

STEPS TO THE CROSS

What Love Looks Like

Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, John 12:2-8

Mt. 26:6-13 6 And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured *it* on His head as He sat *at the table*. 8 But when His disciples saw *it*, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to *the poor*."

10 But when Jesus was aware of *it*, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. 11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. 12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did *it* for My burial. 13 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

Mark 14:3-9 3 And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured *it* on His head. 4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. 7 For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. 8 She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 9 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

John 12:2-8 2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. 3 Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

4 But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, who would betray Him, said, 5 "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" 6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

7 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. 8 For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

INTRODUCTION: As we follow Jesus' steps to the cross, it was Wednesday of the final week of Jesus' life in a body like yours and mine.

- Only two days remained before His death upon the cross.
- On Sunday, the Son of God had shined into the eyes of blind Bartimaeus and into the heart of wicked Zacchaeus.
- On Monday, the Son had burned the money changers and merchandizers who cared only about themselves and their own desires but cared nothing for internal devotion or heart felt worship to God.
- On Tuesday, the Son cast His light into the future to reveal the joy and glory that awaits those who believe and trust in Him.

Now Wednesday has come. The Savior left the bustling city of Jerusalem to spend Tuesday night in Bethany, the hometown of Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead and Lazarus' two sisters Mary and Martha. This day is very different from all the other days of the week, both those that preceded it which we have already discussed and those that will follow it.

I heard a man once call Wednesday "The Day the Son Stood Still," because it was the only day that Jesus did not venture forth into Jerusalem. The only thing we have recorded in any of the four gospels that Jesus did that day was to eat a meal in the home of Simon the Leper, with his friend Lazarus joining Him for dinner.

It was a quiet day. You may be wondering why we are even taking time to examine it if nothing happened. But you will notice that I did not say nothing happened. A lot happened. But it happened while the Son stood still.

The first thing that we know happened was this.

I. JESUS TOOK TIME TO FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVING FRIENDS.

I think I ought to begin this point by admitting to you that of all the lessons taught and all the points made throughout each of the days of the life of Jesus during Holy Week, I find the ones about this day the most personally convicting. Because I am a doer, a get with it, go to it, kind of guy. I get antsy just sitting around and chewing the fat. Even when I watch TV, a show has to be very engaging in its plot or I prefer to watch while I do something else at the same time.

And normally, I can find comfort for my busyness in the example of Jesus because He could be a real doer also.

- In one day, He heals a blind man, transforms the life of a city's biggest sinner, and offers Himself as Savior and King to a multitude.
- On another day He cleanses the temple and curses the fig tree and teaches about fruitfulness and about growing faith.
- And on another day He teaches everything about the future, the ages to come and unlocks mysteries to people's amazement, all in a single day!

And I say, "That's my kind of guy!"

And then I come to Wednesday, and I find that in the middle of the most important week of His 33 year earthly life, that Jesus goes to have dinner with some friends. And then when I read in the three gospels that record this event,

- He does not even seem to have an agenda for the meeting!
- He is not leading the disciples to plan the rest of the week.
- He is not going over assignments.
- He is not offering some new teaching or doctrine.

He's having dinner, not just with the twelve, but with other close friends who have come to know Him.

And frankly, I am blown away. There is a message here for me. Is there a message here for you? Jesus' actions that day tell us ...

A. Fellowship with believing friends is important for us all.

God knows me. He knows it often takes more than a single prompt for me to get the message. Years ago Pam Kirkland told me a story that has stuck with me.

A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the preacher decided to visit him.

It was a chilly evening. The preacher found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his preacher's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a comfortable chair near the fireplace and waited.

The preacher made himself at home but said nothing. In the silence, he contemplated the dance of the flames around the burning logs. After a few minutes, the preacher took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth, all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent.

The host watched all this in quiet contemplation. As the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead.

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. The preacher glanced at his watch and realized it was time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

As the preacher reached the door to leave, his host said with a tear running down his cheek, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday."

B. None of our fires burn as brightly or as warmly alone, as they do together.

C. Even the Savior, who had the power to stand alone, chose not to always be alone.

The second thing that happened that day was ...

II. A FOLLOWER TOOK TIME TO POUR OUT HER LOVE ON THE SAVIOR.

While Jesus was eating, Mary, the sister of Lazarus slipped quietly into the room.

- She carried an alabaster container, some called it a flask, others a box.
- It was a container made of alabaster stone, but what was in it was what really mattered. It contained a full pound of very precious perfumed ointment.
- It is probably hard for us to picture just how precious this ointment was. It would have cost nearly a year's wages for the average person.
- Without question, it was Mary's most precious possession.

Mary had undoubtedly used some of the ointment before.

- When very special occasions arose, she dabbed a bit behind her ears and the fragrance testified to the importance of an event.
- She probably had used some to anoint the dead body of her brother Lazarus when they prepared him for burial.
- But even though she was probably generous in its use on her brother, it was so potent, so powerful, and so precious, that with all of its uses up until now, hardly any was gone.
- There was enough here for the rest of her life.
- Mary looked at Lazarus, alive, healthy, robust, seated with the Master, sharing a meal together.
- What Jesus had done for her and her family caused her heart to swell until it felt like it would burst from her chest.

No one noticed her movement across the room or what was in her hands.

- Martha was busy serving the table, and Jesus and the disciples were absorbed in conversation.
- Mary eased up behind the Savior and with a simple motion broke open the box and poured the entirety of its precious contents over the head of her Lord.
- Immediately the room was hushed, and all eyes focused upon her and Jesus.
- The whole house was immediately filled with the fragrance of the ointment and with the testimony of Mary's extravagant love.

But Mary was not finished with her act of worship.

- She quietly slipped down to Jesus' feet, and with the ointment that had clung to her hands as she anointed the Master's head, she anointed His feet as well.
- Then, in an act of self-denial and humiliation,
- she loosed her hair that was always tightly bound upon her head,
- for no self-respecting Jewish woman would let her hair down before the men of a city;
- she let her hair fall to her waist and then threw it over her shoulders and wiped the excess ointment off of the feet of her Lord.

I am convinced that **Mary's worship was motivated not only by what Jesus had already done for Lazarus** and her and her sister Martha,

- **but by what she understood Jesus was about to do.**
- **He was going to the cross, and He was going there for her.**
- She had sat at His feet before and heard Him teach, and she understood.
- He was going to die upon that cross and pay the penalty for her sin.
- As she thought about His sacrifice, no gift she could offer was precious enough to express the gratitude of her soul.
- Worshipping Him in genuineness and humility,
- offering the best she had, was all she knew how to do to express the love and devotion of her heart.

A. This beautiful act of worship shows us the extravagance of genuine love.

1. We all recognize the difference between giving out of obligation and giving out of love.

2. When we are **obliged** to give, we ask, “How **little** can I spend and still do what is considered acceptable?”

- a. And such is the giving of many people to the Lord.
 - b. When these are told that the tithe is the minimum that we should offer to the Lord who gives us everything, some shrink back aghast saying, “That seems like so much.”
 - c. Those same dear souls would be delighted if their government would settle for so little!
3. But giving out of genuine love is very different. As William Barclay said,

**“Love never calculates;
love never thinks how little it can decently give;
love’s one desire is to give to the uttermost limits;
and, when it has given all it has to give,
it still thinks the gift too little.”**

And you might be saying, “Pastor, don’t you wish people gave like that today?” But I tell you, “No! I wish people loved like that today. Then the giving would take care of itself.”

You see, our problem is not that we lack the resources. The problem is that we love ourselves more than we love the Lord. So we use most of what God provides for ourselves and upon ourselves rather than upon and for the Lord.

- When church budgets sag, and mission giving lags, and work that everybody agrees is of the Lord goes unfunded,
- the Bible says it is not because God lacks or fails to provide the resources for His work.
- Scriptures say that God provides in abundance, more than is needed for every good work.
- God provides those resources by entrusting them to God’s people.
- The problem is that God’s people divert some, sometimes much, of what God has provided for His work to providing their own desires.

And what is the root of that problem?

- If we are honest, we will admit that it is a love problem.

- We love ourselves more than we love our Lord.
- That is one of the reasons that Jesus said that Mary's act would be remembered as a memorial to her as long as the gospel was preached.
- Her extravagant act was motivated solely out of love.
- It was contrary to common sense, contrary to popular opinion, contrary to custom –
- just love, and still her love could not match the love that Jesus had for her. Nor could her gift match His gift.

CONCLUSION: Forty-eight hours before He went to the cross, Jesus took nearly a full day and stood still. I wonder if we might not should take at least a few minutes and consider the love and adoration Mary demonstrated to her Lord in light of our own.

When we love somebody, we do all we can to spend time with them.

How much time do you spend talking to the Lord in prayer?

How much time do you spend listening to the Lord speak to you through the Scriptures?

How do you give to the Lord?

Do you give out of obligation, giving the least you can that will be considered acceptable?

Do you give out of love, grateful you have a tangible way to demonstrate to Jesus your adoration and gratitude?

How do you serve the Lord?

Do you serve out of obligation or pressure from others?

Do you serve out of love, glad to be able to join the One you love in doing the things He loves?

We can usually measure our love for someone or something

By the way we spend our time.

By the way we spend our money.