

**Text: Mathew 26:6-13; Mark 14: 3-9; John 12:1-7;**

**Theme: Break the Alabaster, Pour gift that uplift (Best, Broken, Balm, Blessings)**

### *Quote*

*“The breaking of the alabaster box and the anointing of the Lord filled the house with the sweetest odour. Everyone could smell it. Whenever you meet someone who has really suffered; been limited, gone through things for the Lord, willing to be imprisoned by the Lord, just being satisfied with Him and nothing else, immediately you scent the fragrance. There is a savor of the Lord. Something has been crushed, something has been broken, and there is a resulting odour of sweetness.”\_ Nee Watchman*

- Matthew 26, Mark 14 and John 12 detail the breaking of an alabaster box, which many of us are familiar with. Each gospel writer saw it from separate angles and included minute details left out by the other writer.
- The context in which the narrative is situated is worth considering in order to fully understand its significance. Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8 all speak of the same event involving Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus, at the home of Simon the leper, probably a leper who had been healed by Jesus and had become one of His followers. Leprosy was a traumatic and stigmatizing sickness, having been healed of such a dreaded and deadly disease, Simon called for a celebration of his healing and freedom from the clutches of leprosy.
- Lazarus who had been raised by Jesus from the dead was also in attendance. Many people were still mesmerized by his resurrection from the dead by Jesus. This event occurred in Bethany just days before the crucifixion, which is why Mary came to anoint Jesus for the event to come. "She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial" (Mark 14:8).
- Jesus who was the chief guest was facing an impending death at the cross, the ultimate price he would pay for the sin of the world.
- This situated the narrative in a context of celebration as well as reflection. While we celebrate the many things the Lord has done in and through our lives, we must not forget to reflect on the many other things that would hinder and limit our service to the Lord.

## A. Best gift-

- The greatest gifts are the ones that lighten the spirit, ignite imagination and ease a troubled mind.
- Mary gave the best gift that anyone could ever give. It was gift of great quality, great quantity and great cost. It was the best gift.
- Mary was not a wealthy woman. She gave all that her life depended on. This alabaster box containing such expensive perfume very possibly represented her life's savings. It was worth 300 denari, which was about a year's salary in those days. The point is that Mary's resources were limited. She did not have the means to do what she did. She had probably kept this away for a long time, thinking that if times ever got really tough, she would have something to fall back on.
- Mary gave the most precious gift. Precious gifts are wrapped in specially designed packages. Mary's gift was wrapped in an alabaster box. Alabaster is a beautiful semi-transparent gemstone. It was used to make containers which would hold only the most expensive and precious contents. When the contents were extremely precious, the makers would work the stone in such a way that the only way to empty it would be to break the container.
- Mary gave what was rare and pure. This perfume was made from the oil of a herb plant called nard and was only found in the Himalayan mountains in India in Biblical times, so this was a precious import and it could very well have been a family heirloom passed down from generation to generation.
- The best gifts are timely. Mary carefully choreographed, curated and timed her gift to meet the greatest need. In biblical times, perfume was stored in an alabaster jar and could only be used once. Once you broke the seal of the jar, it had to be used at that moment, or it would lose its fragrance. Mary knew that this would be a one-time deal. She was willing to give it all or nothing. She knew the impending death of Jesus.
- Mary's gift was of value addition to the Lord Jesus Christ. Although some people present were bitter, the gift was preparatory for the coming death of Jesus Christ. Christ had sought refuge from friends, he found somebody who understood the need of the hour, to offer socio-psychological support in order to face the impending death. Jesus confesses that the oil was an anointing for his death in a few days.
- It is not so much, what you give to God that counts in his eyes. **It is how much what you give means to you that matters.** We tend to measure our gifts horizontally...that is we figure out how much is expected of us or how much we think is reasonable and fair and we give accordingly. We need to give our gifts to God on a vertical measure. Make it between you and God, not you and the world.
- Great gifts are characterized by trust, sacrifice, kindness, design, genuine intent, honesty, value addition and timing. What is that characterizes your gifts If it doesn't cost, it is not worth giving. Will it cost you time? Will it cost you

material possession? Will it cost you a relationship? Will it cost you reputation? Will it cost you a career? Will it cost you a status?

- Illustration: A young man who was successful was embarrassed about his mother who had only one eye. Every time the mother visited from upcountry, she was subjected to shame, inhuman treatment, verbal abuse because of her missing eye. She would be asked to stay in the guest room. After some years had passed, the man got a letter from the post office addressed, 'my precious gift'. When he opened the letter, he realized that his mother wrote it. A line in the letter caught his attention. The line read, 'I am glad my son that both your eyes are able to see properly. You see son, when you were young, a thorn pricked your eye, I donated my eye, so that you may see. Son I have been sick for the past two years and I may not make it. I just wanted you to know I love you'. At this the son broke down in tears and planned to go home to give back to the mother and ask for forgiveness. , but just as he came near home, he saw a crowd gathered outside his mothers' little hut, it was late, the mother had just died early that morning.
- What gift would you give to your savior? What gift would give to the church? What gift would you give to your parent? What gift would you give to your spouse? What gift would you gif to your pastor?

#### **B. Broken heart**

- Breaking out the alabaster means coming to the Lord with brokenness. Brokenness is a state of self-surrender. Mary demonstrates this self-surrender by kneeling at the feet of Jesus, a symbol that she took the place of a slave. She took the lowliest position of a bondservant. She also demonstrate this inner heart disposition when she undid her hair (~~something Jewish women did not do in public~~), which demonstrates the deepest state of humility and laying down of one's glory at the feet of Jesus. The hair was the symbol of a woman's glory (I Corinthians 11:15).
- Brokenness brings us closer to God, because God is repulsed by pride and self-righteousness. The closer you get to God, more responsibility you are given by God, the more you will be forced to depend on God. (Psalm 34:18)
- A person who is unbroken is a danger to himself, to God and to God's people because he is self-centered, confident and unwilling to depend on God.
- Like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to his teaching, the person who is broken is likely to spend quality and quantity time listening to the Lord, discerning the Lord's voice and following the Lord's direction in life
- The greatest sacrifice which we can ever give to the Lord is a broken heart (Psalm 51:17) brokenness is a tool by which God brings back his wondering and lost sheep back to the fold, back to the comforting and reassuring arms of the great shepherd.
- The most acceptable sacrifice before the Lord, is an attitude of humility. When others consider humility as a weakness, the Lord considers it as strength.
- Brokenness is the antidote for our self-centeredness nature

- Humility is the greatest symbol of confidence, security and courage.
- Break that alabaster in order to lay down your glory; lay down your status; lay down your wealth; lay down your experience and lay down your achievements. There is so much in store for us if we would only come to the Lord in self-surrender, taking the position of a bondservant, sitting at his feet daily to listen to his words, his direction, his teaching.

### **C. Balm for healing and soothing**

- Alabaster boxes are vessels of fragrance! Breaking out the alabaster box means unleashing the power of fragrance. The breaking of the alabaster box anointed Jesus with perfume, but its fragrance also filled the entire house. The fragrance filled the house bringing out a life-giving odour. By breaking out our alabaster boxes, we fill God's temple with a fragrance that rises up as a sweet smelling offering unto the Lord.
- When we break the alabaster box, we become the fragrance of the knowledge Jesus Christ and the life he offers (2 Cor 2:14)
- The world is stinking hatred, violence, greed, disease, poverty, injustice but when we break the alabaster box, we release the fragrance of love, peace, compassion and kindness (Eph 5:1-2)
- The world is sinking in greed, enmity, worldliness, rationalization, secularism, postmodernism, but when we break the alabaster box, we smell uniqueness of the anointing power. A. W. Tozer put it this way, 'The fragrance of the anointing oil was unique. If someone went near the priest, he could say immediately, I smell an anointed man. I smell the holy oil. The aroma, the pungency, the fragrance were there. Such an anointing could not be kept secret' can this be said of us at home, in the work place, in meetings?

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### **D. Blessings- Defended and an enduring legacy**

- What Mary did will endure the test of time. Much of life consists of fleeting moments and events that occur briefly once and then are gone. Occasionally, something happens that will linger in your memory, and you will recount to someone. Often such an event will remain in your memory bank if it is connected to another event, such as a birthday party or a family vacation. So it is with Mary's act. Jesus states that...
- It will accompany the gospel....wherever the gospel goes. There are other stories, especially ones we tell children in Sunday School, that may be even more familiar, such as "David and Goliath" or "The Feeding of the Five Thousand" (which appears in all four gospels). There is something about this story, though, that Jesus regards as particularly important. In comparing the three main accounts (in Matthew, Mark, and John),<sup>13</sup> the most striking feature they have in common, and a statement by Jesus that appears nowhere else in

the gospels, is his assertion about the permanent presence of those financially disadvantaged:

- The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. (Matt 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8) Evidently, despite our best efforts, despite the “Health and Wealth” gospel that some Christians promote, we will never eradicate poverty. So, if we cannot get rid of it, should we just accept it as immutable? <sup>14</sup> If it will not go away, is Jesus suggesting that his disciples ignore the Poor? ...Quite the contrary, perhaps because there have always been those among His people who were poor, God has always been concerned for them:
- Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor.... I am the LORD your God. (Lev 19:10)
- When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor.... I am the LORD your God. (Lev 23:22)
- In fact, Jesus is alluding to a pronouncement God made to Moses:
- There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land. (Deut 15:11)
- This kind of attention is what God expects from His people and for His people. <sup>15</sup> This is the first way what Mary did will endure: It will accompany the gospel. Moreover...

B. It will exemplify the gospel.

- Because this story about Mary will accompany the gospel, it is important that Jesus’ disciples be familiar with it. Perhaps more important, it is necessary that those who spread the gospel practice what it teaches: the humility of servitude that she displayed. By anointing Jesus, she did more than a regular disciple (i.e., even one of the twelve) would ordinarily do. The task of a disciple was fairly well defined in the first century. Even the female followers of Jesus did not venture much beyond food preparation. Personal care (e.g., foot washing) was the responsibility of household servants.
- While you are alive, you choose where you will spend eternity, because “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” (Heb 9:27) It is the most important decision you will ever make. Of course, there are other decisions you can and should make as well (e.g., leaving a will). Some people even make funeral arrangements in advance of their passing. Most people, though, do not write their own eulogy, which is good:
- Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips. (Prov 27:2)

- Still, what will others remember about you? What impression will you have made? What legacy will you leave behind? How much of what you have done in your life will endure beyond your death? For Mary it was (among other things) this act of service to Jesus. Likewise, what you do in service to our Lord will endure.<sup>21</sup>
- In reflecting on Mary's example, I was prompted to ask myself a pointed question: "What's in MY alabaster jar, and what am I going to do with it?"
- Let us search our hearts to see if there is anything hidden there that we want to treasure for ourselves. Would we be willing to pour it out on Him? We will discover things in our "jar" that we are holding back-what we struggle to relinquish to Him, even though we love Him dearly and want to pursue Him with all my heart.
- What about you? What precious perfume is locked inside your heart that could be lavished on our Lord? The little treasures you and I struggle to hold on to may hold back opportunities to worship Him with extravagant praise, releasing ministry and service to Him that will bless all those around us.
- What's in YOUR alabaster jar? And what are you going to do with it?