

On His majesty's service

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[0 : 0 0] But it's done to another portion of God's word, the Gospel according to John 12. Reading at verse 2, there they made him a supper, and Martha said that Lazarus was one of them that started the table with him.

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of Spikenard very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wife to speak with her hair, and a house that fell with the order of the ointment.

Now, again, I would repeat that those of you who are regular worshippers with us like this on the Lord's Day evening, will remember that we are going through the Gospel according to John, and that we have been dealing with various things in connection with this small home in the village of Bethany.

Last week, for instance, we spoke in connection with the supper which had been prepared for the Lord Jesus.

And having run out of time before we could discuss the servants that were present at that supper, I couldn't finish the sermon last hour of the evening.

[1 : 4 0] And so I want to go on this evening to try and to finish that sermon off by speaking to you in connection with these servants as they present themselves to us in verses 2 and 3 of this chapter and the service that they gave.

The year is the last year of our Lord's ministry. It is about six days before the last Passover that Jesus was going to be in attendance upon.

And what we find is that before he enters in upon this Passover and eventually the Last Supper, and from there passing on to the crucifixion, what we find is that here in this home there is a certain preparation being made for him in the way of providing supper.

And how honored these people in that little home must have helped to think that Jesus should have come to their home as being the last home he was going to attend in the village of Bethany.

And how privileged, how privileged, how honored, how privileged, how honored they must have said that Jesus came to their home like that. So in looking at the service which was given to Jesus during this supper time in the home in Bethany, I want us to look at both Martha and Mary as servants doing service to their Lord and Saviour.

[3 : 3 6] So I want to begin with Martha and I want us to realize that although John says very little in connection with the service that Martha gave here, yet he does not fail to include her name as being someone who indeed was involved in service.

For he tells us in verse 2 that Martha says, he doesn't go into any real detail as to what this service was, but I think we can all understand that she was the one who was hustling and bustling around the home, perhaps looking for place and for food and so on in order to place these things on the table before Jesus and his disciples.

Now this Martha, she was a very active, a very outgoing, a very domestic woman in her own right.

She was one who gave herself, as it were, herself as it were, to looking after this side of things within the home.

Hers was not the devotional side as indeed Mary was devotional. Martha was more on the temporal side.

[5 : 07] She looked more after the tires and the tidying up and the plates and the food and all these sort of things. That seemed to be Martha's side of things.

And you remember on another occasion before this that indeed Jesus had to rebuke her because of the way she was going on with these things in the home while tea was guest there.

You remember how he said to her, Martha, Martha, thou art comfort about many things, but one thing is needful.

And Mary hath chosen that good thing which shall not be taken from. And on that occasion Martha was again in her usual active way going about getting the plates and getting the food and thinking to herself that this was the most important thing that she could do until Jesus rebukes her.

And he says, you've got things the wrong way around. You think that these are the most important things you can do? Wait a minute. Look at your sister Mary.

[6 : 22] She is sitting at my feet. And she is listening to my word. She is devoting herself spiritually to hearing what God has to say.

And that is the one thing which is needful. That is the most important thing. All else must come second to that. You remember that occasion then when Jesus rebuked Martha because she appeared to be so worldly.

She appeared to involve herself with the things of the world so much as even to forget that her real place was at the feet of Jesus to hear his word.

And I think it is true in connection with all of us. That we ourselves can get so involved in the world.

Even to the world. Even to the point where the cause of Jesus comes secondary to that. Even to the point that where we forget that a real place ought to be at the feet of Jesus listening to his word.

[7 : 43] What I am saying to you is this. That all of us, myself included, that we tend to forget the importance of the Bible.

That we tend to put the Bible secondary to our worldly occupations. That our worldly occupations mean more to us sometimes than what even the Bible itself means to us.

You know, even though Martha at that first occasion had been rebuked for this. Lo and behold, we find her here again.

John making mention of her. What is she doing? Martha said, she is still in this hustle and bustle of activity. She is still so thoroughly involved in the things of the world.

And this is not the case with you and me again. Jesus sometimes rebukes us for being so worldly. For having your minds occupied with the things that are temporal.

[8 : 56] And that are passing with using. And lo and behold, we receive his rebuke. And what then? Oh, before long we are back to square one again.

We are way back into the world again. The world has such an hold upon us. That it refuses to let go its grasp upon our souls.

When we find ourselves slowly, gradually moving back to worldliness again. And forgetting the rebuke which Jesus gives us in connection with this very thing.

Nevertheless, we do not find Jesus here rebuking Martha the second time. He doesn't open his mouth to her. It is as if he is expecting her to have remembered the first rebuke which he had given to her for being so worldly.

Maybe that is what it was. That he expected her to remember that rebuke. That earlier rebuke. But I think there is another reason here.

[10 : 11] As to why Jesus does not rebuke Martha this time. I think that Jesus' own sufferings are closing in upon him as a massive burden filling his mind.

And that all he can concentrate his own mind on in his human nature is upon the sufferings that are only a few days away from him.

That he is concentrating upon the cross. And upon what he was going to go through on the cross. The way in which they were going to take his hands and his feet.

And how they were going to nail these to the cross. The way in which he was going to be crowned with a crown of thorns. The sign of the curse upon the cross.

The way in which he was going to be forsaken even of the disciples that are with him just now in this little home in Bethany. The way in which he was going to be forsaken of God.

[11 : 23] So much that he cried, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? All of this at this moment is filling the mind of Jesus.

And it's as if it's the only thing he can concentrate on. That seems to be sufficient for him at this particular time. So much so that he doesn't bother with rebuking Martha for her worldly mindedness.

It seems to me that that is perhaps the real reason as to why Jesus does not rebuke Martha.

But I want to go on to the service that Mary gets. I want us to see that there is this devotional side to things.

I want us to realize that the way in which Mary approaches Jesus yet once again. At this point in her life. Shows us, demonstrates for us the way that we ourselves ought to be in regard to Jesus and our attitude to him.

[12 : 45] Mary served Jesus. And she served Jesus by anointing Jesus.

Now there are just three or four little things which I want you to notice in connection with this service which Mary gave to Jesus.

Let me first of all suggest to you that it is Jesus himself that Mary anoints. It is Jesus himself.

Remember last week I told you that there were about fifteen people in the home altogether. And yet, out of the fifteen people that are there, she makes for Jesus.

As if she were saying to everybody that was present there, Oh, I value your presence. I thank God that you saw it fit to come to my home.

[13 : 53] I thank God that you are sitting down at supper with us. I thank God that even though I love all of you put together.

There is this one who is outstanding in my own life. There is one amongst you who goes above all others for me.

And I make for this one. I make for Jesus. Because he and he alone matters most to me in this world.

We must give Jesus that place always. We who live in the twentieth century, we must give Christ his place in our lives.

We mustn't think to excuse ourselves from devotion to Jesus on the grounds that we have other things to do.

[14 : 58] We must always give Jesus his place in our lives. And what is that place that Jesus demands?

He demands the very throne of our hearts. He demands that he comes first before anybody else.

Or before anything else. Jesus must have his place. Now that is the first thing that Mary is showing to us here in her devotional attitude to Jesus.

That he comes first in her life. And the second thing that she shows to us here when she anoints Jesus is this.

That she moves according to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. You see, she is directed as to what she should do.

[16 : 00] This isn't as it were a matter of human choice to go and anoint the feet of Jesus. This is a matter of being directed by the Holy Spirit to go and do this for Jesus.

To go and serve him in this particular way. Therefore, I put it to you that she moved in accordance with the promptings and the directions of the Holy Spirit.

Now let me take that point. And let me put it into our own laps this evening if I can. That there are times when we are prompted ourselves by the Holy Spirit to do certain things.

Which sometimes we turn round and we say, but I don't really want to do these things.

There are times when we are prompted to go to a home where there is a believer. And we turn round and we say to the Holy Spirit, but I don't feel like going there.

[17 : 20] There are times when we are prompted to go to the prayer meeting. And then we say, but is it really necessary for me to go to the prayer meeting? Whilst it is the Holy Spirit that is prompting us.

Would he prompt us to something which is evil? Surely he prompts us always to something which is good. And if he himself is in the midst of his people, surely that is a good thing.

And if we are prompted therefore to go to the prayer meeting, it is the Holy Spirit that is prompting us to go there. And yet we turn round and we say, but is it really necessary for me to go to the prayer meeting?

Is it necessary for me to take up a means of grace? It's as if we are turning to him and saying, is it necessary for me to pray? Is it necessary for me to go on the Lord's day?

Is it necessary for me to do anything for Jesus? When we turn to him under these promptings and we say to him, well, is it necessary for me to go?

[18 : 24] Of course it is necessary for us to go. If we want to be like Jesus, that is a necessity in our lives that we respect what Jesus himself commands us.

Look at the epistle to the Hebrews. Forget not the assembling together of yourselves as the manner of some is, who had forsaken the assembling together of themselves as Christian people.

Don't do that. When you are prompted by the Spirit, when it comes on your conscience that you are not where you should be, then take note that it is the Holy Spirit prompting you.

And take the Holy Spirit of his word and prompting and go where you should be. It is so important that we do this.

Who knows, but it might very well be the last opportunity that we'll ever receive under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. And shall we go to the throne of judgment and say to the Holy Spirit there, I received your prompting, but I said to myself that it wasn't really necessary to go according to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 50] I just said to myself that the Lord would excuse me for not going because I thought it was not necessary to go according to that prompting. You know, when there is illness in the home, there is another situation.

And we are prompted to go to that place where there is illness. And our conscience says to us, yeah, there is a believer there, and that believer is very ill.

And should you not go and see that believer who is very ill, you know, the prompting of the Spirit ought to move us to go and see this believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here then is a woman who submits herself, a lovely woman, a godly woman, who submits herself to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to go and anoint Jesus of all the ones that were there.

And she wanted to serve Jesus, not people really, although she loved the Lord's people and all of that, yet Jesus, this is what Jesus commands me to do by his Spirit.

[21 : 09] Therefore I do it because Jesus commands me to do it. And thus she honors the very name that she professes. And then secondly, look at this, it was Jesus' feet she anointed.

Jesus' feet. Now that shows us two things. First of all, it shows us her great love for the feet of Jesus. And you might turn to me and say to me, what a strange thing.

You know, that anybody should love the feet of someone else. And yet I say to you, this woman, as she looks at the feet of Jesus, she sees something that is to her unique, something that is really special.

Not that they were feet different from any other feet in shape or size. But these were the feet that carried the most blessed person that ever walked the face of the earth.

These were the feet. These were the feet. And that is what she sees in these feet. That these feet are carrying God from one village to another, doing good unto all men, and especially to the household of faith.

[22 : 37] That is what is so special about these feet. That she should go and anoint these same feet.

She anoints his feet. And this also shows us something else. Her own lowliness of mind. It's as if she is saying, I cannot, I do not feel worthy of climbing any higher than this.

I can reach his feet to anoint them. And if only I can use the ointment even to anoint his blessed feet, then that in itself will make me happy.

For I feel so unworthy that I should go near his blessed head. That his feet themselves would be to me a real place of honor.

Ah, my dear friends. Who tonight can say that he or she is worthy in the presence of God? Who?

[23 : 51] Who tonight can say that they would climb to the highest as regards to God? Who tonight says to himself or herself, well, I feel quite worthy of taking my place beside Jesus in the highest place.

No. No. Be thankful even if you get but to the feet of Jesus. Be thankful if tonight you have a hope for eternity of sitting at these blessed feet.

Be thankful if tonight you can visualize eternity on yourself sitting in the lowest place in heaven. Be thankful even for that vision and for that hope itself.

If you can visualize such an hope for yourself. Let me put it to you like this. If you love Jesus Christ. If you love Jesus Christ. Then you need to have no doubt.

But you shall sit at the feet of Jesus in glory. You shall sit there. And even though it be the most lowly place in glory.

[25 : 16] I say to you. You'll be that thankful to look at these feet. And to look up into his face. And to behold there the gracious Savior who did so much for you.

But seek even tonight. To be found at the feet of Jesus itself. Even in that lowly position. Seek to be found where this be.

Then let me put to you a third point about Mary's service. It was with ointment that she anointed the feet of Jesus. Now this ointment.

John tells us that it is a very costly, a very precious ointment. Let me just explain that to you. It cost 300 denarii.

Now according to the days in which these people lived. They received one denarii per day. So what you have here is this.

[26 : 22] A working man's wage for 300 days. Right? And that is why the evangelists speak of this service as being a very costly service that Mary did for Jesus.

She came and she took almost a year's wages with her. In order to pour these wages on the feet of Jesus.

And what do you see then? You see this. That this love controls the sacrifice or the service which she is making.

She is a woman who loves much. She is a woman who cannot do enough for Jesus. She is a woman who is given over to doing everything that she can for Jesus in devotional sense.

She is a woman who does cost her much. Yet never feels it too much for Jesus.

[27 : 36] You understand? Therefore, I put it to your own selves this year. Whatever we do for Jesus.

Do we do it with grudge and heart? Do we do it saying to ourselves, well, maybe I could lessen it by a degree or so.

Maybe I could bring it down a little bit further and I needn't do so much for Jesus as what I am doing. But you see that is exactly the way the devil would want it.

He would want us to believe that we are already doing too much for Jesus. And that everything is costing far too much in regard to working, to serving Jesus.

Jesus, let me turn to the unconverted for a moment. Let me put it to you. That there is one command that Jesus puts to you tonight.

[28 : 37] Son, daughter, give me thine heart. What is your response to that? Do you know this?

It's the greatest thing that you could do for Christ. Is to give him your heart. And as long as you haven't done that, you haven't started to perform anything for Jesus.

Of all the things that he mentions in Scripture, this is the one thing which for Jesus goes above all other things.

Give me your mind. Give me your life. Give me your soul. Put it into my care. And then follow me.

That is what Jesus requires of us when he says to us, Son, daughter, give me thine heart. Is it too much to give tonight?

[29 : 49] Is that the way you feel? That you, if you give your heart to Jesus at this age you're at now, that there is so much you're so liable to lose?

If you give your heart to him, Oh friend, Do you think you're going to lose that much by giving your heart to Christ? What does it matter what you lose?

As long as you gain the one thing. As long as you have salvation. Isn't that the one thing that is needful?

And he wants your heart before you can have salvation. Is that, I say to you again, too great a demand that Jesus makes upon you?

Is it too costly a demand that Jesus makes upon you when he says, Give me your life? Give it to me.

[30 : 54] Don't hold it from me. Give it to me. Tonight I want it. Jesus says to the unconverted, yea even, and to the converted themselves.

And then in regard to this anointing of Jesus, it was not too much for, yes I'm almost there, but there is something else also.

There was an odour from that ointment. And you know how John lays emphasis upon that here? That the odour filled the house.

The odour filled the house. It was such a strong fragrance. It was mir that had come from India, from the balsam of India.

And there is such a strong fragrance from that mir. And you say to me, Well, what's so important about that? Why bother to include that in the narrative at all?

[32 : 01] Why bother to tell us that there was such a strong odour, such a strong fragrance from the ointment? Because it's a signifies certain things for us.

The smell of the ointment first and foremostly signifies this. That it was a sweet smelling savour to God.

If you go back to the early Old Testament where Noah offers a sacrifice, what you read is this, that the sacrifice of Noah was of a sweet smelling odour to God.

What you have here is a woman sacrificing to God. She brings her sacrifice of this cruise of ointment.

She breaks it and lets the ointment pour onto the feet of Jesus. And it's as if she is saying to Jesus, This is my sacrifice to you.

[33 : 12] This is my sacrifice to you. What I cannot put into words, I'm putting into action. Remember I told you last week, she was a very reserved, a very shy woman.

And it's as if she can never speak. It's as if she doesn't have this confidence to speak out. But she can act.

She can put into action what she cannot put into words. And that is exactly what she is doing for us at this time. And by her action, she is offering a sacrifice to Jesus in the ointment.

And that sacrifice contains such a sweet smelling savour to God. It's as if God is saying about this, This is sweet indeed.

The sacrifice of this woman. The sacrifice of service. The sacrifice of cost. It's so sweet to me in my presence.

[34 : 24] That is one thing that the smell of the ointment speaks of. Shall I put to you something else?

I think it speaks in addition to that, of the sweet sacrifice that is going to be in Christ's own life. It's as if she is saying, I recognize something about thee.

Lord, I do. What is it Mary? What do you recognize? I recognize this. That there is going to be even a greater, a more sweet smelling sacrifice, than what I can offer at the feet of Christ.

And we ask her, What is the greater, what is the more sweet smelling sacrifice? Oh, I recognize something she says, Oh, I recognize something she says, that he himself is going to be sacrificed.

And that there never will have been, and never shall be, a greater, or a more sweet smelling sacrifice, and the sacrifice that shall be given in a few days' time, on the cross at Calvary.

[35 : 46] I think it signifies that very much. Because you see, if you go on to the next point, what we have is this, that it was in recognition of Jesus' death.

That is the point that Christ himself made. Let her alone. She have done this in view of my burial.

It was the custom to anoint the body of the person who was about to be buried. But if you look at Jesus, when he is crucified, Joseph of Arimathea comes, brings the body of Jesus down from the cross.

But there is no word about anointing the body. No word. Just that he wrapped it in a linen cloth. Oh, kind-hearted Joseph, you took that blessed body, and you wrapped it in that linen cloth, and you took him to the grave that was prepared for yourself, and you laid that blessed body down there.

Kind-hearted Joseph. But we read nothing of the body being anointed according to the custom.

[37 : 05] The dead Jesus' body did not go without anointing. For here is this lovely, godly woman. She is doing it for him before it comes to the time.

His body is being anointed for the burial. Because the rest either had fled, or there was no time to anoint the body.

She is doing it in view of all of that that is yet to take place in his crucifixion.

And surely it was a witness to all those who were present there. Oh, people, who are present in that little home in Bethany.

You fifteen people, are you not impressed with the sweet-smelling savour of the oil? Oh, yes, they say it fills the house.

[38 : 06] Then let that be a witness for you of a woman who loved much, because she was forgiven much. A woman who was a poor sinner, and who had come at one point to Jesus, and had received salvation from Jesus.

And because she had received salvation from Jesus, loved Jesus, oh so much. Oh, my dear friend, can you say that tonight?

I love him much, because he forgave me much. This heart of mine, it was so ugly. It was so full of sin.

But my Saviour Jesus, he cleaned this ugliness. He made me white as snow. He gave me salvation.

How can I not love him with all my heart? Oh, friends, friends, gauge your hearts this evening on how much love you have for this same Jesus.

[39 : 25] Do you love much? It is only because you have had much forgiven. That you so do. And what a witness to these people. What a witness when we see a blessed Christian in our own day, loving Christ in the various ways that we have been mentioning, towards devoting themselves to Jesus.

Oh, what a witness to the 20th century. Indeed, indeed. Indeed, indeed. What a witness to Gerlach.

When we see just one or two unique Christians, devoting themselves to Christ. What a witness for this community.

When we see that taking place indeed. Then you notice what she does. That very ointment with which she has cradled the feet of the Saviour.

Once she has finished that, she takes her own hair. And she begins to dry, to wipe off the ointment that is on the feet.

[40 : 43] Maybe excess ointment on the feet. She takes her own hair. And she begins to rub her own hair on the feet of Jesus. To wipe off the excess.

Do you know why that? Do you? Do you know why it isn't a towel that she took? Why her hair? I'll tell you why. Because she wants to be anointed with the same thing as what Jesus is anointed with.

Therefore, what you have as this, a means of identity. A means of being identified with Jesus himself. What you are being anointed with.

I want to be anointed with. Friend, can you say that tonight? Can you? That whatever Jesus was anointed with in the way of the Holy Spirit's anointing.

That you want to be anointed with the same cup. The same blessedness. Do you want the same blessedness as Jesus has?

[41 : 51] Do you? Do you want holiness of life? Do you want to be in heaven with Jesus? Do you? Then you must be identified with Jesus.

You must have Jesus. Jesus must come first in your life.

And all else besides come second to Jesus. No, it's not the way it is with you this evening.

Jesus first. Everything else second. I love Jesus because I've been forgiven by Jesus. I love him much because I've been forgiven much.

I've been made whiter from the snow, from the ugliness, the uncleanness of my sin that was with me.

[43 : 00] If you are not the only one who is with you, is that the Jesus that you know in your life this evening. Then whatever service you are called upon to carry out for, it will never be too much. Never.

It is for Jesus. And as such, it will never be too much.