

OUR BEST FOR CHRIST

"She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." Mark 14:8.

Jesus Christ was a frequent visitor in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany. There the latch-string was always out, and the table was always set. Jesus found this well-ordered home much to His liking. It was a home of true family love and one in which Jesus was always a welcome guest. These two sisters and one brother were ever ready and glad to give their best to the Lord Jesus.

On one occasion when Jesus was visiting in their home, Mary sat at His feet and listened attentively to Him while Martha was busy preparing the meal. Martha said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me alone? bid her therefore that she help me." Jesus replied, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." In those two women Jesus saw the two great attitudes of life: Mary was putting the emphasis upon spiritual and eternal things, while Martha was putting it upon material and temporal things. Mary represents those who put God and His kingdom first, and Martha represents those who make the world of "things" the end of life. All of us are compelled to make the choice between spiritual and temporal things or material and temporal things. Because Mary set the right example for us and all others for all time, Jesus commended her for her wise choice and held her up as an enduring example.

Tuesday before our Lord was put to death on Friday, He went out to Bethany to spend the night with His friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, in whose home He always found relaxation and encouragement. That evening a feast was given in His honor in the house of Simon, whom Jesus had previously healed of leprosy. Among those present were His disciples and His close friends, Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead a short while before. It is quite likely that Martha had charge of dinner, which was the very kind of thing she liked. What grateful recognition and homage were paid Him at the very time the authorities were seeking to arrest Him.

The occasion was one of intense interest. It was a puzzled, wondering, and anxious group gathered around Simon's table that evening. There was a very unusual air of suspense and sadness because they all felt that the storm, which had been gathering about Jesus, could not be delayed much longer. With the shadow of the cross His path and the weight of the sin of the world upon His heart, Jesus told them plainly that He was going to be put to death.

Mary had been very close to Jesus. She had talked with Him often and intimately in her home. She realized that He was about to be taken from them. Her keen intuition convinced her that this was the last chance she would have to show her great love for Him. While the meal progressed, Mary, not fearing what others would think or say, resorted to a device of her own planning to pay grateful homage to Jesus. Disregarding the custom of her day that a woman should not enter a room where men were feasting except for the purpose of serving, Mary went to Jesus, who was reclining at the table, and broke the seal of an alabaster box of precious ointment of spikenard and poured its contents on Christ's head.

Why did Mary do what she did for Jesus? When she anointed her Lord she was not seeking a place in the limelight. She was not seeking to win the applause of the crowd. She was not striving for fame. She was not selfishly struggling to have herself remembered. Why then did she do it?

1. Mary wanted to express her grateful love for her blessed Lord.

The Master had done so much for Mary. He had permitted her to sit at His feet and listen to His words of grace and truth, which had meant life to her. He had greatly honored her and her family by His presence in their home. He had been with her in the deepest sorrows of her life, when she had lost her only brother by death. He had shown great sympathy and affection for her and Martha. He had raised their brother from the dead and had restored him to his place in the home. She was grateful to Him beyond words for the recovery of her brother. Her action grew out of her grateful affection for her Lord. There was such a warm and adoring love in her heart that she felt it would be impossible for her to express adequately her heartfelt gratitude for His goodness and kindness to her. Her anointing of Jesus was the spontaneous prompting of her heart to do something as a testimony of her personal devotion to Him as her blessed Saviour. She gave the best she had and did the best she could for Him. She gave her all to Christ for love's sake.

2. Mary wanted to honor her wonderful Master.

Out of reverence for His personality, she wanted to honor Him personally by pouring the ointment on Him. It is an easy thing to honor Christ when others are honoring Him, but real love delights in honoring Him when no other does. Mary did not trust others to anoint the Master for her, but she anointed Him with her own hands. There are numerous things which must be done by each individual for himself. In the physical life one must breathe, eat, drink, sleep, rest, and die for himself. In the spiritual life one must have faith in Christ, trust Him for salvation, confess Him before men, and grow in grace and knowledge for himself. "Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God."

3. Mary wanted to do something for Jesus while He lived.

Her gracious deed was so timely because she anointed Him while He was yet alive. How much better was that than if she had waited until He had died. Many gifts have lost their beauty because they were late. For instance, Nicodemus gave Jesus one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes after He was dead. A lot of human appreciation comes too late; that is always true when it is delayed until death. The Lord invested the act of Mary with wonderful significance by saying, "She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." Blessed indeed is that person who does the right thing at the right time in the right way and for the right purpose, which is the glory of God and the good of men.

Mingled feelings prompted her to make the offering -- an adoring love for her Master, gratitude for the restoration of Lazarus, adoration of the character of Jesus, recognition of Him as the Lord of life and death, and the desires to do honor to One Who was about to die. There is something very touching and beautiful, as well as instructive, in this remarkable incident. Mary did not have to strain her affections to bring forth the alabaster box of ointment; it was the spontaneous expression of her heart. There was not much that she could do for Jesus; but what she could do, that she did. Mary threw her flowers in the Lord's pathway instead of keeping them to put on His grave. She did not keep her precious ointment for His cold, dead body, but she poured it on His head as a token of love and sympathy while He could benefit by it, while He needed the courage and power to go forward in His redemptive purpose. What a timely act of kindness and love! We ought not to keep the alabaster boxes of our love and tenderness sealed up until our friends are dead. We ought to fill their lives with sweetness; we ought to speak approving and cheering words while their hearts can be thrilled and made happy by them. The kind things we mean to say or do when they are gone should be said or done before they leave us. We all know that this is the nice and right thing to do, and it is a tragedy that we will not do as well as we know.

What were the effects of what Mary did for Jesus? As the fragrant odor of the perfume filled the dining room there was astonishment and indignation on the part of the disciples. The general feeling among them was that it was not in good taste. Murmurs of surprise and expressions of criticism were voiced by them. This was an unexpected consequence of a most blessed action, and the fault lay with those who complained about her gracious deed and not with her. In the eyes of the critics two things were wrong with the gift -- it was too costly for the use to which it was put and not charitable in the use to which it was put -- too costly to be used for Christ and too costly not to be used for the poor. They branded it as an act of reckless extravagance and fantastic devotion.

What right had they to meddle or interfere with what she did? When it appeared that the whole scene was to end in the condemnation of Mary's marvelous exhibition of love and devotion, Jesus came to her rescue with the appreciation of His great and loving heart. He said, "Let her alone: Why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." Thus He taught that one should be very careful about interfering with those who are serving Christ. Those words of appreciation from the Saviour compensated for all the loss and all the criticism that her act had called forth. What a comfort to her to know that there was one who understood! What a peace came to her mind when her act of worship was accepted with the assurance that her motives were understood and that her unique expression of devotion fitted in so beautifully with the emotions that were in His heart in view of all He was so soon to suffer. Her deed was made memorable because it was prompted by love. That broken box of spikenard exhaled a fragrance that indeed sweetened the last days of our dear Lord's life. Her generosity enriched Him. Her beautiful act nourished Him. Her high appreciation encouraged Him.

"She hath done what she could." What praise could be as sweet as this sentence from Jesus' lips? What more could be asked? What else did Jesus say? He said she would be remembered for what she had done. She did all she could for Him Who had done so much for her, for Him Who would soon die for her. As Mary of Bethany gave her very best for Jesus Christ, so should we be willing to give our very best for Him. The important thing is for you to do what you can for Christ. If you really love Him you will not be content to serve Him by proxy -- to hire some one else to show Christ how much you love Him. There is something which you can do with your own hand, out of your own heart, in your own way, that no other can. Find out what it is and do it with your might. Christ deserves the best of everything -- the best hours of the day, the best years of our lives, the best words we can speak, the best songs we can sing, the best sermons we can preach, the best deeds we can do for Him, because He gave His best, even His life, for us. If you will do what you can and give Him your very best you will certainly receive His appreciation and win His commendation. You, too, will be remembered for what you have done. It must have brought much joy to the heart of Mary when her Master told her that she would never be forgotten, that the memory of her noble deed would last as long as the Gospel of Christ.