

Series: Encounter Easter

Sermon Title: Encounter Loyalty

Text: Matthew 26:6-46

Big Idea: Theology drives loyalty.

Introduction: Today we dive into the Easter portion of our Encounter series. We are going to be looking at the passion encounters that Jesus had as he was heading to the cross. Today we will be covering a big chunk of text as we turn to Matthew 26. And we will be covering v. 6-46. So, grab your Bibles, and let's dive in. In these 40 verses, there are 3 encounters with individuals that I want to narrow in on. In each of these encounters, we are going to see differing levels of loyalty to Jesus. What I hope we discover in looking at these levels of loyalty is first a self-assessment of our own loyalty to Jesus. Secondly, what is driving our loyalty?

Transition: So, let's get started this morning as we look at Jesus' encounter with a good friend of his Mary while they were in Bethany. Let's read v.6-12.

Jesus' encounter with total loyalty.

6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. 8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked.

9 "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

The first level of loyalty we see displayed in this encounter with Mary is that of complete and utter loyalty. We see this loyalty displayed by her sacrifice of material possessions. What we see in this interaction is the opposite of what we studied last week about the rich young ruler. According to some scholars, the perfume that Mary poured out was worth about 300 Denarii which is equivalent to 300 days' worth of wages or 10 months of your salary. This is an expensive perfume that consists of a combination of exotic oils and extracts of various spices and flowers. Not only was the perfume expensive but the container the perfume rested in wasn't

cheap either it was an alabaster vial that was crafted out of very fine, translucent white gypsum bottle.¹

The quality of this perfume not only captures the disciple's attention but so does the quantity. It isn't like she poured out only a cup of this stuff which by worldly standards would have been very generous. She doesn't even pour out a quarter of it, nor half of it. She pours out all of it. Not even saving a drop for herself. This was a completely selfless act on behalf of Mary. She didn't care about the oil she cared about the one she was pouring it on. This act was a demonstration of complete and utter trust and loyalty towards Jesus. Mary in this act was giving Jesus all the marbles and yet look at the disciple's reaction to this. They were disturbed by it, why?

The disciples reacted so strongly because, during Passover, it was customary for affluent Jews to offer financial help to the poor.² The disciple's rationale was that she was completely wasting a valuable resource on Jesus. It didn't make sense to them. It didn't seem like good stewardship of her resources. Friends, there is an important lesson here. Sometimes our obedience and loyalty to God look like foolishness to others including other Christians at times. Christians who may not have the same level of loyalty. One thing my tax guy tells me every year is maybe you should rethink how much you're giving to the church yearly. "Why are you asking the elders to pray for healing what is that going to do?" "You're choosing to go to church and miss what soccer game? Your kid will lose his spot in the starting lineup." "Why are you saving for sex for marriage... it's probably a good idea to make sure you are both sexually compatible before you get married."

Jesus steps in and defends Mary's actions. He informs them that this act serves as part of the preparation for his burial. According to Biblical scholar, Craig Keener informs us by stating, "When a rich person died the body was doused in perfume and then wrapped in a burial shroud.

¹ Barbieri et al., *The Moody Bible Commentary*.

² Walvoord, *Matthew*.

More spices were placed in its folds, not to mummify the body but to cut the odors of decomposition for tombs were not airtight. However crucified criminals did not receive such treatment. After a body was left to putrefy on a cross, it was usually cast into the city dump, in Jerusalem's case the Hinnom Valley on the southeast edge of Jerusalem and received no burial at all. What this woman did honored Jesus and gave Him burial preparations that, under normal circumstances, he otherwise would not have received.”³

It is in Jesus' defense that we can begin to see the motivation that was driving this loyalty of Mary. And that motivation I would submit to you was her theology. She was thoroughly convinced that Jesus was who he said he was and that he was going to do what he said he was going to do. Keener again makes the observation “While the disciples were slow to accept the repeated prophecies of His death, Mary seems to have comprehended it at least in part. Although she was not as active as the disciples or in a place of leadership, and though she did not serve as Martha had done, sitting at the feet of Jesus gave her insight into spiritual things which many in their busy lives never received.”⁴ She knew who Jesus was and what he was going to do before he even did it. Friends this is what theology is. Theology is all about gaining an understanding of who God is and what he has done. Theology is not something we should dismiss as just for academics. It is something that we need to be pursuing because our theology drives our loyalty.

In Jn 12:4-5 we see that one of the disciples that was irritated at Mary's “irresponsible” actions was Judas Iscariot. Judas seems to have been the one who asked why she was not using this perfume as a way to give money to the poor. John continues to observe that Judas said this not out of concern for the poor but because of his own greed. What we learn about Judas is that he was completely disloyal he was a thief and he was also the treasurer of the twelve. If he received the perfume, he would have kept it for himself.⁵

³ Walvoord.

⁴ Keener, *Matthew*.

⁵ Keener.

Transition: This criticism of Judas leads us to the next encounter that displays disloyalty.

Jesus' encounter with disloyalty.

14 Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests 15 and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. 16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

What we see in Judas' actions is disloyalty to Jesus. Now there are a lot of questions revolving around Judas' motivation for turning on Jesus. There are a lot of explanations but I would argue that it was Judas' theology. Judas was less captivated by Jesus and more concerned about himself. Judas followed Jesus for personal gain and personal benefit. Think about it, Jesus was not what Judas wanted him to be. Jesus continued in his ministry and teaching with the disciples to discuss his death and resurrection. All Judas caught was that Jesus was going to die and this is not what he signed up for. Following a guy who dies as a criminal gives him nothing. This is not the kingdom he signed up for. As one commentator put it. “When Judas finds that Jesus' kingdom will not profit him materially and may even cost him his life, he chooses to get what he still can from his lengthy investment in Jesus: he sells Jesus for the price of a slave. Judas abandoned his spiritual birthright for better material conditions, and in saving his own life he lost his eternity. Judas represents all those who follow Jesus for what they can get from him, not for how they can serve him.”⁶

There are a lot of people in this world who follow Jesus because of the benefits they get out of it. If you own a boat, you know how Jesus feels. You know you got friends not because of who you are but because of what you have. This isn't a relationship this is a transaction. I think one of the biggest steps of maturity within a Christian is when they don't engage in a relationship with Jesus for the fire insurance but because they are completely captivated by Jesus himself. You go to church because you want to know him. You do your quiet time daily because you want to hear him. You read scripture daily because you long to hear his values and his concerns. Judas did not believe that Jesus was who he said he was. Judas' theology was weak and this weak theology drove his disloyalty.

⁶ Keener.

The Last Supper 26:17–19pp—Mk 14:12–16; Lk 22:7–13 26:20–24pp—Mk 14:17–21 26:26–29pp—Mk 14:22–25; Lk 22:17–20; 1Co 11:23–25 17 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?” 18 He replied, *“Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’”* 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. 20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating, he said, *“Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”* 22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?” 23 *Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”* 25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “You have said so.” 26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, *“Take and eat; this is my body.”* 27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, *“Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”* 30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus’ encounter with broken loyalty.

Right after the group shares a meal Jesus begins to inform the disciples of not only what he is going to do but of how they are going to respond. In that response, he narrows in on Peter which is where we don’t see his loyalty break under the stress of following Jesus.

31 Then Jesus told them, *“This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ 32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”* 33 Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” 34 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, *“this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”* 35 But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same. 36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, *“Sit here while I go over there and pray.”* 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”* 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* 40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. *“Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?”* he asked Peter. 41 *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* 42 He went away a second time and prayed, *“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”* 43 When he came back, he again found

them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. 45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, *“Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”* ... 69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. *“You also were with Jesus of Galilee,”* she said. 70 But he denied it before them all. *“I don’t know what you’re talking about,”* he said. 71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, *“This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.”* 72 He denied it again, with an oath: *“I don’t know the man!”* 73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, *“Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.”* 74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, *“I don’t know the man!”* Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: *“Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”* And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter is moving from a high of highs to a low of lows. There is a lot of that when you follow Jesus. There are seasons of spiritual highs and seasons of spiritual lows. We see Peter’s sinned humanity begin to reveal himself. There is a lapse in his loyalty to Christ and that lapse seems to be rooted in the circumstances. It is funny how when God doesn’t meet our expectations we tend to question our theology. This is exactly what happens to Peter, he maybe knew Jesus was going to die but it wasn’t happening in his timing. It’s crazy how your loyalty can shift when stuff becomes real. I mean it wasn’t necessarily real when they were breaking bread and drinking wine. We know that Peter didn’t think it was real even when they were in the Garden. I mean you see his lack of theology as Jesus is experiencing one of the most stressful times of his life and instead of keeping watch and taking it very seriously, he falls asleep even after Jesus rebuked him. It didn’t become real until Jesus gets arrested. Now is when the rubber meets the road. Now is when his theology is tested. Is Jesus really who he says he is and if he is am I going to stay loyal to him?

We have these “Jesus-arrested” moments in our lives when things don’t meet our expectations, don’t we? Whether it’s when we are sitting in the hospital, or getting fired from a job that you thought he was calling you to. You can begin to question who is in control. Who is the one who can provide and when you question your theology you begin to question your loyalty? And Peter denies Christ. Why am I doing this? Why am I following this guy?

Peter’s denial v. Judas’ Denial

Peter's denial is very different from Judas' denial. Peter was completely surrendered to Jesus we know this because of his past actions and ministry alongside Jesus. He was sold out... however, he had a brief lapse in Judgement. Jesus points out the difference between Judas and Peter back in Chapter 10 when he sends the 12 out to do ministry and in his instructions, he says,

32 "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

Peter lived a life that acknowledged and trusted Jesus... Judas however did not. A Moody puts it, "The tense of the verb denies indicates that if a person's life could be defined or summarized as whole by the words, "he denied Me," then that person can expect to be denied by Jesus. But that label does not fit Peter's life. He surely denied Christ, but he repeatedly "confessed Christ" after that Jesus is not warning about an occasional lapse in one's witness that is otherwise found in a life punctuated by outspoken identification with Him."⁷ Friends follower of Christ let this be an encouragement to you.

Broken loyalty can be repaired by God's grace.

While we are saved, we are not perfected until we die and are united with Christ in heaven.

John in his first letter writes,

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. – 1 John 1:8-10

A good pastor mentor friend of mine always tells me the **Christian walk is about direction not perfection**. This is what people of the world and even some within the church don't understand. Some criticize Christians for their hypocrisy. The reality is that there is hypocrisy. We might preach one thing but live another. We are not perfect. However, there is a big difference between how we handle our imperfections. Instead of relying on ourselves to resolve those things we allow the imperfections to draw us to cling to the Cross of Christ and the grace that is

⁷ Barbieri et al., *The Moody Bible Commentary*.

offered. This is what separates Judas from Peter. Peter allowed his denial of Christ to draw him to the cross whereas Judas allowed his denial to lead him to his own death and spiritual demise. This loyalty struggle strengthened Peter's faith and helped him live out his name

18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”- Mt 16:18-19

After Peter encounters Jesus's resurrected body he is on fire and nothing can stop him. Peter's theology is confirmed by his unstoppable loyalty.

Conclusion:

In Acts we see Peter starting the Church as he stands before the Sanhedrin.

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 Jesus is “ ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”- Acts 4:8-12

Powerful friends. We may not follow Jesus perfectly at times in our life. When that happens, I want to encourage you to turn to your theology. Take a theology course, and be reminded of who God is. Be reminded that Jesus is who he says he is and he did what he said he was going to do. When you get your theology right then you get your loyalty right. Your loyalty rests in your theology. One Christian author once stated, “I've come to learn that theology matters. It matters not because we want to impress people, but because what we know about God shapes the way we think and live. Theology matters because if we get it wrong then our whole life will be wrong.” Where do you stand with Jesus? Are you sold out like Mary? You are uncertain like Peter. Or have you just followed him for what you get out of it like Judas? Well, it might be time to open up those theology books.

Bibliography

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