

The anointing of Jesus

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Preacher: Rev Donald Lamont

- [0 : 00] Would you turn with me now for a little time as we meditate together in a portion we have read from God's Word, Mark's Gospel, and the 14th chapter, reading again from verse 3.
- Being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at Meek, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of stikenard, very precious, and she break the box and poured it on his head.
- And what follows? The hour had almost arrived when the Savior should accomplish the particular mission for which she came into this world.
- Every step in his ministry was leading nearer and nearer and nearer to that momentous and awesome woman when he would be taken and by wicked hands crucified and slain.
- As we are told in the Acts of the Apostle, he would indeed be delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, that human hands would be the instrument through which he would be brought to death.
- [1 : 21] He is now here preparing his followers more thoroughly for the arrival of that event. They must be more perfectly grounded in what is going to happen in a few short days.
- We have to remember the awful trauma which his death would occasion to them, and this would no doubt be much more acute if he had not beforehand warned them of its advent.
- But there were some, it would seem, among his followers, who were not taken altogether by surprise so far as this event was concerned, and who sensed that something of this nature was about to take place.
- We cannot but believe that this is what our Lord is implying at verse 8, where he says, She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint my body to the bearing.
- Here was evidently a woman of great faith who had an insight into what was in the offering.
- [2 : 44] And this is our first head in meditating upon this portion of scripture, the great faith which motivated this act of anointing.
- Only faith can be pleasing to God, and only faith could act as this person acted on this occasion. It is clear that she was certain that he was going to die.
- This is clearly supposed in the words of commendation spoken by the Saviour himself. We cannot imagine that she would have performed a singular act of this nature without having some knowledge of what she was doing.
- And we cannot imagine that our Lord would have spoken these words without knowing that she had such a knowledge, how precise her knowledge was of the nature of the Saviour's death and of his sufferings is quite another matter.
- But that she believed that his death was imminent would certainly seem to be suggested by our Lord's statement in the chapter here.
- [4 : 05] But how was she so sure that he was going to die, that something unique was going to take place? On what ground was her belief based?

On what was her faith resting as she believed that he was going to die? Well, I believe that her knowledge was bound up with his own word and with the word that he himself had spoken.

Although it is not distinctly stated in Scripture, it is inconceivable that such a person as Mary of Bethany, although her name is not given in this particular context, it is clear from other parts of the Gospels that the person was indeed Mary of Bethany.

So it is inconceivable that such a person as she, one of the inner circles of our Lord's friends, would not have heard him making reference to his forthcoming sufferings and to his death.

We believe that she was frequently in his company and frequently heard him speak and preach. We are told at least on one occasion that she was found sitting at his feet, listening to the words, the gracious words that proceeded from his lips.

[5 : 36] And so I say it is inconceivable that she didn't hear him on some occasion indicating that this was to be the end of his mission, the purpose of his mission in the world.

And for his significant, she acted on what he spoke, what he said, on the words that she heard from him.

We are told, for instance, that on another occasion, he made reference to his death among some of his own immediate followers, his apostles.

And we are told that a certain person in that audience simply would not listen and didn't want to know anything about it.

An attitude which called forth the most stinging rebuke. Remember, from our Lord, get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not of the things of God, but the things that be of man.

[6 : 44] And so, Mary of Bethany was quite different, it would seem, from some of the other followers of our Lord.

She believed implicitly the word that he had spoken. My friends, to say that we believe the word of our Saviour, and yet to say that we believe and yet repudiate what he has spoken, is making another nonsense of faith.

Her knowledge, then, we believe, was bound up with his own word, the word that he himself had so clearly spoken to them on more than one occasion. And we believe, too, that her knowledge was inseparable from her experience of grace.

That is, the subjective inner experience of his grace, which his gospel effects and imparts and which makes the gospel so meaningful and so personal.

This, of course, is not the whole of the gospel or anything like it, but it is a very considerable and a very significant slice of the gospel and it conveys tremendous confirmation and tremendous comfort in its wake.

[8 : 06] We frequently turn to the scriptural account of what happened on the Emmaus road to demonstrate the reality and the validity of such a minor experience as this.

On that occasion, you remember, Jesus dealt with his followers, with those two men. He dealt with their conscience and he dealt with their mind. He rebuked their unbelief, you remember, all fools and slow of heart to believe all that the scriptures, all that the prophets have written.

He spoke to their conscience, he rebuked them and then he spoke to their minds. Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he went on, we read that, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself and the net result of it was that their affections were utterly gripped and their own testimony afterwards is, did not our heart burn within us as he spoke to us by the way and opened to us the scriptures, there was an inseparable connection between his dealing with them, his speaking to them and their hearts being touched.

So there is the subjective experience of his grace as well as the objective knowledge that he had brought to them in and by the word.

And we see too that this woman's knowledge insisted that she should act, that she should work, which of course is the proof of the livingness of faith.

[10 : 01] Faith works, faith acts, faith responds when it is a land. Show me thy faith without thy work, says the apostle James, which of course is impossible.

And he goes on, and I will show thee my faith by my works. In other words, it simply isn't the faith of the gospel at all, if it is not active and diligent.

There is another notable character referred to in the gospels, you remember to whom Jesus said, O woman, great is thy faith.

You see, such was the strength and such was the greatness of her faith that she simply refused to desist. She would continue to act, to work.

She would not go away until her request had been granted. it. This is the kind of activity that faith, that the faith of the gospel always produces.

[11 : 08] So this is clearly the first thing, the very clear thing that we have in this anointing by this worthy woman, the greatness of the faith that lay behind this act of anointing.

But then the second place, we must go on to see the great courage which this anointing act demanded. It is not difficult to imagine what a difficult task this good follower of Jesus said before herself as she decided that she would engage in this act of anointing.

It is not difficult to suppose what some of the criticism would be. We have it of course suggested to us in the context. We can suppose some of the other forms of criticism that would be levelled against her.

They would no doubt say for instance that she was being impiously familiar in what she was doing, especially as women. She was a woman and women hadn't particularly elevated status in the society of that day.

So they would no doubt say that she was being impiously familiar in this act that she was now engaged in. But she knew and others knew that Jesus always acted towards women differently from his contemporaries.

[12 : 55] But he elevated them to their rightful place of dignity before God and before men. Thus while her detractors would certainly, we believe, accuse her of impiety and presumptuousness, she herself knew better.

For she knew the grace and the love of the one whom she was now anointing and honouring in this act of devotion. And it would also no doubt say that she was seeking glory for herself and only glory for herself and publicity and preeminence.

Today it would no doubt be considered as a publicity stunt by a great many. Indeed many who engage in this sort of thing are no doubt trying to draw attention to themselves or to some cause in which they may be interested.

And it cannot be doubted but that Mary's enemies would conclude the same thing about her. We know that the Bethany family certainly hadn't endeared themselves to the establishment because of their attachment and their love for the Lord Jesus Christ and indeed there was a moment afoot at this very time to kill to put Lazarus himself to death because of how many had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as a result of his being raised from the dead.

so they would no doubt say that she was seeking glory for herself and she no doubt knew it and so he demanded great courage to do what she did.

[14 : 43] But then it was very clear that they also said that she was being utterly prodigal and that it was all a waste of good money which could easily have been put to a better use.

why was this waste of the ointment asked the man who carried the bag Judas and who was at length to betray the saviour for it might have been sold for more than 300 pence yes indeed a very considerable sum of money the wages of a whole year and have been given to the poor and they murmured against her greed ah how typical of human nature to consider a ministry of this nature as another and total waste of resources there's something that is being thrown away and something that is of no value whatever and they would no doubt accuse her and say that in any case it was a needless exercise that she was engaged in what did it achieve what did it affect a valuable quantity of highly prized perfumed oil was allowed to run to waste the whim of a woman was perhaps satisfied but that is all that it resulted in so these men of insensitivity and unspirituality would say and would accuse her of many improper and uncharitable things but how wrong they were how far of the mark in their conclusions conclusions if only they had listened if only they would bow their stubborn wills and listen to the saviour himself speaking then they would realise how far off the mark they were but in their fury and rage they had neither ears nor eyes for anything except their own biased and distorted conclusions and so of course in the context we have the practical and immediate effect of this in the case of

Judas himself where we read that he went to the chief priest to betray him unto them and so in view of the suspicion and the prejudice with which she was faced he demanded a great deal of courage the courage wrought by the grace of God to engage in the singular act that he is now engaged in but we see also in the third place the great fruit which this anointing act bore in spite of perhaps the misgivings of friends and the conclusions of enemies it nevertheless bore fruit and above all else there was glory and there was honour accruing to the saviour himself this was the greatest fruit of all borne by this act of anointing this was the principal aim we believe which Mary herself had in mind at this time her enemies could say what they wished they could accuse her of self-seeking they could accuse her of self-advertisement of cheap publicity of desiring preeminence before others but she knew within herself that all she had in view was the enhancing of the person and the pinpointing of the work of her

Lord and saviour Jesus Christ and the saviour himself rightly judged this to be the case when he stated she has wrought a good work on me she has come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying she has drawn public attention to the singular act of my ministry she has focused men's minds on the reasons for my being in this world this is undoubtedly what he himself had been doing at different points in his ministry hitherto but oh how slow men were to believe him and to accept these truths so there was glory and honour accruing to the saviour himself in this act of anointing and there was also the fragrance of true devotion evidenced in this anointing in John's account of the incident and in chapter 12 of that gospel we are told that the house was filled with the odour of the ointment now the odour was of course an exceedingly pleasant one to the senses such odours were frequently used as we know in eastern lands as a mark of singular respect if a man wanted to show a guest how honoured he was in his esteem then he would anoint him with a specially prepared perfume now it's not the literal fragrance that captures the imagination in what this woman did but the fragrance of devotion and of love to her

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and her Christ centred commitment to him she no doubt considered the varying implications of her self denying act what people would say what people would think how people would react how people would interpret this matter but having weighed all these things in a balance she concluded that to hide her light her witness was too high a price to pay and so she did what she knew in her own heart was right and proper her devotion and love to the Saviour was something that the fear of man must never be allowed to extinguish and so there was this fruit following her act there was the fragrance of true devotion and of true love evidenced in what she did and of course there was the commendation spoken by the

[22 : 04] Saviour himself when he immediately came to her defense and when he said let her alone why trouble he her and again she had done what she could she has come beforehand to anoint my body to the burying she might have had misgivings before us to what she was proposing to do but not any longer after she had heard the master speaking so approvingly of her action she cared not before the devils in hell were to combine against her after all he had vindicated her before her friends and her enemies she sought his glory and his honour and although perhaps she may have feared that what she was in process of doing would indeed be changed with an element of self-advertisement she now had the assurance from the

Lord's own lips that her offering was graciously received and accepted and that was all the reward that she ever looked for now then my friends the call extended to you and to me in this tremendously significant incident in the word of God the call extended to us is simply this to anoint the saviour this is the call that the gospel extends to the people of God and this is something that demands the attention of all who have tested said that the Lord is gracious this is the duty of every day and of every moment to anoint the saviour see then that you anoint him with the oil of a meaningful confession we are once more approaching the sacrament of the

Lord's Supper in our midst and our catechism calls us to the exercise of a particular duty in connection with this when it says that they who would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper must examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body of their faith to feed upon him of their repentance love and new obedience lest coming unworthily they eat and drink judgment to themselves in other words we are to discern that his body as put to death that we are able to make a personal application of that death in relation to our own needs and that in that death is the life the life of our soul that is to discern aright the

Lord's body in other words to put it into scriptural phraseology he loved me and gave himself for me that is a meaningful way of understanding what the Lord's death signifies and discerning the Lord's body and have faith to feed upon him in other words it is a way of anointing him we are to anoint him then with the oil of a meaningful confession and we are also to anoint him with the oil of a holy and sanctified life that is a life separated to him and a life separated for him there is no anointing more fragrant to our Lord than when his people recognize that their citizenship is in heaven from whence also they are to look for the saviour the Lord

Jesus Christ it requires much courage and much grace to be in the world and to be in it as a useful and profitable citizen in that world while not being of it pure religion and undefiled says James before God and the father is this to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world you are to anoint the Lord Jesus Christ with the oil of a holy and a sanctified life and we are called to anoint the Lord Jesus Christ with the oil of a fervent devotion and love such as was demonstrated by this worthy follower of the Lamb of God you see he himself calls for the manifestation of such a spirit as this on the part of his people he poses to each one of them the question lovest thou me and then he goes on to call for their duty to call for their obedience he looks not only for a positive response to this question but also for a positive demonstration of the reality of this matter in the life and in the witness of his people such as this will never be careful about itself as was the case with

[28 : 20] Mary of Bethany or its own reputation before men its whole ambition and desire will be the projecting of the saviour in its profession and in its life in its conduct so you are called to anoint him with the oil of a fervent love and devotion to his person and to his cause and you are called my friend to anoint him with the oil of a consistent profession day by day a profession that will be steadfast that will be unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord or you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord there is nothing more fragrant in the world of redeemed men and women than the consistency of the walk and the talk that is the fruit of the grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ in the life the fruit of the spirit the apostle in Galatians 5 the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace long suffering gentleness goodness faith meekness temperance against such there is no law and when these things are shown in a consistent pattern of life then the savior is anointed the savior is honored the savior is glorified and this after all is what he looks for this is what is well pleasing to him this is what he calls his people to this is what he demands day by day of them as they go through this world there is courage demanded there is faith demanded that he himself gives the grace and the strength to do what is demanded of them and he promises according to your day so shall your strength be we have of course no sufficiency in ourselves but we have to remember that our sufficiency along with everything else comes from the savior who calls and who demands such an anointing as this of his people in whatever they turn their hands to whether it be a distinctly spiritual duty such as worshipping or commemorating his death or a duty in connection with our daily living in the world it is to be done under the impact of our anointing of him in everything we do whatsoever thine hand find us to do do it with thy might as unto the

Lord may he enable us by his grace to do this as we go on in life shall we unite together in prayer oh Lord our God do thou enable us each one to take our own peculiar alabaster box and to anoint thy head at all times to enable to enable us as we walk through this life day by day moment by moment to have respect and regard to this singular obligation may we never forget it may we never overlook it to all shame we have to acknowledge that too frequently we do we forget and we overlook what is the principal obligation to which we are called we ask thy forgiveness in this and we pray for the strengthening of thy grace to enable us day by day moment by moment to anoint our

Lord and our Savior in word in thought and in action continue with us we beseech thee bless us as we gather again together in the evening bring glory to thy name this day everywhere where the gospel is proclaimed and hear us oh God in heaven thy dwelling place cleansing us from all unrighteousness in Jesus name Amen