**She Has Done a Beautiful Thing**

November 29, 2020

Mark 14:1-11

Key Verse 14:6 “‘Leave her alone,’ said Jesus. ‘Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.’”

In the last passage we studied the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. When he came first, he came as a baby in a manger. He suffered much to shepherd many helpless people. Finally, he was crucified as the Lamb of God. But when he comes again, he will come in clouds with great power and glory. He will send his angels and gather his elect who suffered and gave their hearts to live for his glory. The second coming of Jesus is our glorious hope, and we should be spiritually alert to keep watch in this troubled world. We celebrate the advent, starting today. We celebrate Christmas for two reasons; first we commemorate Jesus’ coming to this world as a baby in a manger 2,000 years ago; second, we express our anticipation of his glorious coming. In today’s passage we see a love story, expressed through a woman who poured out her heart in love and appreciation to Jesus.

Look at verse 1. “Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.” The Passover was the first day of a celebration called the “Festival of Unleavened Bread,” commemorating the historical events recorded in Exodus, and captured in modern movies like “The Ten Commandments” and “The Prince of Egypt.” The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. But God saw their misery, and he intervened, delivering them through 10 spectacular plagues. For the tenth plague, God was going to slay all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the slave. God told his people to slay a one-year old lamb and spread its blood on the doorposts of their houses. When the angel of death saw the blood, he passed over that house and they were not killed.

Now this Passover is significant because Jesus would die on this Passover. It is very significant that Jesus had to die on the Passover. Jesus himself will become the Passover Lamb. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, in two days, Jesus will become like a lamb led to the slaughter. He will be condemned to death and crucified on the cross. When he sheds his blood on the cross, he will be bleeding and dying for all the sins of all the people of the world past, present and future. There is no one who can free us from sin. There is no one who can cleanse our guilty heart and free us from shame and God’s judgment and wrath, except Jesus and his blood. Because of Jesus’ blood, when we believe, God’s judgment and wrath will pass over us and we will be saved.

What was Jesus doing while facing his impending suffering? Look at verse 3a. “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper…” Jesus spent his final days serving others. It is interesting to note that Mark says “a man known as Simon the Leper,” and not that he actually was a man with leprosy. He was a wealthy man, to have a home large enough to accommodate Jesus and his entourage. Perhaps he had been a leper once, and was healed by Jesus. But he kept the name, “Simon the Leper,” to remember Jesus’ grace. The disciples and Simon enjoyed the meal. They laughed and joked, as though living with Jesus would go on forever. No one understood what the coming days meant to Jesus.

Who could encourage Jesus in this hour? Look at verse 3b. “…a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.” Mark doesn’t mention anything about who she was, or how she came to be there, or even what her motivation was. He emphasizes two things: her alabaster jar of perfume, and what she did with it. Nard is harvested from the Spikenard plant which grows only in India and Nepal. Those few who could afford such an expensive, imported item would use it very sparingly, or keep it on a shelf as a symbol of wealth. Likely this alabaster jar of perfume was the most valuable thing the woman owned. She may have been saving it for her own wedding. But she came to Jesus, broke the skinny top off the jar and poured the entire bottle onto Jesus’ head, before anyone could stop her. This was an extravagant expression of love for Jesus. It was a deeply personal act that cost this woman everything she had. In her mind, there was only Jesus. When she poured the perfume on Jesus, she was pouring her everything on Jesus. She was saying to Jesus, “Jesus, you are worthy of this, my most treasured possession. I want you to know that I love you, I cherish you, and to me you are the most valuable thing in the world. I am so thankful for you, Jesus! Please accept my love, Jesus, in response to your great love!” This was a timeless moment between a redeemed woman and her Savior. This jar represented her life, and she broke it and poured it out on Jesus.

But there was a different view of this event. Look at verses 4-5. “Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.’ And they rebuked her harshly.” They were angry, as though something terribly tragic had just occurred. Why such a response? Certainly the strong smell of the perfume disturbed their appetite. But they were very angry at her waste. This jar was worth more than a year’s wages. In 2019, the average yearly wage in Canada is $52,600; $52,600 could support 112 children a whole year through World Vision. As the disciples watched the perfume stream down his face and soak into his robe, all they could think was, “What a waste.” Honestly, some of us might be thinking the same thing. But God’s work sometimes seems to have a lot of waste. People still think it a waste to give a year of one’s life to God such as serving God as a missionary in Africa, saying, “Why do you waste your talent and career?” Many of our friends say, “Why do you waste your time, going to church on Sunday? We can save a lot of traveling time, and easily worship God through online.” People are especially sensitive about money. “Why do you give offering to church? Why not donate to homeless shelter?” Even many Christians say, “Why do you waste your time in Bible study? Isn’t it enough to go to church only once on Sunday?” It is very easy to think that our efforts were waste when we devoted ourselves to serving God but did not get much fruit.

The woman was getting quite a rebuke by the disciples. But Jesus got involved. Look at verse 6. “‘Leave her alone,’ said Jesus. ‘Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.’” Jesus defended this woman, and silenced his disciples. There Jesus was, smelling like lilies of the field, soaked through with perfume. But Jesus deeply understood her beautiful heart and called her extravagant action “something beautiful.” This word translated beautiful is more than just aesthetically pleasing. It means acceptable and appealing as well. Jesus accepted her act of love towards him. This is what pleases Jesus, and what he deems beautiful. Jesus approves of wasteful expressions of love for him that the world would never understand. Why is it so? Look at verse 7. “The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.” Yes, disciples of Jesus should serve the poor. This was the example that Jesus gave to us, and the woman should be responsible for the poor and sickly people around her. But Jesus emphasizes here, “You will not always have me.” Jesus is saying, “Do you realize in two days I will be gone from you?” There is an opportunity to express our love to Jesus, and it is limited. This woman, seeing the chance to express her love lavishly on Jesus, took it, and received Jesus’ approval and acknowledgement. Jesus declares that loving him and doing what pleases him takes higher priority than even the poor and needy. Does that shock you? Who is Jesus to claim such a place? Jesus understood and accepted the woman’s lavish gift. She gave everything, pouring out her life. But Jesus is worth all this and more. Revelation 5:12b says, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Because Jesus gave his life for us, he is worthy to give our lives to. He is worthy of all our heart, soul, mind and strength. What Jesus is looking for from us is not accomplishments, degrees and achievements. What Jesus looks for in us is a life laid at his feet, a soul crying out from the very depth of our being, “Lord, here it is! It is all yours, because you are worthy!” This was the woman’s confession.

Throughout history God has used this kind of wasteful love toward Jesus to advance the gospel. Whether we see fruit or not is not as important as loving Jesus. William W. Borden was born as the millionaire heir to the Borden Dairy estate. When he graduated from a high school in 1904, he traveled through Asia, the Middle East and Europe, and his heart was burdened for suffering people in the world. He wrote home, stating his clear desire to go as a missionary for Jesus. Some people felt it was a waste, throwing away his life and potential. Borden wrote in his Bible, “No reserves.” While attending Yale university, his steadfast commitment to love Jesus had great influence on his fellow students. Small group Bible studies he started in his first year increased from 150 students to over 1300 student participants by his graduation. Upon graduation, he turned down several high paying job offers. He wrote in his Bible, “No retreats.” After graduate school in Princeton Seminary, he set sail for China. Stopping in Egypt to study Arabic, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of 25. Headlines across the nation mourned his loss. Was it a waste? Borden didn’t think so. Before his death, underneath the words, “No reserves” and “No retreats,” he wrote in his Bible, “No regrets.”

Look at verse 8. “She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.” We know from John’s gospel that it was Mary, Lazarus’ sister who poured perfume. Every time we see Mary, she is at the feet of Jesus. The first time we meet her, she is sitting at Jesus’ feet learning (Luke 10:38-42). She hears the Word, and wants to be taught the Word. The second time we see her, it is at the tomb after Lazarus has died (John 11). In other words, Mary has suffered, and gone through a very hard situation and time in her life. She has experienced loss, but she falls at the feet of Jesus, because he is the only One who can get her through this sadness, and grief, and depression. Here we see her again at Jesus’ feet. Now she knows fully who Jesus is, and she worships him with all that she has, and her greatest treasure.

What that shows us is a picture of the progression of the Christian life. We hear the Word, and are brought to saving faith. We continue to hear the Word, and grow in maturity and understanding. Even when tragedy or hard times come upon us, we fall at the feet of Jesus, and cling to him in faith. Ultimately, as we know him better and better, we love him more and more, and our hearts are filled with worship, and praise, and love for him. We understand that the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. We understand that he is the treasure. We understand that it’s all about Jesus! The gospel reveals the love of God that we cannot but respond to with whole-hearted surrender. Do you know the value of our Lord Jesus? How much is Jesus worth to you? Is Jesus worth wasting your life on, pouring it out without reservation? Look at verse 9. “I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Jesus saw the great hope that through his death the gospel would be completed, and the gospel would be preached to the whole world. Wherever the gospel is preached, Jesus’ death will be proclaimed, and whenever Jesus’ death is proclaimed, this woman’s action will be told in memory of her.

Look at verses 10-11. “Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.” When we read the gospel accounts, it seems these events are not directly chronological. Judas had time to consider Jesus’ words. He really didn’t like it. The example of the woman who wasted the perfume disgusted him. What makes a difference between the woman and Judas Iscariot? It is about accepting Jesus’ death on the cross. The woman understood and accepted Jesus’ death for our sins. So she wanted to participate in his suffering by pouring out perfume. She did what she could by offering what she had. But Judas did not accept Jesus’ death. He thought that Jesus was wasting his life and power by dying on the cross. Why not use his power to crush Romans? Why not use his power to establish the messianic kingdom. When he did not accept Jesus’ death, his heart became crooked. He then thought only about his own well-being. He wanted to find an opportunity to hand Jesus over to the authorities for some money. In reality, Judas did not love Jesus, though he was chosen as a disciple. When he did not give his heart to loving Jesus, his heart became polluted. He then desired to do a wicked thing and betray Jesus, the one who loved him and who would die for him. This great act of darkness in contrast with the woman’s action really challenges us to think about where our heart is.

Do we truly love Jesus with all our hearts? Are we here because we want to give to Jesus the lover of our souls, all our heart and all our devotion? Or are we here for some personal and secret reason to get something and satisfy our sinful nature? May God help us to know how valuable our Lord is, how lavish his love is for us, and we may be those who do many beautiful things for Jesus, like this woman.

Big Idea: How much is Jesus worth to you?