

## MARY'S SWEET PERFUME

– *OCTOBER 4.* – MARK 14:1-11. –

**"She hath done what she could." – VERSE 8.**

THE last five days of Jesus' ministry are full of interest. The incident especially marking our lesson occurred at the close of the Jewish Sabbath day just preceding our Lord's crucifixion. Jesus and His disciples had come to the Passover Feast, He telling them that He would there be crucified, but they thinking that He was speaking in some kind of figurative language. Indeed, at no time during Jesus' ministry did His crucifixion seem to be less likely than when it occurred. His preaching and the preaching of His disciples, first the Twelve and afterward the Seventy, had awakened considerable interest throughout all Jewry – especially in Galilee.

Great throngs of people were at Jerusalem to celebrate this Feast, which would last a week. Thousands of them had heard of Jesus; and many of them had been recipients of His mercy in the healing of their diseases. Just a short time before, a considerable number had discussed the propriety of proclaiming Jesus king. Indeed, on the very next day after the incident of this lesson, the multitude, some following and some preceding Him while He rode upon the ass, had acclaimed Him king. They had cried out, "Hosanna in the highest to the Son of David, who cometh in the name of Jehovah!"

But the Master knew that the masses would be only as children in the hands of the great teachers of the time. He knew that there was a murderous hatred against Him amongst the chief priests, the Scribes and the Pharisees. True, it is written that they hated Him without a cause; that is to say, without a just cause (John 15:25); but they had cause enough to hate Him, from their own viewpoint.

## **THE ATTITUDE OF THE RELIGIOUS TEACHERS**

Although the Jewish nation had lost its liberty long before and had no prospect of ever winning it back, nevertheless there had never been a time since the days of Solomon when their political prospects looked so favorable. The Roman Emperors had manifested their willingness to co-operate with these very priests, scribes and religious leaders. The Emperors wished merely to rule, and realized that they could exercise more influence through these religious leaders than in any other way.

Thus the great religious teachers felt themselves sponsors for the people. They perceived that their hold over the more ignorant Jews was being impaired by the teachings of Jesus. They felt so satisfied with themselves as claimed representatives of God and as intermediaries with the Roman government that they did not think it worth while to make inquiry respecting Jesus and His teachings. Indeed, from their viewpoint, everything was going along reasonably well. They could wish for nothing better than that their plans might not be interfered with.

Many of them had lost all faith in God and in a future life. Others, retaining faith in God and His promised Kingdom, thought that affiliation with the Roman Empire would be the best way of strengthening their nation and preparing it for the Messianic glories. From this viewpoint, Jesus was a disturber of the peace. He did not belong to their clique. His manner, no less than His teachings, reproved them and tended to break all their influence with the people.

The religious leaders had heard that Jesus was coming to the Feast. Our lesson tells us that they discussed how He could be wisely dealt with, killed, gotten rid of in any way. They seem to have been unanimous in believing that His destruction would be for the good of the Lord's **[R5541 : page 283]** Cause, as they misunderstood that Cause. Another Scripture tells us that Caiaphas,

the chief priest, had declared that it was expedient that one man should perish rather than that the nation should perish. (John 11:49-52.) They fancied that the teachings of Jesus, if allowed to proceed, would certainly awaken the people to a faith in the Messianic Kingdom. They thought of Jesus as an imposter, but feared that His teachings would incite some kind of fanatical uprising.

The religious leaders had murder in their hearts. It was merely a question of how they could accomplish the murder and deceive the people, so as not to provoke those who had begun to exercise faith in Jesus. Their conclusion was that the Feast time would be an unfavorable one; for He would be surrounded by the multitude, some of whom thought Him a great prophet, others of whom considered Him to be the Messiah. Such was their attitude of mind when Judas went to them privately, suggesting that he would be in touch with the movements of Jesus, and that for a certain amount of money he would inform them of the most suitable time for making Jesus a prisoner – a time when the multitude would not be with Him. His plan was finally decided upon and carried out.

### **THE FEAST – THE ANOINTING**

Jesus and His disciples were the honored guests of that Lazarus whom Jesus awakened after he had been dead three days. It was at the home of Simon the Leper, who probably was dead. Jesus was the guest of honor, His disciples sharing with Him. Martha and Mary, with Lazarus, were hostesses. The supper had progressed when Mary entered with a vial of very expensive perfume, the contents of which she poured upon the head of Jesus and, according to another account, subsequently poured a portion of the same perfume upon His feet.

The house was filled with the perfume; Jesus was honored. Then came a voice of murmuring – "Why this waste?" St. John tells us that the leader of the murmurers was Judas, and that evidently several were influenced by his speech. Judas posed as the friend of

the poor, intimating that his regrets were not selfish or personal, but that he thought what good might have been done to others.

The Apostles afterward learned that this speech was hypocritical. At the time Jesus understood the anger of Judas, which led him openly to insult one of the hostesses of the occasion. St. John tells us the anger of Judas was because he had failed to get this money himself. He was the treasurer of the little company of disciples; he carried the money-bag; and, as they afterward came to know, he was a thief, who privately was laying by for himself. (John 12:6.) And Judas is probably not the only person who has plead for the poor and at the same time sought to divert funds to himself. **[R5541 : page 284]**

### **THE MEASURE OF MARY'S DEVOTION**

The statement of Judas that the perfume was worth three hundred pence is probably not an extreme valuation. Three hundred pence would be about six dollars. At a time when the silver penny, worth sixteen cents, represented a day's labor, three hundred pence would practically represent the labor of a year. Sixteen dollars per ounce, sometimes more, has been paid for the attar of rose; and history tells us of fabulous prices paid for perfumes in the past.

Today perfumes can be made and sold at trifling cost, in comparison with the past. And yet the ancients were passionately fond of perfumes; and the liberal use of them, as in the case before us, marked a deep respect, yea, reverence. Mary doubtless felt that her very highly esteemed friend Jesus, who had brought her brother back from the tomb, was none other than the Messiah, the Son and Representative of Jehovah God. The reverence which she felt for Jehovah she sought to express toward His highest Representative, Jesus.

Poor Mary must have felt quite crushed as she heard the harsh criticism. But Jesus came to her defense, saying, "Let her alone.

Why trouble ye the woman? She hath wrought a good work on Me. She hath done what she could; she hath anointed My body for its burial. The poor ye have always with you; and whensoever ye will ye may do them good; but Me ye have not always."

Surely the Master's approval comforted Mary; and wherever the Gospel of the Lord has been preached, this story of her loving devotion, to the extent of considerable cost and probably considerable self-denial, has been told as a memorial of her, not merely to honor her, but especially to inspire and encourage others of God's people to the obtaining and exercising of a love which delights in service, yea, in costly sacrifice.

### **A SUGGESTION WORTH CONSIDERATION**

A Boston printer, now dead, put on his business card the following helpful and practical suggestions: – "Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead, but fill their lives with sweetness. Speak approving and cheering words while their ears can hear them. The kind things you say after they are gone, say before they go. The flowers you mean to send for their coffins, bestow now; and so 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 now in my weary and troubled hours, and open them, that I may be refreshed and cheered, while I need them and can enjoy them. I would rather have a plain coffin without a flower, and a funeral without an 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 cannot cheer the burdened spirit.  
Flowers on the coffin shed no fragrance backward over the weary  
way by which the loved ones have traveled."

