



Matthew 26:1-16
Blessing and Betrayal

Summary: Extreme reactions force us to ask: am I blessing Jesus, or betraying Him?

What is the most extravagant thing you have done for someone else, the biggest gift or surprise; the biggest expression of thanks or love, something good, kind, helpful?

Maybe you took someone out to a nice restaurant, or bought an expensive piece of jewelry. Maybe you gave generously to support someone's mission trip or ministry. Giving isn't always about the financial cost though, is it? One of my brothers was a bone marrow donor. I think that's a pretty big deal.

Of course, smaller things can be extravagant too. Tomorrow is my anniversary; we celebrate 19 years together. I still remember when Madeleine and I were dating. We lived 20 miles apart. One morning I went out to my car, headed to work, and found fresh-baked cookies on my windshield at six o'clock in the morning! She had baked them that night, then secretly drove 40 miles round trip, to leave a little surprise for me. That's a pretty special gift.

And she's not the only one. Two weeks ago, Stephen and I were in Ethiopia, and Tiffany had surprised him by packing little notes and gifts in his bag, including something to be opened on his birthday which occurred on our trip. They were pre-meditated expressions of love, tangible examples of effort put out by a loving spouse.

Well, this morning we're going to see far greater extravagance in Scripture – an act of worship directed toward Jesus, but like a bright diamond laying on a piece of black velvet, it will be flanked by two acts of betrayal prompting us to ask the question: what is the true allegiance of my heart? Am I the kind of person who goes out of my way to bless Jesus, or am I the kind of person who is willing to betray Him?

Don't be too quick with your answer, but read with me now:

Matthew 26:1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, *that* He said to His disciples, ² "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

You remember, we're reading Matthew's biography of Jesus, and we've come to the final days of His life. Everything is building toward His arrest and crucifixion, but also, ultimately toward His resurrection, which we'll see on Easter Sunday.

³ Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, ⁴ and plotted to take Jesus by

trickery and kill Him. 5 But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

These men form the core of the nation’s leadership; they are the heads of aristocratic families. Some hold religious positions, some hold civic positions, and with the permission of Rome, they provide most of the day-to-day guidance and direction for the country.

If you have been with us as we move through Matthew, you remember Jesus has been patient, *extremely* patient with these men – answering their questions, explaining things to them, working miracles to prove His claims, but they had no use for Him, they weren’t willing to accept what He was saying, so they look for a way to get rid of Him.

Jesus is a threat to them. A threat to their way of life. They feel like Jesus is going to cost them something, and it’s a price they’re not willing to pay.

All of this reminds us that *outward actions are an expression of our inner values*.

These men value themselves. They prefer their ideas to those of Jesus. He says one thing, and they think another. He has been announcing a new kingdom, a new way of life, a call to repentance and reconciliation with God, and these men don’t see a need for any of it. Or they think they have a better way.

To be clear – they hear Jesus. They know what He says. This isn’t a mystery or a secret; they don’t wonder what’s going on. Jesus has been clear and public with His teaching and miracles. But they rejected all of it.

Now, that’s nothing new. That’s the root of the very first sin – God told Adam and Eve how to live, what to do, and gave them *one thing not to do* in the Garden. And they did that one thing. They valued their own ideas over what God had said.

Friends, you and I do the same thing all the time. In big ways and small ways, we choose our ideas over Jesus. We follow our desires. We choose self over Savior. And we justify it.

You have to understand: these men were not cold-blooded killers. They weren’t moral monsters. They weren’t pathological sociopaths who wanted to kill Jesus for fun. They just had their own ideas about what life should be about. They had their own ideas about how things should go, their own ideas about what was most important. And when Jesus opposed them, when they felt threatened; when they felt like He could have a negative impact on their lives or plans; they felt backed into a corner and they lashed out.

But it made sense to them, it was reasonable, justifiable. No doubt some felt it was ‘unfortunate’ things had to go this way, but they could explain why they were doing it. In fact, the high priest Himself put it this way – sometimes it’s better for one man to die, than have the whole nation perish (John 11:50). Here’s what he meant – it’s better for us to get rid of Jesus than to have the Romans think there’s some kind of revolution brewing down

here and then bring in an army to put down a rebellion and destroy us all.

So, you see how it made sense to them. They could justify it. It wasn't pretty, but it felt necessary if they were going to maintain the status quo – if they were going to keep doing things the way they had grown familiar with, they were going to have to fight to stay in control.

They were rationalizing and explaining things away so they could do what they wanted to do and keep living their lives. You and I understand what that's like, because we've done it ourselves. Most likely no one died as a result, but we've all made some compromises here and there for the sake of keeping things the way we like them.

Contrast that with what we see next:

6 And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table.

Mark and John also record this event. John tells us the woman is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. The one who sat and listened to Jesus teaching while Martha ran around attempting to be the ultimate hostess. This is that Mary. She has spent time with Jesus. He was a family friend. She knows him well. Pouring the oil on His head was an act of worship, a sacrifice. It was a way to show 'there's nothing I want more than to be a part of what You're talking about Jesus.'

Do you see the contrast? On the one hand you have a group of men with status, rank, title, and position, and they're trying to figure out how to hold on to it all, while this woman is quietly pouring out an extravagant act of submission and adoration.

John tells us the oil was worth 300 denari. A day laborer received a denari for his wages, so you're looking at almost a year's wages for the average worker. This is some really expensive, rare, stuff.

It's nothing like what they made us buy as recruits in boot camp. Wind Drift cost around \$3 and we called it "smell good" because you had to have it so you could "smell good" for uniform inspections. The stuff burned when you put it on.



Compare that to this: I don't know how many of you caught the news, but last week, just in time for this sermon, a company in Dubai brought out the world's most expensive perfume.



A bottle of Shumukh is going to set you back nearly \$1.3 million (USD). For that, you get a case that is over 6 feet tall, decorated with over three and a half thousand gemstones including nearly 39 carats of diamonds along with topaz and pearls set in solid 18k gold and pure silver on a bottle made of hand-blown

Italian glass. The perfume is actually dispensed by a remote control with a nozzle, which adjusts to your height.

So, yeah, expensive and rare perfume is a thing.

Now, the oil Mary poured on Jesus wasn't quite that fancy, but still, it was worth nearly a year's wages. This was probably the most valuable thing she owned; perhaps it was part of her dowry and she gives it all away for Jesus.

Why? Because when she heard the same thing as everyone else heard, it drew her closer to Him.

Jesus was incredibly divisive. You were either for Him or against Him. Giving up the most valuable thing she had, and giving it to Him, was an act of allegiance, a practical demonstration of her priorities by pouring it out, and pouring it out *on Him*, she was saying You are more important to me than anything else in this life.

But remember, she did this while other people were around and they don't all understand or appreciate her extravagance.

Matthew 26:8 But when His disciples saw *it*, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to *the poor*."

Put yourself in her shoes – or sandals if we want to be historically accurate. Mary had this idea come into her mind: "you should go and get the oil and anoint Him with it."

And then there was this inner dialogue – the same one you experience. What!?! Really? Where is this coming from?

Well, the Bible tells us in **Phil 2:13** "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." The Holy Spirit is active in our lives, He brings ideas and desires to us and we either receive them or reject them. So, at this moment, God was at work in Mary giving her this idea and she was wrestling with it. If you've been there you how know it went back and forth:

- Yes, that's a great idea.
- Wait, really?
- OK, I'll do it.
- Um, do I have to do it now? With everyone watching? Can't it wait until later?
- No, I really feel like I have to do this right now.
- OK, I'll do it!

And then, she's immediately criticized and questioned. And some of you know what that's like too. You did the thing you felt like you were supposed to do, you said the thing you felt like you were supposed to say, and now, it's just awkward.

So, she's standing there. Probably shaking a bit, a little bit uncertain, and very self-conscious, wondering what have I done? And Jesus comes to her defense.

10 But when Jesus was aware of *it*, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. 11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. 12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did *it* for My burial. 13 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

He says she has done a good thing, something about preparing His body for burial, which wasn't necessarily what she was going for, but at least He's pleased. He affirms her extravagance and vindicates her. He receives her gift and praises her for it.

But let's be very clear about what's happening here – this is not about the dollar value of your charitable giving to the church. Mary made a gift to God that was worth a year's salary – and yes, God may prompt some of you at some point in your life to make a large donation to His kingdom – in fact, maybe that's part of the reason why He is prospering you – maybe you should give part of that inheritance, bonus, or profit from the sale of your house.

But remember - God always cares most about your heart. The same Jesus who commended Mary's extravagant sacrifice equally commended a widow who gave two mites – worth fractions of a penny. He explained to the disciples:

Mark 12:33...“this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.”

The things we give – whether our time or talents or treasures, are simply reflections of what is already going on in our heart. Mary gave an enormous gift to Jesus *because* she had already given her allegiance to Jesus. There was no holding anything back. When Madeleine and I married, we established a joint bank account and shut down our personal accounts. There was no more “yours” or “mine” it was all “ours.”

That's the kind of attitude that Mary is demonstrating here – total allegiance, total union with Christ. “I want to be on your team.” And men, don't miss this – it's easy to write this off as the romantic affections of a woman, but it's never portrayed that way, this is never portrayed as her hitting on Him. You can't just write this off and say, well that's a bunch of emotional chick-flick stuff and it's fine for the ladies. This is the equivalent of a knight surrendering his sword. It's an act of dedication, of allegiance.

Let me say one other thing here – because there is an idea blowing through our culture right now about purging and getting rid of stuff. Two thousand years ago Jesus told people in the Sermon on the Mount not to store up your treasures on earth where moth and rust

destroy and thieves break in and steal, but to store up your treasures in heaven where they have eternal value. Here, with Mary, we see that in action – she trades something she owns in the physical world for the joy of making a big deal out of Jesus.

Jesus has always been anti-materialism, anti-consumerism. He has always been saying, “don’t horde up stuff.” If you see your brother in need, give.

But it hasn’t always been that popular of a message, until recently when it a short little Japanese woman wrote a book and got a show on Netflix. And now, all of the sudden, the idea of getting rid of things, minimizing, freeing yourself sounds so appealing, so fashionable, so trendy. I’m just curious why the people who are so busy clearing out their closets in response to the teaching of Marie Kondo didn’t do it in response to the teaching of Jesus.

Now, if she has captured your attention because your friends are talking about it, or posting about it, I don’t want to discourage you from going through all your stuff – but let me encourage you to redeem the whole process – don’t just think about Marie asking “does this bring me joy?” But think about Mary and what she gave away, and why.

Don’t de-clutter because it’s trendy, and certainly don’t bring a bunch of junk to the Rummage sale just to get it out of your house – but do think through your possessions and ask: is there anything that I *would not* be willing to give away for the sake of Jesus?

Is there anything you’re holding onto because of what it does for you, how it makes you feel, how it helps you see yourself? Does having a full closet of options make you feel good? Does having that toy – I’m speaking to adults and children here – make you feel good about yourself? Would you give up your gaming console for Jesus? Would you give up your car? Would you give some of that money you’ve been saving? Is there anything you would resist handing over to Jesus?

Maybe you have some material possessions that need to go into the rummage sale or somewhere else – maybe even into the trash – is there something you’re holding on to that God is saying surrender as an act of worship to Him?

Maybe not. We’re not going to come through and collect an offering. Mary was the only person who did this – not everyone was supposed to give such an extravagant gift. But the principal applies to us all – is there anything that you’re not willing to part with?

That’s the question you need to ask – not “Does this bring me joy?” But, “Does Jesus bring me greater joy?”

Remember, what we see here with Mary is not ultimately about what she gave or it’s value. Her gift was great because it represented a surrendered, allegiant, affected heart.

And we see that with even greater clarity when we contrast it with the cunning act of

betrayal that happens next.

14 Then one of the twelve, [this is one of Jesus' closest group of disciples, the men who have spent the greater part of the last three years with Him, the one...] called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. [Now there's some debate over exactly what the thirty pieces of silver were worth, but at most it was about 3 months wages – 25% of the value of the oil. It could have easily been less.] 16 So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.

People have all sorts of ideas about his motives – what would cause him to sell out Jesus?

Judas was probably from a different part of Israel than the rest of the disciples – so some people think he felt like an outsider and never thought he was really accepted. Some people think he was just greedy, he used to keep track of the finances for the group, and if the oil that was poured on Jesus had been sold, he would have had a lot of money to siphon off on the side, maybe he was angry about that. Some people even try to spin it in a positive light and say that he was trying to force a conflict believing that Jesus would come out on top and this would usher in the revolution.

The fact of the matter is, the Bible doesn't clearly tell us, so everything is speculation. But one thing we can say with confidence: he saw things differently than Jesus, he had other ideas, and he went after them. Instead of coming to Jesus, he went to other people. Mary gave everything she had to Jesus, Judas went to find what he wanted somewhere else.

His question for them was: "What will you give me if I do this?"

We face the same question today. There will be times when you feel that other people have the power to give you something if you turn away from Jesus.

And so, you will be tempted to keep your relationship with Him a secret, or to downplay it, for the sake of acceptance. This is the most common trade we make: I don't make a big deal about Jesus and you accept me. It happens on your sports team, it happens with your neighbor, it happens with your family, it happens at school, it happens with your boyfriend or girlfriend or spouse. We keep quiet about Jesus to find acceptance with them. But we don't call it betrayal, we call it convenience.

Now, to be clear – I am not saying you have to go around wearing a Jesus shirt everywhere you go, or plaster a Jesus bumper sticker on your car. You don't have to have a gospel tract in your back pocket or your Bible under your arm at all times. I'm not asking you to be obnoxious for Jesus – but I am trying to say that all of us, all of us, face the temptation to walk away from Him and receive something from others.

So, let me ask: where do you see yourself in this story? We have two extremes – and you probably wouldn't line up exactly with either of them – but where do you fall along the

spectrum? Are you more likely to be the one walking away from Jesus or the one bringing Him the most valuable thing you own?

If we're honest, it probably depends on when you ask the question, doesn't it? Because, there's a little bit of Mary, and a lot of Judas, in each of us.

So let me make my final point this morning – we've talked about how people responded to Jesus, but what about Jesus Himself? Mary has chosen to worship Him, but her act of devotion is sandwiched between two acts of betrayal. Jesus is being trapped and betrayed at the very moment that He is seeking the good of others. He came to seek and to save the lost, to proclaim liberty for the captives, to call men and women into the Kingdom of God – to ultimately lay down His life as a sacrifice for our sin.

He is working for our good while we waffle back and forth wandering between loyalty and denial.

But let me ask: what harm has God ever done to you? What does He owe you? What do you feel He is holding back from you? What do you think you need, really need, that He cannot or will not provide? What is tempting you to turn your back on Jesus? And how does that compare with all that He is offering you?

Which leads, ultimately, to the question – do you know the Jesus Mary knew? My friends, if there is something you feel like you need to hold on to, or if there is something you feel like you need to find somewhere else – can I encourage you to ask the question – what did Mary know that you don't know? Why was this her reaction at the same time Judas was selling Him out?

Do you know this Jesus? And if not, what do you need to do to know Him more?

There are several ways I could answer that question – you could ask people about Jesus. Ask what they have experienced, what they know.

Certainly it's important to read the Bible – go back to the sources, listen to what Jesus said, and what people said about Him.

But the most important way to know more about Him is to respond to what you already know.

God often comes to us and brings us a sense of conviction, a sense of His presence, an unavoidable, unshakeable awareness that God is real and He's trying to get my attention.

Respond to that. If you have questions about what that means, ask someone here, we would be happy to help you. But my bet is, you know what to do. You know what God is speaking; you're just having a hard time finding the strength and courage to do it. You're like Mary trying to decide – should I really break this seal and pour out this expensive oil?

Because if I do, there's no going back.

If you're having a hard time doing what you sense God is leading you to do, tell Him. Ask Him for help. There was a man who came to Jesus and said Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief. It's OK to ask God for help in obeying Him.

And if you need help with any of that, ask. Ask the person who brought you, ask your friends, ask your spouse, ask your small group or Bible study leader – we're all in this together, the church is a community, a family, a place for everyone to belong and a place to find help. So ask. And together, we will struggle and fight, we will sacrifice and give, we will surrender and serve, we will worship and obey for the glory of God and the good of others.

Let's pray.