

Mark - Two Days Before Passover

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the principles of light rejected leading to misunderstanding and love received creating love and devotion, using the story of Jesus' betrayal as an example.

Duration: 41:18

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 26:1-2, Matthew 26:14-15, Mark 14:1-11, John 4:19, John 13:34-35

Topics: "Passover"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the rejection of light and its consequences. He emphasizes that when knowledge and understanding are rejected, it often leads to misunderstanding and even hatred towards those with differing beliefs. The preacher explores the reasons behind the rejection of Jesus by the ecclesiastical leaders, highlighting the role of their desire for wealth and their failure to address their cardinal sin. He urges the congregation to reflect on these principles and apply them to their own lives. The sermon also touches on the power of love received, which leads to love being reciprocated, and the dangers of lust ruling, which can lead to irrationality and blasphemy. The preacher then directs the audience to the passage in Mark's Gospel, specifically focusing on verses 1-11, where the episode of Mary breaking her alabaster box of ointment is discussed in the context of the overall narrative of Jesus' passion.

Transcript

Now shall we turn prayerfully together to Mark's gospel in chapter 14, and we are going, as has already been indicated, we are going to look at the passage verses 1, comprising verses 1 to 11. Coming to this passion narrative that extends to the end of chapter 15, we shall discover that we have been looking at some of these on previous occasions. For example, the episode of Mary breaking her alabaster box of precious ointment we have considered on a previous occasion.

But this morning we're going to see it in a slightly different light, in that we're going to look at the entire passage here, believing that Mark has, by the Spirit of God, placed it in a very particular setting. And sometimes the setting of a truth is all-important. Mark, by the inspiration of the Spirit we believe, has brought together three episodes here.

They're quite distinct, and yet they're related. And what I want to try to do this morning in this first exposition that relates particularly to the passion of our Lord, is to try and present the whole picture that we have in these verses, in this passage, and yet to see the significance of the parts. And I think we shall

discover that they have their own very telling application to us, as to every age of time.

Now the first thing I would like you to notice is this. I'd like us to see the three main parties that feature in this passage. They are, first of all, the ecclesiastical leaders.

You look at verse 1. Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way, as the New International Version puts it, some sly way to arrest Jesus and to kill him. Now the first group that we have here then, comprises the ecclesiastical leaders of the day and age. When we turn over to another gospel, namely that of Matthew, we find that Matthew refers also to the elders of the people being present.

Now that brings together the three main sections of the highest court of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. The teachers of the law, the chief priests, and the elders. So that this is a most significant court, an ecclesiastical court especially, but also the court that ruled over affairs of state.

It was the main court in the life of the Jewish people. And if what we read in the other gospels is true, then the group gathered here represented the Sanhedrin as a whole. The second main party here, the second and the one that we prefer to turn to, is of course this devoted disciple whom we're told elsewhere was Mary of Bethany.

John's gospel tells us that. Now this is a delightful setting, a delightful scene, and a delightful episode. It's one of the most precious probably in the whole of the gospel narratives.

The setting here is Bethany. Bethany where Lazarus and his two sisters Martha and Mary lived. Though what takes place here actually happens in the home of a man who is spoken of as Simon the leper.

Simon had evidently been suffering from leprosy. He couldn't have been suffering from leprosy at this point in time because the authorities would not then have allowed them to meet in this way. So we should probably conclude that by this time Simon has been healed of his leprosy and this was a kind of party that was arranged for those who were indebted to the Lord Jesus for this benefit or for that blessing.

And so you can see the combination of these two families. The family of Simon who had been a leper, healed of his leprosy, and the family of Lazarus. Lazarus who in recent times has been raised from the dead.

The central figure in the episode that took place there in Bethany is Mary, one of the two sisters. She had been waiting for some time and she had been planning. And at the appropriate season when everybody was seated for the meal in Simon the leper's house, Mary came in.

Mary who had sat at Jesus' feet. Mary who had heard his word and believed his word. Mary of whom Jesus said according to Luke that she had chosen the one thing that was necessary.

Mary is the one who features here, a devoted disciple. And then the third, can I refer to him as an exposed hypocrite? Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. For three and a half years or so, Judas had paraded as a follower and a disciple of Jesus.

But in heart he had never been a disciple. No one was suspicious of him. No one had sensed it.

In fact, Judas had been given the one post among the twelve. That was the post of a kind of treasurer. Whatever monies they had, Judas looked after them.

And Judas for the whole three to three and a half years had followed in the footmarks of the Lord Jesus, taken in intellectually what he had said, listened to his teaching as Mary who sat at his feet. But with a world of difference, Judas's heart had never been changed by what he heard. Judas's soul had never been redeemed.

And in due course, the mask he wore had to wear thinner and thinner. And by this point, it's off completely. And as we see here in these words, they tell us that Judas went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.

Actually, the other Gospels add to that and say that he went to betray him for gold, for silver, for gold for the price of a slave, for thirty pieces of silver. Now, these then are the three main parties. The next thing I want you to notice is this.

I want us to look for a moment at the priorities of each party. Each party had its own distinctive priority, something particular that it wanted to do at this particular point in time. Just as you and I have our priorities, we shall set out into a new week, we shall begin a new day, God willing, tomorrow morning, and we shall, whether we acknowledge it or not, we shall have our priorities.

And we shall soon reveal to men and women looking at us what those priorities are. Now, the priority of the ecclesiastical leaders was the murder of Jesus of Nazareth. The second part of verse 1, the chief priest and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way, that's a very accurate way of translating the Greek, looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and to kill him.

Now, this sounds incredible, doesn't it? It sounds unbelievable that intelligent, well-educated people such as these were, and we must say that, that they should be involved in this unholy alliance and league which is nothing other than a plot to murder. Let's put it stronger. These represent the whole body of the Jewish people.

To them had been given the covenants according to the Old Testament. God had entered into covenant with them. God had given them his law.

God had sent his judges and his prophets to direct them in his own way. We could understand the pagan Romans or the Greeks doing this kind of thing, but the Jews, the Jewish people, heirs of the covenants and of the scriptures and of the prophets, these leaders, it's unbelievable. And yet this is exactly what we have here.

And they think, as arrogant people always think, that they're in charge of the situation, they're masters of the situation, and it's only a matter of time. They can slay the Son of God. They can do it.

They've got all the power and all the authority in their hands. They can do it just as they please. Amazing how governments like to think that.

Now, this may take me off my tack a little bit, but I think I ought to point it out to you. That things are not always as they appear. This great ecclesiastical body decided what they were going to do.

They were looking for a sly way, as Mark puts it according to this translation, to get rid of Jesus, to murder him. But they said, we shall not do it during the feast. Look at the second verse.

But not during the feast, they said, or the people may riot. Now you've got the picture. This is the high court of jury represented.

And they say, we're going to murder him. We've got him in our hands, but we're not going to do it. We're going to choose our times.

We are not going to do it during the feast in case there is an insurrection. He's got so many followers. He's got so many people who've been blessed by his hand or by his word.

So we choose our time. If you'd like to turn over the pages to Matthew's gospel in chapter 26 verses one and two, you will find these words, or let me read them to you. When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, as you know, the Passover is two days away.

These words were spoken on the very same day as the ecclesiastical leaders met two days before the Passover on the very same day. Jesus said, as you know, the Passover is two days away and what the son of man will be handed over to be crucified. You got the picture.

They said, we're going to kill him, but not on the feast on the time of the feast, because there'd be too many people around who may be in sympathy with him. He says two days before the feast and the son of man will be delivered over to be crucified. You see, he was in charge.

He was still master of his fate. He was going to determine the time, the appointed time of his deliverance. And of course, as we go on into the gospel narratives, we find that this is precisely what happened.

Jesus was delivered up at the time foretold in scripture and the time that Jesus said he would. They may think they're doing their own will as indeed they are, but unwittingly they are fitting into the purpose of God. And Jesus himself is choosing the time when he will agree to lay down his life for others.

That verse in John 10 verse 18 is a very important one. No one said, Jesus takes my life from me. That is without my conceding to it and willing it.

No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. And this command I have received of my father.

Do you see the point? They think they're in charge. Actually, they're not. He is.

The priority of the ecclesiastical leaders was the murder of Jesus. The priority of Mary was the honor of Jesus. While the guests were reclining at the table, awaiting the meal to be served, a table was a low one, of course, as was the custom, probably in the shape of a U. And the folk reclining at the table were squatting as it were, sitting, reclining, leaning on the table with one arm, with their feet coming out as it were from under them.

Mary had all her plans ready. Quietly, unobtrusively, she brought in this costly alabaster jar of precious ointment, of pure nard. Apparently, the contents were the fruit of an aromatic herb found only on the heights of the Himalayas, somewhere between Tibet and India.

The value of the contents of that jar was equal to a man's full wage for a whole year. But Mary got it. And it was probably the costliest thing she had in the home.

Probably here was her bar of gold. But here she brings it, and she brings it behind Jesus, and whether he was aware of what was taking place or not, she opens it or she breaks it, and she pours the content over his head, but so pours it over his head and neck that John tells us it also, it also perfumed his feet. So that virtually the whole body of Jesus was bathed, was baptized with this expensive perfume which Mary broke upon his head.

And then John tells us this, having so done, Mary, out of sheer adoration for the object of her love and faith, undid the tresses of her hair. And with the very hair of her head she began to wipe the feet of the one at whose feet she had so long sat, heard his word of grace and of salvation, received the pardon and the mercy of God and much else. Sat at the feet of him who called her brother back from the grave where he'd been buried for four days.

She now not only sat at his feet but knelt there and wiped the feet and the perfume on it with a hair of her head. The priority of the ecclesiastical leaders was the murder of Jesus. The priority of Mary was the honor of Jesus.

It's to do him honor. She wants to do one thing. She may have helped preparing the meal, I don't know.

She may have done some of the washing up afterwards, I don't know. But the priority as far as Mary was concerned that day was something bigger and something greater. It was this.

It was to break her costly alabaster box on the head of Jesus and even over his feet and perform this service which was prophetic as Jesus later says. The priority of Judas Iscariot however at this point in time was to reap some material gain for himself. Judas' iniquity stands out in bold black colors.

Whether we recognize it in terms of his collusion with the ecclesiastical leaders in the murder of our Lord or whether we contrast him with Mary. It doesn't matter. All the skillful artistry of Scripture.

You couldn't bring out the blackness of Judas' crime any better than this. The Holy Spirit is the supreme artist. See this man a disciple in collusion with the very enemies of the Lord Jesus who are planning his murder.

That's black enough. But see his wretched quest for filthy lucre in contrast with this dear woman who's bringing something that has cost a man's wages for a whole year and pours it and squanders it as they said on the head and on the feet of the law. You see the Bible is concerned that we should see the sin of Judas in all its heinousness, in all its gravity, in all its iniquity, in his hellish composition.

And my friend I trust you and I can see that today. Now Judas was not alone in some of the things that went on here. But I'm not going into all the details.

Some of these details we've considered on a previous occasion. Judas was not alone in criticizing Mary. Others did too and said why this waste? It would have been so much better if that jar of ointment had been sold and the proceeds given to the poor.

Others said that as well as Judas. But Judas was the only one whose heart was so stirred with sin that he would make money out of the very death of the Son of God. Money of course which was coins which were too hot for his hands to hold very long.

And I tell you if anybody would have clung to those coins Judas would have done so. For his conscience must have been seared that he had rejected the truth for so long. He must have had a seared conscience and yet even Judas could not hold on to the price that he got.

And in no time we find him coming and throwing the money back into the temple. But more than that selling his Lord for the price of a slave was something that seared his soul for all eternity. Now the celebration of the Passover and the events that led to the crucifixion of our Passover Lamb our Lord Jesus Christ will soon be upon us.

The main parties involved in the celebration in 1980 may vary somewhat from what was the case in the episode here before us. And yet in principle we may still have the successors of these same three parties present even in a church service such as this. God forbid it but it may well be that there is someone here who is plotting the very murder of Jesus if that were possible.

Who just wants to get rid of him. Who finds him too much of a nuisance to live with and who in principle would say exactly what the chief priest said away with him. We will not have this man to rule over us.

But you know blessed be the name of God I'm quite sure of this I know this well enough. There are Mary's around. May the Lord add to their number.

Men and women who have kept their very best and who are prepared to bring it and to break it and to hand it over lock stock and barrel in any circumstance at the appropriate moment so that it becomes the Lord's and he is honored. Oh there may be differences. You may not bring an alabaster jar of precious ointment.

No no no. Because Jesus is not physically present with us anymore. But the principle remains.

But you know unfortunately there are Judas's still left too. Those who have made loud professions and have accompanied genuine disciples for a period of up to three to three and a half years and have been out exorcising demons and announcing that the kingdom of God is at hand and that the Messiah has arrived and they've seen all these things and they've said all these things but their hearts have not been changed and their God still is gold and if they can make a little extra gold they will sell him even to his death. My friend I ask you personally and I ask you sincerely to which group do you belong.

Bear with me and I just want to mention three principles that emerge from the passage. And of course when we come to a passage such as this it's the principles that particularly apply to us. And there are principles here.

Now let me just mention them. First of all the first principle is this. Light rejected leads naturally to misunderstanding.

That is the light of knowledge I mean. Light rejected leads naturally to misunderstanding. Oftentimes to hate of those with whom you disagree.

And light rejected is capable thus of breeding murder. A few moments ago I posed the question how is it that people such as the ecclesiastical leaders of the ancient Jewry could conceivably reject the Messiah that God had promised and foretold in the scriptures. You know the answer is found in this very simple principle.

They rejected the light that God gave them. The Old Testament scriptures tell us that the Messiah that was to come was to come in a twofold capacity. Oh it speaks of his coming as a king to reign.

There is no question about that. But it also speaks of the same person coming to suffer. He was wounded for our transgressions.

That was spoken prophetically. He was bruised for our iniquities. That is the prophet speaking prophetically of him.

Earlier on at the end of chapter 52 Isaiah says his visage was marred more than any man. Looking across the unborn centuries Isaiah says the servant of the Lord is coming. His visage will be so marred you never saw a face like his.

And you follow through Isaiah 53 and you see the furrows of which he speaks and the wounds and the lacerations deep and terrifying. Now the Jews of our Lord's day couldn't make sense of that. That the Messiah should come to suffer.

Now you can't blame them for that. But what we do blame them for is this that they didn't believe it. Though they knew that God had spoken it.

They believed the scriptures you see. They believed in the inspiration of the prophets. They were not liberals.

They were not unbelievers as far as the scriptures were concerned. They were conservative. They believed the scriptures but then they chose to explain away this particular strand.

So you see they were rejecting one major strand of light. Then in turn Jesus comes. The Messiah is born.

And he says I'm going to suffer. They said well he can't be the Messiah. And the more he spoke about suffering the more they said it can't be he.

But the Old Testament had also said that he would do this. He would heal the sick. He would touch the blind and the leper.

And he would even raise the dead. And so he did. And even though he fulfilled so many of those Old Testament prophecies yet they said it cannot be he.

It's someone else. He's someone to get rid of. You see this is the first principle.

You reject the light that you have. And not only will it lead you to a violent disagreement with those who receive the light. But it can even breed murder in your soul.

These men are going to slay Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God because they rejected the light of God concerning him. And the testimony not only of the life and of his ultimate resurrection and ascension and the sending forth of the spirit. The second principle is this.

Love received creates love. And breeds devotion. How do you explain Mary.

How do you explain this remarkable contrast. She was child of the same heritage. She was brought up in the same world.

She had read the same scriptures. She had worshiped in the same synagogue. She had heard what these folk taught.

How do you explain her. I'll tell you. We are retracing our steps but it must be said again.

She had sat at Jesus feet. And as the Revised Standard Version rightly puts it over against the King James Version. Not just listen to him.

Not just heard him. Passively. But listened to him actively.

She had put herself out to listen to him. As if she had said master speak your servant hears. I want to hear what you've got to say.

And having heard what he had to say. She had chosen the one thing that he said was necessary. And she received from his very hand and from his very lips the words of eternal life.

Which should not be taken away from her. But what then. Well you see the point is this.

The moment you receive the love of God into your hearts. That very moment the love of God creates love in your heart for himself and for others. Now this is the mystery.

This is the mystery of love. I don't suppose there is a greater miracle than this in the whole wide world that men with hearts of stone who hate one another. Can't stand the face of each other.

Can't sit by one another. Can't look at one another. I tell you there is a miracle of grace whereby if the love of God in Christ and by the Holy Spirit comes into their hearts.

Not only do they begin by responding in love for God. But they begin to love one another. And that was one thing they said about the early Christians.

See how these folk love one another. How did they love one another. Well this is the answer.

The love of God in them begat a love for God and for men. In the village near where I was brought up we had an old water pump. I don't know whether I've ever said this before.

It's amazing how some of the things of childhood always come back to you. You must tell me if I repeat myself. The pump went down to a well and you know we ladies came and they just pumped and pumped.

That's the that was in the day before they had water installed in their homes. And I noticed one thing which caused me to wonder what was happening. Every now and again the old pump would get dry.

Not necessarily in the summer. Sometimes in the winter the pump would go dry. And then I noticed that folk would knock at the door of the house which was right opposite the pump.

Where in my day a very elderly old lady lived alone. And they would ask her for a jug of water. About a pint or so.

And they would bring out the pint of water and they would pour it into the works. Into the pipe. Now you may know how it works.

But they would pour a pint or so of water in and then they would start pumping and out it came gushing. You know I see there a picture of the human heart. There are hearts here this morning that never can love.

Because their hearts are stone. And all our hearts by nature are just like that. We cannot love a holy God.

It's not in us. In so far as we love God at all it must be a God who is made after our own image. A God of our own imaginings who does what we liken to do.

A God whom we can keep in his place. We'd love that God because really it's self-worship. But we do not love a holy God and we don't love holy people.

We don't love good godly holy people. Any more than we love holiness and sanctity. How then can we love what we ought to love? I'll tell you.

By receiving the love of the Lord Jesus into our hearts. Paul puts it like this. Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus.

And then he goes on to say and the Holy Spirit he said is shed abroad in our hearts. Romans 5. By the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been poured in not just a pint.

We can't speak of the Spirit in those terms anyway for the Spirit is personal. But the Spirit in his person has come to indwell our hearts and the fruit of the Spirit is love. Mary loved whereas the ecclesiastical leaders hated and the reason is this Mary's heart has received the love of God and now it produces love for God and for men.

And lastly and I'm only going to say a this but there is another important principle here. Lost ruling usually leads to irrationality and profanity and that in turn can breed the ultimate blasphemy. Now this principle is illustrated in the life of Judas.

His peculiar desire or lust, you know the word for lust is simply the word for desire. His peculiar desire was not in the realm of passion, physical pleasure. His peculiar desire, his peculiar lust was in the realm of possessions.

He wanted gold. He was in the gold race and he worshipped gold. He worshipped money, lucre.

And you see he worshipped it to such an extent that he was prepared ultimately to barter with the enemies of our Lord to betray him to them that they should kill him for the price of a slave. And that is the ultimate blasphemy. It is to think of the incarnate God as deserving only the price of a slave to be betrayed.

And Judas' estimation of Jesus of Nazareth was right there. When he was offered 30 pieces of silver he says, I'll sell him. It all started because the desire for gold had never been dealt with.

The lust for possession had never been broken, never been curbed. He had walked with Jesus, he had talked with Jesus, he had listened to Jesus, he had preached for Jesus, but he'd never brought his cardinal sin to be dealt with and pardoned and himself to be remade. Brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm going to ask you to be courageous enough with me to go out of this service this morning and to have some time alone today to apply these principles to ourselves.

They're very important. Light rejected leads to misunderstanding, then to hate and can lead to murder. Love received creates love and breeds love.

We love, says John, because he first loved us. And lastly, lust ruling leads to irrationality. I haven't had time to point that out.

Profanity and the ultimate blasphemy. That treats the incarnate God on the level of a slave. Where do you find yourself this morning? If we're going to profit from this series together, we've got to be honest with the Lord and with ourselves.

And as we find that the Lord is putting his finger on us and revealing ourselves to us, may the Spirit of God enable us to acknowledge what we see to be true and to seek his face and find his grace to help in this our time of need. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that your word is truth and your spirit is the spirit of truth.

That you are not the false accuser of men. We pray that you will give us the grace in acknowledging this to receive the light of truth, to give thanks for the very convincings and convictions of the spirit, and so to yield ourselves afresh to you that we may be molded after the image of Mary, who herself bore the image of her Lord. And we ask it in his holy name.

Amen.

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