

A Sacrifice Of Extravagant Love

Mark 14:1-11

Introduction: 1) Let me ask you a question that I hope you will be brutally honest in answering: “have you in your life as a follower of King Jesus ever made a sacrifice of extravagant love?” Can you recall a time when you did something that really cost you? You actually went without something you really wanted because of a sacrifice of extravagant love for Jesus? I believe I did. Once. Yes, to my shame, once.

2) The sad fact is we are good at giving Jesus our leftovers and hand-me-downs. I served a church once that’s student building was filled with old, worn, ratty couches. Sweet folks in our church had bought new couches for their homes and so they donated their old, worn couches to the church and in the process got a tax break and felt good that they had done something noble. But, had they really? In the spirit of full discourse, I must confess one of the couches in the youth center had been given by me. It was no longer worthy of being in my house but it was good enough for Jesus.

3) In Mark 14:1-11 we seek something all together different, something truly remarkable, an indisputable sacrifice of extravagant love by a woman Mark allows to remain anonymous. And we also see the tale of 2 lives that could not stand in greater contrast when it comes to true and unreserved devotion to our Lord: an

unnamed woman who gave her very best and a man named Judas who betrayed the Son of God. Of the woman Jesus said, “wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (v. 9). Of the man Judas our Lord said, “It would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (v. 21).

Transition: 4 truths emerge from our text as we eavesdrop on a moment of pure, extravagant, sacrificial love.

I. Extravagant acts of love will be public. 14:1-3

- The backdrop of this story is the Jewish feast of Passover and Unleaven Bread (v. 1). This celebration took place annually and was observed in Jerusalem. It was a time of remembrance and thanksgiving for God’s miraculous deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage through the Exodus (cf. Exodus 12). This Jewish “Fourth of July” included the slaughter of the Passover lamb whose blood on the doorpost had caused 1400 years earlier the “death angel” to pass over each home where he saw the blood, sparing the life of the firstborn in the family.
- Jewish persons were flocking to Jerusalem to celebrate but in the shadows of secrecy the Sanhedrin (“the chief priest and scribes”) were seeking to arrest Jesus and kill him. Mark says they hoped to arrest him by stealth (*NIV*, “some sly way”), but felt they must wait until after the feast “lest there be an

uproar (*NIV*, “riot”) from the people” (v. 2). *The Message* paraphrases their words, “We don’t want the crowds up in arms.” They knew Jesus was popular with the people and therefore they would wait until the crowds had gone. However, things would proceed on God’s timetable not theirs and Christ the Passover Lamb would be sacrificed for us right on time (1 Cor. 5:7).

- Suddenly the scene shifts (v. 3) to a home in Bethany of a man named Simon. Jesus apparently had healed him of leprosy. Matthew 26:6-13 and John 12:1-8 also record this story. John 12:1 tells us the event happened “six days before the Passover” so Mark’s account is something of a flashback. John’s gospel also informs us that the lady who anointed both Jesus’ head (Mark 14:3) and feet (John 12:3) was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus “whom Jesus had raised from the dead” (John 12:2). Some have surmised that Simon may have been their father.
- As Jesus was “reclining at table” (v. 3), Mary “came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over [the head of Jesus]”. The unadulterated nard was a sweet smelling perfume from a rare plant found only in India. She broke the flask, making it no longer usable, and poured its full contents out on Jesus, both his head and feet which she wiped with her hair (John 12:3). It is interesting to note

that each of the 3 times we see Mary in the Gospels, she is at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39, John 11:32, 12:3). This was done in full display of a room full of people. It was done against cultural convention as a woman normally would not approach a man in this setting except to serve him food. Mary cared not one wit for any of this. Jesus was her Lord and Master. She deeply loved Him and would have done anything for Him. And, she did not care who heard or saw. Her devotion to Him trumped all others. She wanted everyone to know the inestimable value she placed on Jesus. So she went public! No one could deny or doubt where her loyalty lay. Can the same be said for you and me?!

II. Extravagant acts of love will often be criticized. 14:4-5

- The woman's act of astonishing, radical devotion did not go unnoticed. It also did not go without significant criticism. The critics would have no part in praising what this woman had done.
- Mark informs us that some began to talk among themselves and they were "indignant" (v. 4). Eugene Peterson says, "they swelled up in anger, nearly bursting with indignation over her" (*The Message*). Led by Judas (John 12:4ff) and in self-righteous pride they questioned both her motive and her action, "Why was this ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii [a year's salary] and given to the

poor. And they scolded her.” They continually expressed their anger and displeasure “snorting” at her.

- Several important observations can be made at this point.

1) The disciples not only demeaned the woman, they also demeaned Jesus.

To honor Christ in this manner they said was a “waste” (v. 4). They did not believe He was worthy of such a sacrifice of extravagant love.

2) Some are willing to be poor in their possessions in order to be rich in their devotion to Jesus. Others are not. And, it is the latter group that are usually the critics.

3) The world, and sadly many in the church, will never have a problem with moderate, measured devotion to Christ. They will have little or no problem with too many possessions, too much wealth and a pursuit of a comfortable and convenient Christianity. But, walk away from a “real career” in athletics, business, medicine, law or real-estate and you will be marked as foolishness, living a “wasted life.” Walk away from mom and dad and serve the Lord in an inner city in America among the poor and hurting and you will be deemed foolish and impractical. Walk away from family and friends and head out to the mission field among an unreached people group (7,055 as of 5-18-12) taking your small children with you and you will be chided as foolish, radical, even imbalanced in need of serious counseling (and maybe

even drugs!) Yes, you may be criticized here but in heaven you have a Master who applauds your love and devotion for Him! Paul puts it all in perspective does he not in Galatians 1:10, “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a slave of Christ.”

- George Whitefield the evangelist of the 1st Great Awakening said, “Oh for a 1000 lives to be spent in service for Christ!” However we must never forget, we only get one!

III. Extravagant acts of love will be remembered. 14:6-9

- In Acts 7:54-60 we have the record of the stoning of Stephen the first Christian martyr. In vs. 55-56 we read a most remarkable statement where Stephen sees the Lord Jesus “standing at the right hand of God” (stated twice). Our Savior stands to receive his faithful martyred servant into glory.
- Here in Mark 14:6-9 we see our Lord again standing up for another faithful servant, a woman who has showered Him with a sacrifice of extravagant love only to be scorned and ridiculed by those who should have known better.
- “Leave her alone” Jesus commands them (v. 6). “Why do you trouble her?” Why do you harass her? Harang her? Give her a hard time? “She has done

a beautiful thing for me.” She has done something wonderful and incredibly important to me as verse 8 makes clear.

- Verse 7 has caused some readers real heartburn. They misread the verse supposing Jesus to be somewhat callous and insensitive toward the poor.

The poor are always with us in this fallen and broken world and we can and should do good for them. Jesus believed that. Jesus taught that. The issue is between “always” and “not always.” The poor are always there but Jesus would not be. The opportunity to show Him this kind of personal love and affection would soon be gone. Further, and we should not miss this. Jesus is God speaking and the first of the great commandments always trumps the second (cf. Mark 12:30-31). Jesus indeed asserts his priority and preeminence above all others (Col. 1:18). And, this might help. Put these words in the mouth of any other human person and they sound scandalous, self-centered, even narcissistic. Put them in the mouth of the Son of God who “for your sake became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9) and they make all the sense in the world. Care for the poor, but worship the Savior!

- True love never calculates the cost. Genuine devotion never considers the investment. It simply and spontaneously acts and does all that it can,

disappointed only in the fact that it could not do more! This is exactly what we see in Mary.

- Jesus makes 3 striking observations about her in vs. 8 & 9. First, “she has done what she could.” She held nothing back. Nothing! Second, her act of extravagant love had prophetic and symbolic significance: “she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.” Did she fully understand what was about to happen? Probably not. Did she have greater insight into our Lord’s coming passion than the 12 disciples? Of this I have little doubt. Third, Jesus makes a promise that her sacrifice of extravagant love will never be forgotten as the gospel advances among all the nations throughout “the whole world.” (v. 9). The word “truly” (Gr. “amen”) add a word of certainty to His promise. Wherever the good news of salvation is proclaimed in the whole wide world, what this lady has done will be told again and again and again in memory of her. And, the fact I am sharing this story truly is a continuing validation of what Jesus promised.

Broken Vases

The aroma of extravagant love.
 So pure. So lovely.
 Flowing from the veined alabaster vase
 Of Mary’s broken heart-
 A heart broken against the hard reality
 Of her Savior’s imminent death.
 Mingled with tears, the perfume became-
 By some mysterious chemistry of Heaven-

Not diluted, but more concentrated,
 Potent enough behind the ears of each century
 For the scent to linger to this day.

Doubtless, the fragrance, absorbed by His garment,
 As it flowed from His head
 Accompanied Christ through the humiliation of His trials,
 the indignity of His mocking,
 the pain of His beatings,
 the inhumanity of His cross.
 Through the heavy smell of sweat and blood,
 A hint of that fragrance must have arisen
 From His garment-
 Until, at shameful last, the garment was stripped
 And gambled away.
 And maybe, just maybe, it was that scent
 Amid the stench of humanity rabbled around the cross,
 That gave the Savior the strength to say:
 “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

And as Mary walked away from the cross,
 The same scent probably still lingered in the now-limp hair
 She used to dry her Savior’s feet-
 A reminder of the love that spilled
 From His broken alabaster body.
 So pure. So lovely.
 So truly extravagant.

It was a vase He never regretted breaking.
 Nor did she.
 -Ken Gire, Jr.

IV. Extravagant acts of love will stand in stark contrast to those of betrayal. **14:10-11**

Some people find Jesus useful because of what they think they can get from
 Him. Others find Jesus beautiful because they get Him.

- This woman found Jesus beautiful and gave all she had to Him. In contrast Judas found Jesus useful and sought to get all he could for Him. The man from Kerioth (probably located about 10 miles south of Hebron (*NBD*, “Judas Iscariot,” 625]), Mark reminds us, “was one of the twelve” (v. 10). Not surprisingly, he is always last in all list of the apostles. He was so close to Jesus and yet he missed Him.
- Amazingly he takes the initiative in going “to the chief priest in order to betray” Jesus (v. 10). Both Luke (22:3) and John (13:2, 27) inform us that Satan moved him to betray the Lord. Still, he made a free-will choice to betray the Son of God.
- Verse 11 is both simple and tragic all at once. The leaders of the Sanhedrin were glad to hear this and promised Judas money. Matthew informs us it was for 30 pieces of silver (Matt 26:15; cf Zech 11:12-13), “the value of a slave accidentally gored to death by an ox (Ex. 21:32). That Jesus is lightly esteemed is reflected not only in his betrayal but in the low sum agreed on by Judas and the chief priest” (Carson, *Matt.*, *EBC*, 593).
- Judas then began to look for “an opportunity to betray him” (v. 11). It would come much sooner than he expected, but with results he would find “deathly disappointing.”

- What a contrast we so clearly see in Mary and Judas. A comparison is most instructive.

Mary

A woman of no real standing
 Gave what she could to Jesus
 Blessed her Lord
 Loved her Lord
 Did a beautiful thing
 Served Him as her Savior
 Memorialized forever for her
 devotion

Judas

A man and one of the apostles
 Took what he could get for Jesus
 Betrayed his Lord
 Used his Lord
 Did a terrible thing
 Sold Him like He was his slave
 Memorialized forever for his
 betrayal

- Oh, how I want to be like Mary. But oh, how often it is that it is Judas who so readily appears when I look in the mirror. Only the gospel of my Savior is sufficient for my sin, sick soul.

Conclusion:

I strongly suspect that were Mary, the unnamed woman of Mark 14, alive today, and we were to interview her and ask her the question, “What is your favorite Christian hymn?”, I strongly suspect she would say, “that’s easy. It was written in 1707 by Issac Watts. Why Charles Wesley reportedly said he would give up all his other hymns to have written this one. Mr. Wesley wrote over 6,000 hymns you know! Some say he wrote over 9,000! Now the hymn written by Mr. Watts: “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” I love all 4 stanzas, but 1 and 4 are especially meaningful to me!”

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

- 1) When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

- 2) Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most—
I sacrifice them to His blood.

- 3) See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

- 4) Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.