

Anointed At Bethany

The identity of this dear lady who anointed the Saviour at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper is unknown. Some think she was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, some suggest Mary Magdalene. However, the Holy Spirit has withheld her name and the reason seems to be that we look not so much upon the woman, but upon the gesture of love and the act of sacrifice offered by her to her Saviour. She understood what few in the room that night grasped. She came aforehand to anoint Christ's body to the burying.

A testimony for the ages

The Lord's appreciation and affirmation of her love and sacrifice will not allow us to overlook this beautiful act or its symbolical meaning, for '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'. So be it. Tomorrow, we shall remember the dear soul who came aforehand to anoint Christ's body to the burying.

Kindness and criticism

There is a stark contrast highlighted in these verses. There is the kindness, compassion and understanding of the woman who brought her very costly offering to the Saviour. But there is also hard-heartedness; a critical spirit from indignant murmurers who observe this beautiful and precious gesture and completely fail to understand its significance. Out of alleged concern for the poor they condemn the gift as excessive and the giver for her extravagance, even calling it a waste. However, it is no waste what is dedicated to the Lord and the Saviour will have none of their fault-finding, telling them, 'Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.'

Satan enters Judas

It is perhaps the force of the Saviour's rebuke against their carping that provokes Judas to leave the meal and return to Jerusalem to betray his Master to the Jews. His offer to deliver Christ to them directly and privately is an opportunity too good to refuse despite the chief priests and the scribes' earlier decision to delay their move against Jesus until the end of the feast. Thus the will of God is done, and the wrath of man bows to His praise.

A timely lesson

There are many lessons and warnings in this little passage concerning attitudes, values and being judgmental. Some judged this lady and held forth the poor as being more eligible for her kindness than her Saviour. They might have felt they had right on their side, but the Lord knew better. He graciously elevates the sacrificial act of this woman and honours her love for Him above the good works done to others. There is something very tender and moving in the Saviour's words, 'she hath done what she could'. Here was a dear soul who had her priorities right despite the criticism of fellow believers.

Anointing for burial

She came to the Lord at the last opportunity she would ever have and brought a gift both thoughtful and costly. The depth of her awareness, consideration and sensitivity in this moment passed right over the heads of most of those present. She brought 'an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head'. Beautiful gesture! Soon that head would be battered, bloodied and bruised but first it was anointed with the most odorous balm this woman could buy. Every blow that fell upon the Saviour's head, and every thorn that pierced His brow hereafter, was cushioned with healing ointment; every strike scented with spikenard.

What do we learn?

Tomorrow we shall speak of the Lord Jesus and all He has done, but in accordance with His wishes we shall also speak of what this woman did. For the Lord has said that her coming aforehand and anointing His body to the burying shall be spoken of her throughout the whole world for a memorial. Some of those present at this meal in Simon's home dined for the health of their bodies, some groaned in narrowness of spirit and prejudice of heart, but this woman engaged with her Saviour. She touched the Lord with her kindness, and comforted Him with her love. She enriched the gathering that evening by her presence, and filled the room with the sweet scent that sprung from her deed. She did a good work upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

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