

April 11, 2021

“Our Devotion Transformed”
Mark 14:3-9

FCF: Our struggle with priorities

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The resurrection of Jesus
(magnet) transforms the devotion of our hearts.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

For those who had time to escape the California wildfires of 2017, the question was often “what do we grab?” As flames barreled toward their homes, devouring block after block, residents had 15 minutes - in some cases, 15 seconds - to grab what they needed ([READ](#)):

A musician opted for the violin. A golfer grabbed his clubs. A bride-to-be remembered her dress. Many dived for the practical—toiletries and clothes. Others fumbled through boxes and old photo albums, desperate to save memories. One woman grabbed diapers, wipes, and clothes for her kids, but nothing for herself. An 82-year-old woman grabbed her walker and - of all things - a hairbrush, but forgot her husband's thyroid medication. As Tonia Whitaker, 31, sat with her kids on a blanket in the corner of the Petaluma Community Center shelter, her voice quivered as she went down a list of things that could currently be in flames: sonograms... the new bike her older son recently got for his seventh birthday, and all of his unopened presents. At least one man, 57-year-old Michael Dornbach, died refusing to leave something behind. "I'm not leaving without my truck," Dornbach told his nephew, who begged him to flee without the vehicle.

Crises tend to reveal what we value. Big events have a tenacious way of exposing our priorities.

Of course, they can reshape them as well. This is to be the first in a series along these lines - “this makes sense, given the Resurrection.” And only with that does it make any sense.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Mark 14:3-9](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

“*Near-Death Experiences Can Totally Transform a Person in Seconds*” Says Scientist - the title of a recent article in *Newsweek*. Dr. Bruce Greyson, a specialist in psychiatry and neurobehavioral sciences at UVA has been studying this for more than 40 years ([READ](#)):

As a psychiatrist, this is the most fascinating aspect to me because I make my living trying to help people change their lives. That's very difficult to do. But here's this experience that in a few seconds, can totally transform someone's attitudes, values, beliefs and behavior. They typically make people more spiritual if I can use that word. They make them more compassionate, more caring, more altruistic, and they become much less interested in physical things—in material goods, in power, prestige, fame, competition. This does not go away with time. I've talked to people in their 90s, who had the experience as teenagers, and they say it's like it happened yesterday—that they've never been able to go back to their old life. This is often a comfort to them, but often it can be a problem as well. I've seen marriages break up because the spouse couldn't tolerate the change. I've seen career military people or policemen who could not tolerate the idea of hurting someone after their near-death experience change careers. I've seen cut-throat businessman who decided that competition was silly after a near-death experience change careers. And they typically go into helping professions—medical care, teaching social work, or clergy, something like that.

So there is documented change that comes to many when they have a personal brush with death.

The resurrection of Jesus has a similar effect but at a far deeper level. For it is not just a fact we believe but a power that has been unleashed, opening a door for transformation, moving into our gravitational center, our greatest loyalties and longings, touching the “devotion” of our hearts. Our text bears this out. The resurrection of Jesus transforms the devotion of our hearts.

How so? In three ways - the nature, the extent, and the very focus of our devotion.

I. THE NATURE OF OUR DEVOTION

First, the nature of our devotion. Put another way, the idea of worship - a topic that is vital for us all to consider. It's the greater background to the text, something not to be ignored.

A) The Reality of Our Worship

1. A simple definition

The reality is we are all worshippers. What is worship? It connects to the place of our deepest trust and confidence. It's what we hope in and count on, the focus of our attention and sacrifice.

2. Essential to our humanity

It's an essential part of being human, of being made in the image of God. (READ Ecclesiastes 3:11) We are searching, looking, and longing. This is true of us all. And we all land somewhere.

B) *The Importance of Our Worship*

We are all worshippers. Which makes this idea of worship really important to consider.

1. It directs our lives

For it directs our lives. It affects our goals and priorities. It drives how our time, our energy, and our money is allocated and spent. In fact, you can trace those things to see what you worship.

2. It shapes our hearts

Worship directs our lives. And it shapes our being. What we revere we resemble (READ Psalm 115:4-8). Adoration is tied to imitation. One leads to the other. We become what we worship.

This is the nature of our devotion. It is a tremendously important topic.

Application:

And there are very real consequences to this. As N. T. Wright wisely notes (READ):

When human beings give their heartfelt allegiance to and worship that which is not God, they progressively cease to reflect the image of God. One of the primary laws of human life is that you become like what you worship; what's more, you reflect what you worship not only to the object itself but also outward to the world around.

Those who worship money increasingly define themselves in terms of it and increasingly treat other people as creditors, debtors, partners, or customers rather than as human beings. Those who worship sex define themselves in terms of it (their preferences, their practices, their past histories) and increasingly treat other people as actual or potential sex objects. Those who worship power define themselves in terms of it and treat other people as either collaborators, competitors, or pawns. These and many other forms of idolatry combine in a thousand ways, all of them damaging to the image-bearing quality of the people concerned and of those whose lives they touch.

You hear what he's saying. This matter of devotion is not just some theoretical thing.

So to say "the resurrection of Jesus transforms the devotion of our hearts" is significant.

II. THE EXTENT OF OUR DEVOTION

Which takes us to the second point - the extent of our devotion, how far it should go. (READ Mark 14:3) What do we see this woman doing? And what does Jesus commend?

A) *The Facts on the Ground*

Let's look at the facts on the ground, the things we know and can be sure of here.

1. Who she was

Who was she? From John's account, we learn this is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. So she is a disciple of Jesus, a committed student of His teaching, and a witness to the revival of her brother Lazarus from the dead. And not just a witness but someone deeply moved by that event.

2. When this was

So that's who she was. When was this? Jesus says her actions would serve as an anointing for His burial, pointing to His imminent death a week later. But there's something implied here - His resurrection, tied to the fact the gospel would come to be proclaimed in the whole world.

So Mary was acting rightly just based on what she knew of Jesus. And He is saying there is even more reason for this being a beautiful thing - even if she couldn't have grasped it in that moment.

B) Her Memorable Response

Her response is truly memorable. In fact, Jesus tells us it will not be forgotten.

1. What she had

What did she have? An alabaster flask. This was an ointment jar, itself a luxury item. This flask was filled with a costly imported oil, worth a year's wages, likely a prized family heirloom.

2. What she did

And what did she do with it? She broke the neck of the flask so as to pour out the oil upon Jesus' head, about 12 ounces by the other accounts. This was no dribbling but a drenching, filling the house with its aroma as it ran down onto Jesus' feet which she then wiped with her hair. This was a truly humble and whole-life act of devotion. Which Jesus called good and beautiful.

Now let this image settle in and let it speak to the question of the extent of our devotion.

Application:

What is Jesus due? Especially in light of His death and resurrection, what is He due? Mary poured out her greatest treasure for the One who would pour out His life for her. How much then is too much? How far is too far? Again, think back to Jesus' commendation of her. Mary holds nothing back and Jesus does not correct her. We are to break the jar and pour it out.

What would that mean? Surrendering our whole life to Him, entrusting the entirety of our future to Him, making Him our security and identity and allowing for no other rivals. Letting Him have the first and last say in our homes and relationships, in our plans and pursuits. For Jesus is our great Savior, our merciful King, come to earth and back from the dead for us.

Do you see? The resurrection of Jesus transforms the devotion of our hearts.

III. THE FOCUS OF OUR DEVOTION

Which then takes us to the third point, the focus of our devotion, not just its extent but its direction. Here it would be helpful for us to consider the pushback from the witnesses, Jesus' baffled disciples. (**READ Mark 14:3-7**) What's going on here? Don't they have a point?

A) Not Ignoring the Poor

Let's be clear from the outset. By rebuking the disciples, Jesus is not ignoring the poor.

1. The Old Testament quotation

He alludes to a passage from Deuteronomy 15, the context of which clearly urges generosity to the poor. And this is something we see all through Scripture as being a high priority to the Lord.

2. Jesus' own concern

And so it is very much part of Jesus' own concern. In His teaching, He corrects the motive but never the action of giving to the needy. Jesus repeatedly shows concern for the poor. Whatever this means, it does not take away from His call for radical generosity. So what does He mean?

B) But Claiming the Priority

Jesus is not ignoring the poor. He is claiming the priority over our works of service.

1. Astonishing words

Put yourself there. Weigh what you hear Jesus saying. These are astonishing words. “What she has done takes priority even over those good things.” Who on earth does Jesus think He is?

2. Serious implications

To ask the question pretty well gets to the answer, doesn't it? Our generosity towards others is to be an expression of our worship of God, part of our devotion. We have been given two great commands (**READ Mark 12:28-31**). So we are to love God and to love one another. And what Jesus is saying is that we are not ready to do the second unless we give attention to the first.

This shocking exchange is meant to point us to the focus of our devotion.

Illustration:

Think of what's involved in re-entry from space. Imagine you're flying in a Mercury capsule, a Space Shuttle, or something from SpaceX. You have to come in at just the right angle. There's but one path and approach you to which you must hold. So leading up to re-entry, the pilot and ground control work to make the course corrections so the mission can end well.

Application:

How does this tie into Mark 14? Each of us needs constant course corrections in ministry and service - no matter what area it may be in. We can see it with the disciples here. What Jesus received as being beautiful they had rejected as wasteful. That's a pretty wide disparity. And it points to the bent-ness of our own hearts. Jesus is saying, “You want to serve me? To do the right thing the right way for the right reason? Start here. Start with me. And stay with me.”

The resurrection of Jesus transforms the devotion of our hearts, including the focus.

CONCLUSION:

I've used this illustration before but it's worth bringing out again. Some of you may know of the New Madrid Earthquakes. In the central MS Valley, from December 1811 through March 1812, there were a series of tremors felt as far away as New York City, Boston, Montreal, and Washington, D.C. Thousands of forest acres were devastated. Five mile long fissures were opened. Boatmen reported waterfalls on the Mississippi River and that there were waves running backwards for several hours. Cartographers had to change the maps. Think of that.

My friends, the resurrection of Jesus has changed the maps. The message “Christ is risen” has punched into this world and sent just such a shockwave. This is news not just for one region or a specific time. This is for all of us, every one of us, in every arena of life. Nothing can remain the same. So much that we knew is no longer so. The landscape has changed.

The resurrection of Jesus is real. And it transforms the devotion of our hearts.

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