**She Has Done a Beautiful Thing**

November 24, 2013

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 and as a broken-hearted shepherd. Finally he was crucified as the Lamb of God. 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 the glory of God. The second coming of Jesus is our glorious hope, and we should be spiritually alert to keep watch in this troubled world. In this passage we see a love story, expressed through a woman who pours out her heart in love and appreciation to Jesus. But it is not primarily about her. It is the beautiful love story of Jesus, who poured out his life for us.

**First**, “A woman came with an alabaster jar” (1-5). Look at verse 1. “Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him.” The Passover was the first day of a celebration called the “Feast 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 lamb and spread its blood on the doorposts of their houses. When God saw the blood, he passed over that house.

The important reason why the Passover is mentioned here in verse 1 is because Jesus himself will become the Passover Lamb. According to John 1:29, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins 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 both 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 not touch us.

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 3. “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. 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 wedding. But she ran up 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, about $45,000 in Canada; $45,000 could support 150 children a whole year through World Vision. Imagine how many food pantries would be well stocked with that income. Imagine using it as a down payment for our Bible center. Instead, this woman poured it all over Jesus. 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. We had the international conference at Indiana University at Pennsylvania last summer. Sometimes I wonder why we have this conference, spending so much money, time and labor. Especially for those coming from Africa, they have to spend over $3,000 in airfare. It is like a year’s wages for them. Isn’t it a waste? Maybe it is better to spend that money in feeding the hungry in Africa, or build a Bible center.

**Second**, “she has done a beautiful thing to me” (6-9). The woman was getting quite a brow-beating 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 verses 7-8. “The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.” 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. But he still said, “She did what she could.” 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 titles, 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.

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.” What she did was personal and impractical. But Jesus promises to include this woman’s great act of love into the gospel down through history. Through history God has used this kind of wasteful love toward Jesus to advance the gospel. Whether we see fruit or not isn’t as important as loving Jesus, and looking for his acceptance. William W. Borden graduated from a high school in Chicago in 1904 as the millionaire heir to the Borden Dairy estate. As he traveled through Asia, the Middle East and Europe at the age of 16, 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, his steadfast commitment to love Jesus had great influence on his fellow students. Small group Bible studies he started in his freshman year increased from 150 students to over 1300 student participants by his graduation. He presided over a huge student missionary conference held at Yale. Yet in all this he kept his focus and direction, and narrowed down the calling to the Muslim Kansu people of China. Upon graduating, he turned down several high paying and noble 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 9 again. “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.” This woman’s act of love is an example and standard to be shared throughout the world. At the core, the gospel is not primarily about serving people, although sinners are lost without it. At its core, the gospel is primarily about pleasing God. The gospel creates in sinners a condition that satisfies the heart of God. 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?

**Third**, Judas, one of the Twelve, betrays Jesus (10-11). 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 disgusted him. He sensed that something wrong would happen to Jesus. 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.