

Uncalculated Love

The Anointing of Jesus

Matthew 26:6-13

Morning reading: Hebrews 1

Marvin R. Knight

Senior Pastor, The Church at South Mountain

Main point: Christ is worthy of our heart's richest and best gifts.

Introduction:

Her story is the story of a rise to stardom and how she gained the courage to break free from her abusive husband. In 1984, the title of her most successful single asked the question, *"What's Love Got to Do With It?"*

If Tina Turner asked that question in a bible study, the answer from the Scriptures would be very insightful and apply to each of us today, as we think about the story of another woman. The Word of God teaches that what *we* love, what *you* love, "...has everything to do with it."

- In John 3:19, Jesus explained that the reason people refuse to come to Him to be saved is that they "loved darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." Love has everything to do with it.
- In Luke 16:14, the Pharisees were said to scoff at Jesus' teaching about the unrighteous steward because they were "lovers of money." Love has everything to do with it.
- In 2 Timothy 4:10, the great Apostle Paul sat heartbroken, isolated, cold, and wet in the Mamertine prison and he wrote to Timothy to *"make every effort to come to him soon"* because, *"Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me."* Love has everything to do with it.

We could go on and on, drawing from verses like 1 John 2:15 which warns us *"Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him..."* to one of our Lord's last letters to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2 where He indicts them about abandoning their *"first love"* (v.5).

In our text today, we meet a woman who demonstrated that "love has everything to do with it," and more than that, what she did for Christ in **uncalculated love** would be remembered until the end of time! I want to ask you today to bring your mind and heart to Word of God, and allow the Scriptures to show you if YOU believe that *Jesus is worthy of our heart's richest and best gifts*, and how to do it.

Context:

The basic theme of verses 1-16 is the stage being set for **the atonement of Christ**. Now if you Google *the atonement of Christ*, you will find many false religious groups who say the same things about what the atonement means. Almost all of them describe the atonement as *the payment for our sins*, but they leave out *what the Bible says about Jesus' identity and the only saving response to Him*. Now, remember, the devil doesn't mind if you believe some truth, as long as you *misunderstand Christ* or fail to respond to Him in the right way, at the right time, and with the right motive.

To be *reconciled to God* and restored to favor with God—which is what the atoning death of Christ provides—the right response, with the right motive, at the right time must be made to Christ. May the Lord help us to do so today.

Here is a recap of the context.

- In verses 1-2, we find Jesus PREDICTING His death as He explains to the disciples that the Passover which was coming was different than any other, for, in His death, they would witness *the Great Passover*. The one to which all of the others pointed. And in His death on the cross, He would be God's lamb slain to take away the sins of all who believe.
- In verses 3-5, Matthew unveils to us the leaders PLOTTING and conspiring His death which He just predicted.
- In verses 6-13, we see Mary PREPARING Jesus for burial, pointing to His approaching death and atonement.
- Then finally in verses 14-16, Judas initiates the BETRAYAL that will make possible His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. But His hour had come! Now was the time.

By placing these accounts here together, Matthew would have us to understand that no one can be exposed to Jesus and remain the same. You will either *love* Him or *hate* Him, *follow* Him or *reject* Him, be *melted* by Him or *hardened* toward Him—but there will be a response. The very glory of His person as the Son of God demands a response.

There are three responses in the scenes before us, and each response can be found today among us.

- First, there is a response of the leaders and Judas, and their response is one of *indifference*. They cannot abide that He live any longer and they conspire to put Him to death. It is a bitter, angry and malicious response. There are parallels to that today. Some people don't mind if you mention Allah, Krishna, or whoever else one may follow or pray to, but if you bring up the name of Jesus—no, no! They will not have it. They get animated, hostile, inflamed—they are opposed to Christ.
- Second, there is a response of disciples, and their response is one of *incomprehension*. They don't understand what He is doing, and there is pettiness about them, and as a result, they don't respond as they ought to. There are parallels to that today. Some people come to church week-in and week-out, who never seem to get it. They don't grasp what the Gospel is all about. They continue to be out of line with His mission, His agenda, His cross, and His requirements.
- But the third response is what we want to give our attention to today. It is the response of Mary. It is the response of profound devotion and uncalculated love.

Here are the three response—which one will you make today? What category do you fall in—indignation, incomprehension, or profound devotion? I will come back to this at the end of the message.

Exposition

Now it's easy to get lost in this extraordinary scene and chase many "rabbit trails," so let me make a couple of observations which will help us understand what it is happening here without losing the main focus.

- ⁷ a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined *at the table*. ⁸ But the disciples were indignant when they saw *this*, and said, "Why this waste?" ⁹ For this *perfume* might have been sold for a high price and *the money* given to the poor." ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. ¹² For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. ¹³ Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

A. Observation #1: The location—Where are they? (v.6)

- ⁶ Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper,

Explained: The place is *Bethany*—only two miles or so from Jerusalem. A short walk to the east. Jesus is staying in Bethany each night during the Passover. We are familiar with Bethany because it is the home town of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, along with his two sisters, Martha and Mary (*John 11:1ff*). Jesus loved this family (*John 11:5*) and had a close relationship with them. But this time, the Lord is not at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; He is at the home of "**Simon, the leper.**"

Now we can reasonably imply that Simon was *a former leper* because if he still had leprosy, he would have been banished outside the city and cut off from normal social interaction to live in isolation with other lepers. So, this must have been someone whom Jesus healed. The fact that Simon is in Bethany and his home is an indication that he has recovered and now he is allowed social interaction with other people. This is all we know about Simon, and it is enough!

Applied: Can you imagine being a leper, rotting, rubbing, and wasting away (which is a picture of sin)? Imagine being separated, polluted, defiled, and then being healed by Jesus! Imagine being restored by Jesus and then having Jesus into your home for fellowship and personal relationship!

Having withdrawn from the chaos and conflict of Jerusalem, with the Sanhedrin seeking to arrest and kill Him, we are given a glimpse into the very personal friendship and fellowship of Jesus during His days before the cross. As Jesus retreated into the home of Simon, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus came over for a time of sweet fellowship. There are perhaps 20 people in this home—the 12 disciples, the Lazarus family, and a few others. But something took place which stuck out in everyone's mind.

B. Observation #2: The person—who is this woman and what did she do? (v.7a)

- ⁷ a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined *at the table*.

Explained: We know this woman to be Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

Matthew does not tell us her name, but John does (*John 12:3*). Although we cannot say with certainty that Mary of Bethany is the same promiscuous woman that we read of in Luke 7:36-38, this is what we can say about Mary of Bethany.

We know that she was an amazingly *perceptive* woman. She was not *impulsive*. She was not *unthoughtful*. We know that Mary's customary position was that *she loved to sit at the feet of Jesus* and listen to words which flowed from His lips. We see Mary of Bethany three times in the gospels.

The first time you recall is the occasion when her sister, Martha was busy providing hospitality to all the guests and getting all the food ready—and in a moment of frustration looks around for Mary, but Mary is sitting at the Master's feet, eagerly listening to His words. She tried to get Jesus to tell Mary to help her with the preparations, but Jesus said,

- **Luke 10:41-42**—Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but *only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

I believe from THAT moment onward Mary started to ponder the question, "how can I demonstrate to Jesus that I truly love Him and truly understand what He has come to do for me?"

The second time we see her was when Jesus came back to Bethany after the death of her brother Lazarus, and when the two sisters came out to meet Him, again, Mary falls at His feet, but this time in deep sorrow, seeking comfort. It is a touching scene.

- **John 11:30-35**—Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. ³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus, therefore, saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴ and said, "Where have you laid him?" They *said to Him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept.

The third time, is here in our account. And again, Mary is at the Master's feet, *not as a learner seeking light, or as a sufferer seeking comfort, but now as a worshiper expressing love.*

I want you to see three things about what Mary did.

1. **Mary did a *beautiful* thing.**

Explained: Verse 7 tells us that she took an alabaster vial of very costly perfume. An alabaster vial was a valuable container. It was a small stone flask with a long slender neck. Can you see it? It is like a stone bottle, with a long neck like a supermodel, so that what is in it can be poured out with a sense of *precision*. What is in it? Matthew calls it a *costly perfume*, but Mark calls it *pure nard*, which was an aromatic oil from a rare plant in East India (*Mark 14:3*). It was about a pint of very expensive ointment which Mark tells us could have been sold for over 300 denarii. A denarii was equivalent to a day's wages, so if you do the math and take out days for the Sabbath, this was worth about a year's salary.

Today, if you are making minimum wage and you work full time, your yearly salary would be a small step north of \$21,000. Think of the enormous sacrifice it would be to forfeit a year's pay! We know from John's gospel that it was Judas who calculated this amount because he was the treasurer and he used to pilfer the money that was put into it (*John 12:4-6*).

Where did she get this alabaster vial? Most likely it was handed down from one generation to another. It was probably an *inheritance*. It was a *family heirloom* that served as a family safety net if they found themselves in dire straits financially. If Mary's family ever got in a tight spot, they could always take this alabaster vial, sell it, and get out of financial hardship.

Now think about this dear friend. She takes *the most valuable thing* she has, and she gives it to Jesus! This is how she *EXPLAINS* to Jesus what she *THINKS* of Him. She is filled with *gratitude*. She wants Jesus to have it *ALL*. She did not pull out an eyedropper and merely drop a sprinkle on his forehead, but rather, she snapped the neck off the jar so that what was in it might flow out *fully, completely, and unreservedly* on Jesus.

It was not *spontaneous*. This was an intentional *act of devotion and uncalculated love and sacrifice*. She did not run and grab it under a moment of conviction or pressure. No, she deliberately took it to Simon's home. She *meant* to do it. She did not offer it as a *matching fund*. There is nothing wrong with that practice, but this was between her and her Savior. She wanted to demonstrate to Jesus what she felt in her heart. She did not do it to *IMPRESS*, but to *EXPRESS* what she thought of Him and what He was doing for her. It was a beautiful thing!

Applied: At different times in our lives and in different ways, it is incumbent upon us to express our love to the Lord in a way that is...COSTLY. Sometimes it is easy to give *money*, but what will cost you more is to provide *TIME*. Sometimes it is easy to provide *time*, but what will cost you more is to provide *MONEY, SERVICE, your TALENTS, your VACATION, or the greatest treasure which you currently possess—your HEART and SOUL (Cf. Mark 8:36)*. What is most costly to you? What is most valuable to you?

Many people give only *after the approval of others*. Some people give with *an eye to the approval of others after they give*, but not Mary! She gave what was *costly*. She gave Jesus *everything* she had—and it was a *beautiful* thing. Jesus called it a "*good deed*."

I wonder if you can see into Mary's heart and observe *the motivation* that led her to give the best thing she had to her Lord and Savior? It was a *beautiful* thing.

2. Mary did a *wasted* thing.

- ⁸ But the disciples were indignant when they saw *this*, and said, "Why this waste? ⁹ For this *perfume* might have been sold for a high price and *the money* given to the poor."

Explained: The disciples said it was **wasteful**. The word they used (*apoleia*) means misuse—why this misuse? This squandering! They were "**indignant**"—in the Greek (*aganakteo*), it's the picture of a horse with flaring nostrils. They were hot! Angry! Lit (as the young people would say)! But why? Why this response?

They thought they were taking the high moral ground. This is one of the tricks of debate. What you do is that you seek to portray your opponent in a negative light by trying to seize the higher ground morally from which you can look down on them critically.

Woman, we are for the poor, but you are acting senseless, extravagant, and wasteful. Do you know what we could have done with this money? Do you know how many needs would have been met?

They are seeking to take what Mary has done and cast it in the worse possible light. Reckless! They say. Wasteful! And notice, how they look down their long, self-righteous noses upon her in unrighteous anger. Don't you know that there are people who are hungry with no food, no shelter, no clothes?

That was the disciples' response. John tells us that Judas had another motive for speaking as he did.

- **John 12:4-6**—But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, ⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor *people*?” ⁶ Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.

So the disciples had a cold hearts toward Christ and a wrong perspective, Judas has wrong motives, and what was really behind it was *covetousness*. But notice what Jesus said.

- ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me.

The root meaning of the word **“bother”** (*kopos*) means to beat, and the expression is one that we can relate to today. When we see someone verbally assaulting another person, we say, “Why are you beating them up...” We mean emotionally. “Quit beating them up or assaulting them,” we say. This is the same expression. Jesus steps in and says, “...leave her alone boys...stop it right there...it's time to back up off her...”

It is a strong rebuke. **“She has done a beautiful (“good”—*kalos*) thing, a noble or admirable thing to Me,”** In other words, Jesus is saying, it is not what you would have done, you may have had other ideas, but *“she has done what she could”* (*Mark.14:8*), and it was not a wasteful thing.

Applied: Sometimes there are people in the church who become critical that one ministry has more budget resources than another, and then they gossip and complain behind the scene and start division—but Jesus is pointing out here something significant, and it is this...

- ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.

What did Jesus mean by this? He meant that *the obligation to help the poor will always be opportune*...you could help the poor anytime you want. The opportunity to minister to the poor will always be there.

Some opportunities are ALWAYS present versus those that are TEMPORARILY PRESENT.

Jesus will only be with them for a little while longer, so the opportunity to minister to Him is temporary. There is a continuing obligation to help the poor as long as we are in this world, but there is a difference between what you can ALWAYS do and what you can do RIGHT NOW. What they could do at the time was minister to Him, and what Mary did was not a wasteful thing, it was a beautiful, admirable, noble thing.

- ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.

Now that statement, coming from the lips of anyone else, *reeks of arrogance!* Put that statement on the lips of your *father, mother, grandmother, the Pope, or the pastor* and we would say, "My, what a big head he/she has!" Try to put these words *on your lips* and, see how they sound? "*The poor are always going to be around. You can give it to them at any time. I am not going to be here forever.*" How would this sound, coming from our lips?

There are millions of people right now who are struggling to make it through the day because they do not have enough money to get a loaf of bread or some rice to live. Hundreds of people will die of starvation today, but Jesus says, "You will always have people in this condition...but *'you do not always have Me.'*"

Why did Jesus say that? *Because He sets Himself above the needs of humanity.* Jesus is in a different category. He is not like *everyone else*, and what He was about to do, could not be done by anyone else!

Imagine yourself in the room. And as the disciples laid back on these low couches, perhaps resting on their right elbows with their heads close to one another, Mary comes up and snaps the neck of that stone jar and pours out 20 or 30 thousand dollars' worth of pure nard on His head!

Would you be tempted to say: "What are you doing? Maybe a \$50 bottle or \$100 bottle at the very most! But \$20,000?! C'mon Mary—that's a little extreme, right?"? No...it was not a *waste* for her, but it is a TEST for us.

Applied: Is this an ordinary Man? Is this some faithful pastor or wise prophet? No, this is the Son of the living God! There is something unique about Jesus, and He ACCEPTS the best, and He EXPECTS all you have to give.

James Montgomery Boice asks,

"Do you think that if you give Jesus your most precious possession, He will overlook it or not know why you have given it? He cherishes the gifts of every yielded heart. Your gift will be different than Mary's. It may be your free time or a bank account, or even your children. Would you give your children to the Lord's service if Jesus should call them? Would you give yourself if He should call? Would you give your wealth to send others? Nothing given out of love will ever be overlooked by Jesus."¹

It was not a *wasted* thing for Mary; it is a *test* for us. Can you enter into this? If you cannot enter into this, and you still think this is a waste, if you believe that anything is a waste for Jesus, *then it proves that you have never seen Him for who He is.* He is God incarnate. He is the Son of God who came to die for your sins and mine.

What Mary did was a *beautiful* thing. Mary did a *wasteful* thing—at least some thought it was.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol.2, The Triumph of the King*, Baker Books, Grand Rapid MI, 2001, p.554

3. Mary did a *prophetic* thing.

- ¹² For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. ¹³ Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.

Explained: Jesus interprets her act, and in doing so, He reveals that His death will be that of a criminal—whose body would be not buried with a proper ceremony. A criminal would not typically be anointed for burial before it was dead! Anointing was done for the corpse (*Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56-24:1; John 19:39-40*).

Mary understood that this must be done NOW. She would not have a chance later. In a way, by giving ALL to Jesus, she gave something to *every poor person in the world*.

Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 8:9,

- **2 Corinthians 8:9**—For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

What we need to remember is how a woman gave the very best thing to Jesus. She loved Jesus. She was utterly devoted to Him. Mary did what she could. She anointed His body beforehand for burial. Jesus understood *what* she was doing, but more importantly, Mary understood what she was doing. Time and time again, Jesus said...

- **Matthew 12:40**—for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
- **Matthew 17:9**—As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”
- **Matthew 17:12**—but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him but did ^[a]to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.
- **Matthew 17:22-23**—And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; ²³ and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.” And they were deeply grieved.
- **Matthew 20:17-19**—As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve *disciples* aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, ¹⁸ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify *Him*, and on the third day He will be raised up.”

The disciples still didn't get it. But Mary did. She understood that He was going to die in the place of sinners like her. As a woman, she would not have access to Jesus when that time came, so she is doing what she can NOW before the opportunity is past!

Perhaps, Mary was familiar with that verse in **Isaiah 53:8-9**,

- By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living

For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?
9 His grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

She understood the heart of the Gospel. The heart of the Gospel is a cross. Jesus was dying for her. He was paying the price to set her free (*Matt.20:28*). He was meeting the just and fierce anger of God in her place (*2 Cor.5:21*), and no price was too high for her.

But as we shall see in the next scene. Not only did *Mary get it*. Satan got it too! The dragon was there in the room, entering *the heart of Judas* and making his next move. The devil understood what was happening too, and he was trying his utmost to prevent it. Perhaps, he is at work to prevent you from getting this message today.

Applied: What can you do? Don't do what both the Jews and Gentiles did—*don't ignore the evidence!* Don't try to wash your hands of responsibility to respond. Do what Mary did—listen to Him!

Conclusion:

Matthew 26 is a very searching passage which tells us a great deal about the corruption of the human heart and once again, confronts us with the Gospel of Christ. It confronts us with Christ again, and it answers for us:

- How can religious people be so hateful, bloodthirsty, and vengeful?
- How can disciples who have walked with Jesus for three years still be so petty and mean-spirited?
- How can Judas who has looked into the eyes of perfect love and witnessed the grace of God in action, betray Him unto death?

Which category do you fall in today?

- Do I belong with the religious leaders—who are outwardly devoted and committed, but secretly hold hatred toward Christ and resist Him?
 - Do I belong with the disciples—still failing to comprehend the Gospel, still acting petty and judging other's actions as a cover up for my lack of profound devotion?
 - Am I like Mary—uninhibited, unrestricted in my devotion to Christ, uncalculated in love, and willing to go all the way with Jesus?
1. How do you tell Jesus you love Him? Let nothing you possess be more important than Him.
 2. Do you want to be remembered? Then do as Mary did. Give it all to Christ.

Footnotes:

Why the different time frames for the woman with the alabaster vial in the gospels? The short answer for the different time frames is that Matthew and Mark insert the story into their gospel records to communicate the time of Jesus' suffering (2 days before Passover). They are making a writer's choice to place this scene in their portrait where they see fit to make a strategic impact on the reader, whereas John and Luke are following the events more chronologically (6 days before Passover [*John 12:1*]).

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