

Jesus' Commendation of a Good Work

Matthews 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8

Jesus is making His final approach to Calvary. He arrives at Bethany a few days before He will be crucified. Bethany was two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus visited Bethany six times. Bethany appears to be one of Christ's favorite places to visit (not Nazareth... Jerusalem).

In our text Jesus is at the house of Simon the leper with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. It is a picture of the three-fold ministry of a local church:

1. Lazarus pictures the church *bearing* **WITNESS** to new life in Christ. Although Lazarus never speaks a word, he is a bold witness of the power of Christ. You witness two ways: (1) By what you say, and most importantly, (2) By what you are. Every church needs Lazarus'.
2. Martha pictures the church *busy* **WORKING** for Christ. While we are not saved by good works, we are saved unto good works. God has given us a work to do. Every church needs Martha's.
3. Mary pictures the church *bestowing* **WORSHIP** upon Christ. Worship is manifested in bowing at Jesus' feet... giving an offering to Jesus... and working for Jesus (Mk. 14:6— "*a good work ON ME*"). Every church needs Mary's.

What is "*a good work?*" Anything done in love for Christ's sake is a good work. Anything we do that is not done out of love for Jesus does not deserve the title of a good work.

I. **A good work for Christ will be COSTLY.**

A. The **POURING** of the ointment.

1. Jesus and His disciples are reclining around the table having supper with Lazarus while Martha is serving.
2. Mary approaches Jesus from behind with a container of a very costly ointment of spike-nard.
3. Mary puts some of the ointment on Jesus' feet. She looks at Jesus and tears swell up in



her eyes and thinks, “He is worthy of the whole box!” And she pours the entire contents upon Jesus’ head.

- B. The **PRICE** of the ointment (John 12:5—300 pence).
1. She gave the equivalent of one year’s wages. She didn’t care about the cost!
 - True worship doesn’t count the cost. Jesus is worth it!
 - Mary gave her **BEST**—Not something left over, broken, or out of style.
 2. This expensive ointment was often part of a woman’s dowery. If so, this offering would possibly sacrifice Mary’s future relationship as a wife or mother.

II. **A good work for Christ will be CONSPICUOUS** (John 12:3).

- A. **EXHIBITED**—Real devotion to God cannot be hid. The whole house was filled with the aroma of the ointment. Everyone noticed.
- ➡ One problem in some churches today is worship is considered to be a private matter—not done overtly. Worship should be confined to our closet.
- B. **UNINHIBITED**— I’ve heard some preachers say: “We don’t have worship services—We have preaching services.” NO! This service is not about a preacher! It is not about sermonizing! No, sir! I came this morning because I want to worship the Lord and have Him touch my heart! And when He does, I’m just liable to get emotionally expressive about it!
- ➡ When you run head long into the wonderful grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, you can reach a point where you just don’t care who knows how much you love Him!

III. **A good work for Christ will be CRITICIZED.**

- ➡ Real acts of devotion toward God will attract the criticism and opposition. There will always be someone who will question any act of devotion to Christ.

- The instigator of the criticism against Mary was a devil. His critical spirit spread to the other disciples like cancer (Mt. 26:8).
- A. They question the **WHY** (v. 5). It is interesting the first recorded utterance of Judas in Scripture is, "**Why?**"
1. Critics will always question your motives in worship— Why is he raising his hands? Why is he shouting like that? Why are they clapping?
 2. Judas was a thief and couldn't care less about the poor. Surely Jesus was more interested in the poor than he was. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor.
- B. They question the **WAY** (v. 5— "*...sold...*").
1. Judas had everyone fooled (except Christ). His fellow disciples trusted him to be the treasurer. They weren't going to trust impetuous Peter, or Matthew, a former tax collector.
 2. When Judas said, "Why wasn't this sold and given to the poor," I can almost hear some of the apostles thinking: "Praise God. Judas is so spiritual. He is always thinking about the needs of others before himself."
- C. They question the **WHO** (v. 12— "*...given to the POOR...*").
- "This should have been given to somebody else." Typical of the jealousy of Satan—Judas had a problem with WHO was being honored and getting the glory. The devil wants the glory and the worship.
- Judas was implying Jesus was not worthy of this kind of devotion—or expense.
1. Mark 14:4— "*Why was this WASTE of the ointment made?*" What an insult that honoring Christ is considered a waste!
As if...
 - ...the great God of glory is not worth it.
 - ...the One who created the universe and everything in it is not worth it.
 - ...the One who saved you from a devil's hell is not worth it.

- I want to bless His name and say, “He is very much worth it, and more!
2. Why didn’t Mary use this ointment to anoint her brother Lazarus when he died?
 - a) Consider this: Every time Mary is mentioned in the Scripture, she is at Jesus’ feet intently listening to His words. There is little doubt to what Jesus was speaking—He spoke openly about his coming death, burial and resurrection. Christ’s disciples didn’t get it! But Mary did!
 - b) Mary was the only one who understood “*aforehand*” what was going to happen (Mk. 14:9). Therefore she hid this precious ointment away for a time she could anoint Jesus *prior* to His death.
 - c) Mary realized there would be no need to save the ointment until after Christ died and was buried—because He wasn’t going to stay buried. Therefore she set the ointment aside to anoint before He died!

➡ **What an act of faith!** It illustrates the importance to sit at Jesus’ feet and pay close attention to what He says.

IV. A good work for Christ will be COMMENDED (Mark 14:6-9).

- A. Jesus **DEFENDED** her (v. 6). He is my advocate. Jesus stood up for Mary’s devotion. If Jesus accepts it, it doesn’t matter what others may think or say!
- B. Jesus **COMMENDED** her (vs. 6, 8). This is one of the most impressive commendations our Lord ever made was about Mary —“*She hath done what she could.*” There was nothing more she could have done!
 1. The question is not how much I have done or given, but could I have done or given more than I have?
 2. Too often we focus on what we can’t do instead of seeing what we can do.

3. **Ability is the measure of responsibility**—God will only hold you responsible for what you are able to do—Not what you cannot do.

C. Jesus **MEMORIALIZED** her (v. 9). Mary's story is now published in thousands of languages and has been spoken about 2000 years later as a memorial to her!

SUMMATION: (vs. 8-9 cf. Mt. 26:13): Mary was and is remembered for what she did for Christ! As I consider this text, I have to ask myself: How will I be remembered? We'll either be remembered for the good we've done or the bad. Many will not be remembered at all because they did nothing at all!

"*She hath done what she could.*" Could the Lord say that of me or you?

I am only one, but I am *one*...

I cannot do everything, but I can do *something*.

That which I can do, I ought to do, and what I ought to do, by the grace of God, *I will do!*"