

The Suffering Servant: Devotion & Duplicity

Mark 14:1-11

The title of today's sermon is made up of two words, devotion and duplicity. I want you to think about that first word, devotion for a moment. I'm not using it this morning to refer to your morning routine of reading God's word. I looked up the definition of the word and there are several options given. Let me read the first two of these to you. First, devotion is profound dedication or consecration. Second, devotion is earnest attachment to a cause or person.

One of the clearest examples of devotion to the cause of the gospel over the past hundred years was the American missionary Jim Elliot. Jim was a student at Wheaton college who was profoundly dedicated to taking the gospel to people who had never heard it before. His consecration to this cause ultimately led him to Ecuador with a group of 4 other men and their wives. They had targeted a jungle tribe called the Auca Indians who lived in remote isolation and were violent toward outsiders in order to maintain their culture and way of life. In fact, the word Auca literally means savage.

The men began making contact by flying a small airplane over the village and dropping gifts and shouting greetings. Finally, on January 3rd, 1956 they landed on a strip of land by a river near the edge of the jungle and made contact with a small group of Aucas. Things initially went well, but a group of 10 hunters showed up later that day and killed all 5 of the American missionaries on the spot. Jim Elliot was 28 when he died.

Can you imagine how this event would be covered in the news today and with social media? What a waste! How extreme! This guys clearly had a messiah complex! And, let's be honest, to a typical American worldview it is insane for a bunch of well-educated Americans to risk their lives to try to get a 2,000 year old message to some primitive jungle people.

But the devotion of Jim Elliott and these other men was driven by a worldview that said this sacrifice was well worth it. Many of you will know these famous words that Jim wrote in his journal. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

It's this understanding of life that the gospel of Jesus Christ demands of us. We cannot remain half-hearted, casual followers of Jesus. This morning we are going to begin the last section of the Gospel of Mark and it's here that we find Jesus making the ultimate sacrifice for us. And His sacrifice calls for us to be singularly devoted to Him and this section begins with a story showing us what true devotion to Jesus looks like. Turn to Mark 14:1-11 this morning.

Keep in mind that everything since chapter 11 has been during the final week of Jesus' life. Jesus entered Jerusalem to great applause and acclaim from the people. He debated with the religious leaders in the temple courtyard. He predicted the coming destruction of the temple and the temple leadership as well as the end of the age. Now look at 14:1. The Passover began on Friday evening at sundown and so the events we are looking at today took place on Wednesday.

Here we encounter the religious leaders of Israel, led by the chief priests and they are not happy with Jesus. Look at the next part of verse 1. Keep in mind that Jesus caused a scene in the temple when he drove out the merchants and attacked the flow of commerce. He also embarrassed each and every group of religious leaders by debating them in the temple. He said things like "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?" So, the key religious leaders are seeking a way to destroy him, but they know they can't just arrest him in the open. Look at the end of verse 1 and verse 2.

During the week of Passover the population of Jerusalem would swell to as much as 4 times the normal size. It was also a time when people were celebrating God's deliverance of Israel from a foreign power in Egypt. With all these people in one place thinking about overthrowing a foreign government it makes sense that the religious leaders were especially concerned about riots against Rome.

We've been expecting that Jesus would die at the hands of the religious leaders since chapter 8, but now the focus is back on their plot to deceitfully destroy him. Of course, verses 1-2 don't tell us how they will be able to catch Jesus without inciting a riot, but if you skip down to verse 10 you get more information on this. Judas, one of Jesus' disciples goes to the chief priests. He initiates. How do the chief priests respond? Look at verse 11.

Now we know that Judas is looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus. Most likely this means that he will inform the religious leaders of Jesus' movements at night

when things are quiet and the crowds are not gathered. The stage is set now for Jesus to be betrayed by one of his closest associates.

Now, you obviously noticed that we skipped verses 3-9 to put the two pieces regarding the betrayal of Jesus together. This is what we call a sandwich technique and Mark uses it often in this Gospel. He inserts one story in the middle of two halves of another story and to understand both stories you have to read them together. In the middle, verses 3-9, we have a story of incredible sacrifice and devotion to Jesus. Mark intends us to read this story of devotion in contrast to the betrayal of Judas. Judas seemed to be a follower of Jesus, but when the time came, he was willing to betray the Lord for some money. That's certainly one response to Jesus that we often see.

But, the other response is what we find in the middle, in verses 3-9. We find someone so overwhelmed by love for Jesus that she gives up what is of nearly priceless value to her to show just how worthy He is. And as we are entering the final stages of the life of Jesus, I think Mark wants us to consider our own devotion to Him. So, this morning we will see **5 Sketches of Extravagant Devotion that bring purpose to our passion.**

1. It will be Lavish (v. 3)

Let's begin in the first part of verse 3. Of course, we know that with all the people in Jerusalem during Passover, many pilgrims would have stayed outside the city. Jesus and the disciples stayed in Bethany, about 2 miles from Jerusalem. While they are there on Wednesday evening a man named Simon, who most likely used to be a leper, hosted a gathering for Jesus and His disciples.

While they are eating something happens that defies social conventions of the day. Keep reading in verse 3. A woman enters the room, goes over to Jesus, breaks a flask of ointment or perfume and pours the whole thing on his head. This wasn't just your average perfume. Mark goes to great lengths to show just how valuable it is. Nard was incredibly valuable as the plant it came from was grown in India. This particular flask was pure nard, not diluted at all.

Rather than opening the bottle and pouring it out, she dramatically breaks the bottle and empties the entire thing on his head. Anointing someone with perfume or oil was a sign of friendship and fellowship according to the OT and pouring the

whole bottle out was well beyond normal courtesy. She wants everyone to know just how important Jesus is. We read in verse 5 that this flask could have been sold for an entire year worth of wages. The median income for a household in Woodhaven Michigan is \$58,500 a year. So, imagine you had a bottle of essential oil that would sell for \$58 grand on Ebay. What person is worth lavishing that on?

This is an effusive display of devotion to Jesus and Mark includes this here because this is the type of extravagant devotion followers of Jesus ought to emulate. But even as you're sitting there you're probably thinking, that is uncomfortably crazy. It seems a little over the top to be that committed to something. We are pretty weirded out by people who are that passionate. We prefer a little bit more carefulness and even handedness.

C.S Lewis wrote about this idea of moderation in our practice of our faith. His book *The Screwtape Letters* is a series of letters written from an instructor demon to his apprentice demon about the art of tempting humans. Here's what the demon writes concerning passion and moderation.

"In a week or two you will be making him doubt whether the first days of his Christianity were not, perhaps, a little excessive. Talk to him about 'moderation in all things'. If you can once get him to the point of thinking that 'religion is all very well up to a point', you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all - and more amusing." - C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

If Jesus is who He says he is and if He died for our sins then moderation in our pursuit of Him and love for him is the wrong answer. But people will not like it when we act as if Jesus is everything.

2. It will be Scorned (vv. 4-5)

Notice the reaction from those eating with Jesus witnessing this display of extravagant devotion. Let's read verses 4-5. They are indignant in their minds. It's not just that they don't like her actions, they feel they are wrong. They explain why. With that price for this oil they see her actions as a complete waste of a valuable resource and they scold her or censure her. It's interesting here because by telling her that she has wasted this resource they are saying that Jesus isn't worth it either.

Genuine and passionate devotion to Christ will be odd to the world around us. It will be considered misguided and inappropriate. But keep in mind that Jesus isn't simply calling for passion. You can be passionate about the poor and still be missing the most important thing to do devoted to. That brings us to our 3rd sketch of extravagant devotion.

3. It will be Christ-Centered (vv. 6-7)

What separated this woman's devotion from others is the fact that it was centered on Jesus. She was being scolded now in front of this room of people and Jesus defends her actions. Look at verse 6. Jesus is like, stop giving her a hard time because she has done a beautiful thing to me. The focus of her action was showing the worth and value of Jesus and he knew that. The words "beautiful thing" could be translated "good work." She has done a good work to me.

The disciples who are scolding her fail to value and recognize the devotion she is showing to Jesus and that He is worthy. They are worried about the poor, and Jesus addresses their concern in verse 7.

Now, I have heard this verse used to say that it's of no point to serve and help the poor. That's not the intention at all in what Jesus is saying. In fact, he takes these words from Deuteronomy 15:11 which makes the exact opposite point. Because you will always have the poor with you, you ought to help and serve.

But keep in mind what Jesus says at the end of verse 7. He is two days from death then he will rise from the dead and ascend to the Father. If this woman wants to show extravagant devotion to Jesus two days before his death that is completely appropriate and right.

I think what Jesus is saying here is that we should not let the good become the enemy of the best. The "some" who were scolding her had not yet learned the supreme value of the Savior. They had not yet learned to fix their love on Him and on Him alone. It is good to love your spouse, your kids, your job, and your favorite book. But do not give your highest and best devotion to anything other than Jesus Christ. An old puritan author said it this way:

"Love is the greatest and most excellent thing we are masters of; and therefore it is folly and baseness to bestow it unworthily." - Henry Scougal

Extravagant devotion is fixed on Jesus as the greatest and highest good, but practically speaking, it doesn't always involve a lavish gift like this.

4. It will Give what it Can (v. 8a)

Notice what Jesus says of this woman in defense of her action at the beginning of verse 8. "She has done what she could." We talked a few minutes ago about the missionary Jim Elliott, who was killed in seeking to spread the gospel to a group of people who otherwise would never hear. This story is about a woman who chooses to pour out what must have been among her most valuable and prized possessions to show her devotion to Jesus. These are massive and expensive actions.

When you hear this it's easy to think that unless I express my devotion in similar ways, it will not be enough. This woman did what she could and that is what mattered. Her devotion was extravagant, but she had the opportunity and the ability to give up something like this to show the worth of the Savior. This is not expected for each of us.

Jesus is asking and calling us to ordinary, extravagant devotion day after day, week after week, year after year in the small things. Showcase the worth and value of Jesus Christ by serving people at your job, loving your spouse, shepherding your kids, serving those less fortunate around you, showing up to church and singing with all your heart, helping your neighbor, sharing the gospel, reading your Bible and loving Jesus with everything you have.

Give what you can, where you are, and Jesus will be honored. Of course, all of our devotion is a response. It's a response to the work of Christ in our lives. This is our 5th sketch.

5. It will Flow from the Gospel (vv. 8b-9)

We don't know exactly what this woman knew about Jesus' upcoming death and burial, but Jesus connects her actions directly to his death. Look at the end of verse 8.

Then notice the promise that Jesus makes concerning her actions in verse 9. Now, what's interesting here is that her name isn't mentioned in this story. I don't think Jesus is promising that this story will be told wherever the gospel is proclaimed

simply as a reward for a really nice thing she did. So, why does Jesus say that this story will go wherever gospel proclamation goes all around the world?

He says that because her actions are the supreme example of what happens when the gospel changes you. Her extravagant devotion flows from a heart that loves Jesus and values His work. So, when people around the world hear this about the work of Jesus: Mark 10:45. They will also hear this: Mark 8:34-38. And they will see a clear and compelling example in this passage of an extravagant devotion that flows from the gospel.

What are you devoted to? What is your heart captured by? A devoted heart leads us to make sacrifices in big and small ways for the Lord.