

Mark 14:1-9

The Value Christ Places on Specific Acts of Devotion

She hath done what she could... v. 8

What have you done for the Lord? It's a searching question to contemplate isn't it? In a general sense many would answer by saying *I'm trying to live for Christ by walking in the ways that are pleasing to Him and by trying to avoid things that are not pleasing to Him. I'm trying to raise my children to believe in Him; I'm trying to conduct my business in a way that honors Him; I'm trying to uphold a good work ethic in the world and to be above reproach in all my dealings* etc.

Those answers are all good but they're also very general. What I'm interested in this morning is specific acts of devotion. This, after all, is what we find in our text – a specific act of devotion that so impresses Christ that He memorializes that act by saying in verse 9 *Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.*

Do we not see in such a statement by Christ what high value Christ places on specific acts of devotion? It's interesting to note that in this passage as well as the parallel passage in Mt. 26 that this woman is not even named. Both passages – the one in Matthew's gospel and the one in Mark's gospel speak of this act of devotion being memorialized but neither passage names the woman.

We have another anointing mentioned in Luke's gospel but that passage is clearly a different anointing than what we find in our text. In that passage the setting is the house, not of Simon the leper, but Simon the Pharisee. The woman in that passage is not named either but we are told that she was a sinner and that incident took place much earlier in Christ's ministry than what we have in Matthew and Mark's gospel.

We also have an account in John's gospel chapter 12 of Christ being anointed in similar fashion to what we find in our text. And in John's gospel the woman actually is named. It's Mary, the sister of Martha and the sister of Lazarus. I'm inclined to think or at least to allow the possibility that the anointing of that chapter is also a different anointing than what we find in our text. If you look carefully at the passage in Jn. 12 you'll discover a number of differing details from our text including the time reference. The event of that chapter was 6 days before the Passover. The event in our text is also referenced to a point in time which is 2 days before the Passover.

There are a number of things that the account in John's gospel has in common with the passages in Matthew and Mark but there are also a number of differences which I say allow the possibility that we have accounts of 3 different anointings of Christ. The thing I find striking in the account of our text and in Matthew's gospel is that in both instances the devotional act is memorialized by Christ yet in both instances the woman is not named.

This leads me to think that the name of the woman is not nearly as important as the specific devotional act of the woman. I believe Christ wants us to focus on her action more

than on the woman herself. And the reason I believe Christ wants us to focus on her action is that we'll appreciate the high value that Christ places on such specific acts of devotion. This is why I raise the question – *what have you done for Christ? What specific act of devotion can you find in your own life that was done toward Christ?*

The fact that this specific act of devotion is memorialized by Christ teaches us that this is something to be remembered and so that's what I want you to do this morning. I want you to remember this act of devotion. In particular:

We Should Remember the Value that Christ Places on Specific Acts of Devotion

And the question I'll endeavor to answer this morning is *why* – why we should remember the value that Christ places on specific acts of devotion. We should remember that value, first of all:

I. That We May Avail Ourselves of the Same Opportunities

Verse 8 tells us that *she did what she could*. This is Christ's own tribute to her – *she did what she could*. There were many things she could not do and would not do. And especially is that the case in comparison to the others that were there. We know that Christ's disciples were there. Peter would have been there as well as James and John and Andrew and others.

These would be the ones who would go out by twos and would preach the gospel and work miracles. Seventy of them had already gone forth and had come back rejoicing and had testified that even the devils had been subject to them through Christ's name. It would be from among this body of men that much of the New Testament would be written and the New Testament church would be ruled.

And yet none of the disciples would be memorialized by Christ the way this un-named woman would be memorialized. None of them would hear said of them that *Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her*. The disciples would argue among themselves as to who was the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. They would undoubtedly in the course of those arguments compare the spectacular things that they were empowered to do.

This woman, on the other hand, would perform no miracle or write any letters under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. She would not start a church or stand before rulers. But as Christ Himself says *she did what she could*. And the lesson that stands out from her action and from Christ's commendation of her action is that Christ expects no more or no less from you and from me. We must also do what we can.

Notoriety, you see, is not what brings opportunities for specific acts of devotion to Christ. This woman did not need and did not seek notoriety. What she had, rather, was a sincere and heart-felt love for Christ. She certainly exemplifies the very thing that Paul

says about agape love in 1Cor. 13 when he writes in vv. 4,5 *charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil...*

We saw in our recent studies of the Sermon on the mount that notoriety has the potential to nullify what we would endeavor to do for Christ. Do you remember how many times Christ stated that our charitable deeds or our alms-giving was not to be done in order to be seen of men but was to be done rather toward God – the same with praying and the same with fasting. These things are to be practiced in a God-ward direction not a man-ward direction.

And when our specific acts of devotion are done that way then God takes note and Christ remembers. Nobody else may notice. Do you remember the widow with her two mites? She was in line with the rich men who would cast their gifts into the treasury. They were the ones that drew attention to themselves. They were the ones who impressed others with their show of piety. But who did Christ notice? He noticed the one that went unnoticed by everybody else.

The opportunity exists, then, for you to engage in specific acts of devotion that will be remembered by Christ. Availing yourselves of such opportunities should be your highest priority. Oh that you and I may hear Christ Himself say to us on that day when we stand before Him *well done thou good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*. Nothing we gain in this life will come close to comparing to hearing those words. Nothing we gain in this world will have the value that Christ's commendation will have.

But if we're going to avail ourselves of the opportunities that will gain Christ's commendation, we must know something of the nature of this woman's devotional act. There are certain things about this woman's action, you see, that made her devotion valuable to Christ. Consider with me, next, therefore, that we should remember the value Christ placed on this woman's act of devotion:

II. That We May Sacrifice as This Woman Sacrificed

Each of the gospels contains an account of Christ being anointed. And in 3 of the 4 accounts we're told that the ointment that was used for anointing Christ was *very precious* or *very costly*. Mark's gospel alone gives us a conservative estimate of the cost of the ointment. *It could have been sold for more than three hundred pence*, the disciples grumbled.

However the value may compare to our currency today the text makes it plain that the ointment was expensive – expensive enough to move the disciples to regard the use of it on this occasion as extravagant waste. Only in the case of the sinful woman in Luke 7 are we given no idea of the cost of the ointment she used. In that instance the emphasis is on the tears she shed while anointing the feet of Christ.

The point that needs to be emphasized from these various accounts of Christ's anointing is that specific acts of devotion that are highly valued by Christ will cost you something.

This may be one of the reasons why such acts of devotion are too rare. Don't we have to acknowledge to our shame that much of our devotion to Christ takes place when it costs us nothing? We serve Christ when we think it's convenient to serve Him because to do otherwise would cost us time. We serve Christ when we feel up to the task of serving Him because to do otherwise would cost us effort and we'd have to abandon our comfort zones.

I'm reminded of David in 2Sam. 24 who was instructed in v. 18 to *Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite*. It was an emergency. A pestilence had been unleashed upon Israel and the angel of the Lord was stretching out His hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it. This altar had to be erected and the sacrifice made in order to restrain God's righteous anger.

And when David explained to Araunah that he needed to buy his threshing floor in order to erect an altar, Araunah offered to give the designated spot to David along with the necessary things for the sacrifice. And we read in v. 24 of that chapter a statement that David makes to Araunah that demonstrates the principle that must govern our worship:

2Sa 24:24 And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

Our service to Christ does cost us something, you see. And this is not to say that there's merit to what we pay in terms of time or effort or money. I think it would be more true to say that costly acts of devotion reflect Christ-likeness. The governing factor here must be our awareness of what Christ's service to us cost Him. And in the case of this woman in our text there appears to be at least a hint of awareness that His service to us would cost Him His life. Look at what Christ says of her devotion again in v. 8 *She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying*.

You see the connection, then, between her devotion and Christ's death? Her devotion was grounded in Christ's death – her devotion gained its merit on account of Christ's death. And the fact that she made a great sacrifice in her specific act of devotion demonstrates a certain conformity to the sacrifice that Christ Himself would make.

Aren't you glad this morning, that Christ was willing to leave His comfort zone in order to serve you? If redemption was to be accomplished then Christ must come into this world and be born as a man. He must leave the environment of heaven where all is peace and bliss to come into a sin-cursed world. And all the while He was in this world He never really found a comfort zone, so to speak.

There was nothing comfortable about His incarnation. He must be born in a stable under extreme circumstances. And shortly after His birth His parents must flee with Him into Egypt to escape the jealous rage of Herod. During the days of His earthly ministry He would say *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head* (Mt. 8:20).

It's not hard to tell, is it, that Christ was never really very comfortable in this world. And when it came to His death, there was certainly nothing comfortable in that. We hope that when our time comes we'll be able to lay down peacefully and drift off to sleep and wake up in heaven. Christ would know no such thing. His death represented the epitome of cruelty. His death was specifically designed to bring forth the most agonizing and torturous pain. He must die a slow death as well as a humiliating death.

And all of this constituted His service to you and to me. Regarding His birth – it was unto you. *Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.* Regarding His death – it was for you. *This is my body broken for you – This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.*

His service to us, then, cost Him much and He was willing to pay the price because He set His love and grace and affection upon us. It becomes apparent, then, why He places high value upon the devotion of His followers when that devotion costs them. He places value upon such devotion because He sees in it at least a dim reflection of His own devotion to you.

The next time, then, that you have opportunity to serve and worship Christ and perform some specific act of devotion toward Him but you don't feel like it – you would do well to ask yourselves – *Did Christ feel like leaving heaven? Did Christ feel like being beaten and buffeted? Did Christ feel like having nails driven into His hands and His feet?* It might help you to overcome your infirmities and avail yourself of the opportunity to serve and worship Christ. You won't come close to sacrificing as He sacrificed but that won't stop Him from placing high value on your devotion.

There is one more characteristic about this woman's devotion that we must cover. We must appreciate the high value that Christ placed on the devotion of this woman:

III. That We May Emulate Her Meekness

There is something in this passage that is sadly ironic but must be acknowledged as holding true even to this very day. The sad truth is this – when you avail yourselves of the opportunity to show your devotion to Christ through specific sacrificial deeds you will be misunderstood – you'll be criticized and you'll have to bear reproach.

Note the reproach that is heaped on this woman in v. 4 – *And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.*

Mark's gospel identifies the critics by saying *there were some that had indignation within themselves*. Mark comes across as being too embarrassed to identify these critics specifically. Matthew's gospel is very specific. Mt 26:8 *But when his disciples saw [it], they had indignation, saying, To what purpose [is] this waste?*

The irony of the situation is that the criticism of this woman's devotion to Christ did not come from outside the circle of Christ's followers. These words are words you would expect from the Pharisees. They were, after all, constant antagonists of Christ's. They were

all the time searching for ways to criticize Christ. You wouldn't expect anything but criticism from them. The tragic irony of the case before us now, however, is that the criticism was coming from the disciples. And what they failed to realize was that they were not merely criticizing the woman but at least indirectly they were criticizing Christ Himself.

And as I said – the sad irony of the passage finds its way to our own day and to our own lives. How often have you found your own devotion to Christ misunderstood and criticized? Worse still – how often have you found yourself manifesting a critical spirit toward someone who has endeavored to show his or her devotion to Christ? You could have done it better you say to yourself. You would have shown more compassion. You would have been more practical. You would not have been as wasteful.

We sometimes harbor the notion, don't we, that we're not really engaged in malicious gossip as long as our criticisms are restricted to our Christian circles. Then our gossip becomes sanctified discernment and our real desire is to help the subjects of our criticisms to improve.

Would you note here regarding this un-named woman in our text that she never replied to the criticisms of the pious disciples. She didn't answer them with the same type of words – she didn't allow herself to be pulled down to their level. She was content to leave the matter with Christ. She was able to cast this burden on Him. In the words of Psalm 37 she was able to *commit her way unto the LORD and to trust also in Him* with the assurance that *He shall bring it to pass and He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day.*

And don't we find Christ doing this very thing for her? Would you notice that Christ defends this woman and He vindicates her act of devotion *Let her alone* He says in v. 6 *why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me.* And then He vindicates her further by memorializing her act of devotion.

And so the thing to take from her example is the truth that the Lord accepts your acts of devotion toward Him even when others challenge it and criticize it. The Lord places very high value on actions of devotion even when others may not see much value to it and may even view it as a waste of time or money or effort.

Let me conclude, then, where I began. I began with a question – what have you done for Christ? How do you show your love to Him? Perhaps more to the point now would be the question – what will you do for Christ? If you find yourself willing and desirous of availing yourselves of the opportunity to show Him your devotion then you should know that it will cost you something. It may cost you time – it may cost you effort – it may cost you money. Is Christ worth the sacrifice?

Your devotion to Him may also bring you reproach. Is Christ worth the reproach? I hope this morning that you'll go from the Lord's house with your heart stirred to find ways – specific ways to show your devotion to Christ. If you, like Paul can say *thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift* then you'll also reach the conclusion that Christ is worthy of your

devotion. May your heart be further stirred through the realization that Christ places very high value on your devotion to Him. You can expect that while others may challenge and criticize you, Christ Himself will defend and vindicate you. May your heart be stirred, then, to commit to Him in specific ways – your time, your effort, your gifts, indeed your all.