a spiritual sandwich. This could also be illustrated by bookends on a shelf. The bread on both the top and bottom of the sandwich, or the bookends, consist of the chief priests and scribes of verse 1 and Judas Iscariot of verses 10 & 11. The meat, or center of the sandwich, is the anointing of Jesus revealed in verses 3-9. The bread of the sandwich, as well as the meat in the middle, evident here in the opening verses of **Mark Chapter 14** are preparatory steps – the former plotting trickery to betray and kill Jesus. The latter is the outcome of Jesus' death; His dying to save the people He came to earth to save. "The ugliness of (the priests & Judas Iscariot) makes the beauty of (Mary's) sacrifice even more meaningful." (Wiersbe, 158)

Actually, preparation is highlighted at the very beginning of this book. In **Mark 1:1-3**, we read these words, some of which were first uttered by the prophet **Isaiah (40:3)** – "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You." ³ "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.' "

Much of life is preparation, is it not? This morning, the choir and the Sunday School children made their final preparations to be demonstrated during today's service of worship. Afterwards, instrumentalists with the praise team will continue preparations for when they next offer music in worship. Sunday School teachers prepared lessons for their students before delivering them the hour before worship this morning. Athletes, actors, orators, first responders, military personnel – and so many more – prepare for competitions; for movies, shows, and plays; accidents, emergencies, or national defense.

You, dear ones, prepared for being here this morning – you may have selected and prepared the clothes you're wearing, you likely went to bed at a responsible time, you completed your Bible study lesson, or read and meditated on this sermon text. Hopefully, you prayed for those participating in leading and aiding worship, for your fellow church members, and for the readiness of your own heart to receive God's Word through this sermon. Preparation is a mark of one's spiritual maturity; preparing is a manifestation of love for Jesus and your brothers and sisters in Christ.

As I've wrestled with this text this week, three things stand out to me for our edification and growth in grace and godliness.

1 – Sin doesn't take a holiday. No sooner than Jesus' sermon discourse of **Mark Chapter 13** concludes, we're brought right back to the present with a reminder of the Jewish leaders'

desire to kill Jesus. Hear again verses 1-2 – “After two days it was the Passover and *the Feast of Unleavened Bread*. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. ² But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people.”

The annual Passover, also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the major Jewish pilgrimage festival, was taking place. The population of Jerusalem swelled by thousands during this 8-day commemoration. The Passover called to remembrance the Israelites’ deliverance from slavery in Egypt, when God’s avenger of death passed over the homes of faithful Israelites who had placed the shed blood of lambs over the doorways of their homes.

The desire of these Jewish leaders was wicked to the core. They resented the crowds of followers that Jesus attracted and the miracles He was able to affect. They despised the authority with which Jesus preached. They wanted Jesus dead. It’s bad enough to kill a man innocent of the charges levied against him. But, these teachers of God’s law wanted to snuff out the Messiah God had promised to send to deliver His people from their bondage to sin. All this was due to their sin – it had to be – for Jesus never sinned.

Sin is our greatest problem. It is so sneaky and deep-seated. It stains our every motive, to include even our praise of Almighty God! Stand guard and don’t let sin have its victory over you. We need each other to hold each other accountable. Don’t withdraw from the fellowship, or try doing this on your own. Sooner, than later, you could be sin’s casualty. It takes no breaks!

2 – True Devotion to Jesus is Extravagant.

The woman described in verse 3 is Mary according to John in his gospel account (**John 12:3**). She does something she’ll always be remembered for. “...a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured *it* on His head.”

“Alabaster” was white stone often used in making figurines and jars. When this verse says Mary “broke the flask,” it means that she broke the seal, not the bottle itself. (*ISBE*, Vol 1, 85) “Spikenard” was native to northern India and was a favorite perfume in antiquity. The prefix “spike” refers to the shape of the plant from which the oily perfume was drawn. (*ISBE*, V3, 490) It was quite valuable; verse 5 reveals the amount of spikenard Mary poured over Jesus’ head would bring 300 denarii, a full year’s wages for a laborer of that time.

Verse 4 teaches there were some people present in the house who were angry with Mary. Mark doesn’t identify these men, but Matthew, in his account of this incident, tells us these men are Jesus’ disciples. (**Matthew 26:8**). John attributes these words to Judas Iscariot (**John 12:5**). They couldn’t believe Mary poured out something so valuable over her Savior’s head. These men were merely thinking of themselves (or their ideas) when they said such a foolish thing. Perhaps they should have considered instead the worth of the One Mary worshipped here. *What can be too good to give Jesus?* Our devotion to Jesus is marked by extravagance!

One commentator notes, “The native language of love is lavishness.” (Hendriksen, 559) *How does that appear in your life, dear ones? How are you extravagant for Him? Some wear their finest clothes to worship as a demonstration of their love for Jesus; some give sacrificially of their own finances for the work of Jesus’ people, the Church, as a mark of their love for Jesus; Some when they packed their shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child, put quality, durable things in them that last, not the cheapest stuff they could find. Others share their extravagance in preparing much delicious food for fellowship meals or meals to those ill or new-born parents. Rather than thinking critically of such grand acts of worship, perhaps we should consider amending our shriveled, cold, Scrooge-like hearts?*

Jesus chided the critical spirit among His followers. He told them to leave Mary alone and to stop troubling her. Rather than wasting the perfume, Jesus instructed the men that she had done a good thing. Like Mary, we must do what we can with all that we have.

3 – The Wounds of A Friend Hurt Deeply.

John 12:6 teaches us that Judas Iscariot was the treasurer for Jesus and His traveling disciples. Verse 11 in today’s text teaches that he went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. The chief priests were so happy to hear they had a contact within Jesus’ inner circle; they eagerly offered to pay Judas Iscariot for his treason. Gladness at badness is madness!

Judas Iscariot is the greatest traitor of all-time, given He betrayed the greatest Man of all-time, our Lord Jesus Christ. Even as Mary’s extravagant devotion stands for all-time as a memorial to her, Judas’ extreme selfishness in turning Jesus over to the Jewish authorities memorializes him as a turncoat of the first order. He had a front row seat to the earthly ministry of God the Son, Jesus Christ. He saw Him heal and bring the dead back to life. He witnessed Jesus calming storms, walking on water, and feeding thousands with a snack.

Yet, Judas’ desire for money was more important to him. How like so many professing Christians today who spend their time, effort, money and resources on everything else but the Lord and His Church. *Do your life habits betray what you say with your words?*

Last week I saw a news report of a man who went hang-gliding, and he wasn’t strapped in the glider! The flight was videotaped. Within seconds of take-off, Chris Gurskey realized he wasn’t hooked in his safety harness. He was holding onto the glider -- and the pilot -- for dear life as they soared some 4,000 feet over a mountain valley in Switzerland!

The pilot took measures to land the glider as soon as possible. Gurskey recalled, “When my feet hit [the ground] I don’t think I could’ve made it another five or six seconds.” Afterwards, he needed surgery on his wrist. He received a titanium plate and seven screws. He also tore a bicep tendon from holding on as long as he did.

And even though his first hang gliding trip was terrifying, Chris Gurskey will hang glide again since he did not get to enjoy his first flight.