

From Insignificance to Fame

by Arno Stegen

The sermon encourages believers to respond to God's call by doing what they can, exemplified by the woman's act of devotion to Jesus.

Duration: 1:04:05

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 25:40, Matthew 26:6-16, Mark 14:1-9, Acts 16:9

Topics: "Fame"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of a woman who gave and did all she could for God. The preacher emphasizes the importance of responding to God's call and testing ourselves to see if we have done what we could. The sermon references Mark chapter 14, where the chief priests and scribes were seeking to kill Jesus. The preacher warns against giving the enemy an opportunity to harm the gospel and emphasizes the need to be in tune with the Lord in our service.

Transcript

Lord, we pray that you will open our hearts, open our ears and our minds to hear and understand that what you want to say to us this morning. But Lord, while they are open for you, may our hearts and ears and minds be closed to anything else which the devil will want to distract us with. We pray, Lord, that you will bless your word and make it alive, that it will change our lives.

Amen. Amen. Well, we've been challenged this morning and I thought, well, I don't know, maybe Uncle Ernie should have just carried on and taken the service.

His heart is full and that's where we always get blessing from, when someone's heart is full. Well, we have been challenged about the call of the needy and ultimately the call of God in our lives. We've heard how the Lord has spoken to us and through what Paul experienced before he went to Europe, where he heard that call, come over here and help us.

Well, today I'd like us to look at a woman who gave and did all she could. And maybe if we put the two together, it can also maybe bring up some things in our lives where we can test ourselves to see how we've responded to God's call to us. Of this woman, the Lord said she has done all she could.

And hopefully by the end of the service, we can also test ourselves in the light of that and ask ourselves whether we are doing and whether we have done what we could. Now, let's turn to Mark chapter 14. From

verse 1, 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 be a riot of the people. Now while he was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper and reclining at table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of costly perfume of pure nard and she broke the vial and poured it over his head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, for what purpose has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over 300 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 the poor you always have with you and whenever you wish you can do them good, but you do not always have me.

She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for the burial. And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall 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. And 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. Now there's so much in this portion, we can have two or three messages, but I'll try and just summarize what was a blessing to me in 2-1.

We hear how the chief priests, the enemies of the Lord, were seeking to kill him. It was a very difficult time for the Lord and his disciples. And while they were waiting for an opportunity, they probably didn't realize that that opportunity was a rise and would come to them through one of those that was closest to the Lord.

And may it be a warning for all of us. We must realize the devil, the enemy, is seeking opportunities to harm the gospel, to harm the Lord's work and his cause. May that opportunity not be given him by one of us who can't claim to be close to him.

The one who was of the closest to the Lord was one of the most dangerous to the Lord at that time. And maybe we'll see more of it as we carry on looking at this portion, perhaps at some of the reasons why it was so. So we read about the time when the Lord was in Bethany at the home of Simon.

When this woman came along. And we've read about what she's done. And I'd like us to look a bit closer at what she did and what it meant.

But before we get to her, I'd just like to say a bit more about Judas while we've touched on him. We know how when she poured that perfume over the Lord's head, there were those who were very unhappy about what she had done. They were upset.

They scolded her. They were angry. But the Lord honoured what she had done.

And we see here how easily it can happen that we can be at cross purposes with the Lord. If we read how these people responded, the arguments they had, one could say very valid arguments. They said this perfume could have been sold.

It was worth more than a year's salary. I imagine what you earn in a year. Now you work for longer than a year, save every cent, not spend one cent, and then you buy something with it.

That's the value that this perfume had. And these people, and we read in Matthew that it was the disciples themselves included, who were upset about what this woman had done. They said there's so much need out there.

So many poor people. One could have given it to them and probably even justified it by saying that one could have done it in the name of the Lord. And what wouldn't that have meant to the gospel? But while they were saying those things, the Lord was saying the opposite.

And hopefully the disciples quickly realised that they were on the wrong track. Where the disciples would have realised, we're not in tune with the Lord. We're on two different wavelengths.

What we are saying and what the Lord is saying is two different things. May we always be on our guard that when we stand for something, when we say something, that we make sure that it is in tune with what God is saying. It's like singing a duet.

If we were singing together, I need to sing with all my strength and with all that I have. But at the same time, I need to be listening to him to make sure that I am in tune, that I'm in harmony with him, that I don't sing totally out of tune with him, or maybe even singing a different song altogether. Or even as we're talking, one in English, one in Zulu, but we're saying the same thing.

It means the same. It has the same message. It must be said in the same spirit.

Not like the one preacher who was preaching and he had someone interpreting, and suddenly the interpreter stopped. And the preacher looked at him and he said, well, what's wrong? He said, no, you can stop. I finished.

So he was preaching his own message, the interpreter. Now there we would say, surely there's something wrong with such a person. But isn't there much more wrong with us? If we are talking, if we are standing for something, and it's something totally out of tune with what the Lord is doing and saying.

We claim to be part of the Lord's team, but we're doing our own thing, not what God is doing. Doesn't it say in the Bible that the disciples, apostles, they were working and the Lord worked together with them and confirmed what they were doing. That's what it should look like as we serve the Lord.

If what we're doing isn't in tune with the Lord, then we're not serving him. Then we're serving our own ego and our own belly. And so these people were out of tune with the Lord.

But the Lord reprimanded them. And it would seem that many accepted it. And at least it seems as if they stopped scolding her.

But obviously the question is still theirs, whether they in their hearts also accepted it, or whether in their hearts they still continued murmuring. It so easily happens for people who are not personally involved, but who stand at a distance and they look on. They have a lot to say, and we South Africans know a lot about it.

We South Africans are masters at being spectators. All you need to do is look at the recent happenings in the rugby world. Oh, people all know how to play rugby.

And we can say one thing about the spectators who are still in the stadium. At least they go to the effort of being close to the action. But those that have the most to say are the ones that are sitting 10,000

kilometers away in front of their TV sets and their sofas, sipping away at their tea and coffee.

They are the best rugby players of all. I think they just haven't come to the realization that the selectors will never see them while they're sitting in their sofas. Otherwise they'd have been playing themselves.

I think we Christians are sometimes no better. We don't do any better than those people who watch TV. For those that are the furthest away from the action usually have the most to say.

If you were there on the field, in the scrum, in the heat of the action, I think you wouldn't have so much time to say what you're saying anyway. So if you have a lot to say and a lot to criticize, then you should ask yourself why you've got so much time to do it. And of course nowadays with the rugby and with the sports it's become much worse because I think South Africa has lost what really matters in life.

People are losing what life is all about and so they look for it in sport. And that's why when their team loses, their whole world crashes. And maybe the bigger the crash in your life when your team loses, so maybe that crash becomes relative to the emptiness in your life because there's really nothing else you have in life to hold on to.

Where your life with Christ is no longer what determines your life, but your whole life just hinges on the success of your favorite team. When the South Africans beat Samoa, the whole of South Africa was rejoicing and happy. A week later they were on the ground because we had lost again.

I'm not here to speak about rugby. Maybe if you're one of those people, hopefully it shows you what is important to you in your life. The one moment you're up in the clouds, the next moment the coach must be fired, the whole management must be fired.

If they had won, you would have said the opposite thing. That's how people can change with the wind. Just depending on circumstances, someone is great and wonderful, the next moment you must fire him.

The same person, you're worse than the mobs in Jerusalem. When Jesus came into the city, they were praising him, shouting Hosanna. A few days later they were shouting crucify him.

Is that what depth our life has? So while we go through life, it's of utmost importance that wherever we are, whoever we are, in what position we are, we need to listen to what the master is saying. And that we make sure that what we're saying is in tune with what he's saying. So while they seem to accept what the Lord is saying, maybe it will have only been outwardly, I hope not.

But the risk is always there. That you keep quiet but your heart is not quiet. You're still not happy with what has happened and what the Lord has said.

But Judas was not happy, we know that. Even though he didn't say something immediately, but it came out later. He was there, he saw what happened.

He probably was one of those that complained. The Lord corrected him, tried to help him. But he went out there and looked for the enemies of the Lord to arrange to betray him.

He had just complained about the money that had been wasted there. And then out he goes to the chief priests and he goes to them and says, what will you pay me if I betray him? See how two-faced people can be. But it also shows us what was in his heart.

He wasn't worried about the poor. He was worried about his own pocket, his own well-being. If he would have been so concerned about the poor, then he wouldn't have gone and struck a financial deal immediately after that.

And based on that, he was prepared to sell the Lord. And then the question comes up, one wonders why Judas was with the Lord at all. What had motivated him to become a disciple in the first place? Was it the love for God and for the Lord? Or was he only there because it was convenient for him to be there? In fact, maybe it was because of his love, not for the Lord, but for the love of money.

Because he had been given the position of treasurer. The money that came in went to him for him to look after. And he was the one that gave it out again.

And that's maybe why they're difficulty feeding those 5,000, because he had to give the money and he wasn't prepared to. I don't know. Because maybe he was worried that he'd get less.

I don't know. But what we do know is that in those years where he was with the Lord, he did love money. And maybe he overcame it at some point in his life, but when it was critical and we got to the crucial moment, it got the better of him.

So he went to the chief priest and says, what will you give me? That was what drove him in his life. It was his own self and his own love for money, his own benefit, what would be convenient to him. What suited him was the driving force in his life.

No wonder he couldn't serve the Lord. No wonder he became the one to betray him. And dear friend, if we are in the Lord's service and there's any self ambition and where self drives what I'm doing, and maybe my love even for money will become the Lord's biggest enemies.

And if money was the motivation that made him a disciple, maybe it was money. Maybe combined with own ambition and his own fame and his own reputation. But it was that thing that became, that was his downfall in the end as well.

If money is your motive, then money will make you leave or betray the Lord as well. The question is just how much will you be prepared to accept to do your dirty work? How much money, how much fame will swing your allegiance? Are you going to serve the Lord at any cost? Or is there something that may swing your allegiance? So Judas went and said, tell me what you'll pay me. He came back and was with the disciples, with the Lord again.

He was in their midst after he had struck that bargain. And he was among them, but why? He was only there waiting for an opportune time. Does one call someone like that an opportunist? He was waiting just for the right opportunity to get what he wanted.

Among the inner circle, among the disciples, right beside the Lord, doing as if everything was carrying on normally. And yet his motive was that he was just waiting for the right moment to do his dirty work. That was the only reason why he was still there.

He wasn't doing anything positive for the Lord's work. He wasn't involved in the Lord's work. Yes, maybe he had even stopped saying negative things about the Lord's work.

He was just there and kept quiet. But he wasn't quiet. He wasn't neutral.

He was there waiting for the right opportunity to make his move. Dear friend, how committed are we to the Lord's cause? We've heard we can be there right in the heat of the action. We can be sitting on the sideline.

And if you're sitting on the sideline because you're encouraging those on the field, when the going gets tough, you encourage them. But you can also be sitting there booing them when they do the wrong move. You're just waiting for them to do the wrong thing.

Well, maybe you can just be sitting there. You're just waiting for the right moment to make your move. Now we've spoken about the others.

Now let's go to what I really wanted to talk about. This woman, an amazing woman who we didn't know beforehand, but suddenly she becomes world famous because of a seemingly insignificant thing that she did, which could have gone unnoticed, but the Lord saw it fit that this what she did should be known and recorded for all eternity. And she's not the only example in the Bible.

But she is known today, and the Lord said it, that it will be known throughout the world what she's done. And why is she known for what she did? Because she did what she could. That's what the Lord expects of us.

No more, but no less either. The Lord just expects us to do what we can. You heard the Lord's call.

Come over and help us. Have you since done what you could? There's so many examples we could use. What hasn't the Lord told us over the years for many of us? Have we done with that what we could? And obviously what is important is that we do what we can in the Lord's eyes, not in my own eyes.

It doesn't help me saying, well, I did what I could, but the Lord doesn't think so. And obviously what we do needs to be in tune with what God wants us to do. Otherwise we'll be like Peter, who not long after this event, drew his sword and chopped off the high priest's servant's ear.

Peter could have also said, well, I did what I could. But it doesn't help just doing what you think you can do. You have to be sure that what you do is what God wants you to do.

Otherwise you'll end up chopping off people's ears and maybe even chopping off their heads. I've heard someone say that that is what it appears Peter was actually trying to do, is to chop off his head, but he ducked and that's why he only got his ear. And how often don't we as the Lord's servants go about, we hit left, right, and center, and all we're achieving is chopping off people's heads, their corpses lying all around, and we claim to be serving the Lord.

So it doesn't help us just going off at a tangent and doing what we, the first thing that comes to our mind, but first testing to see whether what we're doing is going to be up-building or not. So easily by what we say, we can chop off people's heads. And the Lord says, no, not that way.

We need to do what we can, but not that what we think and come up with in our own heads. We have to do what we can in Christ's eyes, that He can say, Arno has done what he could. Not that I claim it, and that no one else claims it of himself or herself, but the Lord confirms and says, I know what this person is capable of doing.

I know what was best in the circumstances, and that person has done what he could. And then you get those who don't do what they could for various reasons. We just need to think of those three servants that were given talents.

We know of the first one who did what he could with his. He went to work with them. The second one got less talents.

He didn't say, oh no, this is not fair. The first servant got more than I did. This is not right.

Are you intelligent? No, the Lord is not fair. My brother, he can do this, he can do that. I'm only allowed to do this.

But this servant said, no, I've got less. My duties and my responsibilities are different to my brother, but let me make use of what I've got. And the Lord blessed it.

But the third one got one talent. And he was upset. He said, no, the Lord is a hard man.

He's unfair. He gives the other one five and he gives me one. That's not right.

Are you intelligent? He's a hard man. Has he no feeling for what I feel when he only gives me one? And we all know that he went and he buried it. He didn't even use the one that was given him.

Does it now still surprise you that the Lord only gave him one? The Lord also knows where to invest. And if people don't invest with a certain institution, then that institution can't go and blame the people. They must blame themselves and say, why can I not convince these people to invest their money with me? Can't you convince the Lord who sees your heart that what he would give you, you would be able to, to look after with his help and that he can entrust it to you.

But this man, he said, no, it's not right. And he didn't even use that little bit which the Lord took the risk of giving him. So at least he couldn't have an excuse.

The Lord gave him a fair chance. And he's fair to all of us. He gives each one a chance.

But it's up to us what we do with it. But this man didn't do what he could. And we read of that widow as well, who when the Lord was standing at the temple and they were coming and giving their donations in the church.

One is sometimes amazed to see where one finds the Lord. Did you expect that you'd find the Lord sitting in church where the people put their donations into whatever they put them into? And actually looking and seeing what people are putting in there. Did you know that the Lord can see what you're putting and donating to the church? For the one who gives to the Lord's work, that's good news, isn't it? But if you're selfish and you keep everything the Lord blesses you with to yourself, then you should be ashamed, because the Lord sees how much you're giving back to him.

So remember that the Lord sometimes also sits at the donations box. And I can speak like that because there isn't one here. Because I'm not talking about Sisyphus, I'm talking about the Lord's work.

And I'm just telling you where the Lord Jesus was found one day. And it was so important to him that it's recorded for all eternity. And the rich people came and put in huge amounts of money, giving something of the huge wealth that they had.

But it was still a lot of money. But we don't hear much about them. But we hear of one person.

And the Lord singles her out. The one who put in one cent. One cent.

Today with a cent you can't even buy a sweet. There were the days that I can even remember where you bought four sweets for one cent. Now you can't, I don't even know whether you can buy one sweet with four cents.

But this lady gave one cent and her deed is recorded for all eternity. Why? Because she gave everything she had. So dear friend, I don't know what you've got.

But the Lord knows what you've got. He doesn't just know about your money because we're talking about it because these are the examples that are being used here. But we're talking about serving the Lord with all your strength, with all your might, with all your mind, with all your heart, with everything you've got.

Now with all the Lord has given you, plus all your capabilities and your gifts and your talents. Tell me, how much of that do you give for the Lord's service? When you get to the end of this day, just ask yourself how much of what you've got you've given for the Lord. Will the Lord, not you, but will the Lord be able to say, so-and-so has given all she could, or all he could.

The Lord expects no more from you, but he also doesn't expect less from you. The Lord will bless you and honor you if you honor him with what you give him. But he will also not let you off lightly, just the same as that servant who buried his talent.

If you don't give and do all you can. And remember, it's not only not doing what is wrong, but you need to do what is right. The Bible even teaches us that if we know to do good and don't do it, that is reckoned as sin.

Maybe you get to the end of the day, you say, well, I've had a good day. I didn't swear at anybody. I didn't get angry.

I didn't gossip, whatever. And obviously that's wonderful if you don't do sin and if you don't do the wrong thing. But is there something good that you could have done and didn't do it? Is there something you could have done for the Lord and you were slack in it? Can you then still sleep peacefully if you know that you failed the Lord? So this woman came with her costly perfume.

She had worked hard for it. But when she had earned it, her first thought was, what can I do for the Lord with this that I've earned? Not like some people, when they earn some money, the first thing is, what car can I buy with this money? In fact, some people don't even only start thinking of it when they've earned it. They usually start thinking of it before they earned it and make a lot of debt to get it, and then they can't even pay it off.

A child can say, well, if I just get some money, if I've got some money, the first thing is, what soccer shirt can I buy, what soccer shoes and what soccer ball? That's the first thing they think of. But this lady, the first thing she thought of, I've got this now, I've worked for it. What can I do for the Lord with it? She came to the Lord and she took this jar with this costly perfume and she broke it.

She made sure that there was no turning back. She made sure that she had to give everything, because the first thing she did, she broke it, so she couldn't keep anything back. She didn't come with her jar and

start pouring slowly, just a few drops, to see what the reaction would be, and maybe even to see what the Lord's reaction would be.

And when, if he would have said, oh, my daughter, you are blessed, then she'd quickly pour a bit more just to get more of the blessing. She wanted to give everything irrespective of the response. She committed herself.

She wanted to go through with it. I wish more Christians would have of the Spirit, who have this type of commitment, who can say, Lord, whatever I have, whatever I've got, I want to do what I can with it for you, and I don't want to look back. Lord, I want to serve you, and I want to give everything.

I don't want to just start serving you, and then see how it goes, and see whether I need to change my mind, or maybe just pour half the perfume, just give half, and then, well, maybe, you know, look at my options halfway through. No, this woman said, Lord, what I've got, I want to give for you, and not half, not 90 percent, I'm making sure I want to give everything. I want to say, Lord, here's my life, no turning back.

This woman was unknown before this, but now she became famous. She is known and will be known. Her name today is worth more than that precious ointment which she gave.

Her reputation is far greater than the value of that ointment which she poured out. The Lord himself honored her. If you want to be honored by the Lord, be prepared to give everything.

Be prepared to give what you can, and to do what you can for him. What you will benefit is far, far greater than anything you can ever give, but you'll only benefit when you give as a sacrifice, when you know, I'm actually losing it all. If you give in order to benefit, you won't.

If you give because you're waiting to see how much you're going to give back, and then you give in relation as well, you're going to lose your ointment, and you're going to lose that precious jar that you've got, and you're going to lose the blessing as well, and you'll lose the honor. God won't honor that. May God grant us the grace to do what we can, not for ourselves, but for the Lord.

And to God be the glory. Indeed, Lord, your word is a mirror to us. Lord, we've heard what you have spoken to us.

Lord, through your word, you've revealed to us there where we fall short, and there where we have walked with you. Lord, there are none as privileged as we are to hear services like this. And Lord, we've heard about Judas Iscariot and how Satan entered into him.

And Lord, we sensed how and heard how he then betrayed you, Lord Jesus. Lord, we have heard from you what life you expect from us. Lord, we've heard about the one who gave the last farthing, her last scent.

Lord, thank you that we can come to you, Lord Jesus, and surrender our whole heart, give everything to you so that we would be ready to meet you one day. Lord, we ask you that your grace and your blessing would be upon us all. Those who are here at the mission and those who have traveled to get here, please go with them.

Lord, grant that the one who senses and is convicted from you that he has become like Judas Iscariot, give them the grace to seek your face. We ask this, Lord, trusting in your name. Amen.

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