

"SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD."

– MATT. 26:6-13. – OCTOBER 28. –

Golden Text: – "She hath wrought a good work upon me."

THIS STUDY turns us back from the discourse of the Tuesday preceding our Lord's death to the Saturday night preceding his death – the close of the Jewish Sabbath day. In harmony with the prevailing custom, Jesus and his disciples and others were invited to a feast that evening. They had just arrived the previous evening from Jericho as intent upon keeping the feast of Passover at Jerusalem – the feast of which our Lord Jesus said, "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Luke 22:15.) Although Jesus had been telling the apostles that he was going to Jerusalem and would there be crucified, they seemed not to realize the matter, probably because he had spoken so many things to them in dark sayings, as, for instance, when he told them that he was the bread that came down from heaven, etc., and that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. Perhaps the crucifixion suggested was also hyperbolic language; at least they could not realize that it would be so, even though Peter had been reproved for his disbelief in the matter.

The feast was in the house of Simon the leper. Simon was a common name in those parts at that time, and this Simon was distinguished by the fact that he had been a leper – quite possibly he had been healed by the Lord, and this may have been the beginning of the intimate acquaintance between Jesus and the family of which Lazarus, Martha and Mary were prominent members. One of the Evangelists tells us that Lazarus was one of those who sat at the feast, that Martha was one of those who served, and the lesson before us tells especially of the work of Mary, who, while the Lord was reclining, approached and broke the seal of an alabaster box of precious perfume (not ointment, in

the present use of the word). One of the accounts says that it was very precious, another that it was worth 300 pence, which in our money would be about \$50.

Such anointings were very rare, usually for kings or princes or nobles; and the disciples, under the lead of Judas, who seems to have been the spokesman (see John's account), were all filled with indignation at the waste. John tells us that Judas was a thief, who carried the bag, the treasurer of the company, and that his solicitous remarks respecting the use of the money for the poor were hypocritical. In any event we may sympathize with the other apostles for falling in line with his arguments, for they were all poor men, unused to such luxury and extravagance, and in this respect probably represented the majority of the Lord's people today, who likewise would consider a perfume bill of \$50 a very extravagant waste of money. We are all the more interested to know how Jesus himself regarded the matter. We realize that our conceptions of matters of this kind are more or less biased by our own selfishness or poverty and necessity for economy.

"WHY TROUBLE YE THE WOMAN?"

Our Lord discerned at once the criticizing, fault-finding spirit amongst his disciples and promptly took the part of Mary, saying, "Why trouble ye the woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me." Woman's intuition had guided Mary in the doing of the proper thing at the proper time. She realized that she owed the Master a debt that she never could pay, and that this costly offering of the perfume would be but a small tribute, a small expression of her gratitude. She had found in the Lord an object worthy of her heart devotion; she was not a woman's rights advocate; she found no fault with the Lord that he had not chosen her and Martha to be members of the company of apostles and to go abroad preaching his name and fame. Doubtless she would have gladly undertaken this work had she been so directed, but her

womanly instincts did not lead her in this direction nor cause her to take offense at the Lord's showing a difference between the male and the female as respects the promulgation of his message.

Although debarred from the honorable service of a public ministry of the Truth, our Lord declared, "She hath done what she could." She did what pleased the Lord; she illustrated the noblest and truest qualities of the feminine heart, love, devotion, fidelity; she spoke by actions rather than by words, and the perfume of her acts of love and kindness and adoration of her Lord have come down through the ages, filling the entire Church of Christ with the sweet odor of the perfume she poured upon his head and subsequently upon his feet. This is in accord with what our Lord prophetically **[R3877 : page 331]** declared respecting the act, "Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there also this that this woman hath done shall be told for a memorial of her."

What a sweet memorial of Mary! How we all love and reverence her true womanhood, and appreciate the fact that her intuitions in respect to this anointing of the Lord were superior to the reasonings of the twelve apostles on the subject – they were too cold and calculating, too business like. She made up for this deficiency in the warmth of her loving devotion. Undoubtedly woman has filled profitably just such a niche as this in the Church's history during all the centuries from then until now. Without her part undoubtedly the religion of Jesus would have been much more cold and business like and formal than it is; but the broad, deep sympathy of true womanhood has helped to interpret the heart of Christ, the love of Christ, and has proven a blessing to all of the followers of the Lamb.

"THE POOR YE HAVE ALWAYS"

It is a miscalculation to suppose that the moments spent in communion with the Lord, in the study of his plan, and the dollars

and hours spent in his service, in the promulgation of his Truth, are wasted, and that thus the poor have less. On the contrary, in proportion as any one has true, loving devotion to the Lord, he will have devotion to his service and to the poor. No one can love the Lord in sincerity without being the more sympathetic and the more generous proportionately to the poor and to all within reach of his benevolence. As the Scriptures admonish us, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty" – to want – to poverty of soul as well as poverty of purse. (Prov. 11:24.) The Lord's followers are to be prudent, economical but not parsimonious, not miserly, not stingy, not hoarders of wealth. They are to cast their bread upon the waters; they are to do good and trust to the Lord for the results; they are to use freely the riches of the Lord as entrusted to them, both temporally and spiritually, and are to receive their blessing from the exercise or increment of these.

This very act on the part of the devoted Mary and our Lord's commendation of it have doubtless been helpful to the Lord's people along these very lines throughout this Gospel age. Similarly we were once inclined to consider the One-Day Conventions and the General Conventions of the Lord's people to be entirely too expensive, to represent a waste of money that might have been used otherwise; but our experience is that there is a blessing in the using of the money talent – that whoever fails to do some investing, some sacrificing in the interest of the Truth, will surely fail to get the large returns of spiritual blessing. Whoever on the contrary seeks to use his means in serving the Truth to others and in nourishing his own heart receives proportionately the greater blessing. We are even inclined to think that the Lord makes up to them in temporal matters also; but should this not be the case – should they be the poorer in temporal matters as a result of their spiritual feasting – we know that spiritual nourishment, fatness of soul, prosperity as New Creatures in Christ, is by far the most important matter with which

we have to do. It is the very object of our present membership in the school of Christ, association with the fellow-members, [R3878 : page 331] that we may grow in this very grace as well as in knowledge and love in the Master's likeness.

ANOINTED FOR HIS BURIAL

Our Lord declared that Mary's action was a preparation for his burial. We remember that several of the honorable women of the Lord's company came to the tomb early on the first day of the week with spices and ointment, perfume, for his anointing, after the custom of the time, and because they failed to remember and recognize his prophecy of his resurrection from the dead on the third day. Their motive in thus going was undoubtedly a proper one, and yet Mary's conduct in anointing our Lord before his burial was very much more to the point, very much more appreciated by him. And so it is with us: with our dear friends, the brethren and others. It behooves us to anoint them with kindly words, loving sympathies, tender expressions, while they are still in the valley of conflict, before they have reached the end of the journey. We know not how much even the very strongest of the Lord's followers may need a word of sympathy and encouragement at times, and we do our own hearts good when we tender such sympathy.

We do not mean that fulsome flattery should be poured upon one another; but there is a wide difference between flattery and encouraging, sympathetic words; and who is there of sympathetic heart, possessing a heart filled with the love divine, that is not himself an alabaster box of perfume, which should be opened and poured upon the spiritual brotherhood and all of our earthly friends and relatives as we might come in contact with them, and in proportion as the blessing of the Lord would be appropriately theirs. Let us not forget this; let us use these opportunities which are ours day by day of scattering flowers in life's pathway for

others, and perhaps as we do this the Lord will allow some one to scatter some flowers also for us. On the principle that he who watereth others shall himself be watered, he who helps others should never go hungry, he who comforts others should never lack comfort. Doubtless the Lord will see to it that in proportion as we have and exercise the proper spirit of benevolence and generosity toward others, we will have our share of rich blessings in return when most needed.

"OF THE PEOPLE THERE WERE NONE WITH HIM" – ABLE TO SYMPATHIZE FULLY

Very evidently at the close of his ministry our Lord was feeling more or less of disappointment that a larger number of the Jews had not received his gracious message, had not believed on him. Especially would this thought come to him as he read in the mind of Judas that he already was planning to be his betrayer. Moreover, he saw something of the same spirit of fear in the other eleven of his apostles, for he already knew who should betray him, and knew also that the others would forsake him and flee in fear in the hour of his distress. If his message, if his love, if his Spirit communicated to these men would still leave them so weak in many respects, it argued that he had accomplished comparatively little in his ministry, and that the other five hundred brethren might not be more devoted than the twelve.

What a comfort it must have been to the Lord in the midst of these thoughts to find that there was one loving **[R3878 : page 332]** soul which did appreciate him and brought the alabaster box and anointed him before his burial. The joy, the comfort, the blessing that came to the heart of our dear Master, and that strengthened him for the experiences of coming days, was worth far more than the 300 pence. Not only was he willing that the matter should be told for a memorial of Mary, but we may safely conclude that in the everlasting future Mary will be ranked very

high amongst the faithful followers of the Lord. She may not be one with the apostles upon the twelve thrones of Israel, but we may be sure that she will have some grand, some honorable place near to the one she loved and for whom she showed her devotion.

An unknown writer says, "Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak approving, cheering words while their ears can hear them and while their hearts can be thrilled and made happier by them; the kind things you mean to say when they are gone, say before they go. The flowers you mean to send for their coffins, send to brighten and sweeten their homes before they leave them. If my friends have alabaster boxes laid away, full of fragrant perfumes of sympathy and affection, which they intend to break over my dead body, I would rather they would bring them out in my weary and troubled hours and open them, that I may be refreshed and cheered by them while I need them. I would rather have a plain coffin without a flower, a funeral without a eulogy, than a life without the sweetness of love and sympathy. Let us learn to anoint our friends beforehand for their burial. Post-mortem kindness does not cheer the burdened spirit. Flowers on the coffin cast no fragrance backward over the weary way."

SELFISHNESS VERSUS GENEROSITY

Our lesson concludes with the account of how Judas soon afterwards went to the chief priests and bargained with them that for thirty pieces of silver he would seek an opportunity and betray Jesus into their hands. What a sharp contrast is here drawn between the love and generosity of Mary and the mean selfishness of Judas! The one was so full of love that she could not do enough for the great Teacher at whose feet she loved to sit, from whose lips she had received so many blessings, such joy of heart, and by whose power her brother had been recalled from the tomb and probably previously her father healed of a loathsome disease. We

also should remember how much we owe this same Teacher, that his are the wonderful words of life which have brought unto our hearts joy, peace and blessing. By his words we ourselves have been called from the dead condition, for, as the Apostle declares, we were once dead in trespasses and sins, but now are quickened, energized, by the Spirit of the Lord, by the spirit of love.

We ourselves also had the leprosy of sin, condemnation, were children of wrath even as others, but our sins have been graciously covered by the Redeemer, the leprosy has been cleansed, and we have been made whiter than snow in the sight of our Lord through faith in the precious blood. We, too, have learned to sit at the Master's feet and to enjoy his teachings, and have been transformed thereby by the renewing of our minds. Is it not appropriate that we should feel that no offering we could bring him could in any sense or degree express the gratitude of our hearts? Can we not also find alabaster boxes of precious perfume for the Master? True, the Head has been glorified, and the members of the body, too, are now passed beyond the veil, but his "feet" are still with us, the last members of the body of Christ are here. Let us hasten to do all in our power, both temporally, and spiritually, for the feet of Christ; let us do all in our power to cleanse them from earth defilement, even though it cost us tears; let us anoint them with the precious spikenard perfume. The more costly the affection and love that we bestow upon the members of the body of Christ, the very lowest and humblest of them, the better; all should be but an expression of the warmth of love which is in our hearts for Him and His. The time is passing rapidly – soon the last members will have crossed and be beyond the veil, beyond our anointing and beyond the blessed word; "She hath done what she could." Let us earn that expression from the dear lips of our Lord by faithfulness to those who now represent him in the world – to the household of faith, to the members of the body of Christ.

FOR THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

Selfishness seems to lie at the very foundation of all the mean, ignoble deeds of our fallen nature. It was selfish ambition that led mother Eve to grasp the forbidden fruit, and it is safe to say that selfishness ever since has prompted to all the mean and ignoble things of the six thousand years' reign of sin and death. The spirit of a sound mind is what we should each and all strive for. This would mean, on the one hand, that we should not be too extravagant, and, on the other hand, that we should not be too parsimonious. But if we should err on either side would it not be safest and best that we should err on the side of too great generosity rather than on the reverse? Well did the Apostle write that the love of wealth is the root of all evil. This might include not only money but wealth of honor, name, influence or power. The Apostle adds, "which some coveting after have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." – 1 Tim. 6:10.

As an illustration of this class take the case of Judas in our lesson, selling his Master for thirty pieces of silver! No matter if he did reason that Jesus had said that he was about to die, and said that this perfume was associated with his burial. No matter if Judas were sure that all these things would happen to the Lord anyway, and thought that he might just as well have the thirty pieces of silver. It did not condone the offence. Selfishness and meanness had so far been encouraged in his heart that, notwithstanding his intimate association with the Master, his knowledge of his precious words and mighty acts, neither love nor reverence stood in the way of selfishness.

Judas "went to his own place," the Second Death, and that with a realization that it would have been better for him had he never been born. Whoever will allow selfish ambitions of any kind to have control in his heart, whoever will not allow the Lord's

grace and truth to come into his heart and enlarge it and fill it with love, will likewise go to his own place, the Second Death. The divine provisions are only for those who will eventually be filled with love, the Spirit of God, the spirit of generosity. Let us all **[R3879 : page 333]** then more and more avoid the Judas spirit, the heart of selfishness, money love, self love and ambition, and let us more and more have the loving heart of Mary and her humility, which not only made her willing to spend her means to serve the truth, but made her willing also to humble herself even to the extent of tears and the use of woman's highest ornament, her hair, in the service of her Master, her Lord, and that upon his humblest members, the feet of him.
