

“The Lord Is Anointed for His Burial”
(Matthew 26:6-13)

How does love affect our lives? How can someone who is looking at us tell if we love something or not? What does that love make us do differently? Doesn't it draw us to that thing we love? Doesn't it make us a servant to it? Doesn't it make us bend our lives around it, so that what we love becomes the center of our lives? Children, how do your parents know what you love? How can you know? All you have to do is look to see where you spend most of your time, what it is that you get most excited about, what it is that motivates you, and then you know. It's sad to say, but how many times have your parents seen you get excited about watching a movie, or playing some sport, or getting together with your friends, but then see you reluctant to come to family worship or to church? How many times have your parents seen the same thing in yourselves? Love has a dramatic effect on our lives. It determines how we will spend our time. It motivates us to do what we do. Whatever we love will control our lives, which is why we are warned in the Bible again and again to be careful about what is in our hearts. Solomon wrote to his sons, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it *flow* the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23).

Now why do I bring this up? It's because of what's in our passage this morning. Here we see a woman who loved. She loved the Lord so much that it moved her to do something very special for Him: she took some very expensive perfume and anointed Jesus for burial. Now it's true that this anointing of Jesus for burial speaks volumes to us about the love of God for us. But the focus of our passage is the loving act of this woman towards her Savior that the Father used to anoint His Son. This shows us that love for the Lord will motivate us to minister to Him. That is the theme of this passage. This woman wanted to show Jesus how much she loved Him for what He had done and was about to do for her.

What I want us to look at are four things in our text: 1) First, that if we love the Lord, it will motivate us to minister to Him, 2) second, that sometimes the things we do out of our love for Jesus will be misunderstood by others, 3) third, that the Lord accepts our loving service and will use it to accomplish His will, and 4) last, that the Lord will never forget what we do for Him, but will reward us for each and every act of love. First, let's consider that if we love the Lord, it will motivate us to minister to Him.

We are told that when Jesus was in Bethany staying at the home of Simon the leper – a man that we really know nothing about, except perhaps that he was a man who had been healed by Jesus of his leprosy – that “a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and . . . poured it on His head as He reclined at the table” (v. 7). This woman is believed to have been Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, or perhaps Mary Magdalene, from the parallel passage we have of this account in John 12. But whoever she was, she appears to have known Jesus, and more importantly, to have loved Him. Only those who were close to Jesus were aware that His death was near. And only those who loved Him were concerned enough to minister to Him before His death. It is said that the strength of a person's love can be measured by what he is willing to give to the object of his love. This woman gave up something which was very

precious to her in order to minister to Jesus. It was precious not only because of its value – because of its great cost – but also because things like these were hard to come by for the average person. This woman must have found Jesus to be very precious, because she gave something to Him which was very precious to her. Why was He precious to her? Undoubtedly because He had granted her the forgiveness of her sins. But also undoubtedly, because the Lord had changed her heart so that she could see the beauty of His holiness and be drawn irresistibly to Him.

Now we might pause here for a moment and ask ourselves the question, How precious is Jesus to us? How much do we love Him? Do we love Him a lot, or only a little, or not at all? If our love can be measured by what we give to the object of our love, what does our giving tell us about how much we love Him? Now I'm not talking only about money. Jesus isn't interested only in our money. He actually isn't interested in it at all, if we're not interested in giving it to Him. What I'm talking about is our lives: our time, our abilities, our gifts, our strength, our thoughts, our aspirations in life. What do these things tell us about how much we love Jesus? Do they show that we love Him a lot, a little, or not at all? If we were honest with ourselves, I think we would all admit that no matter how much we do love Him, we don't love Him enough. No Christian on this earth loves Jesus enough. All of us fall short of the kind of love we should have for Him. Jesus gave up the riches of heaven and became poor, that we might become rich. What have we given up for Him? Jesus left the security of heaven to be persecuted by those who hated Him for us. When was the last time we were persecuted for Him, or were even willing to be persecuted? Jesus was rejected and despised; He suffered and was put to death for us? When was the last time we suffered for Him? When have we ever even risked our lives for Him? Jesus is the most holy and beautiful being in the universe. How many times have we given up time to pray to Him and to meditate on Him for something that is infinitely less important? None of us here this morning loves Jesus as we should. None of us here is really moved as we should be by His sacrifice for us. We only have a very faint idea of how beautiful He really is. But by God's grace, perhaps we will understand better than we did, and be willing to give up more than we have, as we think about His love for us, and how worthy He is of our love. If we love the Lord, it will motivate us to minister to Him; and the more we love Him, the more we will be willing to sacrifice in order to do what He wants us to do.

But now second, we see in this passage that sometimes the things we do out of love to Jesus will be misunderstood by others. When the disciples saw what this woman had done, they were indignant, and said, "Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor" (vv. 8-9). They judged that what she had done was wrong. They thought that she could have spent her love and affection on someone else, that she could have used her money for a better purpose, namely, to take care of the poor. They became her judges, and they condemned what she did, simply because it wasn't what they would have done.

How many times have we found ourselves judging what our brothers and sisters do for the Lord? We see them doing this or that for Jesus, but we think that they would have spent their time much better doing other things, the things that we think are important. Sometimes we think that what they do is wrong, even though in the Lord's eyes, it might be very right. We all do this, far more than we think, and far too much to promote the kind of love and unity that our Lord wants in His body. The Lord said

through the apostle Paul, “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:4). And He says through His servant James, “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge *of it*. There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?” (James 4:11-12). Now the Lord doesn’t mean by this that we are not to admonish one another, if we see each other sinning. Love dictates to us that we must. If we don’t, we might lose our brother or sister. But what He does mean is that we are not to sit in judgment over what each other does for the Lord. Each man has to live according to his own conscience before God. Jesus will be the judge in these matters. We must leave them to Him.

If we love the Lord, it will move us to minister to Him. But be aware, sometimes the things we do for the Lord will be misunderstood and even condemned by our brothers and sisters. But third, we need to know that even in cases like this one, the Lord will accept our service – if it is offered according to His Word and out of love – and He will use it to accomplish His will.

They condemned her, but what did Jesus say? “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you have with you always; but you do not always have Me” (vv. 10-11). Notice, Jesus didn’t condemn her. He knew what was in her heart. He knew that she had done this because she loved Him. And so He defended her. He rebuked His disciples. He told them, “Maybe this isn’t what you would have done. Maybe you would have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor. There’s certainly nothing wrong with that. But she wanted to do this for Me. She knows that I’m about to die, that I’m not going to be here much longer. She also knows that My death is for her. When I’m gone, the poor will still be there, and she can still minister to them. But her opportunity to minister to Me is growing short. I receive what she has done, and commend her for it.” Jesus defended her further by saying to His disciples, “For when she poured this perfume upon My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial” (v. 12). The odd thing here is that if Jesus had already died, they probably wouldn’t have objected to this anointing at all. We tend to be much more generous and giving to the dead than we are to the living. Sometimes those who are close to us have to die before we see how much we really love them.

But notice again what Jesus said she was doing. She was anointing Him for His burial. He had just told His disciples that the Passover was only two days away. It was then that He would be handed over by the chief priests and elders of the people to the Romans to be crucified. This was the time of His preparation for death. This was the way His Father had ordained that His body would be prepared for burial – through the loving act of this servant of His. Now certainly the Lord uses the sins of men, even of His own people, to get His will done, as we’ve seen over and over again. But we mustn’t forget that He also uses the loving service of His people. Sometimes, we don’t understand how significant our service is. This woman may have only wanted to show her love to Jesus before He died. She may not have realized that this is what the Father had planned to be His burial anointing. We also don’t know how the Lord might use our weak efforts to serve Him. There are those who have been mightily used of the Lord to do great things in His kingdom, and we’re thankful that the Lord has given them to His

church. But there have also been those whose greatest contribution might have been to be used by the Lord to bring those instruments into His kingdom. We don't know how the Lord will use our service to Him. But we certainly know that if we don't serve Him, nothing will come from it. Let's do our best then to be faithful, even in the small things, and trust that God will bring out of it what is pleasing to Him.

We've seen first, that if we love the Lord, it will motivate us to minister to Him; second, that sometimes the things we do will be misunderstood by others; and third, that the Lord will accept and use our loving service to accomplish His will. But last, I want you to see that the Lord will never forget what we do for Him, but will reward us for those things by His grace. After Jesus reproved His disciples for their insensitive criticism of this woman, He then said, "Truly I say to you, wherever this Gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of in memory of her" (v. 13). Jesus didn't want this act of love to be forgotten, and it wasn't. Matthew, Mark and John all recorded it, so that even today we can still read about it. But of course this wasn't to be her only reward. On the day of Christ's judgment, He will also reward her with the kingdom of heaven and with great joy, because she showed by her life, by her works, how much she really did love Him.

But you know she won't be the only one with a reward. Jesus tells us that even the smallest thing which is done for Him will not be overlooked. He said, "Whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:42). People of God, the Lord won't forget our acts of love, but will richly reward us for them. Obviously, they won't be recorded in the pages of Scripture for everyone to read, because that holy book was completed a long time ago, but they will be recorded in the Lord's book of remembrance. He knows everything that we've done, are doing and ever will do. And He tells us in His Word that not only will He forgive us for all of our sins, if we trust in His Son, but that He will also not fail to reward us for every single one of our acts of loving service to Him.

But why will He reward us, knowing that everything we do falls short of the kind of love we should have for Him? It's only because of what Jesus has done. Don't forget what this woman did – she anointed Jesus for His burial. He was about to be buried, because He was about to die; and He was about to die, because He was about to pay for our sins. The only reason that you or I or anyone else will ever receive any kind of a reward for our works is not because our works earn anything, but only because the Lord has promised to reward us for them for the sake of His Son. Jesus died to cleanse us and our works from all sin, and in Jesus, and only in Jesus, we and all that we do is acceptable to the Father. May the Lord encourage us this morning that nothing we do will be in vain in the Lord, that by His grace, He will repay every kindness that we ever show to Him. But may He also remind us that our acceptance, and the acceptance of all that we do only comes through the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.