

# Treachery and Devotion

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[ 0 : 00 ] Would you grab your Bibles? I'm going to stick pretty close to the text. Now, if you have a look, what we have is a sandwich.

You can see it. You can see it if you look closely. Verses 1 to 2, a story of treachery. Verses 9, verses 10 to 11, a story of treachery. And in the middle, 3 to 9, this amazing act of devotion by this wonderful woman.

So you've got treachery, treachery, devotion in the middle. Now, this is like a literary technique that Mark uses a lot. I'm not making this stuff up.

And he uses it to direct our attention to something really important. And what's important when he uses this technique is the meat in the sandwich, the middle bit, which is the anointing of Jesus.

And it's such, it's just an amazing thing, right? It's an amazing thing what this woman did. It's particularly amazing when you consider that one of the big sort of themes in Mark 14 is the abandonment of Christ.

[ 1 : 11 ] People leaving Christ or plotting to kill him. So it makes this unnamed woman's act so much more incredible in contrast.

It's like a beacon. A beacon representing loyalty and adoration in the midst of betrayal.

And it's a foil to betrayal, actually, but I'll talk more about that later. So what I want to do is I want to chat quickly about the two treachery bits, the bread, and then I'm going to talk about the meat quite a bit longer, okay?

All right, easy, right? Let's get at it. This is one and two, the plot to kill Jesus. So this is one and two happen around, it says, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Folks, if you are visiting with us or you're not really familiar with the Bible story, let me just give you a quick catch up, okay? Right. So these are festivals and they celebrate the liberation of the Israelites from slavery, in particular from Egypt, where they were mistreated sort of slaves, right?

[ 2 : 18 ] So you kind of maybe know the story. Moses goes to the Pharaoh and says, let my people go. And Pharaoh says, no, God sends plagues and plagues and plagues. Pharaoh still says, no, God sends a final plague of death.

Death visits every Egyptian house, but the Israelites have spared death. They sacrifice a lamb. And of course, this points to Jesus, but that's a whole other sermon.

So death passes over the Israelites. Passover. Got it? Easy, right? Unleavened bread. Okay. As a result of death, the death in Egypt, Pharaoh says, go, go, go.

So the Jewish people had to get out really quickly and they're packing up their staff and food for the journey and no time for bread to rise and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. There you go.

Moving on quickly. These were pilgrimage feasts, meaning you had to go to Jerusalem to participate in them. So there's around 200,000 Jews would have been heading into Jerusalem at the time of our story.

[ 3 : 20 ] All of that to say, there's 200,000 Jews in Jerusalem all feeling very nationalistic, which is why the Sanhedrin at the beginning of our passage here saying, well, we probably shouldn't kill Jesus in this climate because it could go sideways very quickly.

There could be a revolt. There could be a riot. Because here is a whole lot of people remembering freedom. And some of them are thinking that Jesus is going to liberate them politically.

Now, the hatred of Jesus is not a new thing. Not from these guys here. It all started back in Mark 3. You remember Jesus heals a guy with a withered hand on the Sabbath.

And after that, the Bible says that these guys planned together how to destroy him, it says. So the previous chapter or the previous couple of chapters when Jesus is cleansing the temple, right?

I mean, that's got to get them pretty fired up. And then these verbal exchanges where Jesus just kind of, you know, wipes the floor with them.

[ 4 : 32 ] Well, their anger must have been fairly white hot, which is, you know, they're wanting to get this guy, right? They're wanting to get Jesus. But they can't.

A lot of Jews around could go sideways. What do they do? Well, they probably couldn't believe their luck when Judas knocks on the door one night and says, I've got a plan.

I want to betray Jesus. So let's have a look at that. Verse 10 and 11. Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the 12, went to the chief priests in order to betray him.

When they heard it, they were glad. Isn't that just one of the darkest lines in the Bible? They were glad, joyful that somebody wanted to betray Jesus.

Judas, eh? Judas, Judas, Judas. Judas. Goodness. I think Judas is often mistakenly cast as a victim of circumstance. A pawn in a game played by more powerful people than him.

[ 5 : 39 ] Perhaps a guy that had no control, possessed. But I think here we see him with great clarity. Judas was a sovereign moral agent who freely chose evil.

Does this mean that his betrayal was a surprise to God? No. Did God mean it to happen? Well, Christ even predicted it. So I think there are two truths wrapped up in just these two verses here. Humanity freely choosing evil and the overarching providence of God. And in this case, the example is the father using human evil for his purposes.

Okay. The treachery part is all quite bleak, isn't it? So let's move on. Let's move on to the meat and the sandwich. So Christ is with his people having dinner at Simon the leper's house.

And verse 3, presumably Simon is no longer a leper. Perhaps Jesus healed him. We don't know. A woman interrupts, pours very expensive oil on his head. Then there's a bit of an argument, a bit of argy-bargy back and forth.

[ 6 : 44 ] And three things stick out to me. Three things stick out. One, the extravagance of the act. Two, the explosion of criticism. And three, Christ's defense of her.

And it is a very moving defense. Let's look more closely. So a woman came in, having dinner. A woman comes in, unannounced, with a jar of nard, broke it, poured it.

When it says nard, I think some of you hear lard, not nard. Nard. Sorry. Honestly, that hurts my mouth.

When I talk like you, it hurts me. So I am just going to say nard and lard. I think we hear lard. It sounds a bit like lard, right? And I think we think that this woman barges in and pours a bucket of thick fat on Jesus' head.

There you go. You're welcome. No, it's not. It wasn't. It sounds a bit unpleasant. It wasn't. This nard was this oil from India. It was an extract from a root.

[ 7 : 50 ] Very expensive. An import. And so far from being something that sounds a bit unpleasant, I think it is one of the most wonderful acts of devotion in the Scripture. And then there's this explosion of criticism.

What a waste. We could have used that money to help the poor. From John's Gospel, we know that it was Judas that said that. And we know that Judas liked to dip his hand in the community purse. He was a thief. And so I think that's covering up something else going on in his heart. He's probably thinking, that money could have been mine. I could have used that. Other people there are also critical.

Why would they be so critical? Perhaps it's something that a few of us can relate to. I think that exuberant acts of devotion, I think sometimes some of us can find a bit distasteful.

Embarrassing. A bit over the top, perhaps. And sometimes we can judge them and go, hmm, they're a bit emotional, a bit needy, perhaps. Or perhaps we don't like these public acts of devotion because to watch them is painful because they shine a light on our own hearts, which maybe have become a bit dull.

[ 9 : 24 ] Back to the story. Now Jesus steps in here and says, leave her alone. You know, it's one of my new favorite parts of the Bible. Just this little, just that line there.

Leave her alone. Leave her alone. I mean, this woman must have been humiliated, right? Just humiliated. She does this beautiful thing, this gorgeous thing. And they just, they get stuck into her. Leave her alone. Imagine the scene. Christ puts himself between her and her attackers. Isn't it wonderful when Christ defends you?

Especially when you've been shamed. And I think shame is one of the most powerful weapons of the enemy.

Folks, if you carry shame and you hear accusing voices, you're useless, you're dirty, you're too over the top, you're silly. Know that Christ stands between you and your accuser.

[10:26] Moving on. She has done a beautiful thing to me. That's what Christ says. That just must have been a salve, a salve to that woman's heart, I think.

And then he says this. She did what she could. It's easy to pass over that line. She did what she could. But that's a very important line for us. She did what she could.

This is what God expects from us. What we can do. Know more than we're able. And what is it you do for Jesus?

Perhaps it's a small thing. Perhaps it's very much. Perhaps it's a lot. Whatever it is, Christ says, you have done a beautiful thing. You remember the unnamed poor widow a few chapters ago.

Surrounded by the religious elite, the wealthy, the important, and she drops two small copper coins in the offering pot. From the outside, very unimpressive.

[11:39] But of everything that happened that day in the temple, Christ was watching. Of everything that happened that day in the temple, Christ says, her act was the only thing worthy of attention. So you have these two women.

Both gave very different amounts. A year's wages were the stuff. Two small coins. And yet, they were both gifts, and they're both treasured by Jesus.

Jesus goes on. And he says, she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. I don't know if she knew what she was doing in that sense, but Christ did.

And once again, he points us, he points us to his destiny, his goal, which is the cross. And then he finishes in verse nine. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

So since then, about 14 empires have risen and fallen. About 2,000 years have passed. On the other side of the world, a Kiwi is telling Canadians about this woman.

[12:44] Isn't that cool? This is, we're fulfilling Jesus' prophecy today. Okay, let me finish with a few final thoughts.

Goodness, that's quite a short sermon, isn't it? I hope you're not disappointed by that. Other people preach quite long sermons.

And so I think on average, we're probably doing pretty good. Let me finish with a few final thoughts. I want to pick out just a couple of verses again. Verse one, the chief priests and the scribes who were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him.

In verse 10, Judas went to the chief priests to betray him. In the end of these final chapters, we know people abandon Jesus. They plot against him. This is a caution to us that knowledge and scholarship do not protect us from betraying Christ.

[13:54] Neither does having a high station in the church. What will? A heartfelt devotion to him. Seen in the act of this wonderful woman. Verse three, a woman came with an alabaster flask of oil of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

A love that is not sometimes extravagant. Might not be love. Verse six, leave her alone. When I am tempted to take on the world's perception of my vocation, which for some people, they view it as a waste, Christ defends me.

And he defends you when you are made to think what you believe is foolish, that your commitment to Christ is silly, know that Christ stands between you and your accusers.

And the voice of the enemy wants to shame you. Christ defends you. Verse eight, she did what she could. God requires nothing more from you than what you are able to give or do.

Nothing is required of us that we can't do. What a relief, isn't it? I remember at 15 years old, growing up in a humble kind of household and thinking, I'm gonna show the world, I'm gonna do amazing things or whatever, and then becoming a Christian at 17, translating those kind of overdone dreams onto my Christian faith.

[15:37] What a relief to hear these words from Christ. No straining over activities that we don't have gifts for. No jealousy directed towards those who can do things we can't. No blaming God for our limitations.

No unrealistic dreams that are a waste of time and of energy and depress us because we can't live up to them. No wishing we could do more when we have done what we can.

I wonder if the widow wished she could do more. Yet God singled her out in history and said, she did an amazing thing.  
So whatever you're doing for Christ, big, little, in between, it is a beautiful thing. Amen.  
Amen. Amen.