

## Setting Our Face To Go To Jerusalem Week 3

**Encounters on the Journey** – Turn with me to the Gospel of Mark chapter 10. We are continuing our Lenten series, walking with Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, heading towards Jerusalem and his crucifixion and resurrection.

On his way to Jerusalem, daily drawing closer to the cross, Jesus has three encounters that I want us to consider. I want us to read these passages and try to put ourselves in Jesus' place as he interacts with these three. What was he thinking as he met these three people? Three unnamed people that Jesus encounters and I believe he identifies with each of them in a rather unusual way. Three unnamed people that show us something of the demands of discipleship and what true worship is all about.

**Mark 10:17** we meet a man that the other gospel writers refer to as the rich young ruler. Here was a young guy who, at least to everyone around him, appeared to have it all together. Let's read this short passage (v17-22).

Rich and young and no doubt good looking. In fact, if you are rich and young, it really doesn't matter what you look like, people will tell you you are good looking. He had wealth, youth, power and influence, after all, he was a ruler over someone or something. He was on Jerusalem's Ten Most Eligible Bachelors' List. He was well groomed and well mannered. He kept the commandments, he did good works, he was kind and respectful to his mother and father, but on the inside, something wasn't quite right. Something was missing. And so he comes to Jesus because he heard he was an extraordinary rabbi. **“Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** He had it all together, but he lacked something. Go down the list again. Do you have everything you need? Youth (check). Wealth (check). Looks (check). Keep the commandments (check). You've got everything you need except for one essential thing. You've put your trust in your wealth and your good works, in your youth, in your accomplishments, in the accolades given you by others, but none of these things can save you. You can't earn eternal life and you can't inherit it. You need a Savior, one that can give you eternal life and you've come to the right person. However, in order to find eternal life and salvation you will have to turn loose of everything else that you are looking to as your savior and grab hold of the One True Savior, Jesus Christ. You can't have multiple saviors. It's an all or nothing deal. So Jesus says, “Let's get everything else out of the way. You'll need to turn loose

of everything else so you can embrace the Savior with both hands and your whole heart. So here's the deal. Sell everything, take your wealth and give it to the poor, relinquish your power and control and then come follow me. I'm going to Jerusalem and to the cross. Come go with me and you'll have eternal life."

Jesus is asking this young man to risk everything to follow Jesus. **"Imagine all you have is me. Will you risk it and follow me?"** The bible says the man's face fell and he went away sad because he had great wealth. It was too much for him. He had to cling to all his stuff, frightened of who he would be without "things." He couldn't surrender it all for Jesus.

And look at Jesus as he looks at this young man. Mark records something that Matthew and Luke do not mention. Mark said, **"Jesus looked at him and loved him."** Of course he loved him. Jesus loved everyone didn't he? But why did Mark record this?

I don't know, but I wonder if Jesus identified with this guy. Jesus too was a young man. He understood about power and wealth for Jesus had already turned loose of greater power and authority and wealth than anyone could imagine when he left Heaven to be born among us. And now he looks at this guy and thinks, "I can identify. I know how painful it is to turn loose of everything and to trust only in God. But that's what I am asking you to do."

Jesus asked this young ruler to give up everything and follow him in order to have eternal life, while Jesus is preparing to give up everything including his own life to provide eternal life for this young man and everyone else — for all who would believe. Jesus was inviting this young man to come risk it all with him but the man couldn't do it. He invited him to come discover the freedom that comes when we stop serving ourselves and start serving others but he was too bound to his possessions. The young man went away grieved and sad and no closer to the eternal life for which he longed, his heart still weighted down with his love of things. And Jesus continues on with his face set toward Jerusalem. Onward to the cross and the sacrifice that would bring eternal life for us. And we move on with him to the second encounter in Mark 12.

Jesus has now entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, has cleared the temple area and is now teaching the people in the temple courts. As he was teaching, he makes some strong statements about the people of power. Notice verse 38. **"Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour**

**widows houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.” Mark 12:38-40**

Talk about confronting the power structure. Jesus is in the temple courts when he says this about the leaders of the temple system that have been exploiting the people for their own financial and political gain. And then look what happens as Jesus encounters another unnamed person. (Read Mark 12:41-44)

In verse 41 Jesus sat down across from the place where the offerings were placed. The rich walked by making quite a show of their gifts and their giving. Some scholars suggest the offering receptacles were shofars, rams horns. When the coins were dropped in, they would make some noise, so the rich dropping in their coins could make quite a show of it. Everyone could see and hear the gift as it fell into the shofar.

The widow put in “two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.” Jesus watched her as she dropped in the coins and then called his disciples to him and told them. **“...this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.” Mark 12:43-44.**

Jesus wanted them to see that it’s not about how much money you have, it’s about how you use what you’ve got. The rich young ruler had great wealth and thought he had too much to lose if he gave it away. The widow lived in poverty but knew that she had nothing to lose by giving all she had. She gave out of her poverty Jesus said, but she also gave out of faithfulness, out of obedience. It’s ironic that she was giving to the very system that Jesus said was corrupt and to the very people that Jesus said were “devouring widow’s houses”, but she was giving as unto the Lord. God would bless her for her faithfulness and obedience but he would punish those who were taking advantage of her “most severely.”

Notice once again the contrast between this unnamed widow, in poverty, in obscurity, and the teachers of the law, the chief priests, those marching around in their flowing robes as Jesus pointed out. Jesus is always drawn to the outcast, the poor, those without power while the world and the crowd always run to the rich and famous. They were trying to make a name for themselves, but think about it, this obscure, unnamed lady is being remembered and talked about this morning almost 2,000 years later.

Jesus is on his way to the cross, with so much on his mind, and yet he stops to watch this little lady put in her two coins. I think he identified with this unnamed widow in her poverty and obscurity because she put in all she had. She gave everything and Jesus was on his way to do the same thing. Perhaps Jesus is thinking, “No one else noticed or had any regard for this widow and her obedience. She gave all she had, unnoticed by the world, but noticed by heaven and by the Son of God. And I am headed to Calvary, unnoticed by the world but watched by heaven where I too will give everything I have, all that I am, out of obedience to the Father.”

I think Jesus understood this widow lady and the sacrifice she made as she gave all she had. Jesus is on his way to the cross, but he pauses to take note of the commitment and obedience of a poor, unnamed widow lady who had come to the temple to give all she had to the Lord. And there is one more unnamed woman we have to consider this morning.

Just two days before the Passover feast, **Mark 14:1-9** tells us Jesus was visiting in the home of a man called Simon the Leper when unannounced a woman comes in the house, breaks open an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume and pours it upon Jesus’ head.

The other gospels may give us a name for this woman, but Mark does not. It is simply an unnamed woman, moved with a heart of love, that comes to anoint Jesus with perfume. A woman who does an extraordinary thing. The perfume she pours upon Jesus is very expensive, made of pure nard. The critics present placed the value of the fragrance at more than a year’s salary for a working man. They questioned why this perfume wasn’t sold and the money used to feed the hungry or help the poor. This act seemed wasteful. Fragrant but also flagrant. Senseless. To those present at the table, it made no sense to waste the perfume or its value, to simply see it poured out. **Nothing could justify such excess except one thing: Love.** There was no other reason. It doesn’t say she was seeking forgiveness or making restitution or hoping for some act of blessing. The widow had given all she had out of obedience to the law. But for this woman, it was different. There was no law that brought her here. No commandment that required her devotion. She came to love, extravagantly. She came to pour out her adoration upon Jesus in the form of this expensive fragrance.

The focus was all upon him. Maybe that’s why Mark doesn’t mention her name, because who she was really wasn’t important. The focus was where it belonged – upon Jesus – upon what she did and for whom she did it. Not for herself but for Jesus.

This was an act of worship. It didn't feed the poor. It didn't accomplish anything by the disciples' standards, but Jesus recognized it for what it was. Those at the table rebuked her for her excess, but Jesus told them to leave her alone. He called it a beautiful thing that she had done and then notice what he says in verse 8. "She did what she could." It sounds like the widow in chapter 12. She gave all she had. She did what she could. Here is one who looks at giving, not as a requirement but as an opportunity – a privilege. It's not **"How much must I give?"** but **"How much can I give?"** It didn't matter how much the perfume cost, all that mattered was how worthy Jesus was of her love and devotion.

**Love finds a way to express itself and to give of itself.** And love brought this woman to Jesus just days before his crucifixion. Whether this unnamed woman understood what she was doing at that moment in time, we don't know. She came out of love with a desire to worship, but Jesus understood a deeper significance in her action. **"She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial."**

Jesus understood that she was there to anoint him. He was our high priest, but no one had anointed him as high priest, but this woman did. He was the Son of David and our King of Kings, but no one had anointed him as king, but this woman did. No one else would gather to anoint his body for burial, but this unnamed woman did. Talk about disregarding the world's symbols of power. Jesus is anointed by an unnamed woman, at the house of a leper.

It really struck me this week as I studied, other than Peter's initial rebuke of Jesus when he began to talk about the cross, no one did anything for Jesus to try to help him or encourage him during this passion week. Everyone was busy worrying about themselves. Only this unnamed woman came to focus upon Jesus and his needs. The disciples couldn't even stay awake in the garden as Jesus agonized in prayer and then they fled in fear after Judas and the temple guards arrived. Peter denied him in the courtyard of Caiphas's house. It was a stranger, Joseph of Arimathea that requested permission to take down his body and place it in a tomb. Where was everyone? Only this unnamed woman came forward to anoint him before the crucifixion. Someone remarked that as Jesus was dying upon the cross, it was possible that he could still smell the fragrance of the perfume, encouraged by the love and worshipful devotion of this one anonymous woman who gave all she had, who did what she could, all she could, for Jesus.

Three encounters on the way to the cross. A rich young ruler who when invited to risk it all and follow Jesus couldn't make the sacrifice. A widow who gave all she had out of obedience to God and this woman, who gave all she had, not just out of obedience, but out of love and adoration and in full surrender.

And here we are, traveling with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. And we've met them all as well today. I wonder if we can identify with any one of these three?

Like the young ruler, Jesus looks at us today and says, "Imagine all you have is me. Are you willing to turn loose of everything else and come to me in reckless abandonment? Come follow me." What will be our decision?

Like the widow we have an opportunity to give all we have in obedience to Jesus today. Not necessarily our last two pennies, but are we willing to give our selves to Jesus, to give up our need for power and control and to let him be Lord of our lives? Are you willing to change jobs if that's what Jesus requires of you? Are you willing to give everything to him today?

Like the unnamed woman with the expensive perfume, are you willing to love Jesus with extravagance today? Are you willing to worship him, to bow before him? Are you willing to be the one in your family or among your crowd who will do whatever is required to serve him with all your heart and soul and strength? Are you willing to break open your most prized possession, that which you love the most, and offer it to Jesus? Are you willing to take all you have and all you are and turn it into an act of love and surrender and obedience to Jesus?