

EMOTIONS AND MOTIVES

MARK 14:1-26

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The passage of scripture that we are dealing with today is a passage that is full of emotion. The feelings expressed in this section of scripture are intense. Feelings such as anger, fear, hatred, gladness, affection, condemnation, and gratitude all can be found in this passage. In just a moment, we will take a closer look at these emotions. But before we do, let me share with you two things I have learned about emotions.

The first thing is that it is not wrong to have feelings. We should never tell a person that he is bad just because he is experiencing certain feelings. In the same way, we should not conclude that a certain person is good just because that person often experiences a certain emotion like happiness. We should never judge a certain person as being bad or good based upon the emotions that person is experiencing.

The second thing about emotions that I have learned is that, in many cases, emotions and motives have a direct relationship to each other. The emotions that we find in today's scripture reading are all inspired and mastered by thinking that is either self-centered or God-centered. The feelings that we will be looking at today begin in the minds of people. Speaking in a figurative way, we can say that the motivations and attitudes of the mind control the emotions of the heart.

Now I realize that the physical condition of our bodies can also cause us to experience many emotions. When we are sick, we usually don't feel good. Certain drugs can also have a direct affect on our emotions. Scientists have discovered that even odors affect the way we feel.

But, our scripture reading does not deal with these kinds of emotions. The feelings we will be looking at today are feelings that are mainly inspired by the way people think.

It's important for us to see this; because even though feelings themselves should not be considered as being good or bad, the thinking that controls the feelings can be considered good or bad, depending on whether it is God-centered or self-centered thinking.

The main purpose of this sermon is to persuade all of us to guard our emotions. And we guard our emotions by first understanding what drives them. We must avoid following emotions that are controlled by self-centered thinking. And we must not be afraid to follow emotions that are controlled by God-centered thinking.

Now, for me to say that we should follow emotions of any kind will probably cause some people to react. We react to such a statement for two reasons. First of all, in the church we emphasize the importance of living by faith and not by our feelings. This is true, and I am not trying to suggest that we should be living by feelings and not by faith. However, when we have determined that the foundation of our feelings is the truth of God's Word, then we should not be afraid to allow our feelings to affect our behavior or certain decisions that we have to make. When a certain person decides to marry another person, the decision, at least in part, is based on feelings of love they have for the person they want to marry. And that is not wrong.

The other reason why we react to the suggestion that we should follow our feelings has to do with the way we are raised. I am told that many Chinese parents teach their children that it is wrong to express emotion. This is probably more true overseas than it is here in America. But, the Chinese do not have a monopoly on this problem. I also grew up with the understanding that emotions must be suppressed. This was especially true in a public situation like a worship service.

I am convinced that there must be a balance. The Bible tells us to live by faith and not by feelings. But, on the other hand, faith inspires feelings, and we should not be afraid to allow such feelings to influence our decisions.

So guarding our emotions means to first recognize where the emotions are coming from. And once that is done, we must do our best to suppress the emotions that are inspired by self-centered thinking and allow the emotions that are inspired by faith to actually influence our behavior. And, though there are other themes and lessons to be learned from today's scripture reading, this is the main lesson I have learned, and it is the main message I want to pass on to you today.

Now let's go back and look at the stories recorded in our scripture reading in order to drive home the need to suppress bad emotions and encourage good emotions.

The stories found in today's scripture reading center around two meals separated by six days. JOHN 12:1 says that the meal at Bethany took place six days before the Passover. The Gospel of John also tells us that Lazarus, whom Jesus had

raised from the dead, was also there during that meal. The emotions that Lazarus and his sisters felt during that time must have been extremely intense. And, we must also realize that, during this time, most everyone was more or less conscious of the fact that the end was near. They knew the people who wanted to kill Jesus were not far away, and they knew Jesus had predicted that His own death would happen during this time. Knowing these things will help us get a better sense of the strong emotions present during that first meal.

The second meal took place during the Passover celebration. That was also a time when emotions were intense. Everyone had a sense that something big was going to happen, but most people didn't really know what it would be. Even the public officials were nervous, and they had a good reason to feel uneasy. During the Passover festival, the population of Jerusalem would swell from 50,000 to 250,000 people. Demonstrations and riots could always be expected, especially on the part of the excitable Galileans.

So, in the midst of a very tense and emotional atmosphere, we now want to look at and try to understand the emotions of the people mentioned in the stories. The people fall into three categories. First, we will notice the enemies of Christ. Second, we will notice the friends of Jesus. Third, we will notice Jesus Christ Himself.

First of all, let us notice the enemies of Jesus and see the kinds of emotions they were feeling. When we look at the enemies of Christ, we will be looking at a group of people and at an individual. The group of people are the chief priests and the teachers of the law mentioned in MARK 14:1, and the individual is Judas Iscariot mentioned in verse 10.

When we look at the chief priests and the teachers of the law, we will discover they had emotions of hate, fear, and gladness. They were feeling strong hate toward Jesus. Verse one says that they "were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill Him." This was an intense hatred that had made up its mind to do an evil deed.

But, the hatred was held in check by a strange fear. Many of the supporters of Jesus were these Galileans, and during the Passover Festival, the city was full of them. So, in verse 2, the chief priests and teachers of the law said, "But not during the feast, or the people may riot." So the emotion of fear held the emotion of hate in check.

But then, they were swept by another emotion. It was the emotion of gladness as they realized one of Jesus' own disciples had come to betray Him.

Verse 11 says that, when Judas Iscariot came to the chief priests and teachers of the law to betray Jesus, "they were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money." They now had a way to carry out their evil deed, and this made them feel very happy.

Now, let us remind ourselves that emotions, in and of themselves, are not bad. Even though the emotion of hate seems to be a bad emotion, the Bible tells us that God hates sin. The emotion of fear also seems bad, but the Bible tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And no one will say it is wrong to feel happy. But when we look again at the thinking which inspired these emotions, we realize that the attitudes behind the emotions were bad. And, emotions based on bad motives actually become a force on the side of evil. They can actually give people the strength they need to commit the most hideous crimes possible.

What inspired the hate of the chief priests and teachers of the law? It was the fact that Jesus had rebuked both their thinking and their behavior. Their pride was hurt, because Jesus had revealed their failure.

And, how about their fear? Where did it come from? Why should they be afraid that the people would riot? It was what they were planning to do was just and right, then they should not fear the consequences. But they were afraid of the consequences, because they were selfish. They knew that the Roman authorities would hold them responsible for a riot, so they were afraid for their own reputation and position.

Sometimes in America a jury will avoid making a verdict that will cause riots, but whenever fear of consequence influences our decisions, there can be no true justice. And the reason is that such fear is inspired by a selfish desire to save one's own skin.

And then, we come to the last emotion of delight, and it is not hard to see what inspired this feeling in the hearts of the chief priests and teachers of the law. It was the thought that they could use treachery to get the revenge they were seeking. The thought of revenge is sweet to the selfish person. It makes him happy.

There is a relationship between our emotions and our motives. The enemies of Christ not only included a group of people, but an individual is also mentioned here. His name is Judas Iscariot. He was present at the first meal, and during that meal he became angry, as did the other disciples. He was angry when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed Jesus with perfume. When Mary did that, Judas had something to say, and his words are recorded in JOHN 12:5-6. Quoting from JOHN 12:5, Judas said, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given

to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." But, verse 6 reveals the motive behind Judas's anger. Verse 6 says, "He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put in it."

So JOHN 12 clearly reveals the motive behind Judas's emotions. He had a mind that coveted money. A mind that covets is probably the most selfish mind of all. No one can see another person covet, so it is a very subtle sin. But it is also the most deadly. It is what causes people to become callous toward the people they used to love the most. In order to possess the thing their hearts desire, people who covet will kill without any sense of guilt. Such was the case with Judas Iscariot who betrayed his Lord for money.

Selfish thoughts control emotions. They either heighten certain emotions that should be suppressed or they suppress certain emotions that should be heightened. Now let's examine the relationship between emotions and motives by looking at the friends of Jesus. Again, we will be looking at a group and an individual.

The group is the disciples who decided to follow Jesus. At the first meal, they expressed feelings of anger. MARK 14:4-5 says that they became indignant and said, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." So the disciples harshly rebuked Mary for what she had done.

But, the disciples' anger and Judas's anger were different. I am certain that the disciples felt their anger was a righteous anger. They truly believed Mary was doing a stupid thing by wasting her offering. They must have felt she was not being a wise steward of the Lord's money.

And then, again, we see this group of people expressing emotion at the Last Supper. Verse 29 says that they were sad. And, verse 18 says that the reason they were saddened was because Jesus had said that one of them would betray Him. Verse 19 says, "They were saddened and one by one they said to Jesus, 'Surely not I.'" Was this sadness inspired by selfish thinking? I don't think so. If their thinking had been self-centered, they wouldn't have asked, "Is it me?" They would have asked, "Is it him?" I think it was a moment when each disciple woke up to the fact that he, himself, was capable of an act of treachery, and this made each one feel sad.

And now, let us notice the individual who was a friend of Jesus. Verse 3 says that this individual was a woman. JOHN 12:3 tells us that her name was Mary. Mary had an unusual devotion for Jesus. As a deer pants for water, so Mary craved

to be near her Lord and hear Him speak His words of life. LUKE 11:39 tells us the story of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus to listen to Him speak while her sister, Martha, was distracted with housework. JOHN 11:32 tells us the story of Mary coming to Jesus and falling at His feet, because her heart was breaking with sorrow after her brother's death. And now, at this meal, we again see Mary at the feet of Jesus. MARK 14:3 says that she poured the perfume on Christ's head, but JOHN 12:3 tells us that she also poured the perfume on Christ's feet and wiped His feet with her hair. She had great feelings of love, devotion, and sympathy for Jesus, because she understood what was happening.

One of the greatest things we can do for another person is to understand them. So many people feel lonely, because no one will take the time out to listen and to understand. Mary listened, and she understood when no one else did. What she did was impulsive, but it was an impulsive action motivated by unselfish love and sympathy. Impulsive actions motivated by love are a sign of strength, and not weakness. This was a wonderful impulse that drove Mary to do this thing. She allowed her emotion to cause her to do something that would otherwise seem unreasonable and irrational. But she didn't care, because she knew that the impulse was inspired by love.

Finally, we take a look at the emotions of Jesus Himself. At the first supper we see him filled with gratitude for the thing that Mary did. At the Last Supper we see that He had intense feelings of condemnation for what Judas was about to do. And then, during that first communion, we see Christ with emotions of thanksgiving.

Jesus appreciated what Mary did, because He understood her motivation. At the same time His enemies were being driven by blind hate, her action was inspired by understanding love. At the same time when the disciples were having trouble accepting the fact of his death, and even wanting to stop it from happening, she was doing something that said, "I understand what you are doing, and I am going to cooperate." Jesus understood her motive, and He appreciated it.

In contrast to the feelings of gratitude He had for Mary, Jesus had feelings of condemnation for what Judas did, because He also understood the motives behind his feelings and actions. In verse 21 Jesus said, "But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." Such strong words of disapproval are reserved for the person who allows his selfish thoughts to take control and become the inspiration of all he does.

And then, at the first communion, Jesus had emotions of thankfulness, because He knew what He was doing would cause people for years to come to

remember the great act of salvation he was about to carry out on the cross.

It was as if Jesus were taking a picture to hang on the wall of the heart of every person who decides to receive salvation. What is the purpose of the family picture that hangs on the wall? The purpose is not to instruct our intellect; rather, it is to touch our emotions. And the purpose of communion is the same. Every time we eat the bread and drink from the cup, our emotions should be stirred. We should not be ashamed if tears come to our eyes as we are reminded of the love that inspired such a sacrifice and as we are reminded of the wretched life that we have been saved from.

And so, when Jesus instituted this ritual, it was like He was taking He was taking a picture that he could hang on the walls of our minds, and he was thankful.

Isn't it interesting how the thoughts that inspired the emotions of our Lord all had to do with us? Such is the case with our God. He is an unselfish God who thinks more about us than He thinks about Himself.

We must guard our emotions. Every one of us is capable of experiencing every emotion that we have looked at today. None of these emotions are good or bad in and of themselves. But behind these emotions are thoughts that are either self-centered or God-centered. Do not follow the emotions that are self-centered. And don't be afraid to follow the emotions that are God-centered, even when those emotions call you to do something impulsive and irrational. Church committees sometimes spend much time calculating what is a waste. And, in doing so, they sometimes miss tremendous opportunities to minister to the needs of people. Soldiers are willing to give up their lives, because they love their country, even when they know there is no chance to win the war. And there are times when we must be willing to make a sacrifice that would appear as a waste to many. But we will never do so unless we are driven by love.

We must guard our emotions. We must know where they are coming from. And we must try to understand the emotions of others as well. If the disciples had understood why Mary used the perfume to anoint Jesus, they never would have rebuked her, even though what they said about selling the perfume to the poor was true. God created us to have emotions. But our emotions can be used as forces to do good or to do evil. So let us daily guard our emotions.

Application

A topic on emotions provides a group with an opportunity to share and analyze emotions they are presently feeling. Separating guys from gals or breaking into pairs may be the best way to do this. Honest sharing also creates opportunities for ministry. Be sensitive to those opportunities when they arise.