Give Your Heart to Jesus

Mark 14:1-9 New American Standard Bible (NASB 1995)

14 *Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him;* [2] *for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people."*

[3] *While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.* [4] *But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted?* [5] *For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her.* [6] *But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me.* [7] *For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me.* [8] *She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial.* [9] *Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."*

Introduction

Once a year, as pastor of this church, I preach on the nature of giving to the Lord in conjunction with our church-wide stewardship campaign. *Our giving is given to the Lord Jesus first before it belongs to the church or the needy. It must come from our heart. Our offering is determined by our understanding of who Jesus is. It is also measured by how much we love the Lord, not by what we own.* This morning, we will think about our attitude in giving through the story of a woman who gave her heart and gave all she had to the Lord Jesus in worship.

What's happening in today's story? It was two days before the Passover, which means only three days before Jesus would be crucified. He was at dinner in Simon the leper's home in Bethany, a town a couple of miles southeast of Jerusalem. There, a woman entered the room where Jesus was reclining. Standing next to Him, she broke a vial of extravagant perfume made of pure nard and poured the entire bottle over Jesus' head. Let me tell you: it was worth a fortune in those days. One time, Horace, the Roman poet, offered to send Virgil, his friend, a whole barrel of his best wine in exchange for a vial of nard.

When the disciples saw what was happening, their jaws dropped. They couldn't believe their eyes. Immediately, a clash of convictions erupted. An argument broke out among those in the room about her act of giving: was it a waste or not?

There were three groups in the room: the disciples (the onlookers), Jesus (the recipient), and the woman (the giver). Let's think about them one by one.

The Onlookers

Mark says "some" were indignant. Matthew tells us the disciples were among them (Matthew 26:8). I will follow Matthew's account here. "*Why this waste?*" That was the outcry of Jesus' disciples when they saw what the woman was doing with the costly vial of perfume—worth a worker's annual wage (in today's money it's about $70,000).

The disciples got indignant. They were very upset, because their conviction was violated. Their conviction deep down in their hearts was this: Jesus doesn't deserve such devotion and honor. He isn't worth that much. He is our teacher and worthy of our respect, but not this much. Maybe He is worthy of a drop or two of the perfume, but not the entire bottle.

That's why they were shocked. Soon, they raised their voices and rebuked her. They put her to shame, because they didn't approve of the way she used her own precious possession. Perhaps they would have had no problem if she had used it for her dowry in marriage or even for her own burial. However, when it was used for Jesus, they had a big problem and exclaimed, "*Apoleia!*" The word means "destruction." To them, she had thrown it away. "What a waste!" "It could have been sold and given to the poor!" They shamed her publicly. But Jesus saw something the disciples missed.

The Recipient

"*Leave her alone,*" intervened Jesus. He reminded His disciples and the woman that her giving was not a waste at all. He continued: she had done a beautiful thing, anointing Him ahead of time for His burial. That was true, because Jesus' burial was rushed (John 19:40-42) and by the time the women came with spices on Easter morning, the tomb was empty (Mark 16:1-6). Her anointing was the loving preparation Jesus received beforehand.

Now, if you only focus on the words such as "waste" or "helping the poor" you may miss the whole point. Jesus is not concerned here with waste or the best ways to spend one's material possessions. Nor does He discourage us from helping the poor. In fact, He said, "Whenever you wish you can do good to them" (Mark 14:7). By the way, He is the one who cares about the poor so much that He declared that the Kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor (Luke 6:20). He proclaimed the gospel to the poor. Furthermore, when it comes down to waste, He is the one who knew what it means not to waste God-given resources. Remember the story of feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fish (John 6:12)? After everyone was fed, Jesus commanded them to collect all the leftovers so that the food would not be wasted. He surely knew what waste is and what is not.

But look at what Jesus adds in the same breath. He turns from the poor to Himself: *For you always have the poor with you,…; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could;"* (Mark 14:7-8). Some opportunities to honor Him will not come twice. She gave while she had the chance. That's a powerful reminder for us. Sometimes we postpone our devotion to the Lord. We tell ourselves we'll serve Him when we have more time, give more when we have more money, or become more committed when life gets a little easier. Do it when you can.

Jesus points to one thing above all: who He is. He is the One who receives our giving and devotion. So, we must ask: Who is Jesus to me? He is more than a good moral teacher. He is more than a master who deserves respect. He is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is fully God. He is eternal. He is God incarnate—God in human flesh. Unlike any other human being, He is sinless. He has the authority to forgive sins in the world (yours and mine). He is our God and Savior. Therefore, He is worthy of our adoration, praise, worship, and our best! He deserves our all! That's what's happening in the story. Knowing who Jesus was, the woman gave her heart, her best, and all she had to Jesus. Let's look at the woman, the giver.

The Giver

To the woman, nothing was too precious or too costly for Jesus. Nothing was wasted on Jesus, because He was her God and her Lord. That's why she gave her heart and didn't hold anything back from Him.

Think about the perfume one more time. The perfume may have been a family heirloom, perhaps saved for her dowry or her own burial. But she gave it up for Jesus. I must say it was more than monetary sacrifice. It was the total surrender of her personal plans, ambitions, and aspirations. That's what happens in true worship. Surrender all to Jesus. He is worthy of nothing but the best from us, not a scrap here and there. Not divided attention here and there.

Do you surrender all to Jesus, your calendar and your wallet included? Do you give your best to Him or just give Him one hour on Sunday mornings? Do you give Him all your heart or only a piece of it and keep the rest with you? It all depends on who Jesus is to you.

When you worship the Lord with all your heart and mind, you may experience sharp criticism and angry glances from the onlookers. That's exactly what happened to the woman when she broke the vial and gave her heart for Jesus' sake.

Even today people don't change and still criticize the true worshipers of Jesus. When you enthusiastically worship the Lord, when you give all you have to Jesus, the onlookers may give you a hard time. Even shame you.

Remember what really matters, though: Jesus' praise trumps all the criticism of the onlookers. Therefore, don't let fear of others' opinions keep you from loving Jesus openly. Only focus on pleasing the Lord. Only worship the Lord in spirit and truth (John 4:24). That's what really counts before the Lord.

In today's story, I can imagine and almost smell the fragrance of that perfume that permeated the entire room (John 12:3). It must have lingered, and she must have carried the sweet scent on her clothes wherever she went. I can imagine people saying to her, "Whatever happened to you? You smell good! Where have you been?" She would reply, "Today I was with Jesus and gave my heart to Him in worship!"

God calls you to be the fragrance of Christ to the world (2 Corinthians 2:15). What smell do you give forth? The fragrance or the stink? Your being a sweet smell to the world begins with your heart entirely given to Jesus. When you worship the Lord Jesus with all your heart and mind, you will carry the fragrance of Jesus to the world.

Conclusion

Remember the gift the woman gave to Jesus. It was much more than the costly perfume. That day she gave her heart. It impressed Jesus so much that He promised her story would be told along with the gospel, the story of worship and adoration.

Our offering is an act of worship too. What we place in the plate, or on the pledge card, is the same thing she poured out: our hearts.

So, as you prayerfully consider your pledge this season, don't start by asking, "How much can I spare?" Ask, "Lord, what does my love for You look like?" Give your heart to Jesus today and every day in worship.

He will remember your devotion.

Let's pray.