



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

April 23, 2017

First and Best – Part 1

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Welcome to church this morning. I'm glad you're here. Today we're going to take a short break from our Sunday morning verse-by-verse study through the gospel of Mark. That's what we've been doing for most of this year so far. At this point, we've made it halfway through chapter 3 of the gospel of Mark. We're going to pause that for a moment.

Last weekend, we had one of the most glorious Easter weekends we've ever had. We had the most people we've ever seen come into this building for anything in our history, and God was just really moving in our midst last week. We're going to go from there into the next few Sundays and talk about the topic of our devotion to Jesus. I want to talk about how passionate we are for this risen Savior we call our Lord, Jesus Christ. How passionate *should* we be?

What kind of devotion, what kind of commitment does Jesus really welcome? What does he expect from us? As I've been getting ready to preach these messages, I have been sobered personally by what Jesus acknowledges as real devotion. I've been struck by my own selective commitment, kind of hearing only the things I want to hear in the Bible and doing only the things that are most convenient, and it has really shaken me up a little bit as I've gotten ready to share this with you.

I'm calling this series *First and Best*, because I'm convinced that when Jesus saved us from all of our sin, all of our guilt and all of our shame was removed, and the old things about how we used to live without Jesus, how we used to think without Jesus... All that stuff is gone now forever, and the new has come. Everything about our hearts has been made new.

From that point, when Jesus saves us and removes all of our guilt and shame and forgives us, he does desire 100 percent of our devotion, 100 percent of our love and commitment. The question is... *What does it look like to be 100 percent in with Jesus?* What does that mean? How does that play itself out? If you're anything like me, I'm guessing that today and the next couple of Sundays you're going to be a little shocked at what Jesus considers devotion to him.

Today is part 1, and the beginning of this message is actually going to be in Luke, chapter 14. We're going to get to Mark 14 in a minute. What we're going to do this morning is look at two separate events in Jesus' life. The first one is intended to set the stage for today and the next couple of Sundays. It's really an introduction to the whole topic of... *What does Jesus consider real devotion?*

The second scene we're going to look at today is going to be a real live example of the devotion Jesus is going to talk about here first in Luke, chapter 14. So if your Bibles are ready at Luke 14, let's go ahead and stand for the reading of God's Word. We're going to pick it up in verse 25.

"Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish."

Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

God, I ask that you would help us to understand your Word today, and in the name of Jesus and in the power of your Holy Spirit, I pray you would give us the grace of open hearts. Give us, God, a willingness to be conformed into the image and likeness of Jesus. Give us a willingness, God, to live as he calls us to live. God, I pray that you would transform us by the renewing of our minds in your Word today. Help us to think about our love for Jesus the way he calls us to. God, I pray today would be the beginning of something amazing in our hearts. In Jesus' name I ask this, amen.

Contrary to what a lot of people think, Jesus never deliberately tried to draw big crowds. In fact, it was more frequent that he would deliberately address the crowds with issues that he knew would have a diminishing effect on the crowd, not a growing effect on the crowd. This situation is no different. The one subject that always seemed to thin out the crowds that were following Jesus, the one subject that would get some of them to turn away, was the subject of commitment and devotion. This is a classic example of that.

We have a crowd here, we're told in verse 25, many of which it would be safe to say were just going along for the ride. There was a huge crowd, maybe bigger than what we have here this morning, and they were following Jesus. Chuck Swindoll, one of my favorite pastors and writers,

said about this moment in Jesus' life, "They were a gigantic crowd of mediocre tire kickers who were mostly spectators and nothing more."

When I read that, that stabbed me to the heart a little bit. I was hopeful that this couldn't be said about us as a church. I was really hopeful it couldn't be said about me or about many of you. As a pastor, as an elder, this is a dreadful thought, that we might be nothing more than just spiritual tire kickers. There's really one main point in this dialogue between Jesus and the crowd.

1. *Real devotion to Jesus is a serious commitment.* I don't intend to make much application here in Luke 14. I'm going to wait until we get to Mark 14, and we're going to see this application lived out right before us, but for now, there are several principles we have to get out of this dialogue that Jesus has with this crowd. Three times he said here, "You cannot be my disciple." That's about as straight as straight talk gets. He touches on three very sensitive commitment nerves that every one of us has.

A. *Real devotion to Jesus is more serious than all of our personal relationships.* Now he's not suggesting that we treat the people we love as second-class citizens, but look at what he says in verse 26. **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."** That's pretty radical.

He's commanding that a commitment to him leaves no room for competition for our loyalty. There's no room for it. Any loyalty to any other person that compromises our devotion and loyalty to him is completely unacceptable. That's his point. Now immediately, outsiders would listen to that even today... People who don't understand the Christian commitment to put Jesus first might think this devotion to Jesus is just a great excuse for us to be unloving to our friends and family, that this kind of devotion to Jesus gives us the right to blow off people in our lives.

Nothing can be farther from the truth. What Jesus is doing here is making our discipleship a matter of priorities. Devotion to Jesus is about deciding who comes first in our lives. It starts with personal relationships. Have we decided that he is the most important object of our devotion?

B. *Real devotion to Jesus is more serious than our personal goals and desires.* With another shocking statement, Jesus progresses from the *priority* of our devotion to the *authority* of our devotion. Look at verse 27. **"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."** In the first century, if anyone was seen carrying a cross, he was going to die. He was on his way to die. Jesus uses that graphic word picture to describe our devotion to him.

Another very good teacher and author, David Platt, said, "In a world where everything revolves around yourself—protect yourself, promote yourself, comfort yourself, and take care of yourself—Jesus says, 'Crucify yourself.'" Ultimately, Jesus is saying devotion to him is about saying no to what *we* want and yes to what *God* wants. Right here, I'm sure the people in this crowd started to walk away.

C. *Real devotion to Jesus is more serious than our personal possessions.* If the people hadn't started to walk away before this point, they certainly were now. In fact, they might have been running away. Look at verse 33. **"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."**

Jesus is calling for a devotion to him that requires us to hold on to every earthly possession we have with open hands. We can own things, but nothing can own us. That's what Jesus is saying. "If your stuff owns you, that means *I* don't own you, and I don't compete." On several occasions, Jesus actually stopped people from following him and told them unless they were willing to go back home and give away everything they had they were not allowed to come after him.

See, real devotion to Jesus is such a serious commitment it's virtually impossible to be this committed to Jesus if we're weighed down by a lot of excess baggage. Scripture reveals that God allows two things to come into our lives to test how genuine our devotion is to him. He allows *persecution* and *prosperity*, and both those things happen, in God's economy, to show us how devoted we really are to Jesus. Here's the truth. Most of us will pass the persecution test, but far fewer of us will pass the prosperity test.

Now from this point on in the message, I want us to look at an example of what this kind of devotion might look like. Some of you are already a little nervous. You're already thinking, "Where is he going with this?" You're already a little on edge. It's kind of like your teeth are gritting. You're suspect already. You're a little cynical. You're like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Where's all the happy stuff where we get to feel good?"

You know what? You can go to "All Comfort Community Church" down the road, but today it's not going to be here. I'm with you on a little bit of how this puts us on edge, but I think where it's going to take us over the next few Sundays may be the most freeing, most exciting thing some of us have experienced in our faith in a long time.

2. *Real devotion calls for extravagant love.* Isn't that what Jesus is getting at? There's a particular scene that adds some priceless perspective to the relationship between real devotion and extravagant love for Jesus. It's such a sacred scene it's actually recorded in all four gospels. The Holy Spirit made sure of that. Now we're going to turn to Mark, chapter 14. I want us to just take a few verses at a time. Look at verse 1.

"It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.'" For Israel, Passover was the Jewish equivalent of our Thanksgiving and even more. Passover would have been circled on the Jewish calendar in red ink.

It was a glorious week-long festival of emotional celebration with family and friends, and thousands of people poured into Jerusalem, filling the streets for a whole week, as they relived the historic rescue of God's people from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. The whole thing was to celebrate God's rescuing power, but not everyone was celebrating.

As you can see here, it was right in the middle of Passover, and in the back alleys, the priests and scribes are secretly meeting and plotting on how to kill Jesus. Just by way of homework, if you want to see how the details of these scenes are so prophesied about in the Old Testament, just spend some time in Psalm, chapter 2, and you're going to see this very moment in Jesus' life prophesied hundreds and hundreds of years before it ever happened.

They realize they have to be secret. They have to be stealthy because of the popularity of Jesus. If they would have went after him, it might have resulted in their own deaths, so they're trying to plot how to do this. Now look at verse 3. **"And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table..."**

Jesus during this feast is at Simon's house, and we're told here by Mark that it was the leper. If you remember, if you were here a month or two ago when we were in chapter 1 of Mark, we saw Jesus heal Simon the leper. It's pretty okay if we conjecture that it's the same leper. Jesus couldn't be eating with him if he wasn't healed. He *was* a leper. Jesus heals him.

Imagine how Simon feels. For the first time in what could have been decades of his life, he's able to be around people, around his family, and celebrate their faith in a great God. There he is in the house with all of his friends and family and with Jesus himself, whom he owes his whole life to, and then in John, chapter 12, it tells us that Lazarus was also at this little party, and all Jesus did for Lazarus was raise him from the dead.

So you can see that this whole scene... You can feel the joy and happiness and love and gratitude in the air. This is a beautiful moment going on right before our eyes. Then look at what happens in the rest of verse 3. **"...as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head."** Every single syllable of this moment is filled with shock and awe, and you have to get there with your emotions right now.

The other gospels include her name. We know her as Mary of Martha and Mary fame, Lazarus' sisters. If they were already eating in this moment, Mary didn't belong in the room. Back in the first century, women and men ate separately. She wasn't even supposed to be in the room. Walking into that room required that she be completely unconcerned, unafraid, of their opinions of her, which leads us to visualizing what this kind of devotion in Luke 14 may look like.

A. *We love Jesus more than everyone else.* She had to make that choice ahead of time. To say that doing this would require breaking away from the normal, acceptable traditions of her day would be the most extreme understatement I could make. A little context. This special perfume she poured over Jesus was rare, and it was usually reserved for royalty. She anoints his head. John tells us that to the amazement of everyone in the room except Jesus she pours it over his head, and what little she had left in this big vase she also poured on his feet, and she pulls down her hair and wipes his feet with her hair.

Now FYI on this. The letting down of a woman's hair in public would have been a very provocative and inappropriate thing to do in mixed company. It was an explosive display of extravagant love and devotion for Jesus above everyone else. Her love for Jesus was greater than being liked by anyone in the room, greater than being accepted or respected or admired by her own brother and all of their friends and all Jesus' disciples at this banquet.

I believe this is what Jesus meant in Luke 14 when he said, "Unless you hate everyone else, unless you love everyone else less than me, you're not worthy to be called my disciple." Her love and devotion for them had to be second to her love and devotion for him. Again, I wonder if we can say that about ourselves today.

Our spouse, our best friend, our boyfriend, our girlfriend, our boss, our kids... Do we think about pleasing them so much it actually affects how serious and extravagant our love for Jesus can be? Does our desire to love and be devoted to the people in our lives actually dictate how much we are willing to be devoted to Jesus? This kind of devotion requires that we love Jesus more than everyone.

B. *We love Jesus more than everything.* This perfume would have been made of a rare Himalayan plant. You couldn't get it anywhere. This was not sold at Bartell's. It wasn't the Jungle Gardenia you buy at Rite Aid. This is the Picasso of perfumes that she has. The vase itself would have been so breathtaking and priceless in its own right in order to hold the contents of this perfume.

Some really smart people and archaeologists have analyzed all this and done the research, and they said it would be worth over a year's salary. In today's day, she had just poured \$40,000 to \$80,000 worth of perfume over the head of Jesus. We don't know. It may have been an inheritance. It could have been a family heirloom that she was saving for the dowry of her future marriage. We don't know, but at the very least, what was in that vase that day represented a big part of her future, and she let it go.

The bottom line was that she owned it, but it didn't own her. She didn't hesitate. She did what her love for Jesus compelled her to do. It didn't matter what everyone else thought. The scene poses a second question for us. Are there things in our lives that have a very tight grip on us that own us more than we own them? Could you ever imagine yourself giving up something of that value for the work and glory of Jesus Christ in our world today?

Most of you would say, "Well, yeah, I mean, if I had perfume that was that expensive I'd be willing to give that up." The fact is most of us don't have perfume that's that expensive. If you do, I'd like to meet you afterwards. I want to look at you with my own eyes. So what I want to do is take inventory of three or four things that might be more in the realm of modern-day value to us, things that are really important to us, things we possess that might help us feel the weight of this.

Let's start with our stuff, whatever that may be. Maybe some of you have really cool collections. Maybe you've been collecting jewelry or coins or maybe you have an art collection or guns or

Beanie Babies. I don't know what you collect, but you have something you think is really valuable. I'm wondering how willing you would be to let it all go for him.

How about just our money, everything we have in savings or in our retirement that's just building right now? How much of that would you be willing to let go of and give to the work of Jesus? Right about now, some of you are looking for the door. In fact, I would guess that some of you are grinding your teeth a little bit. "What are you going to ask me to do?" I'm not going to ask you to do anything. I get that feeling.

This is a devotion to Jesus that not many of us have dared to go to yet. You're pretty uptight right now, and I have three more things I'm going to ask you to think about here. Our stuff, our money. How about our family? If you have children, what if your adult children came to you and said, "We want to go to the mission field, and we want to take your grandkids with us, and we don't when we're coming back"?

How about your time? Are you willing to give away two weeks to go somewhere in the world to serve him? Six months? A year? Two years? She does give us a living example of this kind of devotion. If you find yourself saying, "I *think* I would. If I sensed God was doing that, I think I'm close..." You may not know if you're going to give everything in your savings or every part of your great collection or whatever, but you're kind of sensing, "I think I'm there. I'm close to it anyway."

Let's be warned. This kind of devotion never makes sense to others. Extravagant love never does. If you look at verse 4, it says, "**There were some who said to themselves indignantly, 'Why was the ointment wasted like that?'**" Not everyone loved what she did. There was an instant whispering, murmuring. They were grumbling and growling. She didn't just dip her finger in the vase and touch Jesus' head. She poured the whole thing out, more than likely 12 ounces or more. They were upset. They called it a complete waste. That's pretty revealing, isn't it?

This kind of love never makes sense to others. Remember when you fell in love? There was no distance you were unwilling to drive. You would stay up till 3:00 in the morning talking on the phone, knowing you had to get up at 6:00 to go to work. You would eat popcorn for a week because you spent way too much money on a great meal and an expensive gift for the one you loved, and the people around you are going, "You are out of control," and you didn't care.

This kind of love never makes sense. It can't be explained. It can't be justified to people who have never been loved or have never loved like that. It can't be explained because it's based in a love and trust that's so deep and so personal it transcends being practical and logical. Are there people in your life who think you're extreme because you go to church on Seahawk Sundays? "Why would you do *that*? They're playing at 10:00. You go to church when the Seahawks are on?"

Or you go to church on your birthday or your wedding anniversary, if you're married, or you go to church when company comes in from out of town, and you say, "Hey, you're here on a Sunday. We go to church. You're coming with us." They think you're extreme because you go to

church while you're on vacation. "What? Why?" Do you have someone in your life who thinks you're extreme because you volunteer even though it's on your only day off that week or you volunteer when it's cold and raining outside or you're just exhausted, but you do it anyway?

Are there people in your life who think you are so extreme because you go to a Life Group every week or every other week with the intention of being vulnerable and transparent with other people and being accountable and learning how to be patient, loving people who are hard to love, and you're going there and carrying other people's burdens when your burdens are so heavy you feel like you can't even carry your own? People look at you and go, "Why are you doing that?"

Do they think you're really extreme because you give a tenth of your income to the work of God, even when the economy is slow or the stock market is down or you have other very practical things you could spend all that money on? Do people look at you and think, "That's nuts"? Look at verse 5. **"For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they scolded her."**

They immediately thought of all of the poor people and scolded her. See, these guys did the math. They calculated it, and it didn't add up. For them, their religion was all about what was practical. Their faith in God had to be reasonable, and she was acting like a fanatic. Now you know what the definition of a fanatic is, don't you? Every one of us has the same exact definition of a religious fanatic. A religious fanatic is somebody who loves Jesus more than we do. That's fanatical to us.

I wonder if some of you relate to your Christian faith like this. You measure things in minimums, not maximums. Your love and devotion to Jesus is governed by what's practical, by what's reasonable, by what's comfortable for you. Function always gets more votes than devotion. Moderation gets way more votes than excess when it comes to your devotion and love for Jesus. I wonder how many of us love like this in our personal relationships. Function always wins over devotion. Practical always wins over lavishly loving the person. How sad is that?

I guess that some of you approach your faith in Jesus like this. As long as Jesus fits into the spreadsheet of your life, you're okay, but love doesn't work like this. Passionate love doesn't work like this. If you can explain it, it's probably not very extravagant. This kind of devotion really matters to Jesus. Please don't miss this. What she did really blessed him, and he actually applauds her. If you look at verse 6, Jesus said...

"Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial."

Do you know what he did there? He called their bluff. He knows their concern for the poor was just a thin disguise. We know Jesus wasn't snubbing the poor. We know better than that. Nobody in human history has ever done more to call us to love and defend the poor than Jesus. But he

knows those who are obsessed with the practical and logical do way more talking than they actually do doing, more calculating than loving.

Mary's devotion to Jesus was not only commendable; it was the right thing to do. It blessed Jesus. What I get from this for *my* life, and I hope you get the same, is there is a place in our devotion to Jesus that calls for our love to be extravagant, to be impractical, to be illogical to everyone else watching. Whether she realized it or not, what she did would end up providing dignity to what would be a trial marked by lies and hatred, a brutal crucifixion, and a pauper's burial in a borrowed tomb.

It would have been unavoidable to Herod and to Pilate and the people who beat him and flogged him. It would have been unavoidable to the soldiers who nailed him to the cross and the criminals who were crucified next to him, because for the next 36 to 48 hours, that fragrance of his royalty would linger for everyone to smell. Ultimately, what matters most is what Jesus thinks.

This kind of devotion has lasting testimony. If you look at verse 9... This brought tears to my eyes as I studied this week. **"And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."** There's an immeasurable effect this kind of love and devotion has on the world.

I love this verse. These scolders, these tightfisted, hard-hearted people in the room that day ultimately would fade into obscurity while she would live on and be the fragrance of true love and devotion for Jesus forever, and here we are talking about her thousands of years later. I think of our family and friends who are watching and learning and listening as they witness the kind of commitment and devotion we have.

What kind of fragrance does our devotion have? What does our love for Jesus smell like to others? I don't want my kids to talk at my memorial service about how clean my car was or how nice I kept my yard. I don't want them to talk at my memorial service at how sad I was when *Downton Abbey* went off the air (Which I still am, by the way. I'm not recovered from that. I keep checking to see if it's for real). I don't want them to talk about the hobbies I loved or the degrees I earned or how responsible I was with money.

I don't even want them to talk about how many Bibles I had or Bible studies I taught or how many times I went to church, but if they remember my passion for worship, if they remember my generosity and sacrificial giving or the mission trips I went on that I really didn't want to go on deep down in my heart but I knew I needed to, if they remember the crazy prayers I prayed for impossible things, I think that will linger much longer.

I wonder how many of us file into church week after week, at least most weeks... No doubt because we believe in Jesus and love Jesus. That's why many of us are here, but I wonder how many of us file in every week but our commitment is more like a tire kicker, wondering if church will work for us that day. Does our devotion to Jesus smell more like curiosity and mediocrity than it does extravagant love?

Is what we're doing here just kind of ritual or robotic? Does it lack the life of passionate, improbable, impractical, illogical devotion and love for Jesus? I wonder if for some of us the broken vase is long overdue. I wonder if for some of us sitting here right now, we've been kicking the spiritual tires way too long. We've been doing more spectating than anything else.

What I want to do over the next few weeks is invite all of us to empty ourselves. I want us to wonder, "What would it be like if I gave Jesus my first and my best? What would that feel like? What would that be like in my life?" This *First and Best* series is going to culminate in an amazing Sunday on May 7, two Sundays from today.

Here's what I'm proposing to us as a church on that Sunday, that 100 percent of us come and worship together in three packed services, where we decide ahead of time, predetermine that that Sunday, unless we have a flight booked somewhere, we're going to be here no matter what, and we're going to worship. We're going to see what it feels like to have all of us together at one time giving our best worship.

I'm going to also propose that we all bring our offering that Sunday on the same day. I realize some of us, like me... I give every two weeks. Some of you give monthly or quarterly or whatever, but I'm going to ask that every single one of us bring our tithes and offerings on that same day. Then I'm going to ask that all of us bring 100 percent of the faith and trust we have at this point in our Christian life.

We're going to get on our knees that Sunday and ask God to do impossible things in our lives. We're just going to go all in. I don't know what that's going to be like. Could you imagine if everybody was here who calls us their church home and we all just said, "I want it to be my first and my best going forward"? I don't know what that's going to be like. I anticipate it's going to be different.

I hope you'll be open to this little journey. We worship an unstoppable God who went to the ends of the earth to rescue us from sin and the coming wrath and judgment that are coming upon the sins of the whole world, and that one who died for us admired and commended this woman. I want to be admired and commended by Jesus. Don't you? Would you bow your heads with me for a minute?

God, whatever this means, I pray that in our minds, as we wrestle with this, as we get nervous about it, as we get excited about it, that we would simply, God, hear your still small voice showing us, telling us what it might look and be like for us individually. I pray, God, for all of us who have been kicking tires and just spectating too long that this would be a mighty movement in our relationship to you. God, we love you and thank you for saving us. In Jesus' name, amen.

It may be that this morning you're sitting here, and you've never stepped over that line to give your heart to Jesus first. We want to invite you to do that before you go, because this will make a lot more sense if you've done that. We want to ask you to consider surrendering your life and asking Jesus to be your Savior and forgive you of your sins. There are people standing up here

who are most excited about that today, to give you something to go home with, to encourage you to take that next step of faith. I hope you'll do that before you go home. God bless you. I look so forward to the next couple of Sundays together. We'll see you then.