

MARY ANOINTS JESUS FOR HIS DEATH

Pastor Paul Penno

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It may have been when you walked into your teenager's bedroom and saw that he or she had made the bed, picked the clothing up off the floor, hung them all neatly in the closet, and emptied the trash. The room was a model of neatness, and you just knew that your child must have done something wrong, and was trying to win your favor. Or else your child was expecting something in return.

So, you begin to question your child along those lines, only to hear this reply, "Mom, it's no big deal. I just did it because I love you."

Or maybe your husband came home with a dozen roses. It wasn't Christmas or your birthday or anniversary or Mother's Day. It was just another day, and he brought you roses. You knew that he must have done something wrong, or that he was preparing you for some bad news.

But he says, "No, honey. I bought these flowers because I love you. There's no other reason. I just love you."

Mary's "very precious" alabaster flask of ointment was not bought at a bargain sale. She paid the full price for the finest that could be purchased with no grudging thought of saving anything. One can imagine her asking the shopkeeper for some ointment. Seeing in her only a poor peasant, he suggests a cheap preparation, "Have you nothing better?" she asks. "Yes, I have a better quality, but it will cost you two hundred denarii."

"Do you have anything still better than this?" she persists.

"Yes, I have only the very finest and most expensive, but it will cost three hundred. You can't afford that, Mary. It's only for a king or emperor!" "Let me have it," she replies. With her motive of love, she can do nothing less.

Could God, who is Himself love, do less than His utmost? He thought not of how to effect the salvation of the redeemed at the least possible cost to Himself. Heaven, the "ivory palaces," the devotion of a myriad of angels, the thrones of an infinite universe, life eternal, yes, the precious companionship of the Father, *all* Christ freely spent in the giving of Himself. An ocean of the water of life to be expended lavishly, and the only returns to be a few fragile earthen vessels filled with human tears of love! How infinitely precious must those "bottles" (Psalm 56:8) be to Him!

“And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on His head.” Mark 14:3.

This nard came from India and was contained in a perfume vase. The opening was so narrow it would only allow a drop at a time to pour forth and Mary desired to anoint Jesus’ head with all of it at once.

This poignant act at Bethany is the most beautiful, heart-touching deed ever performed by a repentant sinner. It was welcome evidence to Jesus and to the watching universe that humanity is indeed capable of attaining a profound heart appreciation of the sacrifice Jesus made.

The faultfinding of the disciples exposes our natural human reaction to the tender love revealed at the cross. “And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?” Mark 14:4.

Had we been present on the occasion, we would have found it difficult not to take our stand with Judas and the other disciples. Mary had done something that was to all human appearance irrational and wasteful. “Three hundred denarii” the value of the ointment, represented the wages of a laboring man for a full year, “a denarius a day” being the usual pay. Matthew 20:2. Such a sum would probably have been sufficient to provide a small meal for five thousand men “besides women and children,” according to Philip’s cautious estimate. John 6:7; Matthew 14:21.

If we did not know the outcome of this drama of Bethany, what would we have thought of this apparently senseless extravagance? How many church managers and committee members would approve of such an expenditure? Who among us would not have sympathized decidedly with the disciples in their feelings of outrage? This emotionally disturbed woman deserves rebuke!

We would find our hearts ready to second Judas’s motion of censure: “Why was not this fragrant oil sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”

While the hapless penitent tries to escape unnoticed, overwhelmed with confusion and embarrassment, fearing that her sister Martha and possibly even Jesus will think her foolish and improvident, Jesus lifts His voice above the murmuring of the disciples: “Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have

the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.” Mark 14:6, 7.

Far from approving the disciples’ apparent regard for the poor, He places an entirely different interpretation on Mary’s motive. It was a far truer charity. Her deed was a parable of divine love, a vehicle for proclaiming the gospel. Jesus was forced to defend her, for in so doing He was defending Himself and His cross. He was, in fact, imparting to her deed a symbolic meaning of which she herself was ignorant.

In the alabaster bottle, broken at His feet, He discerned His body, broken and bruised for us. In the precious ointment running to waste on the floor, He saw His blood “shed for many for the remission of sins;” yet rejected and despised by most of them. In the motive that prompted Mary’s act—her heartbroken, repentant love for Him—Jesus saw the true reflection of His love for us. In her sacrifice to purchase the ointment with the sum total of her hard-earned savings, He saw the utter emptying of Himself in the role of the divine Lover of our souls.

In her apparent extravagance He saw the magnificence of Heaven’s offering poured out sufficient to save a world, yet accepted by only a handful of its inhabitants.

Her act illuminates the gospel and casts into sharp and grand relief its principles of love, sacrifice, and magnificence.

“She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.” Mark 14:8. The disciples hardly dared to think about Jesus’ words of His impending death. But Mary understood. Normally a body was anointed and embalmed before burial, but Mary wanted to express her love in a tangible manner to Jesus before He died. She wanted Him to know that she truly loved Him for what He was doing to remove her sins.

“Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” Mark 14:9.

Not for her sake, but for the sake of “this gospel” the fragrance of her deed is to be published abroad like this. Here is the key to all that is perplexing in this strange event. Mary was preaching a sermon.

As a part of an assignment for a doctoral thesis, a college student spent a year with a group of Navajo Indians on a reservation in the southwest. As part of his research he lived with one of the Navajo

families, sleeping in their hut, eating their food, working with them, and generally living the life of a 20th-century Indian.

The old grandmother of the family spoke no English at all, yet a very close friendship formed between them. They spent a great deal of time sharing a friendship that was meaningful to each, yet unexplainable to anyone else. In spite of the language difference, they shared the common language of love and understood each other. Over the months he learned a few phrases of Navajo, and she picked up a little of the English language.

When it was time for him to return to the campus to complete his thesis, the tribe held a going-away celebration. It was marked by sadness since the young man had become close to the whole village and all would miss him. As he prepared to leave, the old grandmother came to tell him good-bye. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she placed her hands on either side of his face, looked directly into his eyes and said, "I like me best when I'm with you."

The more you appreciate such an extravagant love of Jesus who died for you on His cross, you will see the value of your life in His eyes. When you are with Jesus at His cross, you can say, "I like me best when I'm with you."