

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“A Lover of Jesus Christ”
Mark 14:1-11
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New City Church of LA
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I. Introduction

Welcome to New City!

Talk about our vision statement: to be an inclusive gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ.

We are inclusive not because we believe that everyone is okay; but because we believe that everyone is messed up, but that God loves us and accepts us through Jesus Christ more than we can ever imagine, at the same time. That in essence is the gospel.

We are also a community of lovers of Jesus Christ.

What does that mean?

What does it mean to love someone? What is love? How do you know you truly love someone? Of course, love always desires a personal and intimate relationship. I don't think it is possible to love someone without at least wanting a personal and intimate relationship with that someone, and I don't think it is possible to love someone without wanting to express that love.

So, how do we love God? How do we express our love to God? What does our relationship with God supposed to look like?

If you are not a Christian, I hope you will see the kind of relationship God wants to have with you.

Today's passage tells us.

Read Mark 14:1-11

This passage teaches us different ways to have a relationship with God and others: (1) the pragmatic approach of Judas; (2) the extravagant approach of the woman; and (3) the ultimate extravagant approach of Jesus.

II. First, the pragmatic and calculating approach of Judas.

Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve disciples. He hung around Jesus for 3 years. He was the keeper of the money bag for the group according to the Book of John. Here in Mark, it doesn't say who the objectors were but the Book of John in the same story tells us that it was Judas who objected. He knew the value of the perfume, and he thought it was a complete waste of money to pour the perfume on Jesus. He was a practical guy. He was infuriated by what Jesus did. This may have been a breaking point for him. He went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them for money.

Before you condemn Judas a greedy traitor, I want us to think about what it is that Judas is doing and see if we do the same.

He approached his relationship with Jesus for what he can gain from it. He was the treasurer and John tells us that he used to help himself to the money. Following Jesus benefited him. But, when it got inconvenient, he wanted to maximize his return on the relationship he had with Jesus by selling that information to the chief priests.

Isn't that the way we approach our relationship with people, and even God?

We calculate the costs and benefits. Is this relationship going to benefit me? Is this a waste of time? How much is this going to help me? We see people as a means to a goal. If they can't offer any benefits to us, we walk away. Or if they can't help our cause, we walk away. Some of you have thought to yourself: why would I hang out with him? He doesn't have anything to offer me. I want to hang out with him because he makes me feel better about myself or because he is good to me or he will be useful for me in the future.

Why is it that people who are wealthier or more famous or really good looking seem to attract more people to them? People think they will benefit from the relationship. That's why. We have created a pecking order of useful people in our lives and people who don't help us in our lives.

I know some of you are saying, ya, that's not me. Really? I think we are all drawn to people who benefit us or our cause. It may not be true all the time, but it is true a lot of the times, particularly if you have a hierarchical view of people.

We calculate in our relationship with God as well.

- Sometime people ask me if they have to give up all of the drugs (maybe pot is okay?) or if they have to give up pre-marital sex if they become a Christian.

- Or they think or say things like: I'll believe in you and follow you if you give me this or that. If you let me marry that person, I'll do anything for you. I am not saying that God doesn't answer these kinds of prayers, but it does show our approach to our relationship with God.
- When following Jesus brings suffering in our lives, when following Jesus becomes inconvenient, then we sometimes walk away from Jesus.
- Maybe for some of you, coming to church on Sundays is like that—a quick and dirty cost/benefit analysis. What else do I have today vs. church.
- We are willing to do what he wants us to do because we want to be blessed by Him. He's like a big Santa Claus. If we are naughty, He ain't going to bring us His blessings. He ain't going to bring us a good apartment. He ain't going to bring us a wife, a job, money, health. So, we do the things we do because we think if we do it, God will bless us. But, if something happens in our lives where it doesn't seem like a blessing, you either walk away from God or condemn yourself as not being good enough to deserve God's blessings.

When we do this, God becomes a vehicle for the things you really want.

- When you think about it, God becomes second to that other thing you really want. This is true even if that thing you want is a social issue and agenda that you feel will help the poor.
- What you are saying is that you think that other thing is the thing that will get you your ultimate pleasure and happiness. God just becomes a means to your real god, your real idol.
- If you are praying to God for a wife or a husband, and you are willing to do all kinds of things for God to get a wife or a husband, to you, marriage is your real god. That's where you believe you will get your ultimate pleasure, value and happiness.
- If you are following Jesus so that you will be blessed with riches, money is your real god. Money is what you believe will bring you ultimate pleasure, worth and happiness.

Let's break away from this self-centered model, from this calculating approach to relationships.

III. Second, let's see a picture of a woman who broke from the pragmatic conventional approach. She approached Jesus with an extravagant act of love.

Mark doesn't tell us who she is. She is just an unnamed woman. John, however, tells us who she is. She is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (you'll get this if you read John) and this dinner in honor of Jesus. It takes place at Simon the Leper's house. It is most likely someone who Jesus healed. Mary takes alabaster jar of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. This is so expensive that it is worth more than a year's worth of wage for an average laborer. So, maybe around \$20,000. That's a lot of money for a perfume. Nard was imported from India/Nepal area. Even the alabaster jar was expensive. Why would she have something so expensive? It was mostly likely her most valuable possession. She probably had it for her wedding day. The jar was sealed and she broke it and poured the content on the head of Jesus. This is an expression of absolute uncalculated extravagant love. Jesus said she has done a beautiful thing for him. It was an act of beauty. It is not just good. It is beautiful.

It was beautiful because it was done from her heart at a moment's notice. She only had a small window of opportunity when he came for dinner, and she did not want to let the moment slip by.

It was beautiful because she didn't let cultural norms from stopping her extravagant expressions of love. There was a culture of anointing a special guest with oil when they came in, but not perfume like this.

It was beautiful because she gave the Lord her best, her most precious possession without calculation.

It was beautiful because she gave out of pure love.

It was beautiful because it was so intimate.

It was beautiful because she broke a jar.

It was beautiful because her expressions of love rose above mediocrity. It was extravagant!

It was beautiful because Jesus was not a means to another end. She was the one she sought to honor and glorify. It meant that Jesus is the object of her delight, not a way to get to something else that she believed will give her happiness. She was hedonistic in her pursuit of delight in Jesus. Jesus was not a means to some other end. Her joy was Jesus, the Lord, not some gold or silver or fame or something else. She knew that her deepest and enduring delight and happiness came from Jesus.

I think one of the reasons Jesus did not stop her is not because Jesus needs to be honored but because the beautiful act was a consummation of her delight and joy in Jesus. If you think about it, when we enjoy and value someone or something, we can't help but to praise that person or thing. Every enjoyment overflows into praise! People do it all the time. People praise their moms, lovers, their children, their school, their favorite team, even their favorite stores—Costco. Why do they praise? Because every enjoyment overflows into praise. That's one of the reasons Jesus didn't stop her. He wanted her to delight in him and he wants us to delight in Him. When we delight ourselves in Him, we can't help but to overflow in praise.

C.S. Lewis says: "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation." Let me illustrate. I remember when our kids were babies. Grace often fed the babies and just looked at them and adored them. She adored and enjoyed them so much that she told me that she couldn't help expressing her delight. She told them how cute they are, how precious they are to her, how wonderful their various abilities and body parts are, and goes on and on. I believe her praise of the babies not only expresses her enjoyment of the babies but also completes her enjoyment. If someone told her she could not say those things, it would impede her enjoyment of the babies. If Jesus told her to stop, it would have impeded her delight in Jesus. In the same way, our praise and worship of God is not only an expression of our joy but a consummation of our joy.

Are you approaching Jesus as a means to something else you think will give you the real pleasure and happiness in your life or are you approaching Jesus for him, to delight in him and love him?

IV. Third, the only way to seek Jesus for him is to see His approach towards us, the ultimate extravagant love.

He said she is pouring perfume on his body for the burial. Jesus is looking to the cross. You see, Jesus, in an act of beauty, in an extravagant love, at infinite cost to himself, he gave up his life for us. He paid the price of sin so that we would not have to. What is the utility of that for him? What did it benefit him? He did it all for you. He did it just to gain you. He wants to delight in you. He wants us to delight in him. He wants a relationship with us. What you see in Mary is but a shadow of what Jesus did for you. He did it just to make you His beauty. Do you see how transformational this is? The one who was infinitely more worthy than you did this for you. When you see this, there is no more looking at God just as a means to something else. He is utterly beautiful, and he deserves all of our nard, the best of ourselves, all of ourselves. That's when we can respond to him with extravagant end in itself love. And that's when we start to change the way we deal with all of our relationships. It is no longer about what that relationship can get me. It is about living in beauty with others and with God.