

The Goal of the Gospel

By F. M. Perry

Mark 14:3-9 "And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, 'For what purpose has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish, you can do them good; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of in memory of her.'"

From the parallel version of this happening in John 12, we see that the woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. The Lord himself ordained that this story of Mary anointing Him with that costly perfume should always accompany the story of the gospel--that which Mary has done should always be coupled with that which the Lord has done. That is the Lord's own statement. What does He intend that we should understand by His statement-"Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of?" That is the statement of a goal. Wherever the gospel is preached a goal of that gospel shall be that the action of Mary shall be noticed and spoken of.

From the details given in John chapter 12 we understand this incident follows not long after Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was raised from the dead by our Lord. We gather that this family was not a wealthy one. The house in which they lived may have belonged to Simon, for it was in Simon's house that Jesus was staying in Bethany. The sisters, Mary and Martha, had to work in the house themselves for we are told that at this supper, 'Martha was serving.' I conclude that they

had to be careful with their money in that household. Yet, one of the sisters, Mary, having among her treasures an alabaster vial containing 300 denarii worth of perfume, expended the whole thing on the Lord. Scholars of that period of history tell us that one denarii represented an average day's pay for a workman. Thus, 300 denarii worth of perfume represented almost a year's pay.

Human reasoning said this was really too much; it was giving the Lord more than His due. That is why Judas took the lead, and the other disciples supported him, in voicing a general complaint that Mary's action was a wasteful one.

Principle of Waste. Wasting oneself for Jesus.

“Some were indignantly remarking, 'For what purpose has this perfume been wasted?' (Mark 1:4). Let us pause here to consider the meaning of this word "wasted." What is waste? In the eyes of the world waste means, among other things, giving more than is necessary. If a dollar will do and you give two dollars, it is a waste. If 2 ounces will do and you give a pound, it is a waste. If 3 days will suffice to complete a task and you put 5 days on it, it is a waste. Waste means that you give something too much for something too little. If someone is receiving more than he is considered to be worth, then that is waste. Being inefficient is considered to be a waste.

But remember, here we are dealing with something the Lord said was to go out with the gospel, wherever that gospel should be carried. Why? Because He intends that the preaching of the gospel should go out something along the lines of the action of Mary here. That is, that people should come to Him and waste themselves on Him. That is the result He is seeking.

We must look at this question of wasting on the Lord from two viewpoints: 1. That of Judas, and 2. That of the other disciples. I hope we are not like Judas. We probably are somewhat like the rest of the disciples. They had something to learn about this principle of wasting.

All the twelve thought it a waste. But Judas took the lead in saying that the pouring out of this perfume was a waste (John 12:4). But remember, to Judas, anything done for our Lord was a waste. Even the pouring out of water would have been a waste to Judas. Judas never called Jesus "Lord." Judas was one of the world and he represents the attitude of the world. The Lord has never been loved and never had the hearts of the world. So any giving to Him is a waste in the eyes of the world. To many people, for one to give up his worldly ambitions and the using of his talents in a profession or in business of the world in order to become a servant of the Lord is a waste.

Judas felt it a waste. The money could have been better used in some other way. There were many poor people. Why should it have not been given for charity? Why didn't they use it for some social service? Why did they not help the poor in some practical way? Why did Mary pour it out on Jesus? That is the way the world reasons. Can't you find a better way to use your life? Can't you do something better with yourself than this? It is going too far to give yourself altogether and wholly to the Lord! Better to give yourselves to social causes to help your fellow man in the way that the world defines such service.

But if the Lord is worthy, then how can it be a waste? Jesus is worthy to be served. He is worthy for me to be His prisoner. He is worthy for me just to live for Him. Jesus is worthy!

What the world says about this does not matter. The Lord says to the world, "Let her alone; why do you bother her?" So let us not be bothered. Men of the world may say what they like, but we can stand on this ground--that the Lord said, "She has done a good deed to Me". When once our eyes have been opened to the real worth of our Lord Jesus, nothing can be too good for Him.

Now the other disciples, other than Judas, should have understood what the Lord thought about this action of Mary's. But they had not yet learned enough from the Lord. They too said, and even indignantly, "For what purpose has this perfume been wasted?"

These disciples were trying to follow and obey Jesus. They were like Christians today who are trying to follow Jesus and obey Him. Many of us today feel that our first concern is to use everything to the full in highly efficient ways that we understand. If we had been there when Mary poured out the expensive perfume, would we not have been indignant about the waste also?

But that is not the first thing with the Lord. He is not concerned about how we appear in the eyes of the world. He wants us to be used, certainly. I am not trying to justify a complacent attitude to the world's need for the gospel. As Jesus Himself says here, "Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world ..." The question is one of emphasis in carrying out the desires of Jesus.

In approving Mary's action at Bethany, the Lord Jesus was laying down one thing a basis for all service: that you pour out all you have, your very self unto Him. And if that should be all He allows you to do, that is enough. It is not first of all a question of whether the "poor" have been helped or not. That will follow. But the first question is: has the Lord been satisfied?

We can determine to labor and work for the Lord to the full using our own supposed talents to the full. But the Lord is not concerned first of all about our ceaseless occupation in work for Him. That is not His first object. The service of the Lord is not always to be measured in tangible results. The Lord's first concern is with our position at His feet and our anointing of His head. We must first pour out ourselves fully upon the Lord. What ever we have as an "alabaster vial," the most precious thing, the thing dearest in the world to us-- we give that all up to the Lord.

To some, even of those who should understand, it seems a waste. But that is what He seeks above all.

Is our service to the Lord always to be measured in practical efficiency to the world's standards? No. The Lord's first concern is with our position at His feet and our anointing of His head. I see brethren giving tireless service. But we must remember, He reserves to Himself the

right to suspend our service for a time, in order to help us discover whether it is just that service, or He Himself, that holds us; whether we are in love with the service itself, or whether we are truly in love with the Lord.

Ministering to His pleasure. Serving to the Lord's satisfaction.

"Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of." (Mark 14:9).

Why did the Lord say this? Because the gospel is meant to produce attitudes like Mary's. Is the gospel preached just to save sinners? Of course, sinners will be saved. But the gospel is preached in the first place so that the Lord may be satisfied. It is the Lord Himself who meets the needs of the sinner and showers him with blessings. But that is not the first and foremost thing with us. The first thing with us is this: that everything we do should be to the satisfaction of the Son of God. It is only when He is satisfied that we shall be satisfied and the sinner will be satisfied. Our satisfaction comes unflinching when we satisfy Him first.

But, He will never be satisfied without our wasting ourselves upon Him. Is it possible to give too much to the Lord? In the Lord's service the principle of waste is the principle of power. That is, real usefulness in the hand of God is measured in terms which the world calls waste. It's another of the paradoxes of the gospel. The more you think you can do through your own power, and the more you employ your own talents to be efficient up to the very limit, the more you find you are applying the principle of the world and not of the Lord. God wants to establish the principle in us, that our work for Him springs out of our ministry to Him. The first thing for us must be the Lord Himself, not just His work.

Do we seek for efficient "use" in the eyes of the world as those disciples did when they observed Mary pouring out the perfume? They wanted to make every denarii of those three hundred denarii go to its full length. To them the whole question was one of obvious "usefulness" in terms that the world could measure and put on record. But the Lord wants to

hear us say, "Lord, I do not mind about that. If I can only please You, it is enough." It is our task first of all to serve to the pleasure of our Lord.

Anointing Him Beforehand. The Lord must be anointed beforehand.

The Lord said, "She has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do them good; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial." (Mark 14:6-8).

The Lord introduced a time factor with that word "beforehand." Only a few days after Mary broke the alabaster vial and poured the perfume on Jesus head, He was led up Golgotha hill and crucified. His body was laid in the tomb hewn out of the rock. It lay there until the third day. Early on the first day of the week after the Sabbath, some women went to the tomb for the purpose of anointing the body of Jesus. Did they succeed in anointing His body? No! There was no body there for God had raised Him already. There was only one soul who succeeded in anointing the body of Jesus, and it was Mary who anointed Him beforehand. The others were never able to do it.

This matter of time may be supremely important to us also. The question above all questions for us is: What am I doing to the Lord today?

Surely in eternity to come, in heaven, we shall be called to a greater work than we do here--not to inactivity. Jesus said, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master." (Matt. 25:23). Yes, there will be a greater work; for God's work will go on, just as in this story, the care of the poor went on. The poor would always be with them, but they could not always have Him. There was something represented, by this pouring out of the perfume, which Mary had to do beforehand or she would have no later opportunity. In that day when we see Him face to face, I know that we shall all break and pour out everything for Him then. But, today-- what are we doing

today, beforehand?

Have our eyes been opened to see the preciousness of the One whom we are serving? Have we come to see that nothing less than the dearest, the costliest, the most precious, is fit for Him?

Of Mary, the Lord said, "She has done what she could." That means that she had given up her all. She had kept nothing in reserve for a future day. She had lavished on Him all she had. And on that resurrection morning when the other women went to the tomb, Mary had absolutely no reason to regret her so-called extravagance.

Indeed, it is a far more precious thing to Him, that we should anoint Him now, with something costly, something from our hearts, something from the very depths of our being; and we come to the Lord with this, and we break it and pour it out and say: "Lord, here it is, It is all Yours, because You are worthy." If we are to anoint the Lord, we must do it beforehand.

Exuding the Fragrance.

In John 12:3 it says that when the alabaster vial was broken, "The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment." The house was pervaded with the sweet fragrance. Everyone could smell it and none could be unaware of it. What is the significance of this?

Have you not met some Christians in whom your spiritual senses detect a sweet savour of Christ? Someone who has suffered with Christ--someone who has been willing to give up his life for Him and has learned to find satisfaction in the Lord and nowhere else? Something has been crushed in that life, and so you smell the odor. That odor filled the house that day in Bethany and still fills the church today. Mary's fragrance never passes.

This fragrance has to do with what we are, not just what we do. God does not set us here first of all just to preach or just to do work for Him. The first thing for which He sets us here is to exude the fragrance of

Christ in us. That fragrance creates impressions in others, until they are brought by divine revelation into fulness of life in Christ. The first thing for which he set us here is to create in others a hunger for Himself. That is, after all, what prepares the soil for the preaching.

This matter of our impact upon others turns upon one thing, and that is our seeking to do His pleasure, seeking to satisfy Him only, not minding how much it costs us to do so. There must be something about us that gives release to the fragrance of Christ in order to attract others to Him. That something is our willingness to yield, our breaking and pouring out everything to Him.

It is then a blessed thing to be wasted for the Lord. We like to work in a practical way for the Lord, but often we do not know what it means to be wasted on God. We may wish to serve in just certain ways and not in other ways. But, perhaps the Lord would have us serve in the other ways. We may like to be free and always on the go. But, perhaps the Lord would prefer to have us in prison. The great Apostle Paul loved to go on missionary journeys and would have gone even to Spain. But the Lord used him by putting him in chains!

The thought of the fragrance of Christ is expressed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 2:14-16, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?"

May the story of Mary teach us how to please Him. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume which she poured out. Won't you, Christian brother and sister, break and pour yourself out to the Lord even today, beforehand. Do not wait until the Lord comes to claim His people. You will gladly give everything then. The Lord wants you to do it now, beforehand, because you recognize even now that He is worthy.

The invitation is also to those of you who are not yet in the family of God. The Lord wants you to believe, repent and to be baptized and He will forgive your sins. This is the first step in the pouring out of yourself. You must first give yourself to be adopted into God's family of Christians. When you arise from that watery grave of baptism, you have new life and God adds you to His family, the church. Then, you will be near Christ and have opportunity to pour out yourself on Him.

Won't you answer the Lord's invitation.

(This sermon was delivered by F. M. Perry in Bangkok, Thailand in November 1972, in Herndon, Virginia in June 1977, and in Front Royal, Virginia in November 1979.)