

She did what she could - Rev Donald Morrison (Retired)

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[0 : 00] Shall we turn back a while for the passage we read in Scripture in Mark's Gospel, chapter 14. Mark's Gospel, chapter 14.

And in verse 6, Jesus said, leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want you can do good for them.

But you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has done what she could. The Bible records for us many selfless acts done on behalf of the Lord.

We might think of the widow of Zarephath in the Old Testament who gave her last morsel of food to the Lord's prophet Elijah. And was greatly blessed because thereafter the Lord provided constantly for her, replenishing the jar with her food supply.

We might think of the widow who put into the temple's treasury her last remaining coins. Jesus was contrasting her with those who had plenty of money, those who would have put in a lot of money into the temple treasury.

[1 : 24] But they held back a lot of money as well. But she was commended by Jesus because she gave all that she had, two small copper coins, to the work of the Lord.

And although she was unaware that Jesus was watching her, yet the Lord commended her generosity through love. And it has to be said through love. She gave all that she had to the Lord. And it's a sad reflection on the religious life of Israel during the time of Jesus. That in that great temple, the only thing seemingly that gave Jesus any pleasure was seeing that poor woman putting her two copper coins to the Lord's work.

And I wonder in Scotland today what would give the Lord pleasure when he looks at his church, his church throughout the land.

This land which was once known as the land of the book, but which sadly we can see that is no longer the case. And how wonderful it must be to hear the commendation of the Lord.

[2 : 33] The Roman centurion, for instance, was commended for his great faith and amazement. Jesus said to the crowd, I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

Even in Israel, the Lord's covenant people, where you would expect to find people of faith. And yet none of them matched up to the acts of this former pagan, or perhaps even still pagan, Roman centurion.

We might think of the woman who had suffered bleeding for 12 long years and who came up and touched the hem of the robe of Jesus and was commended for her act of faith.

Your faith has healed you, daughter. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering. We're looking at a lady here whom we know as Mary.

She was the sister of Martha. And she came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. And we can go back to Luke's gospel, chapter 7, and we find there a similar account.

[3 : 41] And there are many people who say, well, these are simply two accounts of the same action. But the account that we're reading and going to focus on here this morning took place towards the end of Jesus' three-year ministry.

Whereas that, recorded by Luke in chapter 7, took place near the beginning of his ministry. A woman, we're told in Luke chapter 7, she had led a sinful life.

And she knew herself to have been forgiven of her sins. And when she heard that Jesus had come to her community, when she heard that he had gone into the house of Simon the Pharisee, a house where she would have been thrown out if it were not for the presence of Jesus, she went in and she

too had an alabaster jar of expensive perfume, which Luke records for us.

She poured it out over his feet. And then, unwinding the coils of her hair, she shed tears over the feet of Christ and wiped them with her hair.

It was an act of amazing love. And she was commended by Jesus. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace, he said to her.

[4 : 59] And here was another woman who, having heard that Jesus was in the locale, did the very same thing. It was a very selfless act. But as we were reading here, it was an act that brought criticism, even from the disciples of Jesus, but which brought commendation from Christ himself.

The first time, as I said, was in Galilee. You're on in Jesus' ministry here. We are now approaching Jerusalem as Jesus goes towards the climax, the fulfillment of his earthly ministry.

And before we examine this, let's notice the intentions of the religious authorities. The high priests wanted to kill Jesus. But as we read in verse 2, not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.

They wanted to arrest Jesus. They wanted to kill him slyly, because they knew how popular Jesus was. They knew that if they tried to do it in broad daylight, there would be an outcry.

And so they planned to do it slyly and at night. And at the last supper, when Jesus took the cup, he said, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

[6 : 23] And he added, But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him.

The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. Decreed in eternity. When Father, Son, and Holy Spirit covenanted at a point in time, the Eternal Son would become incarnate, would become a human being, would become a man, and would come into this dark and sin-sick world to do what no man or woman, individually or collectively, could possibly do.

And that is, pay the penalty for the sins of humanity. The high priest decreed that Jesus would die after the feast, when all the people had dispersed and gone back to their homes, when things were quiet.

But God had decreed otherwise. The Lamb of God, the true Passover Lamb, would be slaughtered during the feast. And it's a reminder to us that what God decrees, no one can alter.

And when we look through the Gospels, we ask the question, how many times did the devil try to overthrow God's purposes from the very beginning of the Bible?

[7 : 45] And during the time of David, we see there the number of times that Saul, the king in Israel, tried to kill David. But the Lord had given a promise that David would one day reign in Saul's place, and that one of his descendants would forever reign on the throne of David.

And in that lovely book of Esther, we read of that evil man, Haman, who had an irrevocable order issued for the total destruction of the Jews in the Persian Empire.

But the Lord had already planned to save his people through a Jew. And as Jesus told the lady at the well at Seicher, when he was going up the Jordan Valley and going through Samaria, salvation is from the Jews.

And that man Haman, for all his plans and for all the power that he wielded in Persia, having the ear of the king, yet he ended up on his own gallows.

And Esther and the Jewish people were freed. And then Herod murdered all the boys in Bethlehem under two years of age in a bid to destroy the king of the Jews.

[9 : 00] Remember the words of the Magi who had come on that long, long journey. We have come to worship the one who has been born the king of the Jews. They didn't come to worship the one who would one day take his place and become the king of the Jews.

But Jesus was the king of the Jews from the moment of conception and from his very birth. But the Lord had already warned Joseph to take his family away to the safety of Egypt.

And then finally, it seemed that Satan had a triumph. Jesus was nailed to a cross. He was receiving God's curse. As we read in Deuteronomy, anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.

And here, the high priest deliberately wanted Jesus hung on a tree, crucified, nailed to a wooden cross so that he would receive the curse of God.

And unbeknown to them, that's exactly what Jesus did receive. He received the curse of God because he was bearing the sins of the Lord's people. My grandson, Johnny, he's 14 now, but a few years ago when he was 11 or 12, he asked me a very searching question.

[10:20] He said, Shen, when Jesus was hanging on the cross, why did God have to look away from him? That's quite a deep question, isn't it, for an 11-year-old.

And I explained that God cannot look upon sin because his eyes are holy and pure. As we read in Habakkuk or Habakkuk, God's eyes are too pure than to behold iniquity.

So God took the sin of his people and he placed them on the head of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And for the first and only time in all eternity, he had to turn his beloved countenance away from his son such that Jesus on the cross cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And of course, Jesus was willing to enter into the forsakenness of dereliction in order to save you and I from having to undergo the same punishment.

But Jesus' punishment lasted for an afternoon. The man or woman who dies without Christ, their punishment will last for an eternity, not just an afternoon.

[11:34] That's a dreadful thought, isn't it? And so Satan thought he had triumphed when he saw Jesus nailed to the cross. But on the third day, he rose from the grave.

And in Psalm 33, we're reminded of God's sovereignty. The Lord foils the plans of the nations. He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand forever.

The purposes of his heart through all generations. And so here was a woman who heard that Jesus was dining at the home of Simon the leper.

And so she came in with this alabaster flask of pure nard. The alabaster flask itself would have been very valuable. It would have been carved by hand.

And alabaster wasn't something you could just pick up by the wayside. It was a very expensive product. And it was filled with pure nard, a very expensive perfume.

[12:36] I was Googling nard. Where did the nard come from? It came from the foothills of the Himalayas. And just to pay the transportation costs to bring that nard all the way to Jerusalem would itself have cost a lot of money.

So we do not know how much did this woman Mary pay for the nard. Or perhaps it was a gift that some admirer had given to her. And it may be that she saw her future security in that jar of expensive perfume.

But we simply do not know. But what could have been more special than the fact that she broke open the jar? She didn't unscrew the lid. She broke it open and anointed Jesus with it.

She took what she perhaps thought would be the guarantee of her future security. And she dumped it on the head of Jesus, whom she saw as her true future security.

She poured it on his head. John's Gospel tells us it was on his feet. There's no contradiction here because the ointment would have run down over the body of Christ.

[13:52] And it would have dripped onto his feet. When Moses anointed Aaron for the high priesthood, the oil ran down his beard and onto his clothes.

We see that in Psalm 133. When I was a student, one of the sermons I repeated over and over again in many places.

And I might have repeated it here. I cannot remember. I was preaching about the ornate robes of Aaron, the high priest. Gorgeous robes made of expensive materials and with precious stones inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel.

And it must have been a painstaking work to create those robes for the high priest. And then when it came to Moses anointing him for the work that he would be doing on behalf of the Lord's people, he took the holy oil, the anointing oil.

And you would imagine because of the nature of the garments that Aaron was wearing, he would have measured it out a very small quantity. But no, he just took it and he tipped it out on the head of the high priest.

[15:02] He didn't measure it out and it ran down over his beard and it ran down over these beautiful ornate robes. And it's a reminder of how God lavishes his love upon us.

He lavishes his love upon us. He doesn't just measure it out. Remember the words he gave to Abraham. Abraham, take your son, your only son, the son whom you love, and sacrifice him in the region of Mount Moriah.

And God himself has taken his son, his only son, the son whom he loves, and he has poured him out on the altar of the cross, that we through believing in him might not perish but have everlasting a life.

And what this woman here did when she tipped out this pure nard was an act of sheer love and devotion to her Lord and Savior.

And what a contrast to the spiteful hate of the religious authorities who wanted to arrest Jesus and put him to death. And John in his version of this particular incident tells us the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

[16:21] She gave without counting the cost. Just as the Lord God gave his son to us without counting the cost. God took the most precious thing he has and he poured him out, as I said, on the altar of the cross.

And when we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, wherever we go, if we are truly in love with Jesus, we carry about with us something of the fragrance of Christ.

And I remember many years ago, my late wife used to make a lot of Harris Tweed bags and teddies. Some of you here may have bought some of them at WFM sales.

And there was a world sheepdog trials were taking place in Easter Ross. And we had booked a table in the craft tent.

And we were selling Margaret's Harris Tweed crafts. And we saw a lady down the end of the tent. And she was also selling Harris Tweed crafts. Turned out she was a lady from the other side of the island.

[17:30] And so my wife went over to see what the competition was selling. And as she looked at the crafts that this lady had produced, it suddenly dawned on her that this woman was a Christian.

How did she know that? Well, I believe it's because there was something of the fragrance of Christ around that woman. And so she became a friend to Margaret.

And here when this woman had poured out the nard upon Jesus, the reaction was harsh. What a waste. It could have been sold for a year's wages and given to the poor.

It could have provided a daily meal for over 300 families for one day or one family for 300 days. Very noble and very considerate.

But as Jesus tells us, we will always have the poor with us. And John tells us in his version that it was Judas Iscariot who showed the most indignation.

[18:32] He comments on Judas. He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

And Matthew tells us it was the disciples themselves, not just Judas Iscariot. And their reactions simply underlined the overall hardness of their hearts and the poverty of their love for Jesus.

Or lack of love in the case of Judas. And it's interesting, isn't it, that it was this event that finally made Judas go out to betray Jesus to the religious authorities.

This act of devotion, this act of love, was simply too much for him to bear. And rather than devotion to the Lord, Judas saw Jesus as a means to an end.

Perhaps for three years he'd enjoyed the accolades of having been numbered amongst the twelve. He saw Jesus as a free meal ticket. Mary's attitude wasn't, what could Jesus do for me?

[19:39] But what can I do for him? She gave, he took. And at the end of the day, the Bible is the mirror of our souls.

We look into the Bible and we can measure ourselves against the lives and the devotion or lack of devotion of the individuals presented to us in the pages of Scripture.

The true Christian will often be maligned. But Jesus takes note of every act done on his behalf and he will speak up on behalf of his people.

Nothing said or done, no matter how seemingly insignificant, who was unnoticed and unrewarded. He saw the widow putting the two coins into the temple treasury and he commended the faith and love of Mary here, saying that this selfless act that she had engaged in was a beautiful act.

It was a beautiful act. And we're told here she did what she could. She did what she could. She grabbed the opportunity and she used the resources that she had in order to do something for the Lord.

[20:55] And we might ask ourselves, what can we do for the Lord? Do we take advantage of the opportunities that come our way? Do we take advantage of the resources that the Lord gives to us?

Do we use our skills and talents in his service? Do we willingly lavish our love and our devotion on him who willingly paid the price for your sins and mine?

Mary did what she could. In contrast, the others simply criticized. Within the church, we find that it's always a few people who are willing to do what they can.

But sadly, there are others who do nothing and sit and criticize. John writes, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us.

That word, lavished. It speaks of what this woman had done to Jesus. It speaks of what God does for us through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 56] And Paul in Ephesians chapter 1, in Christ we have redemption through his blood. And she was merely returning the love that Jesus had first lavished on her.

We love, writes John, because he first loved us. And when we consider the glorious riches of his grace that he has lavished on us, can we not love him in return?

The disciples seemed concerned for the poor. But as Jesus said, the poor you will always have and you can help them at any time.

And Jesus was throwing down a challenge. In Matthew 25, I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.

I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me.

[23 : 05] And when the righteous asked Jesus, when did they do these things? He replied, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

Ultimately, Jesus came to die for the poor in spirit. Those who recognize that within themselves there is no good thing. And that our own inherent righteousness is like filthy rags.

And that we can do nothing to commend ourselves to the Lord. But God sent his son to die for the poor in spirit.

To lift us out of the dung heap and to set us with princes. And the opportunity has passed, I'm sure, for any one of us here to take expensive perfume and pour it over the head of Jesus.

But we can still do what we can. We can still do what we can. And that surely includes telling some poor soul that there is a Savior who, though he was rich, yet for their sakes became poor.

[24 : 12] So that they, through his poverty, might themselves become rich. Amen. And may the Lord add his blessing to these thoughts and meditations on his word.

Lord, eternal and ever-blessed Lord, we thank you for your grace, your love. We thank you for the wonderful gift of Jesus, the pearl of great price that you have lavished upon us.

And we pray, Lord, that you would open our hearts. And if there are any here today who are as yet strangers to your grace, Lord, touch their lives, change them, and bring them to see their need of the beautiful Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Savior.

The one who is the way, the truth, and the life. And only through him can we come to the presence of God. Forgive us for anything said this morning that is not in conformity with your word.

And may the glory be yours and the blessings ours. In Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. We conclude by singing in Psalm 45.

[25 : 20] It's the first version in the Psalter on page 268. We sing from verse 10 to 15.

O daughter, hearken and regard, and do thine ear incline. Likewise, forget thy father's house and people that are thine. Then, of the king desired, shall be thy beauty vehemently.

Because he is thy Lord, do thou him worship reverently. The daughter there of Tyre shall be with gifts and offerings great. Those of the people that are rich, thy favor shall entreat.

Page 268, Psalm 45, the first version, singing verses 10 to 15. O daughter, hearken and regard. O daughter, hearken and regard.

[26 : 22] And do thine ear incline. Likewise, forget thy father's house and people that are thine.

Then, of the king desired, shall be thy beauty vehemently.

Because he is thy Lord, do thou him worship reverently.

The daughter there of Tyre shall be with gifts and offerings great.

Those of the people that are rich, thy faith ever shall entreat.

[28 : 05] Behold the daughter of the king.

All glory as hell. All glory as hell. And with embroideries of gold.

My god who has done that. My god who has done that. My god who has done that. God, and swat have been. She shall be brought down to the king, and robes with needle rod.

A fellow virgin following shall unto thee be brought.

They shall be brought with gladness great, and birth on every side.

[29 : 42] Into the palace of the king, and there they shall abide.

And now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, one God, rest and remain with you all, now and forever. Amen.