

A Beautiful Gesture

by John Sung

Jesus praises Mary's sacrifice as a beautiful gesture that demonstrates her love and devotion to Him, which is the greatest form of worship.

Scripture: Mark 14:3

Topics: "Sacrificial Love", "Devotion to Christ"

Description

John Sung emphasizes the profound act of love demonstrated by Mary, who anointed Jesus with precious spikenard ointment, showcasing her gratitude and devotion despite societal disapproval. He contrasts her selfless gesture with the disciples' criticism, highlighting that true love for Jesus transcends material concerns and societal expectations. Sung urges believers to reflect on their own sacrifices for Christ, reminding them that genuine love is remembered by God, unlike fleeting earthly accolades. He concludes by affirming that Mary's act will be eternally commemorated wherever the Gospel is preached, illustrating the lasting impact of sacrificial love.

Transcript

Mark 14

Vs 3 The story begins here with Jesus at Bethany, in the house of Simon the Leper. Being healed of leprosy, Simon made a thanksgiving dinner for Jesus from an overflowing grateful heart. Jesus sat at his table for the first time. While they were at the table there came a woman (John says she was Mary, Lazarus' younger sister.) from a poor family. This family had recently spent a fortune on Lazarus' illness, who died and was buried. Now the Bible also tells us elsewhere about Jesus' visit to their home, and how the two sisters had entertained our Lord. Big sister Martha sweated it out in the kitchen, for they could not afford an amah. I believe they were very poor. Our Lord resurrected big brother who had died. Now Mary was very happy. She could not hold back that urge of giving thanks. For she had heard that Jesus was come to Simon's house. With a heart brimming with joy she brought a box of fragrant ointment. Such a gesture induced our Lord to perpetuate its remembrance even as His coming to save us is to be remembered by the Lord's Supper.

What had this woman done as to be specially remembered? The Bible records many famous women. Why didn't our Lord tell us to remember them? Why particularly this woman? I think when our Lord was on earth, the majority of those who loved Him were women.

Now when Jesus was in Simon's house, she came with the alabaster box of very precious spikenard perfume. It was exquisite. Why did she prepare this alabaster box? Now, she had bought this box of genuine spikenard, not imitation spikenard perfume. What a contrast with what some of us buy for our friends imitation stuff! The spikenard produced in the land of the Jews was the most precious. This alabaster box was filled to the brim with this very precious ointment.

Beloved, when we read the Bible, let us pay distinct attention to every word we read --- alabaster box, very precious, genuine, spikenard ointment. This very best, unique ointment! Now as Jesus was seated this woman came with the fragrant ointment.

Recently when I went to Changchow I brought along some articles for my younger brother. I gave him the presents but the big kerchief that wrapped the presents I brought back with me. The woman did not do such a thing. If we were to present the ointment, we might have gingerly let the oil flow out before we would anoint Jesus. The woman rather broke the box so that its contents spilled her hands, and from her hands to Jesus' body. This signifies her abandoned love for him. Though she was of a poor family. She considered spending the three hundred pence to be most worthwhile. Three hundred pence to the Jew was an enormous sum. Foreign missionaries to Yunnan get only \$15 a month. I said, "How could this be sufficient?" But in Kweichow, Yunnan where things are really cheap \$15 to them is a handsome sum.

Now this woman loved Jesus very much, so she did not count the cost. She not only believed with her heart but also worked out with her hands.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me has everything." Now the alabaster box represents a body purified and bought by the blood of Christ. The ointment represents love. Let our lives be completely broken for Jesus' sake, be sacrificed for our Lord. I've seen how many have sacrificed for their children, husbands. A certain girl spent eight years in love for a husband. Being so infatuated with the desire she contracted T.B. She sacrificed her body for a husband. Then there are some who sacrifice themselves in business, their whole precious lifetime.

But this sister sacrificed herself wholly for Jesus. Sometimes I wonder if ever any loved Jesus. Amongst Jesus' dearest, the twelve disciples, there was one Judas who betrayed Him. And when our Lord was taken, all the rest fled for fear of death. Jesus says, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." The Lord walked with His disciples for three years preaching. The Bible says, "The Lord hungered as he came upon a luxuriant fig tree by the wayside. He went up to the tree to look for fruit, but He found none." Is there any one on earth who loves our Lord? Jesus healed the sick and demon-possessed. He fed the 5,000 in the desert with five loaves and two fishes. But none of them loved Him. It was on the eve of His departure that this woman loved Him by pouring the ointment from her broken jar to anoint Him. The house was filled with its fragrance, to His glory. Not a few have lamented my giving up my life for the preaching ministry. Now this woman once for all, regardless of anything even to death, broke her box of precious ointment for the Lord. All she cared for was our Lord, most precious. She sacrificed herself regardless of every opposition

Vs 4 Not only was Judas displeased with her. Perhaps Peter also, and John, James and Andrew, and the bystanders too. Although they didn't express themselves, their hearts were simmering within. Let me ask you: was our sister's act in vain? Not at all! The Lord looks into the heart and not on the outside. Jesus wept at the remarks. Jesus said. "My dear disciples, you have been followers of mine for three years. Yet you have not loved me. But, this woman has loved me by the sacrifice poured on my body. Beloved

brothers and sisters, Jesus saw through their hearts.

Vs 5 "For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her." They were not only unhappy, but they were even mad! The disciples got angry because of the woman. Did they say a kind word? They poured cold water on her. Many paid heed rather to social service, literacy movement. Whatever movement they got involved in there was no result. The Y.M.C.A.'s of today consider works of charity greater than Jesus. To exalt Christ is labor lost. There is a famous Chinese Church executive who said to me, "Mr. Sung, you have wasted your talents. Why not devote yourself to society and mankind? Why do you talk Jesus, eat Jesus, sleep Jesus, walk Jesus, sit Jesus, everything Jesus the whole day?" Judas thought serving society was the practical way, but he actually coveted the thirty pieces of silver, and for these he sold our Lord away. Many who shout slogans of social service in fact are feathering their own nests. Jesus says, "These are robbers." It is sacrificing for Jesus that is true love. Now so many in China talk of social service, even in their sermons. But they do say the two syllables JE-SUS. Some ask why I sing Jesus. Let me tell you, while the crowd hated, this woman loved Jesus. In all of his 33 years none ever loved Jesus, not even his disciples. Who loves Jesus now? This sister truly loves Jesus by breaking the jar of ointment, to show her gratitude. She had no other way than sacrificing her body to God's glory. What did Jesus do in response?

Vs 6 "And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me." Jesus said, "Judas, let her! Why bother her? For this woman had shown a beautiful gesture in what she has done to my body. The angels are pleased also with this beautiful act. So is God. On earth there is none that loves me. This woman loves me. Judas, let her! Why hinder her?" Beloved, maybe there are not a few who want to stop our work, as the disciples are displeased with Mary. Is Mary discouraged? She says within her, "O my soul, who can understand me? Who? Who?" It was only the Lord who said, "Judas, let her!" Beloved, Jesus says to us, "Do not fear, and just labor on! Labor right on!"

Vs 7 "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you will you may do them good: but me you have not always." The Lord is not against social service. Such service can be done anytime, anywhere. Jesus says, "But you do not always have Me." When Han Sin was a child, his family was very poor. No one ever took notice of him, except a washerwoman. She gave him a bowl of rice, out of pity. When Han Sin became a great man what the washerwoman had done for him was remembered. Han Sin was but a mortal man. Our Lord lives forever. What you've done for Him is not wasted. The Lord said, "What Mary has chosen no one is able to take it away from her". She knew what she should choose to do --- even on our Lord --- Satan notwithstanding. It was a beautiful gesture. She knew the Risen Savior. She loved Jesus.

Vs 8 "She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying". Praise the Lord! Do you know the value of what this woman had done? The Lord said, "She has done it for my burial". Who ever minded Jesus' burial? Not even those disciples who had followed three years. God moved this woman to console our Lord. Beloved! What great things the Lord has done for us! He broke His alabaster box from which flowed that ointment of love, of salvation, even His precious blood. What will you return to Jesus? The woman knew how to break her alabaster box for the Lord. We people of Amoy invite friends to a dinner with the motive of being invited in return. Our Lord has sacrificed Himself, broken His alabaster box. What shall I give in return?

Oh, the love that sought me! Oh the blood that bought me!

Oh the grace that brought we to the fold.

Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold.

Vs 9 "Verily I say unto you, Wherever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." Jesus says, "Verily I say to you, wherever this Gospel is preached --- in Amoy, Changchow, Chuanchow, throughout China, the whole world --- wherever this Gospel is preached this woman will be remembered. Jesus did not mention His mother Mary, not Joseph His foster father, neither major prophet nor minor prophet, neither high priest nor great king. There are those who remember Peter and James, but Jesus says, "This woman!" To this day the fragrance of this woman's ointment remains fresh. The Lord says, "Many earthly things will pass away, wholly extinguished." Whatever man does is of no value, not worthy of remembrance. But wherever the Gospel is preached in the entire world what this woman has done will be remembered.

When a man dies, the people all get busy to hold a memorial service make a tombstone to his memory. I say to you, this is mere human effort. It will not remain. Jesus has not instructed us to remember the social worker. Such a person is not worthy of remembrance. There is nothing we can do to comfort our Lord in His death for us but bearing His cross, considering also His burial. The Lord has given us only one body, not two. It will be broken also only once. How shall we use it? As our voice will break on day, we use the phonograph to record it. As our face will wrinkle in old age we capture its youthfulness by photograph. But what is to be remembered forever according to our Lord is the alabaster box of a body broken for Him. One day you will leave this earth. What will you do that will perpetuate your memory? Many make their tombstone to remember by, whether it will be good or bad. Beloved, do you think this is a good way of remembrance? I say to you, Mary's alabaster box remains to this day, though the Kingdom of the Jews is broken but the fragrance of its contents endures forever. Brothers and sisters, the day of your departure out of this world is so near! What will you do to remember our Lord? What will you do for our Lord?

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