

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Death to Selfie: THE Reason to Be Unreasonable**  
Mark 14:3-9  
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Have you ever done something unreasonable for Jesus? Something that was so crazy, so out there, so extreme that people - maybe even other church people - didn't exactly approve?

A couple years ago in church, I was trying to reenact this ancient custom that the Jewish people had in the Old Testament called the "whole burnt offering." You ever heard of it? Every morning and every evening in their temple, they would bring an animal and instead of enjoying the meat, instead of cutting off the hide to make clothing out of it, they take the whole thing, put it on their altar, and set it on fire. They wouldn't get any of it back; it was like this symbolic way of saying, "God, you're worthy of everything we have to give, no matter how valuable, how priceless, that might be." I love that ancient Jewish custom. Every time they got up and every night before they went to bed, they would remind themselves that we're not doing this God-thing because he's a piñata that gives us candy or a vending machine that gives us the life that we requested. We give everything to God because he's God and he's worth it. And I imagine people who didn't know this God or follow this God must have looked at the Jewish custom and it probably seemed unreasonable and irresponsible and a waste. But for the people who knew that God who rescued and redeemed and saved, it was perhaps the most logical, reasonable thing they could do.

What about you? If people had to choose words to describe your faith, what kind of words would they choose? Would it be crazy? Would it be common? Would it be cautious? Would it be out there and extreme or would it be average or expected? Do you think there are things that you do because of Jesus, if you're one of his followers, which people tell stories about? That maybe if you have kids, they're going to tell their kids: "I always remember what your grandpa used to do." "I always remember what your grandma used to say." If people knew the whole story, the way you spent your time, the way you use your money, the way you raise your children, the way you spend your years, the way you looked at life and work and everything else, would they think it's unreasonable unless they knew the same Jesus that we know?

I don't know about you but I really want to have an unreasonable faith. I mean, not so people can tell stories about me and think that I'm great, but so in some way, it will be a sampling for people to realize God must be great if you know him. I think about the people in my years as a Christian who've inspired me and challenged me and they were not reasonable people. They were people who were all in when it came to prayer or Bible study or generosity or selflessness and service. And I think of the way that they changed me and I just want to do that for another person; I want to pass the baton. And if you're in the same boat, I want to tell you a story today about a woman that Jesus once met that had this unreasonable kind of faith. In fact, her actions were so extreme, they were so out there, that even Jesus' closest followers - like his small group that he had mentored for three whole years - when they saw it, it seemed like a bit too much. Not a single one of them approved of what this woman did. In fact, no one in the room approved

of what this woman did except for just one; for Jesus. So as we think about unreasonable faith, dying to the approval of others today, I want you to turn your Bibles and your attention to Mark 14.

Mark writes: "While Jesus was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume made of pure nard." So apparently, Jesus is in Bethany, which is this little suburb of about two miles southeast of Jerusalem. Bethany actually appears to come from a Hebrew phrase that means, "house of affliction." And if you've heard of Bethlehem, the word "beth" means "house" in Hebrew. "House of bread" is Bethlehem; Bethany means "house of affliction." And many of these scholars think that's because the afflicted and the diseased and the impoverished tended to live in this little suburb of Bethany.

And there's a party in Bethany one day and Jesus is invited. Now, there's this guy named Simon the Leper, which was a sweet nickname, who must have been a former leper because leper's had to live outside of town. So maybe this is one of the lepers that Jesus miraculously healed and as a way to say thank you, he throws this party and Jesus and all of his friends are invited. So far so good, until this woman shows up. We know from other parts of the Bible that her name was Mary and we know that she brought a pint - an entire alabaster jar - of expensive perfume. Mark tells us that inside that jar was pure nard and nard is not just a fun word to say. Nard was this priceless spice from the ancient world. It was imported from India and China and they would take the actual roots of it and they would grind it up, mix it with olive oil, and seal it in jars so the oxygen couldn't touch it and spoil it. Think like a vintage pricey wine. This is so expensive that we're about to find out that what was in that jar - the pint of pure nard - was worth more than a year's wages. I googled it. In modern terms, the median American income for a single person is \$31,128. Can you imagine - this woman brings over \$31,000 of perfume to this party and look what she does in the next verse: "She broke the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus' head." Mary doesn't dab a little bit on Jesus' wrist and his neck; she cracks open the jar and she dumps the whole pint on the Son of God. Can you picture it? Like there's this oil dripping down Jesus' hair, she dumps it out on his feet. John's gospel said she actually starts wiping up the puddles with her hair and the room explodes with aroma and the people explode with anger.

Look at verses 4 and 5: "Some of those present were saying indignantly, furiously to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor,' and they rebuked her harshly." And you can understand why. They're saying, "Mary, what are you thinking? Don't you know where we are? This is Bethany. Do you know who's walking just outside those doors? The poor and the afflicted; the people who don't even know what they're going to eat today and do you know who this is? This is Jesus. Do you know what Jesus thinks about the poor? He says you should help them and feed them and clothe them; that that matters so deeply to his heart. So what were you thinking? If you wanted to be Christian, if you wanted to do something great for Jesus, why wouldn't you have helped the poor? And didn't you hear about Zacchaeus? Man, he had money like you, too, but when Jesus came into his house, he didn't waste it. Instead, he gave half of his net worth to the poor. Why didn't you do the same? You can't take this back; what a waste. How stupid are you?"

And it seems harsh but I wonder if we wouldn't have said the same thing? Let's imagine for a second that we were throwing a fundraiser to combat homelessness in our community and here the caterers are bringing in the food and I walk into the party with a bottle of DKNY Golden Delicious. Ever heard of it? It's the most expensive perfume on planet earth; \$1,000,000 for a bottle. If my math is right, that's almost \$700 per dot. So imagine if I show up at our fundraiser, now I'm just skipping through the room and spritzing everyone I can find: One for you and one for you, two for you, sir. What would you think? You wouldn't have to be Judas or some greedy one percenter to be angry. You'd say, "What are you thinking? Why are you wasting that? The aroma's going to be gone in a second; the poor people are going to be in our community forever. What we could have done with that money! Why are you wasting it?" It's almost like Mary's burning a hundred dollar bill after hundred dollar bill and everyone in the room is accusing her of being a felon. And Jesus just sits there.

I'm trying to picture him listening to the argument as Mary's head starts to drop; as maybe she feels this regret. Was she an idiot? Did she totally misjudge this? And the oil's dripping off of Jesus' hair until he finally opens his mouth and he takes a side. Here's whose side he takes, verse 6: "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me."

Leave her alone. Stop yelling at her, Jesus said. You think this is a waste? You think this is stupid? No, this is beautiful. Jesus said this interesting line: "The poor you will always have with you." That's actually a quote from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 15, where God said even though his people are generous and they should be generous towards the poor, it's not like one gift is going to solve the world's poverty problem. The poor will exist until the day that Jesus returns. And he says that Christians should care about the poor and Christians should give generously to the poor but when Christians give to Jesus Christ, they're not taking something from the poor; they're not leaving a problem that wouldn't exist otherwise. And Jesus said, "The poor you'll have with you; you can't help them. But right now, she should not be embarrassed and she should not be ashamed. She has done a beautiful, beautiful thing for me."

What's the point of this short little story? If I had to summarize it and if you're taking notes, I would summarize it this way: That Jesus loves unreasonable faith. So that makes me wonder, what would that look like for us? If you're going to leave here today and put this message into practice, what would unreasonable faith look like in your life? What sacrifice, what offering, what lifestyle, what change would you have to make that people would be confused - in fact, even some church people that you know - would think, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Why are you doing that? You don't have to." And your heart would say, "Exactly, I don't have to. I get to. I want to." What does it look like for you and for me to break open our jar?

While you think about that question, let me tell you a story about a couple of people who did. Let me start with Eric. Eric was a really, really good runner back in the day; one of the fastest that most people knew. Except the league that he was running in scheduled a track meet on the day that he went to church and so Eric said he couldn't compete. And people thought he was being, you know, a bit extreme and too religious; they said, "You know, you can go next weekend." But Eric said, "I'm sorry, this is my priority." And people said, "You're such a good

runner and this is such an important race. Don't you think you can be there? You know, there will always be church services to go to. You can find a different time." And he said, "No, gathering with the people of God, honoring the Sabbath, that matters more to me than any race, than any award, than any medal." And finally, the race day came and Eric didn't run. His fastest event, the 100 meter dash, he completely skipped and everyone was confused and some people, even church people, were angry. But was he embarrassed? Their anger was a compliment to him and not an insult.

By the way, his full name was Eric Liddell and the race that he skipped was the 1924 Paris Olympics. He had trained most of his life to run the race and they scheduled it during church. And he gave up the gold to honor his God. The unreasonable act moved and confused so many people that they made a movie out of it. Maybe some of you've seen it; it was called "Chariots of Fire," when Eric Liddell broke open his jar for Jesus.

Or what do you think about a woman I knew personally whose name was Ann. If you would ever meet Ann, you would just think she's an average, middle-aged church lady. Quiet smile, there every single week, gray hair, bunch of kids. But Ann was not average; Ann was unreasonable. And her gray hair was the proof. You see, years before I met her, Ann had made this decision that all the money she spent coloring her hair, she would give so that people could hear the gospel. All the money she would have spent on a color at the salon, she instead put into a fund and she gave it so that other people in other countries could hear about Jesus. I've got to tell you, I've seen thousands, tens of thousands, of hairstyles in my life as a pastor; I don't remember any of them except Ann's. Did she have to? No. Does everyone have to? No. Did she want to? Yes and she broke open her jar for Jesus.

So what about you? What would happen that people would tell stories about? Not for your glory but for the glory of our Savior Jesus. Now just as a little asterisk, I'm not telling you to be an idiot today, okay? The Bible has a lot to say about people who are idiots; they're the people who never take any advice from anyone and they say it's just between them and God, right? So if your pastor and your small group and your family and your friends say, "Maybe you shouldn't do this," you probably shouldn't. With that being said, what are some things that people would think are a bit extreme, a bit much? Maybe it makes them feel uncomfortable that their faith is a bit too cautious and a bit too safe? Maybe for some of you, your unreasonable faith would have to do with your time; the way you spend it. What's a priority in your schedule? Maybe instead of apologizing to the pastor and your life group for not being there for a while 'cause things were crazy, you're going to apologize to your boss and the kid's coach because gathering with God's people around God's word is just a priority in your heart. Maybe as a parent you're going to raise your kids in light of eternity and not for the sake of varsity. Maybe there's going to be incredible talent in your life but you know if you do that, you will invest so much time that there won't be enough time to pray together and to meditate on the word of God and you're going to give up some of the awards and accolades of this world so you can have a closer relationship with Jesus.

Now people aren't going to get it. They'll say, "Can't you go next week?" Or, "Can't you squeeze it in?" But you're going to know that you need that time to be close to him. And they'll be baffled and some will even be angry and even Christians will say, "Well, can't you do both?" But you're going to break open a jar.

Or maybe for some of you your broken jar's going to be like Ann; it's going to have to do with finances. Maybe you're going to be successful and you're going to have a lot of money and you can afford a house this big, that's what the bank says, but you're going to live in a house this big so you can be crazy generous. You're not going to see 10 percent of your gross income as the goal; you're going to pass it and get to 12 and then 15 and then twenty. You're going to excel in the grace of giving and you're not going to regret it. Maybe your personal decision is that you're never going to buy a new car and you're going to wear shoes until they wear out and then you'll buy a pair to replace them. Maybe you're going to live in a part of town that are not the nicest homes because you want to show people what Christian love looks like in a really dark place where people desperately need love and selflessness and service. Maybe you could live up here but you're going to live down here so you can give up here.

Or maybe for a handful of you, your jar's going to be missions. That there's this comfortable first world life that so many of us live in this nice little family-friendly town and you're going to give that up for the sake of the gospel. Some of you are going to move your families to dangerous places so the light can shine brightly. Some of you will give up the infrastructure and the education; you're going to learn a whole new language and embrace a whole new culture because some cultures have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. Some of you are going to break your jar and you're going to give up your retirement while everyone is looking forward to sunny condos and another round of golf. You're going to do what others don't; you're going to volunteer and you're going to mentor and you're going to serve. You're going to take that money and you're going to give radically and generously and people aren't going to get it. And maybe that's the point.

For some of you, your broken jar's going to be adoption. You thought about it but it's always scared you. You know, you never know, right? When it's not your kid, when there's other parents, how's it going to turn out? Some of you are going to break a big jar and you're going to think about adopting someone with special needs; with medical complications. And your parents and your brother and your sister, they're going to say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. What if," and "what about" and "how do you know?" And you won't; and that's the point. For some of you, it's going to be foster care because there's some kids that are hurting and broken and your life is safe and comfortable and structured but you're going to break that jar to show someone who's never seen the deep love of a mother and father; what that looks like in Jesus' name. There's a thousand ways we could do it, huh? Not because we have to, not because we're forced to. We would break a jar and people would be confused; they'd look at us and they'd probably ask just one question: Why? And that would be the right question. Why? If you don't have to, why would you? Why give up the comfort and the money and the lifestyle up here; why give up the approval of others and the safety and the cautious approach? Why would you do it, is the perfect question. And it's the question we want to ask Mary, right? Mary, why would you do this? There's no command that Jesus ever gave - if you have some perfume at home, make sure you bust it up and pour it out. Why would she give a year's wages in a single day?

And I know the answer to that question. In fact, the last verses of Mark's text gets us to the answer of that question. Look what we find in verses eight and nine. Jesus said, "She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell

you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." That's such an amazing verse to me. Jesus wants people who live lives that people tell stories about; that people remember. Who do not do what other people can but what they can. And did you catch the motivation why? "She did this to prepare for my burial."

I think what motivated Mary to go above and beyond and to bust open that jar was that she knew something about Jesus that the other boys in the room didn't catch. Maybe it started a few weeks beforehand because this was the same Mary whose brother was raised from the dead. Have you heard that story? Mary and Martha and Lazarus? They're grieving and they're weeping and then Jesus shows up and he walks up to the tomb with Mary. He says, "Lazarus, get up!" And her brother came back to life. And I wonder if that was the day when it really clicked for Mary: "Oh, my goodness. This is not just some teacher; this is God. Jesus. The one who comes to my house is God. He's not just some guru; God is willing to take time for me. God cares about me and my family. This is God." And then Mary somehow grasped this God would do the unthinkable. She was preparing for his what? His burial, which means he was going to die. I mean, maybe Mary, unlike the guys who try to come up with some metaphor, interpretation, maybe she just listened to Jesus when he said, "I'm going to Jerusalem to suffer and die and rise on the third day." Maybe she knew the Old Testament prophecies that when God would come to earth he would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities and by his wounds, we would be healed. Maybe Mary knew that God was not just our friend but God was about to give his life so that they could be friends forever. And when it clicked in her heart, when she thought Jesus is God and God will die for me, maybe she went home and she scrambled until she found the most valuable thing she had. And pouring it out on Jesus in a single day was not crazy to her; it was the most reasonable act of worship she ever had.

And what I want to tell you tonight is that wasn't just true for Mary; that's true for you. Have you ever thought about how unreasonable all of this is? Christianity, on paper, is crazy. It's ridiculous. If you're a logical person, you should not become a Christian because it makes no sense. Think of it: God is in heaven and people are on earth and God leaves the glory of heaven to come to this broken place that makes us cry and weep and mourn. It's unreasonable that God would come face to face with the people who've offended him and wounded him and instead of slapping them, he'd reach out his hands and be slapped for them. It's unreasonable. I mean, Jesus is God. He's eternal. He has no flesh, no blood, no beginning, no end, but he takes on human flesh so that he can be whipped and crucified and flogged; so he can become torture-able, scourge-able and killable. It's unreasonable. And grace! I mean, karma makes sense to me; people who believe in karma, if you believe in karma, I totally get it. What goes around comes around. You get what you pay for. You do the crime; you do the - that makes sense. You know what doesn't make sense? That God would look at me and he would smile and God would look at you and he'd beam and he'd say, "forgiven and loved." That God would give his life on the cross so that he could look at us with delight and joy for all eternity. God's love is unreasonable and Mary knew it and I hope that you know it, too.

Here's the big motivation that drives people to do unreasonable things: That Jesus himself shows unreasonable love. How many guys in the room have ever bought a diamond ring for a girl they love? Hands nice and high; can I see them? Oh yeah, lots of you. Guys, why didn't you just get the Cracker Jack box? I mean, if you just want a visible symbol that she's taken, why spends

hundreds, thousands of dollars? I mean, from the outside, it doesn't make sense, right? She's a woman, you're a guy, there's lots of women, there's lots of guys. Man, but when you're in love, you don't want the bare minimum; you're unreasonable. When I first fell in love with Kim, I bought her 12 dozen roses. I bought a big thing of Styrofoam and cut it out into a heart and designed a scavenger hunt where she would find me at the end of it; I was a little bit desperate but it worked. You say, "Twelve dozen roses? That's unreasonable." It was and I was in love.

And some of you have buried someone you love, right? In the funeral home there's a little sheet of the kind of casket you can buy and the truth is, they don't know the difference. You put them in a Styrofoam box or the most expensive casket you can find but why do our hearts want to do something great? Because love doesn't want the minimum; love is unreasonable and it's crazy.

And so here's what I want you to know; what I need you to know. That God's love for you is so unreasonable until that love grips your heart and you just say, "Whatever I can do." I'll break open a jar, not because I have to, because I want to. Because I get to. 'Cause I'm just thinking - imagine if we did. What kind of joy could we bring? If you broke open your jar this week and the weeks to come, what kind of blessing would you be? Now, I know the answer to that question because I look at it every Sunday. Do any of you know the story of this church? Some of you have been here when we've baptized people and I can see some of the faces who are here today; you've celebrated with the angels. Some of you never really understood what Jesus was like, his grace and his mercy, until you stepped into this place. Some of you had given up on religion and on church until you came here and you found just the simple message of God's undeserved, unreasonable, love for you. There have been so many good things, so many moments of joy in our church's history, but do you know how it all started? With one unreasonable man. A man who had a heart that people in our city would hear the gospel, especially young people, and he gave until we had a church family strong enough to support our ministry, this man singlehandedly gave nearly a million dollars.

Do you think he regrets it? I talked to him on the phone on Friday. He would rather I not tell you his name but you should have heard the joy in his voice as he thinks about those of you who are closer to Jesus. See, that man broke open his jar and now here we are. That old Christian grew up with an older version of the Bible and there's a passage I wonder if he knew before he gave that unreasonable gift. Let me share it with you in the old language from Romans 12. It says, "I beseech you. Therefore, brethren," don't you love the old version? Which means I urge you, brothers and sisters, "by the mercies of God," because you know about God's mercies." His grace, his love, "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." Like, give your body, give everything you have as a sacrifice, and look how Paul describes it: "This is your reasonable service." When you come face to face with the mercy and grace and the love of God, the only reasonable thing to do is put your entire self on the altar every morning and every evening to break open your jar. So I beseech you, brothers, sisters; those of you who know Jesus and his unreasonable love, let's live with unreasonable faith.

Let's pray.

Dear God, rid our hearts of the "shoulds" and "have tos" and just compel us with the "want tos" and "get tos" because we've experienced something that so few people in this world have.

God, overwhelm us with your incredible love. In the short history of our church, we've seen miracles; we've seen you do incredible things and now we want to be the people that are part of the next miracle. We want to pass the baton of blessing onto the next generation, so God, make us different and make us unique. Help us give up the approval of other people, help us give up reasonable faith, and start to live crazy lives for you.

Holy Spirit, without your help, we'll take a step back but with you, we'll take a giant leap forward. So put a spring in our spiritual step today, God. We can't wait to see what happens when we do. We ask this all, Jesus, in your beautiful name, Amen.



## TIME OF GRACE®

# *Death to Selfie: THE Reason to Be Unreasonable*

## Study Notes

### *Summary*

You would think that an extravagant offering for Jesus would receive the approval of the church. Not so. Judas and others criticized the woman who anointed Jesus. The same thing happens today. Follow Jesus and the world might not approve. “You’re wasting time. Wasting money. Wasting energy. Wasting your life.” But Jesus defends those who love him. His approval is what matters the most, since it lasts forever.

- **Mark 14:3-7:** <sup>3</sup> While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. <sup>4</sup> Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? <sup>5</sup> It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly. <sup>6</sup> “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>7</sup> The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.”
- Jesus loves \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Mark 14:8,9:** <sup>8</sup> “She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. <sup>9</sup> Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”
- Jesus shows \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Titus 3:5-7:** <sup>5</sup> He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.
- **Romans 12:1 (KJV):** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

## Points to Ponder

1. Think through Jesus' suffering and death. What unreasonable things did he endure, despite being the Son of God? What adjectives best describe his love for us?
2. Whose "unreasonable" devotion to Jesus most inspired you and/or impacted your life? What did that person do? Why did that person do it?

## Homework for Next Week

Read Song of Songs.

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

—*John 15:18,19*