

“COMMITMENT SUNDAY”

“Broken For You”

Scripture Reading – Mark, 14:3-9

While Jesus was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor”. And they rebuked her harshly.

“Leave her alone”, said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her”.

‘If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.’

1 Corinthians, 13:3, NIV

The theme for Commitment Sunday 2007 is ‘BROKEN FOR YOU’.

It is important for all of us to be able to give fresh focus to personal commitment at the beginning of a new year. The most precious truth is that God is totally committed to us before we were ever committed to him. Through the cross, God revealed the extent of that love – total in reach and effect. At such cost, Christ’s body was broken for us.

God’s commitment to us is both undeserved and unreserved.

In love, we make a response that can never equal or compare to such commitment, but we commit ourselves to God, unreservedly. As we come in dedication, God always has blessings to give us as we make ourselves available. Those blessings are multiplied as we engage in the work and mission that are ours. Only when we are a people committed and dedicated, prepared to be broken bread for the salvation of the world, will God bless and use us.

‘BROKEN FOR YOU’ was inspired by the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume.

This Commitment Sunday, we are invited to ‘break the jar’, offering to him that which is precious to us, whatever it may be. ‘BROKEN FOR YOU’ holds the dual meaning of both Christ’s death for us and our invited response to him.

“BROKEN FOR YOU”

Let us spend a few moments putting this marvellous story into context...

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were friends of Jesus. In fact, Jesus had often spent the night in their home. News came to Jesus that Lazarus was sick and had died, and Jesus wept openly at his grave before he was revived and brought back to life. The feast that we read about in **Mark, 14:3** is a celebration for Lazarus coming back to life.

The house is full of noise and activity. Jesus and Lazarus are talking with each other. Martha is in the kitchen, cooking and serving. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus, her eyes filled with delight and love. She slips out of the room and returns with an exquisitely beautiful alabaster jar full of expensive perfume. As she reflects on all that has happened, she breaks the jar and pours the perfume on the head and feet of Jesus. She does not care about the custom. She does not care about the criticism. She does not care about the cost. All she cares about is Jesus.

Then she gets down on her knees, takes her long hair and pulls it over her shoulder. As she mingles the ointment with her tears, she wipes the feet of Jesus and worships him. Jesus was moved by what Mary did. He recognised that Mary had done a beautiful thing for him, and that her act would be forever remembered as a memorial to her.

That Scripture is being fulfilled in your ears today because Mary lived almost two thousand years ago, and yet we are still remembering her extravagant act of love today.

There are five things I want us to consider about Mary’s magnificent memorial...

1. A MISUNDERSTOOD ACT OF LOVE

‘Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor”. And they rebuked her harshly.’

Mark, 14:4-5, NIV

Those who were indignant complained about the perceived waste.

It was suggested that the perfume could have instead been sold for three hundred denarii. A denarius was payment for one whole days work. As Jewish Law forbid work on the Sabbath and Feast days, the sum of 300 denarii would be more than a full year of wages for a labouring man.

In John, 12:5, we read that Judas was leading the criticism.

John tells us that Judas made his statement because he was a hypocrite, he was a thief. He did not care for the poor at all. He himself had been stealing from the treasury funds of the mission of Jesus. Have you noticed how easy it is for some people to spend other people’s money? Judas was a thief who wanted to steal money and spend it on himself, money that should have been spent on the poor.

It seems that many people feel their calling in church is to criticise others.

Why is it that some find great delight in criticising what others do for Jesus? Personally, I do not think it is your place or mine to criticise others for their service, or lack of service, to the Saviour. Surely, only Jesus himself has the right to declare whether or not he is satisfied with the level of his servant's service!

There is an old story about a man who went into the cleaning cupboard of his corps and discovered five brand new brooms. He immediately went off in a rage, shouting about whether it was a good use of money to buy five new brooms when the corps was deeply in the red. Eventually, he found himself at the home of the commanding officer to talk about his righteous indignation at this perceived waste of money. The CO had no idea about why there were five brooms, suggesting that the hall cleaner used a lot of brooms, or perhaps there was a sale on brooms. Undeterred, the man announced his decision to leave the corps. A few days later, the officer was discussing the incident with his corps treasurer. "Ah", the treasurer said, "I can understand that. It is easy for me to understand why he was so upset". Turning to the officer, he asked, "How would you feel if you saw everything you had given in your cartridge over the past five years spent on new brooms?".'

If you pour your life out to the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be criticised.

Judas and the others were criticising what Mary had done, but she was not paying any attention at all to what they were saying. *Let me give you three reasons why you should not worry about what people say as you give your all to Jesus...*

Jesus will defend you.

In **Mark, 14:6**, Jesus told the criticisers to leave the woman alone because she had performed a beautiful act on him and for him.

It is their problem.

It was not Mary who had the problem; it was Judas and the troublemakers. Do not let their problem become your problem. Surely, you have enough problems of your own to be going on with?

Concentrate on what you are doing.

I wonder whether Mary would have heard the criticism for herself as she was so wrapped up in praising and worshipping the Lord Jesus. Why do Christians allow meddlesome hypocrites to keep them away from the joy they have only in Christ?

We should always seek to measure waste by its worth.

They claimed it was a waste to pour out the perfume so extravagantly upon the Lord, but to Mary, it was truly worth it. Did you know that the word 'WORSHIP' comes from the old English word 'WEORTSCYPE', which literally means 'CONDITION OF WORTH'? Therefore, when we worship the Lord, it is an indication that we believe He alone is worthy of our worship. We never waste our time, talents and treasure when we declare that Jesus is worthy of our worship.

Mary's extravagant act of love was a misunderstood act.

When you love the Lord Jesus fully, extravagantly, and recklessly, you should not be surprised if the world calls it waste. But that is their problem, not yours! Just keep on worshipping Christ

2. A MEAGRE ACT OF LOVE

'Jesus said, "She did what she could".'

Mark, 14:8a, NIV

Of course, the actual gift that Mary gave was not meagre in any sense of the word.

However, there was not a lot that Mary could do. She was not one of the talented people. She could not preach about the Kingdom of God and perform miracles like the disciples had done. She could not prepare a sumptuous feast in honour of Jesus as Martha had done. But Jesus noted that Mary **'DID WHAT SHE COULD'**. It was a meagre work that was appreciated by Jesus.

It is a sad fact that many Christians often compare themselves to others.

There are those who say, *"Oh, I wish I could preach like David does"*. There are those who say, *"Oh, I wish I could play the piano like Joyce does"*. There are those who say, *"Oh, I wish I could play an instrument like Neil does"*. There are those who say, *"Oh, I wish I could sing like Linda does"*. The question is not: *"Why can I not be like them?"*; the real question is: *"What are you going to do with what you have?"*. We need to learn to stop comparing ourselves to others.

The only thing God will demand of you is that which he has given to you.

As someone said, *"If just a cup of water I place within your hand, then just a cup of water is all that I will demand"*. The important thing is that Mary **'DID WHAT SHE COULD'**.

Some people say, "Oh, if I just had a million pounds. What I would do!"

The reality is that if you had a million pounds you would do with it just the same as the ten pound note in your purse or your wallet. As the Bible says: **'HE THAT IS FAITHFUL IN THAT WHICH IS LEAST IS FAITHFUL ALSO IN THAT WHICH IS MUCH'**. Do not waste time wondering about what you could do if...; instead, ask what you are going to do with that which you do have!

'Just imagine that parents who have had born to them twins, one of which has brain damage. After many years, one son goes off to Oxford University where he becomes the leading scholar in his class. When he returns home he tells his dad how well he is doing and, as his father expresses how proud he is of his son, he looks down and sees his other son fumbling down at his feet. His child looks up and says, "Daddy, I have just learned how to tie your shoe laces. Look, daddy, I can tie shoelaces". Do you not think that Dad would not reach down and pull that boy up and hug him and say, "Son, daddy is so proud of you".'

When God comes to measure you, he will not measure you against another.

My preaching will not be measured against the preaching of Billy Graham. Your acts of love and kindness will not be measured against the acts of love and kindness of Mother Teresa. The important thing to learn is that Mary did what Mary could do! Her acts may have seemed like meagre acts when compared with others, but Jesus noted that **'SHE DID WHAT SHE COULD'**.

Mary's extravagant act of love was a meagre act.

It was not meagre because of what she gave, but because it was all she had to give. But is this not what God desires from us anyway? God wants us to give him what we are and have.

3. A MIGHTY ACT OF LOVE

“Leave her alone”, said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me”.

Mark, 14:6, NIV

Of course, ‘meagre’ and ‘mighty’ are in the eyes of the beholder.

Why was her act so mighty? Because Mary gave it all, and she gave it all to Jesus. Jesus told the critics to leave her alone, because ‘SHE HAS DONE A BEAUTIFUL THING TO ME’.

Mary broke the alabaster jar as she anointed Jesus with perfume.

In his “DAILY STUDY BIBLE”, William Barclay notes: *‘There was a custom in the East that if a glass was used by a distinguished guest, it was broken so that it would never again be touched by the hand of any lesser person. Maybe there was something of this in Mary’s mind’.* But this is certain, Mary gave it all to Jesus. She held nothing back for a rainy day, or for her retirement. She did not give Jesus something – she gave everything.

I wonder, do you have the same difficulty that I have?

In my heart I love Jesus and I want to serve him, but the devil tells me, *“Now, David, don’t give it all to him. Don’t give him everything that you are and have. You might be left high and dry. Yes, give him some, but don’t give him everything”.* Does the devil ever talk to you like that? Don’t be so pious. I am certain that he does.

This extravagant and mighty act of love should be a challenge to us.

Ask yourself: *“Lord, am I willing to break the alabaster jar and not pour out of it? Am I truly willing to break it? Am I willing to say, ‘Here it is, Lord, the dearest treasure that I have. Here, Lord, at your disposal I pour it upon your head and lay it at your feet?’”.*

Mary’s extravagant act of love was a mighty act.

It was mighty because its focus was entirely upon Jesus. It was mighty because of its fullness – she broke the jar to keep nothing back for herself. No wonder Jesus said: ‘SHE HAS DONE A BEAUTIFUL THING TO ME’.

4. A MEANINGFUL ACT OF LOVE

‘Jesus said, “She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial”.

Mark, 14:8b, NIV

Within a week, Jesus would be nailed upon the cross, and would die.

Mary’s extravagant act of love was full of hidden meaning. Jesus remarked that she poured her perfume upon him to prepare for his impending death. In his “DAILY STUDY BIBLE”, William Barclay notes: *‘It was the custom in the East, first to bathe, then to anoint the bodies of the dead. After the body had been anointed, the flask in which the perfume had been contained was broken and the fragments were laid with the dead body in the tomb’.*

How was Mary able to anticipate the crucifixion of the Lord?

I think Mary had a unique spiritual sensitivity. It is possible that when she saw the death, burial, and resurrection of Lazarus, she saw a precursor of her Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection. After all, she had heard Jesus speak about being the resurrection and the life and Mary had understood all those things. She knew that the time would soon come when Jesus would be killed.

Perhaps Mary gained this spiritual sensitivity when she sat at the feet of Jesus.

‘As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha”, the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her”.

Luke, 10:38-42, NIV

Imagine the scene about a week later – on Easter Sunday morning.

Very early in the morning, women are travelling to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea where Jesus was buried. Because Jesus was buried with such haste, there was no time to anoint his body with spices. When they get to the tomb, there is no need for them to ask the soldiers to move the stone away to let them in. To their surprise, they find the stone has rolled away up the hill and Jesus is not there. Had Mary have not anointed the body of Jesus when she did, she would never have had another opportunity to minister to him in such an intimate way.

Mary did what she could. She did all that she could. She did it when she could.

In a way, we are really in the business of getting people ready for death. When the coffin is laid in the earth and soil is sprinkled on top of it, it is far too late to do what you have to do. People need to experience the oil of gladness, and with the perfume of salvation before it is too late! *Is there any more meaningful act than to prepare someone for heaven when they are facing the grave?*

5. A MEMORABLE ACT OF LOVE

‘Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her”.

Mark, 14:9, NIV

Today, in 2007, I am helping to fulfil the amazing prophecy of Jesus.

We are remembering today about the sweet perfume of Mary’s sacrifice, and as the alabaster jar was broken, we can still smell something of the sweet fragrance of Mary’s extravagant act.

The truth is that not everything we consider important is going to last.

Two hundred years from now, no one is going to remember how beautiful you or your house and garden looked. They are not going to care if Chelsea or Manchester United won the Premiership. They will not care about England's abject failure in the Ashes Series in Australia. They will not care about much about what the world considers important today.

The Bible tells us about the things in our life that can endure.

'If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.'

1 Corinthians, 3:12-15, NIV

Will your extravagant acts of love survive?

What is there about your life that will count for all eternity?

'Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.'

Daniel, 12:3, NIV

Application

In your mind, I want you to picture your costliest treasure in an alabaster jar.

Whatever is your dearest treasure, I want you to hold it, look at it, and see how beautiful it is. See how precious and how sweet it is to you. Now look at the cross of Calvary. See there the Lamb of God who was crucified for the sins of the world. What will you do with your precious treasure now? Will you break the alabaster jar and pour its contents at the feet of Jesus and hold nothing back from the one who gave his life for your salvation? Do not think about what someone else may have, concentrate solely on yourself. What are you going to do with what you have?

*'BROKEN FOR YOU', my Saviour cries; raising my head, I lift my eyes,
See on the cross his grief and pain, hear whispered words of love again:
'BROKEN FOR YOU'. My heart is stirred. I must respond to what I've heard.*

'BROKEN FOR YOU'. Myself I bring; Lord, I'll surrender everything.

Costly and precious sacrifice, anything less will not suffice.

'BROKEN FOR YOU', my gift outpoured as I respond to you, my Lord.

Denise Brine

Lord Jesus Christ, take us as individuals. Take us, Lord, as a church. And, Lord, fill this place with the sweet perfume of a broken alabaster jar.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!