

(over outline) 5, W. Feb. 21, 71 AM.

YOUR ALABASTER BOX

Mark 14:3-9

INTRODUCTION

Probably no incident in the life of Jesus was more pathetic and yet lovely than the incident of the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany. It is not all wonderful that the influence of this incident has been profound and has fascinated people with deep personal and moral significance.

This incident reveals character. Not alone the character of (Mary), but it reveals the character of (Jesus). And it reveals more than character. It reveals the (other people) who were involved at this time. I think here is a wonderful commendation to womanhood - his tenderness in his relation toward women. Nearly always it is found that men of great genius are profoundly influenced by the gracious companionship and the influence of women. In the lives of men that have been able to move the world, we have seen that always they were marvelously influenced by the good cheer of a woman, a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter, a beloved aunt, or some woman ~~whose~~ whose life was pure, beautiful, and unselfish.

Christ's attitude is certainly profound and tender toward women.

We may search, but we will never find one harsh word from him touching women.

Even when the poor woman was brought before him who was deceived and enslaved by vice. You ~~xx~~ listen in vain for one harsh word. He speaks to her words of hope. He speaks to her words of forgiveness and words of grace as he sends her away.

The scene before you this morning. Jesus now in the home of Simon the leper. Lazarus is there, the man who died recently and was put away in the grave and over whom his sisters sorrowed, and to whom Jesus came and spoke the life-giving word bringing the man back to life from the grave. A man risen from the dead is at the feast.

Simon, the leper, a man himself healed by Jesus gives the feast, and at the feast is the risen man and two sisters; and Jesus comes to that feast and sits between Lazarus and Simon. Mary and Martha are there, the two who loved their brother so much that there was great joy that he was living again. In that happy company, we find this great love and gratitude displayed.

Many years ago in Fairfield, Alabama, a man went through a steel mill. They were rolling out thin plates which were to be used in making tin cans. This steel had to be in accuracy of 1/1000 of an inch in thickness. The final process was the inspection for this accuracy. They used only women to do this

work, and they rapidly turned these thin plates in their hands. The man asked the question as to why only women were used for this inspection. The guide said, "Because a man's sense of touch is not delicate enough to detect the slightest difference in the thickness of the metal. Only a woman's sense of touch can do it."

The delicate sensitive nature with which God has endowed women, the indispensable place he has given them in society, a woman can rise to the highest, or she can plunge to the lowest.

Montague says, "In all societies, women have played a much more important role than their men-folk are generally ready to admit." When we think that life comes through the woman and the genius of her heart, usually her work is given in love. That's why in the home at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, when they were there at meat, we discover this wonderful thing happening.

Now, I want to discuss this alabaster box under three heads: First, the ministering, second the murmuring, and third, the memorial. These three words will help you to remember the story.

I. Consider the ministry - V. 3

They were seated here at the feast, and I suppose that every one

of us wants to be remembered after he dies. It is one evidence of our immortality, for what will we be remembered for? As long as the world lasts, Adolph Hitler will be remembered for the great, terrible monument he left behind. And the virtue that you have in life will be raised in the minds and memories of men around the world. Look now at Mary, the one who is doing the ministering at this time.

The outcome of such thinking of this alabaster box of precious ointment and the pouring of its contents upon the head and body of our beloved Saviour is certainly wonderful. It was on Tuesday night before the crucifixion. Jesus was a dinner guest in the home of Simon the leper. And suddenly the meal was interrupted. Mary of Bethany performed this deed and this ministry upon Jesus.

It was an act of deepest devotion for an alabaster, the ointment, was fit for a present for kings.

In terms of our currency, it was worth about \$51.00 but with much greater purchasing power than today.

How did Mary happen to have this ointment? - we are not told. Perhaps it was her most treasured possession for which she had saved out of her meager resources. At any rate, it was a selfless act. She poured it upon

Jesus' head and John adds upon his feet. Now, this was to show great honor to a guest by anointing his head with oil.

Psalm 23:5 we read, "Thou anointest my head with oil." This was to honor Jesus, and this was a great ministry to our Lord.

Only that afternoon Jesus had said that after two more days he would be crucified. Matt. 26:2. Perhaps Mary had heard about this.

What could she do? She was powerless to prevent his death. There was only one thing that she could do. Out of the sincerity of her heart, she could show Jesus how much she loved him. And so she took the best thing which she had to Jesus.

Now Mary did this to perfection. Can I do too much for this wonderful helper? Is it possible for me to do too much for him? I wonder if Mary had such thoughts. Am I over-exaggerating my debt that I owe him? and the honor that I should pay him? So she puts herself out to the extreme limit of self-sacrifice that she may honor Jesus.

II: Consider the murmuring V. 4-7

V. 4 - There was indignation expressed by some of those - why was this waste of the ointment made? In short, some of them said, this is a dead loss, nothing but a sentimental waste which will soon pass away and which

has only a monetary value alone.

Victor Hugo said, "Men have sight. Women, insight." The men saw Mary's deed, but they did not absolutely understand what she had accomplished. They reasoned that it was a loss. But Mary loved, and her reason was "What must I give?" And love only answered back, "I must give the best." The world needs such sentiment today. Maybe the world needs women who in wild abandonment will give themselves and theirs to Christ in an expression of love.

Christ's interpretation of this beautiful deed is simply amazing. First of all, he receives this gift without embarrassment, very carefully. It requires a big heart often to receive a gift as it ought to be received. And Christ received this gift from Mary without any embarrassment at all. This seems to be a difficulty with some of us when it comes to receiving gifts. When men think about accepting salvation, the gospel of Jesus is free. It is offered to a lost world. They hear about the high planes of it, the marvelous benefits of it, and yet they reject it. The voice of man does not receive the gifts of God but there is always a strange and a hesitant acceptance of his gifts. Now this is a lesson to most of us ~~with~~ without embarrassment Jesus graciously allows this incident to take place. The alabaster box of precious

ointment was poured upon his head and on his feet before his burial - he received this gift.

And he proceeded to defend it.

Those in his company cried out - "Waste". They insisted that there must be some practical sense in such matters and they thought it was inexcusable.

Here is a fearful revelation of the narrow meanness of the character of Judas and some of the others. At once they estimated the value of the precious ointment. They said it was worth 300 pence, wasted by a ~~fox~~ foolish woman. And they talked about the poor. What good words are sometimes found in the mouths of ~~good~~ bad men. Judas talking about the poor and his loving interest in them. Was it so? He talked this way, but he was a thief, and he really wished the money for himself. There are men who are keen and clever with their figures. They talk loud about the economy of the Lord's cause as men watch. They are anxious lest the alabaster box of precious ointment be wasted on Jesus. It was not their interest in the poor nor their concern for the cause of God that they thought it was wasted.

The cry of waste often is one that is mixed up and misunderstood in the cries of the world. We ~~analyze~~ analyze the output of money and service

to Jesus Christ as the years pass by. We say that men spend their fortunes building temples, building churches and buildings, and yet they say nothing at all about those who waste a fortune on pleasure, on fine horses, on pleasure trips, on expensive brick-a-brack. And yet the cause of Christ is allowed to drag along because of our interest, we do not care, and yet there are some who would cry "waste."

The point is, in their murmuring they had a bad spirit. I read about a man once who built a vast home for horses, and yet the tennant who cared for these horses lived in a cottage that did not cost one-tenth of that amount. And the same man offered some shrewd counsel about waste, lack of business, when his church proposed a great forward movement, for the lifting of Christ in the lives of men. This is the same spirit that Judas cried "waste". It was spoke with the wrong intent.

Two young women trained and went out as missionaries overseas - someone said, "That's a waste of life." Two well-trained noble women going to bury their lives in missions. They're giving God their alabaster box, their noblest and their best.

The last days of our Saviour were nearing a close. Now they had seen him raise the dead and work miracles. He began to hold up his cross and

talk about dying and talk about sacrifice.

The big question is have you turned your back upon Jesus Christ? It was a difficult day for Christ. Judas is going to betray him. Peter was going to deny him, and Thomas was going to doubt him. And then at this critical time Mary came to bless him with her ministry. Christ did not relish the days which were ahead, for he had prayed in the garden, if it be possible let this cup pass from my lips. Now this great group were murmuring because this woman had ministered to him. I have come to believe that spirit is one of the biggest things concerning a man or the church. I know one thing, that if our churches are going to have the right sort of spirit, we must emphasize this sort of evangelism and giving. We may have all of our steeples, our luxuries, and I am not against any of these things, such as excellent physical equipment, but we may be dead if we do not have the right sort of spirit. What is the church for anyway? You are marking time if you are not living for Jesus and winning people to the saving knowledge of Christ. It is like a standing army without any ~~we~~ spirit or without any equipment.

What is your spirit, anyway? Is it a murmuring spirit? Your preacher may stand in the pulpit and preach with all of his zeal and power, but if the church is filled with people who have the wrong sort of spirit in their

hearts, that man's hands are tied and it is a most difficult task.

The longer I live, the more I thank God for men and for women who have the right sort of spirit in their hearts. What is your spirit?

Have you become critical? Have you become fault-finding as a personality?

Let me remind you that you are going to find in your church just about what you look for. Even though you may be a charter member of the church, or you may have served in some important place in the church, or may have felt that you are indispensable in some place in the church.

Mary did something that day and Jesus honored that spirit that this marvelous woman expressed because she had the right motive. She wanted to honor Jesus Christ. When I preach, I ought to preach to honor Jesus. When the choir sings, they ought to sing to honor and glorify the same Jesus Christ and they ought to sing the best they know how. In your Sunday School class you ought to be seeking to do the same thing. To reach more people. To spread the alabaster box. ~~Now~~ Now, I may be striking fire this morning, but I'll tell you one thing. I have read and I have heard about more churches being torn asunder and hurt because some Sunday School teachers and some workers did not have the right sort of motives in their hearts. The only way to grow a great Sunday School is to create new departments and new classes.

Some people, ~~they want to~~ - their spirit is such that they would crucify the superintendent or preacher or to seek to get the school to do what it ought to do when everybody else knows what ought to be done. We need to stand together and stay together, and my prayer is that God will help us as a people to make progress in the winning of people to Christ. God pity you if your motive and your spirit is not right. Mary had the right spirit. And Christ defends this woman for this high act, and if you take the right sentiment here which this woman had, then you would see that we would be able to do more for Christian colleges, Christian hospitals, Christian work throughout this world.

There was nothing she had that was too good for her Lord. Yea, her best, she gladly brought it that she might anoint him against that day of his burial.

V. 6 - Jesus said, she has done ~~us~~ a good work, and he praised her for it. There was no ~~us~~ dodging, no seeing how little she could get by with. There was no reserve. She put her best at the feet of Jesus.

I read about a German servant girl who worked for many years and when she passed away, she left her will, and in her own hand-writing, she directed that \$1,000.00 in cash that she had saved be put into a fund in her

church for a worthy purpose. The effect of that simple ~~xx~~ deed was marvelous, and her name will be linked with Mary of Bethany who broke her alabaster box of precious ointment and pouring the contents on the Saviour's head.

Little though our best may be, in the world's sight, if we give it to God, he will put it to a gracious blessing. Now the world needs such sentiment today, and Jesus discounted the murmuring of these disciples. It was not that Jesus was unconcerned about the poor. He ~~had~~ ^{knows their} a feeling of their need. St. Michael Castillo was rehearsing his orchestra. There were hundreds of instruments playing. A mighty organ, great drums, and one tiny flute. The man playing the flute said, "I need not play in all of this roar." And he ceased playing that little flute. At once the great leader threw up his hands and stopped the rehearsal, and he said, "I miss the flute. The one who plays the flute is silent." Does not the great leader of the forces of this universe miss even the playing of the tiniest flute in the orchestra of life when there are those who go on day in and day out without trying to minister in his name, but who ~~murmur~~ murmur instead of ministering. The great lesson to us, we are ~~to~~ to do our very best, and God will put his commendation upon it. "She hath done what she could for me while I am yet here.

The world is filled with sadness just at this point. ~~Example~~

People who fail to do what they can while there is an opportunity to do it.

In V. 5 it tells us that this must have been grave extravagance.

She did something that cost her something. You know, I have heard it said that religion is free. Yes, the grace of God is free, and salvation is free, but

I want you to remember that it cost God all that he had to give it to you.

Jesus Christ suffered and bled and died. That was not very cheap.

If you have Jesus Christ in your heart, you are not going to be content to (do as little) as you can. You are going to do the very best that you can. I believe that you are going to bring God's tithes into the storehouse.

I believe that instead of sitting back and seeing how little you can do, you will be doing your best to bring all that God has given you. Extravagance?

It costs us something. If you want to get something out of your church, then you ought to put something into it. If you want to get something out of the

kingdom, then you ought to quit playing around and plunge into the depth.

Suppose that Mary had sold the ointment and used the proceeds to pay for the dinner in Simon's house. Jesus would have enjoyed the sumptuous meal and the fellowship, but no more. There would have been an aching void of loneliness in his heart. But when Mary poured out her ointment and her love without measure, he received such strength to go forth and die for the world.

You and I cannot do for Jesus' body that which Mary did.

But we can show him our love never theless. We can love others. We may send our check to church, but that cannot take our place in personal involvement in the ministry of a church. We may do certain things, but it will not relieve us of our obligation to witness for Christ. For the gift without the giver is bear.

III. Consider the memorial V. 9

In V. 8 and 9 we read that she ~~has prepared~~ has prepared his body unto death. Someone she loved.

I want to impress upon you the timeliness of this ministry.

There are so many of us who treat our loved ones one way and then when they are cold in death, we become so absorbed and we show so much love. This woman hath given her best, Jesus said. And that was (before) he died. How good and how great that act must have been.

A sentiment of waste of ointment - this goes on from the banquet hall, but Jesus said it was very timely. She has come to annoint me before my burial. She did not wait until Jesus Christ was on the cross. She did not wait until he was in Joseph's borrowed tomb. But she went there to the home of Simon and did this beautiful thing.

Most of our words of love and appreciation are ill-timed, and most funerals I attend, I hear people as they lean down over the body of their loved one and say, "Oh, I loved you. I loved you." And in some cases, I know they are speaking the truth. But I also know that ~~there~~ their timing was bad. Oh, we need to do something for Christ. Don't wait. Don't wait until tomorrow. Don't put it off.

Appreciation is a wonderful thing. I want to remind you that you are going to mean anything to the kingdom of God today is the day. If you are going to accept Christ as your saviour, this is the hour to do it. If your life is going to mean something in the kingdom of God, today is the ~~day~~ day. Today is the day. God's word emphasizes today. This woman came before him and she anointed the body of Christ. Why don't you do something now for Jesus Christ?

She hath done what she could. Jesus literally said, "What she had, she did." She had no power to prevent his death, but she did have the power to show her love and her sympathy. As much as she was able, she entered into the fellowship of his sufferings. Yes, she did all that she could and perhaps more than she knew because she was anointing his body before burial. She did all that human hands could do. And Jesus ~~xxxx~~ blessed her for this.

Now, Jesus said, this is going to be a memorial. And what to Mary was a simple act of love, Jesus said that it would stand as truly one of the great deeds and would never pass as a kindly word or a cup of cold water in his name. To you it may be soon forgotten, but unknown to you, it opens the door of hope to some soul lost.

Very simple sometimes, this soon-to-be-forgotten incident becomes gospel, and it will be gospel until Jesus comes again. Until you hear that glad welcome.

Mary's memorial may be your memorial. Your life may seem to you but little. It is impossible to limit the effects which even an insignificant life may have. That is, if your life is surrounded with power of Christ. Those that murmured had no idea that even when they were in their graves that this would be heralded on the breeze of time. Here was an unselfish leader who lived in the world, and Jesus defended this woman.

Wherever my gospel is preached, this is going to be a memorial of her. If it is the right thing in the consecration of our powers - whatever we can do, whether we can sing, teach, or preach, or make money and consecrate our wealth, or to be faithful and loyal in our pew every Lord's day. Whatever our powers may be, these may become a memorial.

We are to give God our best. Abraham faltered not in giving God his best, and God blessed him for it. Moses gave his best. And there are blessings on every hand for us.

There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,

There are souls that are pure and true.

Then give to the world the best that you have,

And the best will come back to you.

Give love, and love to your heart will flow,

A strength in your utmost need.

Have faith, and a score of hearts will show

Their faith in your word and deed.

For the thing that lasts is love. More famous than the ceasars is Mary of Bethany who broke this alabaster box and poured the ointment on the head of our Lord. And when they have been forgotten, what Mary did shall be told wherever the gospel is preached. This is the abiding thing. But of these love is the greatest.