

A Memorial to Lavish Extravagance

Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Lk. 7:36-39; Jn. 12:1-8

Introduction:

1. Have you ever spent the night in a really nice hotel? Gone out for the evening and eaten at a really nice restaurant and spent enough money to feed 10 people for a month in a third world country? . . . and then felt guilty????
2. If you have ever done anything like this you will appreciate the account we are about to read. (Reading of Matt. 26:6-13.)
3. Matthew places this occurrence in the final week of Jesus' life. While He is going in and out of Jerusalem spending the night in Bethany, He will never leave Jerusalem. He knows this well and has told His disciples. His crucifixion is immediately on the horizon. (While Jn. 12 mentions 6 days before the Passover, perhaps this is a reference to his initial arrival at Bethany. Matthew's account seems to me to place the event one day before the crucifixion. Which means he would never return to Bethany.)
4. What is the significance of this event? What does the Lord expect us to learn from it?

Discussion:

- I. This woman's action is lavishly extravagant (6-7).
 - A. It occurs in the home of Simon the leper.
 1. Historically lepers lived lives secluded from the general populace. Was this man one whom Jesus had healed? This might explain his invitation to Jesus.
 2. Lk. 7:36ff records (the same or a similar event). Where a Pharisee said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."
 - B. John (12:3) identifies her as Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha.
 - C. Matthew says it was an alabaster vial of very costly perfume ("murou"). Last week we observed that the wise men brought myrrh as a gift to the new born king. Some have suggested that this was myrrh oil (R. T. France).
 1. Mark calls it "nard." The NASB margin says, "an aromatic oil extracted from an East Indian plant."
 2. It's value is estimated at three hundred denarii (Jn. 12:5). That is nearly a year's wages. NASB "equivalent to 11 months wages." ~Tens of thousands of dollars.
 3. Can you imagine giving a year's wages to the Lord in this lavishly extravagant way?
 - D. Her gift is reflective of the value she placed on the Lord.
 1. Her sins, which were many, had been forgiven (Lk. 7:47).
 2. Her recognition of her sins had made her love for Him intense (Lk. 7:47). She stands in contrast to Simon. Forgiven little, he loves little.
 3. The intensity of our awareness of our sins and the value of our forgiveness will be manifest in our gifts to the Lord. Are your gifts lavishly extravagant? Paul referred to the churches of Macedonia as giving beyond their ability because they had first given themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:3-5). He admonished the Corinthians to not allow their giving to be marred by covetousness (2 Cor. 9:5).

II. The disciples are indignant (7-12).

- A. It is clearer in the parallel accounts that Judas gave voice to their thinking. He said, "Why was this not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (Jn. 12:5).
- B. John elaborates, "He said this, not because he was concerned for the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it" (12:6).
- C. Judas and the disciples stand in contrast to this woman.
 - 1. Their thinking is of the conventional variety. Judas is thinking about what he can get.
 - 2. Her thinking is different. She is thinking about what she can give.
 - 3. Her thinking aligns with Jesus' thinking and becomes another illustration in Matthew of the last being first and the first being last. The upside down thinking of the world is turned right side up. It is part of the counter-cultural experience of the kingdom of God in contrast with the kingdom of this world.
- D. "But isn't Jesus acting in a self-centered way here? He had called on the rich man to sell all he had and give to the poor (Matt. 19:21) and now allows this woman to use a year's wages on a personal cosmetic."
 - 1. Jesus seems not to be focused on Himself so much as He is on the good deed that the woman has done.
 - 2. He says, "She did it to prepare Me for burial."
 - 3. Is it selfish of the deceased when someone else purchases a nice casket, tombstone, suit, etc. for them? I see nothing selfish in this account except for that associated with Judas' behavior.
 - 4. Is there an underlying theme here associated with the anointing of a king?
- E. This is a once in a lifetime situation.
 - 1. The poor you always have with you.
 - 2. You do not always have me.

III. Accompanying the preaching of the gospel to the whole world this action is spoken of in memory of this woman (13).

- A. Even in our actions today we honor this woman's actions.
 - 1. Matthew and Mark do not even mention her name. For them it would seem that what she did was more important than her personal identity.
 - 2. Luke only identifies her as a sinner, perhaps because this suits his contextual purpose.
 - 3. John identifies her as Mary.
- B. This woman's deed stands in stark contrast to Judas.
 - 1. Her lavish extravagance honored Jesus. He said, "She has done a good deed to Me."
 - 2. She highly valued Him. Judas, on the other hand, betrayed him for the paltry price of 30 pieces of silver.
- C. This woman's deed stands in stark contrast to the humiliation of the cross.
 - 1. In a short while Jesus will be dishonored in the worst way. He will be spit upon, mocked, beaten, scourged, shamed, abandoned and crucified.

2. This woman has appropriately honored her King with lavish extravagance.
- D. The King's lavishly extravagant gift on the cross purchases us from the humiliation of our sin.
 1. He gave us His life. There is no greater love than this and no greater gift.
 2. But it was a gift given to those who were helpless and ungodly (Rom. 5:6).
 3. The value of the gift is His precious blood. "You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life . . . , but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Conclusion:

1. Are you more like Judas who was looking for a bargain or are you more like the woman who saw the lavish gift of forgiveness that she had received and responded with love?
2. What good deed would you do for Him? Will your gift be conservatively restricted by what is reasonable, or unrestrained lavishly extravagant?
3. Will you give your life? Will you give everything?