

Love for the King

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[0 : 00] Well, relationships change us. Any relationship that you have with someone will change you. Or if you have a relationship, someone else has a relationship with you, you'll rub off on them, they'll rub off on you, and one or other of you will be changed. And that is just the nature of relationships. Let me give one example. Before I married Shona, my wife, I used to enjoy good films, films like James Bond, The Godfather, Trilogy, Star Wars, and so on. Great films.

Shona enjoyed other films, films like Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Life is Beautiful. And now we both enjoy similar films. And I don't mean just romance or so on, more in the good film category than the romance category. And that's what happens when you enter into a relationship with someone, you change. They change. And it doesn't have to be a marriage relationship. It can be a close friendship. It can be a work colleague. It can be a work relationship. Any kind of relationship that we have with someone else will change us. And so today what we're going to do is we're going to think about the one relationship that changes us more than any other.

And that is a relationship with Jesus Christ, because that's what we see in a reading from Mark chapter 14. Because at the heart of this passage, right in the middle, we see a woman's devotion for Jesus. But I wonder if you noticed there were three separate scenes in this reading.

So scene one would be a plot to kill Jesus by the religious authorities. And then scene two would be this unnamed woman's devotion to Jesus. And then scene three would be Judas who wants to betray Jesus.

So it's one of Mark's sandwiches that we find quite often throughout his gospel. It's a technique, a literary technique he uses really to emphasize something in the middle. It's sandwiched between, in this case, negative. Negative, get rid of Jesus, an evil plot to kill him. Positive, devotion to Jesus.

[2 : 07] And then negative, betrayal by Judas. And it's a sandwich like this because we're supposed to see the sharp contrast in the different responses to Jesus. So that Mark wants us, in essence, to see, well, how do I respond to Jesus? How do I relate to him? Here's a negative way people relate to him.

Here's a positive way someone relates to him. But what about you? What about me? And so let's consider this under three headings. They're up on the screen there. First of all, an evil act. Secondly, an extravagant act. And then thirdly, an even more extravagant act. And then we'll look at how this changes us. So first of all, an evil act. This is by the religious authorities in Judas. So from Mark chapter 14 onwards, there's a deliberate move towards the death of Jesus. And that's the context here. So if you look back to verse 1 and 2, we read, now at the Passover and the festival of unleavened bread were only two days away. And the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. But not during the festival, he said, or the people may riot. So two days before Passover and the festival of unleavened bread. Now, these two feasts came together and were celebrated as a commemoration of Israel's rescue from their slavery in Egypt, way back in the book of

Exodus and the Old Testament. And so the Passover memorializes the night when the angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelites because they pasted the blood of the lamb on their door frames and the angel of death killed the firstborn of the Egyptians. So God's people were protected by the blood of the Passover lamb. The lamb was sacrificed as a substitute so that the people could be saved. And the Jews celebrated this every year by sacrificing a lamb and then by eating it together and enjoying a meal. And then the festival or the feast of unleavened bread, it followed the Passover just simply to recall how Israel made a hasty departure from Egypt the following morning. And so these were big celebrations to remember how God had saved his people in the past. And so Mark specifically tells us that this was two days away because these two big events made it difficult for the religious leaders to arrest and kill Jesus because Jerusalem was

busy, the town was full. And yet their evil plan comes together with help from Judas. And so let's just jump down to the end of our passage in verse 10 and 11.

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

So Mark here highlights that Judas was one of the twelve, that is he was one of Jesus's disciples. But notice it wasn't the religious authorities who went to Judas, it was Judas who went to them to betray Jesus. And yet we shouldn't read these events that lead towards the death of Jesus and think that this is a situation out of control. Remember the Passover and what it was all about, the rescue of God's people through the blood of the Lamb? That is in effect what Jesus is going towards, to rescue God's people through his shed blood on the cross. And so Jesus is in complete control of this situation. He predicted his death on numerous occasions because he would substitute himself so that through his blood sinful people like you and me could be passed over and rescued from God's judgment.

[5 : 57] And so the rescue of Israel from their slavery in Egypt and the Passover pointed towards God's rescue of his people. And so that's why these verses, we should never think Jesus was some helpless victim who couldn't help dying on a cross.

This is all according to plan. Jesus is deliberately moving towards his death because that is why he came. And this is further expressed by the extravagant act of devotion by this woman.

Because this story, you notice, isn't actually about her. It is about Jesus. And so we've seen, first of all, an evil act. Let's think, secondly, about this extravagant act by the woman.

And this comes up in verse 3 to verse 9. Her extravagant devotion to Jesus is seen with the perfume. And remember, it is in sharp contrast to the religious authorities and their evil act and to Judas and his betrayal.

And we're meant to see the contrast to ask ourselves, who are we more like here? So verse 3 says, 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.

[7 : 13] She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Now, Bethany was about two miles outside of Jerusalem, and Jesus was having dinner at Simon the leper's house. Presumably, Jesus cured Simon the leper of his leprosy, or else he wouldn't be having people in his house.

So he's no longer a leper. And as was the custom in those days, Jesus was reclining at the table, the normal posture for a meal. And that's when he is shown this extravagant devotion, not by Simon, who's the host, but by this mystery woman who gatecrashes the meal.

Now, if this is the same event that's recorded in John's Gospel, then the woman is Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha from Bethany. But this woman's behavior doesn't really fit with the social customs of the day, because a woman wouldn't just appear and walk into a meal like this.

And yet, like anyone, showing up to a party without an invite, she brings a bottle. In this case, it's an alabaster jar of perfume. But another kind of cheap perfume that you get from Boots.

This is very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. Not lard, no, but pure nard. Because nard was this aromatic oil that came all the way from India and was extracted from the root of a plant.

[8 : 35] And so we read in verse 5 that it was worth 300 denarii, which was a year's wages for a laborer. So in our terms, this is probably thousands of pounds in value, this perfume.

And it was sealed in this alabaster jar to preserve its fragrance. And it's likely that this expensive perfume was like a family heirloom. I guess like jewelry that is passed on from a mother to her daughter, who then passes it on to her daughter, who then passes it on to her daughter.

So expensive. And this would have been the most valuable thing that this woman owned, her most prized possession. In effect, this perfume was her future and it was her security.

It was her livelihood. And yet what does she do? Well, she breaks the jar and pours the perfume on Jesus in this lavish act. She couldn't have been more extravagant in her devotion to Jesus.

Because she recognized that Jesus was worthy of all that she could possibly give him. And her action was an indication that she's, in a sense, investing her life and investing her future in Jesus by taking all that she has and laying it on him.

[9 : 53] It symbolized her absolute, total, complete devotion to Jesus. And yet it didn't go down well with the rest of the dinner party.

Because in verse 4 and verse 5, we read that people are complaining. Some of those present were saying indignantly 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 so her act of love was met with anger because the hater is going to hate, hate, hate, hate. They're grumbling. Seeing this as a total waste.

Couldn't the money have been given to the poor if she sold a perfume? Because in a society like that, the poor, they were everywhere. There were always desperate and needy people who needed help.

And so wasn't this a total waste of resources? Why waste all this on Jesus? It could have achieved so much good. How could her action be justified? And we can see the point, can't we?

[10:59] We get this. We can see where they're coming from. It seems so reckless. It seems so extravagant. And yet despite their reaction, what does Jesus do? Well, he jumps to the woman's defense because what they saw as a wasteful thing, Jesus sees as a beautiful thing.

Verse 6, Leave her alone, said Jesus. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. So Jesus accepts and Jesus approves of her extravagant act.

It was a beautiful thing for Jesus because it was an expression of how much she loved and valued Jesus. And so Jesus knew the extent of her devotion to him just in the same way that Jesus knows the extent of our devotion to him as well.

Not just by what we do, by our outward actions, because Jesus knows our hearts. He knows how truly devoted to him we really are.

And we're going to come back to this. But there's more to it because there's a far deeper significance to this act. And it's far deeper and greater than I think this woman could possibly have understood.

[12:08] Her action could not have been more appropriate because of what was going to happen to Jesus. Okay, so let's move on from the evil act to the extravagant act to an even more extravagant act by Jesus.

Because Jesus sees this woman's extravagant act as preparation for his death. So it's all pointing towards this even more extravagant act. Verse 7 and 8 say, The poor you will always have with you and you can help them anytime you want, but you will not always have me.

She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Now when Jesus says, The poor you will always have with you.

You can help them anytime you want. He's not saying, Don't bother with the poor. It doesn't really matter whether you help them or not. What he's saying is, there's always going to be poor people, but because of who Jesus is and because of what Jesus came to do, he is worthy of such extravagance.

So her action anticipates Jesus' death. Jesus makes this explicit by saying, She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

[13:20] Now this woman surely did not grasp the full significance of her action because in the Old Testament, the anointing of kings was done by placing oil on their heads.

But this anointing isn't with the oil to acknowledge Jesus' kingship. It's with perfume to prepare for his burial.

So Jesus is moving towards his death. And we know that in those days, dead bodies, because there was a stench after they were dead, and before they were placed in a tomb, perfumes and spices would be placed on them so the smell wasn't so bad.

And so while others saw what she did as a waste, Jesus sees it as preparation for his death. This woman's extravagant act of love for Jesus was pointing to his even more extravagant act of love by going to the cross for us.

So this was preparation for his saving work. He would come, live, die, be buried and resurrected again. And so just as this woman willingly poured out her perfume, so Jesus would willingly pour out his life on the cross.

[14:38] An extravagant and infinitely costly act. And yet, for many people, then and now, the death of Jesus just seems like a complete waste.

I mean, why did Jesus have to die? What was the point of that? And yet, this was God's way of achieving his saving purposes. And that's why Jesus says in verse 9, Truly I tell you, whatever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.

So Jesus knew his death would be followed by his burial, which would be followed by his resurrection. And this message, his death and resurrection, would be proclaimed throughout the whole world.

And Jesus calls this the gospel. Because gospel, it's a word we might use often, but it simply means good news. The good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

And it's good news because it is God's supreme act of love to an unlovely humanity, to us. Because Jesus Christ is the one who is infinitely valuable, infinitely worthy, and yet his life is poured out for people who are completely unworthy, people like you and me.

[15 : 58] And so nothing could possibly be more extravagant than God's love for us in sending his son to die for us. So how does this change us?

Well, first of all, we see the evil act. Secondly, an extravagant act. Thirdly, an even more extravagant act. And then let's just think as we conclude how this changes us.

Well, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus, does change our lives when we respond to it. And so let's just see how this woman's devotion to Jesus applies to us.

Just listen again to the three things that Jesus said she did. First one's in verse 6. She has done a beautiful thing to me. And secondly, verse 8, she did what she could.

And then thirdly, verse 9, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. And so I think there's another slide. And so three things here. We do for Jesus.

[16 : 58] We do what we can. And we do what will last. So first of all, we do for Jesus. She has done a beautiful thing to me. This woman's act of love was done for Jesus.

It wasn't for anybody else. She wasn't showing off to anyone by saying, look how good I am because of what I do. It was done for Jesus. Jesus had so captivated her heart that she valued Jesus above all else.

He was worth far more than her expensive perfume. In other words, he was worth far more than everything she had. because, you know, Jesus is worth more than all the riches of this world.

And for her, Jesus was worth far more than her reputation. She was prepared to be misunderstood, criticized, because Jesus was more important to her than what people thought of her.

So she did it for Jesus. And the challenge for us is, well, do we serve Jesus in this wholehearted way? Are we prepared to give up what we have out of love and devotion for Jesus?

[18 : 06] Even if it means losing our future security. Or even if it means losing our reputation. Or even if it brings criticism from other people because they think we're wasting our lives.

What this woman did seemed extravagant. It seemed lavish, excessive, and completely over the top. But if, like her, we're captivated by the love of Jesus for us, then we'll forget about ourselves. And the cost won't really matter. Because when we discover his infinite worth and value, whatever we do for him will never be a waste. And so is there anything that you or I wouldn't want to give up for Jesus?

Maybe a behavior, maybe a relationship, maybe our money, maybe our time, maybe our career plans. Do we just want to hold on to those things and say, these are mine, Jesus, you can't touch these.

Because if these are the things that we don't want to give up for Jesus, what does it tell us? Well, in fact, it tells us it's because we love these things more than we love Jesus. If we can't bear to part with them or loosen our grip on them even, it's because they're more important to us than he is.

[19 : 29] And so the extent to which we value Jesus will be the extent to which we offer him our whole lives, our ambitions, our hopes, our plans. But remember, whenever we do express our devotion to Jesus, and it is costly, and it does involve sacrifice, what does Jesus say?

Thanks very much. He says, this is a beautiful thing that you've done for me. He notes. He knows. So that's the first thing we do for Jesus.

Secondly, we do what we can. She did what she could. Verse 8. So, Jesus commends her for what she did. What she had was expensive perfume.

And so she chose to pour all her perfume out on Jesus, out of love for him. And so do we do what we can for Jesus? Now, obviously, there are things that we will never be able to do.

But Jesus isn't expecting us to do what we can't do. A couple of weeks ago, we sent Martin and Jennifer Patterson off to serve as missionaries. Now, Jesus isn't saying that's what everybody's got to do.

[20 : 41] Because we all have our limitations, which can make certain things impossible for us. But that shouldn't stop us doing what we can do. Because if God is giving us gifts, then we're to use them for him.

And so we can do for God, we can do with what he's given us. It might be our time, it might be our home, it might be our opportunities, it might be our finances, our family, or whatever it is.

The challenge is, will we do what we can do for Jesus? So what can you do? What can I do? Never mind what other people do, or what other people can do, and never mind what you can't do, Jesus isn't asking you to do those things.

But what can we do for Jesus? Because if we can do it, then we should do it. That's an expression of our love for him. And then the third thing, we do what will last.

Verse 9, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. So the beautiful thing this woman did for Jesus made a lasting impact, way beyond what she could ever have imagined.

[21 : 51] Jesus' words are actually fulfilled by the very fact we are talking about this woman today. She did a beautiful thing for Jesus, and she has been remembered. Of course, Judas in the story has also been remembered, but for the wrong reasons.

He goes down in history as a traitor. So much so that the name Judas is out there to describe somebody who is a traitor. I remember going to a Glasgow Warriors game in Scottsdale when Edinburgh were playing Glasgow, and one of the players was being mocked and abused for being a traitor, and he was being called Judas, and the crowd were cheering, Judas, Judas, Judas, because he used to play for Glasgow, and then he moved to Edinburgh, and so when he came back to Glasgow, he got that greeting from the fans.

And so Judas is remembered for the wrong reasons, but look at this woman. She is remembered for the right reasons. Judas received 30 pieces of silver for handing Jesus over, and it's so shocking because that is just a tiny percentage of the cost of this woman's perfume, and we're supposed to see the stark contrast because Judas and the religious authorities do a disgusting thing to Jesus, but the woman does a beautiful thing because in pouring out her perfume, she was giving up everything, her earthly security, her future prospects, everything, and yet what she was doing was she was investing in a kingdom that lasts forever, and so she wasn't wasting a single penny, a single thing, and so do we live our lives?

Do we spend our time? Do we offer our best? Do we use our resources on what lasts? Because what this world values, money, possessions, career, status, power, none of that lasts, does it?

But here is a woman who makes the best investment possible by investing her life with Jesus, and so in the eyes of the world, whether back then or now, this might seem like a complete waste of life.

[23 : 57] Why would you follow Jesus? Why would you give your life to him? Why would you serve him? What a waste. You're so talented and gifted. Why use your energy to serve Jesus?

You've heard that said to you the same as I've heard it said to me. But maybe you're here today and you're considering whether following Jesus is really worth it. Well, what the story is telling us is devoting your life to Jesus is actually the most sensible thing that you could ever do.

It is never loss, it is always gain. Listen to what C.T. Studd, a missionary, once said. He said, only one life will soon be passed, only what's done for Christ will last.

And so the encouragement is that if you are seeking to live for Jesus, and follow Jesus, even if you're mocked by others, even if it's hard, whatever you do for Jesus, however small, however seemingly insignificant, it will never be wasted.

Isn't that what Jesus is saying here? We never waste our lives with him. Okay, so this woman's example should be a great encouragement to us because it reminds us Jesus sees all that we do for him.

[25 : 17] He sees the service that nobody else sees. He sees what we give in a way that nobody else sees. He knows the devotion of our hearts even if nobody else does.

And he understands that we can only do what we can. He hears what others say when they mock us. And so when we grasp this deep in our hearts, it is what changes our lives.

It changes them now, but it changes them forever. And so we express our gratitude for all that God has done for us by offering all that we are and all that we have to him in return.

You know, as a minister, quite often I speak to couples about their marriage and offer counseling.

And I was once talking to a couple who were having difficulties in their marriage and there was a lot of bitterness and pain and misunderstanding.

Nobody here, by the way, so don't be trying to guess anything that I'm not saying. But at one point in this conversation, this is what the husband said. And he blurted out in sheer frustration, he said to his wife, he was sitting there, he said, I've given you everything.

[26 : 25] And then he said something along the lines of, I've given you a lovely home. I've given you a new car. I've given you all the clothes you could ever wear. I've given you this, I've given you that, I've given you the next thing.

And he went on and on and on. And his wife just sat there patiently, didn't say a word until he'd finished and then she said to him, that's all true. You have given me everything, everything but yourself.

You see, the greatest gift that anyone can give is themselves. And what has God done for us in sending Jesus? He's given himself to us in Jesus Christ. And so the only right response is that we devote ourselves fully to him.

He's given me to him. Wow, you're still like, who's protecting the did someone to himself.

And so the only one day he lives had gūn ■ breathtaking, that we stay auxillitude■boarding, so the only is that water happening.