

# 'In the House of Simon the leper.'- Mar 14:3

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The sermon explores the emotional lives of the foes and friends of Jesus, highlighting the importance of pure emotion in making possible the saving of the slayers.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:6-16, Matthew 26:21-22, Mark 14:1-9, Mark 14:22-26, Luke 22:19-20, John 12:1-8, John 13:1-2, John 13:21-30

**Topics:** "Devotion to Christ", "Emotional Engagement"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan explores the emotional dynamics present in the events surrounding Jesus' final days, particularly during the two suppers in the house of Simon the leper. He contrasts the conflicting emotions of Jesus' foes, like the chief priests and Judas, driven by hatred and treachery, with the pure devotion of Mary, who anoints Jesus with precious ointment. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and expressing emotions, as seen in the disciples' anger and sorrow, and Jesus' appreciation for love and His preparation for communion. Morgan highlights that true emotional engagement with Christ leads to deeper fellowship and understanding, urging believers to embrace their emotions in worship. Ultimately, he calls for a heartfelt response to Jesus, who is present in the lives of those in distress.

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## Transcript

Mar 14:1-26.

THE dominant note of this paragraph is emotional. As we read it we are conscious of emotional suspense, suppression, expression, caution, courage. The atmosphere is surcharged with feeling. As we attempt to visualize the scenes, we observe the personalities: the chief priests, scribes, Simon the leper, Mary, Judas, the disciples; and central to them all, Jesus. Watching the faces, and listening to the speech of all, we detect tones which express intense and conflicting feelings; anger and affection, devotion and antagonism, evil gladness and beneficent sorrow. Gathered around the Son of man are foes and friends, all strangely moved.

While the introductory statements give us a glimpse of the avowed enemies of the Lord plotting for His death, the principal interest centers around two suppers; at the first of which Jesus was a Guest, while at the second He was Host. The gatherings were separated by six days. John tells us that the supper at Bethany was six days before the Passover. The definite time note in our story refers to the plotting of the priests and scribes two days before the Passover. The second supper was that of the Passover itself. The

end was at hand, and with more or less intelligence, all were conscious of the fact. Hence the emotional activity. Let this then be the subject of our meditation. Here we see evil emotions in the foes of Jesus; mixed emotions in the friends of Jesus; and pure emotions in Jesus Himself.

Let us look at the foes of Jesus; a group, and a man; the chief priests and scribes, and Judas. As we observe the first group, the chief priests and scribes from this standpoint, watching them in order to understand the emotions that were moving them, we see that they were filled with hatred, that they were conscious of fear, and that they were glad. These three things are clearly manifest in this story.

They were filled with hatred for Jesus. This fact need not be dwelt upon, save as it is important to remember that they did hate Him with a profound hatred, an intense hatred. But there was an element that restrained them, they were afraid. They were determined to do an evil deed, and yet for a moment they were held in check, suddenly into this consciousness of hatred and fear there came a new and unholy gladness.

For what reason were these men conscious of hatred of Jesus? He had rebuked their ideals through the whole course of His public ministry. Ideals are always closely related to conduct; consequently the whole tenor of His teaching had been to rebuke their conduct.

During the latter days of His ministry He had rebuked their failures as shepherds of the people. Functional failure is always related to organic failure. Sometimes the physicians tell us that there is a functional trouble, and not an organic one, and we are always comforted. Yet the physician would admit that functional failure is at least an organic peril. Where functional failure is as pronounced as it was in the case of these men, it is demonstration of organic failure. These men had been compelled, in the whole course of the ministry of Jesus Christ, and superlatively in these closing days, to stand disclosed; unwillingly, but definitely self-confessed as corrupt, as having failed. Their hatred of Jesus was consequently of One Who had revealed their failure.

Mark the high tribute to Jesus which this hatred created. There is no greater compliment that can be paid to a man than to be hated by certain men. The greatness of a man is revealed, not only by his friends, but by his foes. These men who are seen acting with hatred against Christ, by their very hatred were weaving another chaplet wherewith to deck His brow.

They were strangely moved by fear, afraid to do the thing that was in their heart. Read again the statement: "Not during the feast, lest haply there shall be a tumult of the people." Why should they fear a tumult among the people? They were perfectly acquainted with the fact that the great human conscience, as expressed in the life of the multitude, agreed with the ideals of Jesus, agreed with His condemnation of their own failure. They feared a tumult. And why should there not be a tumult? What is there necessarily evil in a tumult of the people? Their fear was purely selfish; behind their fear of the people in tumult, there lurked a craven fear of Rome, and of the possible loss of favour, and position. Again, what a high tribute to Jesus, that these men in this hour were afraid of a tumult, which would be inspired by popular love of, and belief in, all that for which He had stood.

The last note of the emotion of these evil men is that they were glad when one of His own number, one of the apostles, told them a way by which they could wreak their vengeance upon Him, and kill Him. It was a gladness born of treachery, gladness in the heart of men who were supposed to stand for the moral instruction and spiritual inspiration of the people. Morality was counted as nothing, in order that their evil purposes might be fulfilled.

Let us now turn to the emotional life of this man, Judas, as it is here revealed. The first note not perhaps quite clearly apparent in the paragraph, but made clear by the paragraph as it is interpreted by statements of the other evangelists, and especially by one illuminative word of John is that of a man whose whole emotional nature was mastered by covetousness. John gives us a revealing word about Judas. Having recorded his enquiry, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred shillings, and given to the poor?" he adds, "This he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having the bag took away what was put therein." There is revealed the master motive in the emotional life of Judas. The word covetousness does not startle the human heart. At its mention none blushes, or blanches. Yet it is the deadliest of all deadly sins. The only word in the Decalogue that brought Saul of Tarsus to conviction of sin, as he himself confessed in the Roman letter, was the word, "Thou shalt not covet." He who could stand erect in the presence of every other commandment, bowed his head, and knew his guilt when he reached that word. Covetousness is the subtlest sin of all!

Mark the fact concerning Judas. "He was a thief, and he had the bag." Was he given the bag because he was a thief? No, but because of his capacity in business matters. Undoubtedly everything was orderly in that little company of apostles. It may seem a small thing to say about Jesus, but He is the Author of order. The weakness of Judas lay in the realm of his power. His capacity was the reason of his appointment to the treasurer-ship of the little band; and right at the heart of his power, or capacity, lay his weakness. This is always so. When the apostle declared in one of his letters, "When I am weak then am I strong," he declared a great truth which may be expressed in another way, Where I am strong there I am weak. Temptation always lies within the realm of capacity. Financial ability is fraudulent possibility-not fraudulent necessity! It is not necessary for a man with financial ability to be fraudulent, but the capacity creates the possibility. Here, in spite of the brilliant essayists of the past, and the no less brilliant novelists of modern time, Judas stands confronting us, a man mastered emotionally by covetousness, the weakness of his own power and capacity.

Yet as we look at his emotional nature again, the more amazing thing is not that of the covetousness which was the inspiration of his treachery, but that of the callousness which enabled him to so act. Mark the hardening of the nature, the petrifying of the heart! The marvel of it, that any man could have lived and walked with Jesus, and yet have done this deed!

I am impressed, moreover, by the craftiness of the action of this man; cunningly choosing a moment, waiting for an opportunity. An emotional nature, hating; yes, strongly moved, wickedly unrestrained, covetous, callous, crafty. The picture is almost too dark to tarry at the looking.

So we look at the page again, to see this same emotional unveiling, in the case of the friends of Jesus. Here again we have a group and a person; the group of the disciples, and Mary.

Glance at the group of the disciples at that first supper, in the house of Simon the leper; undoubtedly the home also of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, to whom Simon was himself surely related. The first thing we observe as we look at them is that they were angry exceedingly, and as they thought, righteously so with Mary. Misled by the speciousness of Judas, misunderstanding entirely the action of the woman, they were angry, that in the presence of human poverty and need, there should be this waste. Judas it was who suggested this. In his case the suggestion came out of the thieving instinct of his own heart. He was a thief, and he had the bag. It was a specious suggestion. In the case of the other disciples, the anger did not arise from covetousness. They thought that theirs was most righteous anger, they were angry with a woman for wasting what might have been given to the poor.

Look at this same group of men once again, at the second supper; no longer glad, but sorrowful, with that poignant sorrow that came out of a great dread. Jesus had startled them by a word, "One of you shall betray Me." In a moment every man was afraid and sorrowful; and each in turn asked the question, "Lord is it I?" It was a great moment of emotion; it was a moment of splendid honesty. When Jesus made His statement He forced them as individual men to come face to face with Himself; and the question they asked Him was not, Is it my neighbour? but "Is it I?" It was a moment when every man suddenly woke to the fact that there was within himself-howsoever he hated it-something of the capacity for treachery. We see them there, strangely stirred with sorrowful emotion and fear.

Now let us return to the first supper, and look at Mary. Again the whole picture is one of the emotions. First observe the understandingness of this woman; how she saw and knew, that day, what no apostle saw or knew. She had had previous experiences of very close fellowship with Jesus. Luke records one, John another. The first, recorded by Luke, was in the day of sunshine and prosperity. He tells the gracious and wonderful story of how, having rendered her share of help in the work of the home, she also sat at His feet to hear His word. In the day of joy this woman had made time for quietness and discipleship, for adoration and listening. She had then found her way to His feet. On a later occasion, as John tells us, when the heaven was black with sorrow, when Lazarus was dead, and in his grave, she found her way to His feet in her desolate anguish, and the sequel is known. Now this was the hour of His anguish, this was the hour of His desolation; and this one woman, of all the group, discovered it. The keen intuition of her heart understood better than any other, all that He was passing through. Mary, coming with that cruse of precious spikenard, approached nearer the sacred sorrow of the Son of man, than did any other soul, at any period in His ministry. Such understandingness is a rare thing. How few possess it! I sometimes think that the highest thing that can ever be said of man or woman is that he or she is an understanding person.

Again, she was impulsive. There may be those who think that to be a sign of weakness. Nay, it is a thing of strength! Of course it matters what the impulse is, it may be evil, but it may be good. For a long while we have been suffering from an unholy horror of anything impulsive or emotional. This was an impulsive act, unconventional, uncalculating, and imprudent if you will, on Mary's part. Of course Judas could not understand this. Even the apostles could not understand it. It was an act born of the prodigality of love, daring not to calculate. No careful, mathematical, mechanical, consideration of how much or how little was this; but the bringing of the most costly gift available, and the pouring of it out upon His head and feet.

This was magnificent impulse; emotion, without reserve; and the deepest value of it was that it brought her into true fellowship with Him, not merely in the sense of understandingness, but in the sense of cooperation. Not idly or carelessly did our Lord utter His words of commendation. Not idly or carelessly did He say to those disciples, "Wheresoever the Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken for a memorial of her." In those words He was revealing a wonderful truth concerning the thing that Mary did. Notice how He brought together, "The Gospel" and "That . . . which this woman hath done." But six days away from that scene was Golgotha, the unfathomable darkness and mystery of the Cross; and beyond it the light of the Resurrection, and out of these came the Gospel. "The Gospel," and "That" stand side by side with each other for ever. That keen intuition of love, that uncalculating outpouring of love was Godlike, and an act in fellowship with the act of God, by which a world is to be redeemed. Mary is here to be measured, not by the inspiration of intellectual apprehension, but by the inspiration of a great heart.

Finally, and that with all reverence, let us look at the picture of Jesus presented here. It is purely emotional. In some senses there seem to be no very great things intellectually. There are however three

things emotional, which impress me, as I read the story. First, His appreciation of love in the case of Mary; secondly, His reprehension of treachery in the case of Judas; and finally, His preparation for emotional communion between Himself and His disciples in all the coming days, for that is what the institution of the Supper really meant.

First, as I look at my Lord z I am impressed by His appreciation of love. Do not spoil this story by trying to explain away this attitude of Jesus toward Mary. Be simple about it, graphic and childlike, and look at the scene as it really was. They were feasting in the house of Simon the leper. A wonderful hour was that; Martha still serving; Lazarus, risen from the dead, sitting at the board, and the disciples round about the Master, blinded intellectually by the mystery of His recent teaching. Then it was that this woman came with the alabaster cruse. Note the whispering among the apostles, and the sudden, swift, almost angry protest of Jesus against their whispering. "Let her alone; why trouble ye her?" Do not be afraid to interpret the words of Jesus so. I think His very protest was a revelation of His appreciation of her love. It is very difficult for us to do; but let us try and understand what that action meant to Him. There He was, humanly speaking hemmed in by blind hate; and here was one action of understanding love! There He was, amid the hindering of His activity; and here was one act of help! There was He A in a dark and desolate land; and lo! out of the heart of a woman, a spring of fresh water sprung for the thirsty Christ! He valued it.

Look at Him again on that second occasion; and again do not rob the story of its force. He knew what treachery lurked in the heart of Judas, and of his arrangements made for His arrest; and He resented it! Try and enter into His feelings here again, so much as may be. Remember His purpose of love, and then see standing in the way of it, this act of hate. Remember His power to help, and then think of this as an attempt to hinder His exercising that very power. Endeavour to apprehend the world-sphere of His benevolence, and then mark how in the highway of its operation, He saw this malevolent action. Then we shall not be surprised at the solemnity of His words, and the emotional anger of His soul, against the act of the traitor.

When the traitor was excluded from the paschal board, He instituted the sacred new feast. The supreme value of the Supper of the Lord is emotional, not intellectual. These symbols reveal no secrets, but they remind us of mystery. Although Mark does not give the full account of the words spoken at this time, we may remember them in this connection. Our Lord said, "This do in remembrance of Me." The activity of memory produces the renewal of feeling, the reawakening of thanksgiving. The Holy Table is the place of the Eucharist. The Eucharist simply means the thanksgiving. Christian men and women, who gather around the board, are priests of thanksgiving, offering the sacrifice of praise. Our Lord instituted the Supper with that end in view. Such provision was inspired by emotion. Jesus was making arrangements for the perpetual recurrence of an hour of tryst between Himself and His lovers, in which they should remember Him.

What is the value of that portrait that hangs upon the wall, dear mother, of your son, or of your daughter away in a distant land? It is something that reminds you of him, of her; when you look upon the face, your heart is moved anew. The portrait is not there to instruct your intellect; it is there to touch your emotion. So in this final hour, our Lord instituted this simple Feast, and established a ritual which, whenever it be truly observed, brings Him back to the memory more vividly, and causes an emotional outgoing toward Himself.

How did the Feast end? With twelve men singing, Jesus, and the eleven. "When they had sung a hymn, they went out." Take the book of Psalms, and read from the one hundred and thirteenth, to the one hundred and eighteenth. They constitute the great Hallel, and from these Jesus undoubtedly sang with His

disciples. What is singing but emotional expression?

Oh! the value and the power of emotion. Evil emotion slays the Lord of life and glory! Pure emotion makes possible the saving of the slayers.

Then let us guard our emotions. What masters them? What inspires them? Is it self? Or is it the Christ? If it be the Christ, then let us trust them, and let us obey them. Let us decline for evermore to listen to the mechanical, arithmetical, accurate, prudent, and devilish calculation, that prevents waste! Let us dare to pour out our hearts and ourselves in emotional adoration!

We may say if only He were here to-day to sit with us at the board, we could do it, and we would! Ah He is here to-day, in the person of all who are in distress. Do not let us be afraid of our hearts. Have you found out that you have one? Count this a gain indeed, and follow its dictates.

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