

## Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Jesus’ Last Days – 11-17 June 2016

**C**hrist would His disciples had remained faithful even at the time of His crucifixion, but as foretold, they scattered: “Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad” (Matthew 26:31). Of the events that marked Jesus’ last days, we focus on the story of Mary who anointed Jesus and the lessons we may learn.

Matthew wrote: “Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto Him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as He sat at meat. But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For ye have the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her. Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time He sought opportunity to betray Him” (Matthew 26:6-16).

Nothing in the entire Gospel history more fully shows the quiet calmness of the life of Jesus, and His perfect ministry of every situation, and His constant readiness for every event, than this feast at the house of Simon. Jesus was exactly what the ordinary man is. Although nobody else knew what was coming, Jesus well knew that within two or three days He was to be betrayed and crucified; nevertheless He accepted an invitation to a supper that was made specially for Him – for “there they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him” (John 12:2). The ordinary man, not merely man of the world, but the professed Christian, would under such circumstances think that he ought to be ‘preparing for death;’ but Jesus was always prepared for everything.

There was no necessity for Him to change His manner of life in view of any event whatever. This contains a lesson for us. Even though we are not expecting death, but the coming of the Lord, we ought to be living day by day so that if it were announced as a certainty that the Lord would come tomorrow, it would make no difference in our arrangements. The exhortation of Jesus is: “Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44). We have no time given us except “to-day” – “now *is* the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Everyday ought to be spent as though it were our last, and yet not our last, but our entire time of preparation for eternity.

By reference to John 12:2-3; 11:1-2, we learn that it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who anointed Jesus at this feast. “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus,” and it is very evident that Mary had great love for Jesus; and this is proof that she had been forgiven much, for the one who is forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:41-42, 47). This reminds us again that the love of Jesus for men does not depend on their sinlessness. “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luke 15:2). If He did not love sinners, He could not love anyone on this earth; and “we love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Note the value of the gift that Mary bestowed on Jesus. The disciples said that “it might have been sold for much,” and in John 12:4-5 we learn that Judas, who was a business man, valued it at “three hundred pence.” This may not convey to the reader its value as compared with present prices. We do not need to know the value of a penny in the time of Christ, as compared with our money; but when we remember that a penny was considered a fair day’s wages (Matthew 20:2), we see that the ointment represented a labouring man’s wages for an entire year. It was no small gift that was poured out upon the Master. It was a royal gift, and was bestowed by Mary in recognition of the fact that Jesus was her Lord.

“To what purpose is this waste?” This was that the disciples said, evidently following the lead of Judas. Do not judge them harshly; we should no doubt say the same under similar circumstances. Let us remember that they did not know at the time what we know from the history. They did not fully appreciate who Jesus was, and they did not know, although they

had been told, that He was about to die, and be taken from them. And the act seemed so unnecessary and improvident. 'If she had only given Him something that He could keep, and that would have been of real use to Him! This ointment is of no practical value to Him, and its odour and effect will soon be gone. It is simply a woman's thoughtless lavishness. With the money that this would bring much food and clothing could have been purchased.'

Thus reasons cold, calculating selfishness; but love can sometimes teach reason. The odour of that ointment has not yet passed away. The Lord does not estimate gifts at their money value in the world market. The poor widow who gave "two mites, which make a farthing" (Mark 12:42), gave more than the rich who gave of abundance; and on the other hand Jesus who was poor, and was used to saving all the fragments of food, so that nothing should be wasted, did not think that this princely gift was anything to be astonished at, or that it was wasted. Did you never stop to think how much property that was dedicated to the Lord in ancient times was by His order deliberately burned up? When Noah came out of the ark, he built an altar, "and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour" (Genesis 8:20-21). "What a waste!" the critic would exclaim. Not by any means; it was an offering of love and trust.

All the sacrifices of old were an expression of the truth that all things belong to God, and that since all things are in Him, we have everything even though we give Him everything, and it is poured out at His feet or consumed into smoke. The gifts of love, like love itself, can never be wasted. Love's labour is never lost; it is its own reward. Christ "poured out His soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12), but the gift was not wasted. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (verse 11). He does not regret the gift, even though it is rejected. As we learn its worth, we shall learn how to give, and shall estimate the value of gifts in heaven's coin, not in that of this world. "Were the whole realm of nature mine. That were a tribute far too small; Love so amazing, so Divine, Demands my life, my soul, my all."

It is possible that Mary did not understand the full significance of what she had done; but she did that which her love prompted her to do, and God in His own wisdom ordained her reward. But what a contrast was presented in the selfish spirit of His disciples! That which had been bestowed upon Jesus they characterised as a "waste"! It was the traitor Judas who first whispered the idea among the disciples, not on account of his love for the poor, but because the money would have been put in the bag which he carried; but the suggestion met with prompt sympathy from the rest. They had been constantly with Jesus, which Mary had not. They had been chosen to the highest positions; they were the foremost in point of privileges and honour; Mary was foremost of anointing Christ for His burial and they lost it.

Mary sought not for honour and renown, but she gained it; for the Saviour said of her, "Whosoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:13). And with it is also told the story of the meanness and ingratitude of the disciples. Her love brought her a privilege that might well have been coveted by angels; but the disciples' selfishness brought them what was just the reverse. May we, by the grace of God, learn lessons from the story.

Yet another instance is recorded of what Mary gained through her love for her Saviour. The record in Mark tells us that, "when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared *first* to Mary Magdalene" (Mark 16:9). Mary, as we learn from the narrative, was more anxious to find Jesus than were the others, and she was the first to behold Him. She was the first to have visible evidence that she had a risen Saviour. At this time, also, as we are told in the twentieth chapter of John, Christ had not ascended to His Father. He had waited in order that He might appear unto her! Her love for Him held Him to the earth until He had filled her longing heart with joy and comfort. May our love for Him hold Him not only to the earth, but also in our bodies so that we may truly say He lives in us (Galatians 2:20).

It is love that finds the highest privileges in the Christian life. Love gains the privileges now, as well as it did then. We may not occupy the high position of others whom we know; but if our hearts are filled with the love of Christ, we may rest assured that our privileges will be as great as theirs. If we do that which our fervent love for Him prompts us, though we may not see the result now, we shall see by and by the privilege and blessing we gained, and the nearness which our love will have brought us to our Redeemer in the life to come.