

The Great Sayings in the Gospels
Message 139
The Remarkable Worship of Mary
Matthew 26:6-13

- 6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,
7 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.
8 But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?
9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.
10 When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.
11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.
12 For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.
13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her. KJV

Introduction:

We have been for a number of messages now in the last week of Jesus' earthly life, before the crucifixion. Without going into a lot of uninteresting detail, it seems that Matthew has taken us backward a little bit in time, back to the previous either Thursday or Saturday night. I say Thursday or Saturday because it could not have been Friday. That would have been the Sabbath since the Jewish day began at sunset rather than at midnight. The preparation and serving of food would have been an outright violation of Jewish Law and something that obedient and faithful Jews would not have done.

It seems that this was the triggering event for Judas to begin the process of betrayal because immediately after it Matthew recorded the following.

Matt 26:14-16

- 14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,
15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.
16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him. KJV

John, in his account of the event hinted that Judas was frustrated here because an opportunity was missed for him to steal some more money from the funds that the Twelve carried with them, since he was the 'banker' for the group, he carried the money box or bag.

John 12:4-6

- 4 Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him,

- 5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?
6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. KJV

The connection of money to the two events seems very obvious and very clear. Judas had come to the point to be willing to betray Jesus for money. We know that he was unconverted and that he was under the power of Satan but there was something at just this moment that moved his thinking to betray everything that he had affirmed to be true up to this moment.

There are some particular issues that are involved in Mary's deed that we should notice today: it was lavish, it was well thought out (planned), it was timely, and it was grossly misunderstood. It strikes me, though, that all real worship and all real service for God should be similar to hers.

A Little About Mary -

Mary was, of course, the sister of Martha and Lazarus of the town of Bethany, just a short distance from the walls of Jerusalem. It was almost a 'suburb' of the great city. These three people were close and devoted friends of Jesus. We do not have the 'back story,' the series of events that had thrown them together as friends, but we do know that their house was a frequent and welcome stopping place for Jesus when He came to Jerusalem. Luke 10 described an event in which Jesus had come to their house and had been welcomed there. Martha had been working hard to prepare a meal while Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening intently to what He was teaching. You will recall that Martha had desired Jesus to rebuke Mary but instead received a gentle rebuke herself.

It seems that a similar situation was playing itself out in the scenario before us today.

John 12:2-3

- 2 There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.
3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. KJV

Martha was serving while Mary was devoting her total attention to Jesus.

The contrast between Mary and Martha being noted, there is also a contrast here between Mary and Judas. She was being incredibly generous. The ointment was extremely expensive and she was freely using it to anoint Jesus. Judas, the thief, was frustrated because he could not get any of this value of the ointment for himself. He and other of the twelve roundly criticized her and that openly which would, ordinarily, brought great shame upon the woman. But Jesus intervened and honored her for the gift.

Mary was one of the most faithful, loving and attentive of Jesus' disciples. Unlike the majority of the women of her culture, she did not seek the permission nor the approval of men when worshiping and serving the Lord Jesus.

And, for her thoughtful, well intentioned, generous and appropriate service to Jesus, He memorialized her for all time. So, we should seriously consider what exactly it was that she was doing.

I. First of all, let us consider the motivation for her deed.

Now certainly we can say that it was love and devotion for Jesus that moved her to express her love and devotion for Him in this way and we would not be wrong. But there was more to it than that, there was thoughtful design and intention.

John 12:7

7 Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.
KJV

Matt 26:12

12 For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.
KJV

The disciples, we know, even now did not comprehend the fact that Jesus was going to be crucified in Jerusalem. And this was in spite of the many things that Jesus had said over the last 3 years concerning just that fact.

Matt 16:21

21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. KJV

Mark 8:31

31 And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. KJV

Mark 10:32-33

32 And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him,
33 Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: KJV

These are just a few of the examples. Now it is true that Mary was probably not present at these events, though she might have traveled with them at times. But even if she did not, we can only imagine what someone like her would have done any time she encountered the disciples or anyone who had been to hear Him speak. “What did He say? Tell me all of it exactly.” And we can imagine how intently she would have listened and how diligently she would have treasured

His words, thinking upon them and turning them over in her mind again and again. And, we can be sure that she prayed often, asking for full and complete understanding of all that she was hearing.

This is not your ordinary disciple. This is not a casual believer, a 'fair weather' Christian. This is a lady who has given herself without reservation to God, who fully and completely believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of all those who believe on Him.

She understood that He was going to die and she apparently thought that there was some doubt as to whether anyone would be able to prepare Him properly for burial. Further than that, she must have felt that His death was going to be soon, that she would probably not get to see Him again before He died. So, she pushed boundaries aside, braved the disapproving looks and words of the men in the room, and anointed the body of Jesus from head to foot (Matthew and Mark say 'head' while John says 'feet.' We can be sure that both are true) with the ointment, even wiping that which ran down to His feet with her hair.

Another tidbit of knowledge is that it was considered uncomely, inappropriate, for a Jewish woman to take her hair down to being loose in the presence of men, yet that is exactly what she would have done in order to wipe His feet with her hair.

Not only that, but she had spent an outrageous amount of money to acquire a large container of spikenard in case she had the opportunity to participate in His burial.

So, here is how intentional and thoughtful Mary was. She had gleaned from Him and from His disciples that He was saying that He was going to be delivered by the High Priest to the Gentile ruler, Pilate, and be killed, after which He would rise again. His body would probably not be able to be properly prepared for burial, so she had seized upon this last opportunity to see Him and did what she could to express not only her love and devotion for Him but also to take part so much as she could in this great work of Redemption that she no doubt believed was the reason for His death.

Worship, you see, in our day, is believed to be spontaneous, rowdy, and almost, if not completely, without thought whereas biblical worship is always extremely intentional and almost always the product of much preparation and certainly flowing from an absolutely devoted heart.

II. This Gift was Lavish

In any other setting or context, this would have been an outrageous thing to do. Some of those who were watching what Mary was doing thought that *this* was completely inappropriate.

The ointment was *myrrh*, derived from pure *nard*, an aromatic herb grown in the high pastureland of the Himalayas, between Tibet and India. "In view of the fact that it had to be procured in a region so remote, and carried on camel-back through miles and miles of mountain passes, it was very high-priced." (Hendriksens, New Testament Commentary, John 3:4)

The value assigned by Judas, John 12:5, was the equivalent of a year's wages for a common

laborer, thousands of dollars to us. So, to pour it out so freely upon someone who was just sitting there at dinner made no sense to these people who had no idea that He was going to die in just a few days.

But for Mary, it was the Lord, the God of Heaven, the Savior, the One Who was going to give Himself for the penalty of her sins and redeem her to God though she was but a sinner. She would not see Him again alive. Moreover, she had planned this, had invested much intention, had deliberately chosen this moment.

Now also consider that she did not know whether Jesus would be pleased with her actions. I am sure that Mary had a sense that maybe the other men there might not approve. This was not a thing that was done. It was contrary to tradition and accepted norms. No one did such a thing and certainly a woman did not approach to touch a man in public when she was not married nor related to him.

So, here too, it was an outrageous act.

History is full of stories of people who did the most unbelievable things in the service of Jesus Christ.

Shall I speak of Philip the deacon who, after preaching the gospel in Samaria, traveled to Phrygia to the city of Heliopolis where he found the people enslaved to the idolatry of worshiping a large serpent? Having seen many of them converted to Christ he caused the serpent to be killed. The magistrates (according to Foxe) were so enraged that they had him scourged and then crucified.

Or, should I tell you of John Mark who ministered powerfully after the deaths of the great apostles in northern Africa. Some of the Egyptians were so frustrated with his success that in the city of Alexandria they had him tied and dragged through the streets, after which they burned him?

Or, would you hear of Thomas, old Doubting Thomas, who carried the gospel to Parthia and India where he was murdered by pagan priests with a spear?

Or, would you like for me to describe the sufferings of the Donatists of Northern Africa who refused the authority of Constantine over their church and were persecuted mercilessly? Or the Waldenses who fled Italy under the first pope and settled in the wilderness near the Alps and were hunted and tormented as if they had been criminals by the civil authorities at the prompting of Rome?

Shall I speak of the brave Reformers, many of whom gave their lives for the gospel of grace that we love? Or would you rather hear of the brave Anabaptists who gave their lives for religious liberty?

Heb 11:36-38

36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

- 37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;
- 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. KJV

The God we serve has so arranged all things that He will either be served lavishly or not at all.

This is one of the greatest if not the greatest failing of the Christian faith in our time. We want to have salvation 'on the cheap,' 'on sale,' 'at the lowest possible price.' But God demands to be worshiped lavishly, to have all that we are and all that we own laid out on the altar for Him. Those two perspectives have nothing in common with one another, so God is grieved and the church languishes in lukewarmness, neither hot nor cold, and has been disciplined with the withdrawal of the Power of God.

III. Her service, like all true service of God, was grossly misunderstood.

I know a man who has twice given up a million dollars so that he could preach the gospel of Jesus Christ on, basically, a survival income. Is there anyone in our world who can understand this kind of sacrifice?

Those who watched Mary that night could not believe their eyes and could not understand how that this was an appropriate thing to do.

But this has been true of everyone. Could James, John, and Peter explain giving up a career as fishermen to live as itinerant preachers? Could any of the Jews comprehend Paul leaving behind all of the possibilities of being the great Rabbi of his day so that he could preach Christ?

Does anyone, even now, really comprehend the Creator of the Universe giving Himself to be crucified for the sins of His people?

If you truly desire to worship and serve the Living God, get ready for two things: His demands that you lavish service upon Him and for people to think that you are crazy.

Matt 16:24-26

- 24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.
- 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.
- 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? KJV

That is the standard. It never has been anything else. All of the lesser standards were invented by men and are worthless frauds.

IV. Let Mary's Service be an example to you.

Make a plan to serve God. Seek after Him, ask Him to lay some thing on your heart to do to His honor and glory.

Do not be surprised if what He leads you to do is outrageous, that is the way He does things.

Save, if necessary, like Mary did, to make it happen.

Step out and do it when the opportunity arises, not worrying about the disapproving looks you get from those around you.

You may just get to do something or be a part of something that will endure as a blessing to others for many years to come.

13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

Jesus memorialized this action not because Mary was His friend but because her service to Him was *exactly* what He wanted His people down through the centuries to consider as a model for their own service to Him.