

A Woman's Memorial

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true devotion to Christ arises from a loving heart acting spontaneously and solely for Him, exemplified by the woman who anointed Jesus with costly ointment.

Scripture: Matthew 26:13, John 12:1-8

Topics: "Christian Devotion", "Sacrificial Love", "Obedience to the Spirit"

Description

In 'A Woman's Memorial,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound significance of the woman who anointed Jesus with costly ointment, emphasizing that true Christian devotion arises from a heart moved by love rather than duty or precedent. Spurgeon challenges believers to cultivate spontaneous, sacrificial acts done solely for Christ, highlighting the eternal value of such devotion. This sermon calls Christians to renew their passion and break free from mere formalism in their service to the Lord.

Transcript

“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.”—Matthew 26:13.

THE EVANGELISTS ARE of course the historians of the time of Christ; but what strange historians they are! They leave out just that which worldly ones would write, and they record just that which the worldly would have passed over. What historian would have thought of recording the story of the widow and her two mites? Would a Hume or a Smollett have spared half a page for such an incident? Or think you that even a Macaulay could have found it in his pen to write down a story of an eccentric woman, who broke an alabaster box of precious ointment upon the head of Jesus? But so is it. Jesus values things, not by their glare and glitter, but by their intrinsic value. He bids his historians store up, not the things which shall dazzle men, but those which shall instruct and teach them in his spirit. Christ valueth a matter, not by its exterior, but by the motive which dictated it, by the love which shines from it. O singular historians! ye have passed by much that Herod did; ye tell us little of the glories of his temple; ye tell us little of Pilate, and that little not to his credit; ye treat with neglect the battles that are passing over the face of the earth; the grandeur of Caesar doth not entice you from your simple story. But ye continue to tell these little things, and wise are ye in so doing for verily these little things, when put into the scales of wisdom, weigh more than those monstrous bubbles of which the world delighteth to read.

And now my prayer is that we may be endued this morning with the same spirit as that which prompted the woman, when she broke her alabaster box upon the head of Christ. There must be something wonderful

about this story, or else Christ would not have linked it with his gospel, for so hath he done. So long as this gospel lives shall this story of the woman be told; and when this story of the woman ceaseth to exist, then the gospel must cease to exist also, for they are co-eternal. As long as this gospel is preached, and wherever it is proclaimed, the story of this woman is to go with it. Our Lord's prediction goes on to be verified, while the memorial of this woman fills the church with its fragrance. There must be something, therefore, remarkable in it: let us pause, and look, and learn, and God give us grace to imitate.

I shall want you first attentively to observe the woman; secondly, I shall invite you to look into the face of her loving Lord, and to listen to what he says about her; and then I shall close with an earnest suggestion that each one of us look to himself, for surely this is meant for our profit, and is not of any private interpretation.

I. First, then, my friends, LET US OBSERVE THE WOMAN HERSELF.

There is much dispute among commentators as to who she was. Some there are who confound this woman with that other woman who was a sinner, who came behind Christ, and washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. There are some too, who think that the woman in Matthew is the same as the one of whom I read just now in the gospel of John; while there are others who say, "Not so, for that incident occurred in the house of Lazarus, where Lazarus sat at the table, and Martha served, while this, on the other hand, is stated to have taken place in the house of Simon the leper that was at Bethany; You will recollect also that this narrative in Matthew happened two days before the Passover—(see the second verse of this twenty-sixth chapter)—while the transaction recorded by the evangelist John, is said to have taken place six days before the Passover. It will be an interesting study for you some Lord's-day afternoon, if you are at home, to sit down and find out these different women, and see how far they are all alike, or wherein there is a difference. I have no time to spare on that subject this morning, and if I had I should not use it, for it will do you good to search the Scriptures and find it out for yourselves. Whether this, however, was Mary the sister of Martha or not, I will leave undetermined. We shall not err in speaking of her as a certain woman. Christ was sitting, or reclining, at the table of Simon the leper. A sudden thought strikes this woman. She goes to her home, she gets her money, and expends it in an alabaster box of ointment, or perhaps she had it in store, all ready laid up. She brings it; she hastens into the house. Without asking any one's leave, or communicating her intention, she breaks the alabaster vase, which was itself of great value, and forth flows a stream of the most precious ointment, with a very refreshing fragrance. This she poured on his head. So plenteous was the effusion that it streamed right down to his feet, and the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment. The disciples murmured, but the Saviour commended. Now, what was there in the action of this woman worthy of commendation, and of such high commendation too that her memory must be preserved and transmitted with the gospel itself throughout all ages?

I think, in the first place, this act was done from the impulse of a loving heart, and this it was that made it so remarkable. Ah! my brethren, the heart is better than the head, after all, and the renewed heart is infinitely superior to the head; for, somehow or other, though doubtless grace will renew the understanding, yet it takes longer to sanctify the understanding, than it doth the affections; or, at least, the heart is the first affected; it is that which is first touched, and being swifter in its goings forth than the head; it is generally more uncontaminated by the atmosphere around, and more clearly perceives that which is right. We in our day fall into the habit of calculating whether a thing is our duty or not; but have we never an impulse of the heart more impressive, and more expressive, than the mere arithmetic of moral obligations? Our heart says to us, "Arise, go and visit such and such an one who is sick:" we stop and say,

“Is it my duty? If I do not go, will not somebody else go? Is the service absolutely requisite?” Or thy heart has said perhaps, once upon a time, “Devote of thy substance largely to the cause of Christ.” If we obeyed the heart we should do it at once; but instead of that, we stop and shake the head, and we begin to calculate the question whether it is precisely our duty. This woman did no such thing. It was not her duty—I speak broadly—it was not her positive duty to take the alabaster box and break it on the head of Christ. She did not do it from a sense of obedience; she did it from a loftier motive. There was an impulse in her heart, which gushed forth like a pure stream overflowing every quibble and questioning,—“Duty or no duty, go and do it,”—and she takes the most precious things she can find, and out of simple love, guided by her renewed heart, she goes at once and breaks the alabaster box, and pours the ointment on his head. If she had stayed a minute to consider, she would not have done it at all; if she had pondered, and reckoned, and reasoned, she never would have accomplished it; but this was the heart acting, the invincible heart, the force of a spontaneous impulse, if not of a very inspiration, while the head with its various organs hath not been allowed time to hold a council. It was the heart’s dictate fully and entirely carried out. Now, in these times, we lace ourselves so tight that we do not give our hearts room to act, we just calculate whether we should do it—whether it is precisely our duty. Oh! would to God our hearts could grow bigger! Let our heads be as they are, or let them be improved; but let the heart have full play, and how much more would be done for Christ than ever has been done as yet! But I would have you remark, that this woman, acting from her heart, did not act as a matter of form.

You and I generally look to see whether the thing our new heart tells us to do has ever been done before; and then, if, like Martha, we love Christ, we still think it will be the proper mode of showing our love to prepare him a supper, and go and stand and wait at the table. We look for a precedent. We recollect that the Pharisee gave Christ a supper; we remember how many others of the disciples have given him a dinner; and then we think that is the proper orthodox way, and we will go and do the same. “Mr. So-and-so gives ten guineas; I shall give ten guineas. Mrs. So-and-so teaches in the Sunday School; I shall teach in the Sunday School. Mr. This or That is in the habit of having prayer with his servants; I shall do likewise.” You see, we look to find out whether anybody else has set us an example, and then we get into the habit of doing all these things as a matter of form. But Mary never thought of that; she never asked whether there was anybody else that had ever broken an alabaster box of ointment on that sacred head. No, she goes her way; her heart says, “Do it,” and she does it all alone, breaks the box, and out flows the precious ointment. I would that we also obeyed the dictates of the heart; but no, we take second thoughts. Depend on it, in the things of Christ first thoughts are the best. It is that heavenly inspiration of the Spirit which comes into the soul, and says, “Do some great things for thy Master—go out and show thy love to him in some hazardous expedition.” Oh! if we did but obey that, what results should we not see? We sit down and say, “Is it reasonable? Is it expected of me? Is it my duty?” No, my friend, it is not expected of you; it is not your duty; but are you going to stop short in bare duty? Will you give to Christ no more than his due as you give to Caesar, when you pay your tax? What! if the custom be but a shekel, is the shekel all he is to have? Is such a Master as this to be served by calculations? Is he to have his every-day penny, just as the common laborer? God forbid we should indulge such a spirit! Alas! for the mass of Christians, they do not even rise so high as that; and if they once get there they fold their arms, and they are quite content. “I do as much as anybody else, in fact a little more. I am sure I do my duty; nobody can find any fault; if people were to expect me to do more, they would be really unreasonable.” Ah! then, you have not yet learned this woman’s love, in all its heights and depths. You know not how to do an unreasonable thing—a thing that is not expected of you—out of the divine impulse of a heart fully consecrated to Jesus. The first era of the Christian Church was an era of wonders, because then, Christian men obeyed the prompting of their hearts. What wonders they used to do! A voice within the heart said to an apostle, “Go to a heathen

country and preach.” He never counted the cost—whether his life would be safe, or whether he would be successful; he went and did whatever his heart told him. To another it spake, “Go thou, and distribute all that thou hast;” and the Christian went and did it, and cast his all into the common store. He never asked whether it was his duty his heart bid him do it, and he obeyed at once. Now, we have become stereotyped, we run in the ancient cart-rut; we all do what other people do; we are just content with performing the routine, and accomplishing the formalism of religious duties. How unlike this woman, who went out of all order, because her heart told her to do so, and she obeyed from her heart. This, I think, is the first part of the woman’s act that won a deserved commendation.

The second commendation is—what this woman did was done purely to Christ, and for Christ. Why did she not take this spikenard, and sell it, and give the money to the poor? “No,” she might have thought, “I love the poor, I would relieve them at any time; to the utmost of my ability would I clothe the naked, and feed the hungry; but I want to do something for him.” Well, why did she not get up, and take the place that Martha did, and begin to wait at the table? Ah! she thought, Martha was at the table, dividing her services, Simon the leper, and Lazarus, and all the rest of the guests, have a share in her attention. I want to do something directly for him, something that he will have all to himself, something that he cannot give away, but which he must have and which must belong to him. Now, I do not think that any other disciple, in all Christ’s experience, ever had that thought. I do not find, in all the Evangelists, another instance like this. We had disciples, whom he sent out by two and two to preach, and right valiantly did they do it, for they desired to benefit their fellow-men in the service of their Lord. He had disciples too, I doubt not, who were very, very happy, when they distributed the bread and the fishes to the hungry multitudes, because they felt they were doing an act of humanity, in supplying the needs of the hungry; but I do not think he had one disciple that thought about doing something exactly and directly for him—something, of which no one else could partake, something that should be Christ’s, and Christ’s alone. This is something, my brethren, which I wish you to remember. How much of what we do in the cause of religion, fails to have any excellence in it because we do not perform it for Christ’s sake! We go up to preach, perhaps, and we do not feel that we are preaching for Christ. Perhaps we are preaching with a sincere desire to do good to our fellow-men: so far so good; but even that is not so grand a motive, as the desire to do it for him who loved us, and gave himself for us. Do you not often catch yourself, when you put a coin into the hand of the poor, thinking there is a virtue in it? And so there is, in one sense; but do you not find yourself forgetting, that you should do that for him, and give that as unto Christ, giving unto the poor, and lending unto the Lord? Sabbath-school teachers! I ask you also: do you not find, in teaching your class, that you often forget that you should be teaching for him? Your act is done rather for the church, for the school, for your fellow-men, for the poor, for the children’s sake, than for Christ’s sake. But the very beauty of this woman’s act lay in this, that she did it all for the Lord Jesus Christ. You could not say she did it for Lazarus, or did it for the disciples; no it was exclusively for him. She felt she owed him all, it was he who had forgiven her sins; it was he who had opened her eyes, and given her to see the light of heavenly day; it was he who was her hope, her joy, her all, her love went out in its common actings to her fellow men—it went out towards the poor, the sick, and the needy. but oh! it went in all its vehemence to him. That man, that blessed man, the God man, she must give something to him. She could not be content to put it in that bag there; she must go and put it right on his head. She could not be content that Peter, or James, or John, should have a part of it; the whole pound must go on his head; and though others might say it was waste, yet she felt it was not, but that whatever she could give unto him was well bestowed, because it went to him to whom she owed her all. Ah! my dear hearers, learn this lesson, I pray you. The scene is a very simple one, but it is extremely captivating. You will do your acts in religion far better, if you can cultivate always the desire to do them all for Christ. Oh! to preach for Christ! What precious work that is! When the mind is fatigued and

the body weary, this will make a man strong to labor and to stiffer too, if he hears the whisper, "Go and do it for thy Master's sake." Oh! to visit the sick for Christ, and distribute to the poor for his sake! This will make toil light; self-denial will become a pleasure, it will cease to be self-denial altogether, if we remember that we are doing it for him! But we do not now as this woman did. I fear our love is but faint and cold. If the spark were kindled to a flame, we should never be content with attending to religion from a selfish motive; we should not assay to do holy works with the idea of getting good ourselves, but our one aim and desire would be, to glorify him—to spend and be spent for him who suffered on the cross for us. These two commendations were surely enough to immortalise this woman—she obeyed the dictates of her heart, and she did it all to him.

There is yet a third thing. I fear, however, I have anticipated myself. This woman did an extraordinary thing for Christ. Not content with doing what other people had done, nor wishful to find a precedent, she ventured to expose her ardent attachment though she might have known that some would call her mad, and all would think her foolish and wasteful, yet she did it—an extraordinary thing—for the love she bear her Lord. Our church-acts at this day—as far as I know the church of Christ, from extensive travelling and considerable experience exhibit a dull, uniform, dead level. There are some few men who strike out every now and then a new endorse, who are not content to ask what the fathers did, what is canonical, what will be permitted and allowed by ecclesiastical polity or by public opinion—men will only ask, "Does my heart bid me do it for Christ, then I will go and do it?" and it is done. But the mass of Christians have not got a new thought, simply because new thoughts generally come from the heart, and they will not let their hearts work, and consequently they never get a new emotion. I believe that the origin of Sabbath schools is to be found in the heart of some one man. His heart prompted him, saying—"Take these little ragged urchins, and teach them the Word of God." If that thought had come into some of you, you would have said, "Well, there is not any Sunday-school connected with the church of Christ all over England; I am sure the minister will throw many obstacles in the way; nobody else has done it, but it would have been a good thing if it had been done many years ago." Robert Raikes never talked like that; he went and did it, and we, poor little creatures, can imitate him afterwards. If we would let our heart work, we should do new things. Within fifty years from this date, unless the Lord come before that era, there will be new operations for the cause of Christ, of which, if we heard them now, we should jump for joy. Perhaps they will never come to pass for years, simply because this is the age for intellectual reasoning, and not the age for heart impulse. If we did but hear our hearts, and heed the promptings of the Spirit within, there might be fifty schemes for the promotion of the cause of Christ started in as many days, and all those fifty, through the Holy Spirit's blessing might be useful to the souls of men.

"But," says one, "you could make us all fanatics." Yes no doubt that is just the name you would very soon earn, and a very respectable name too, for it is a name that has been borne by all men who have been singularly good. All those who have done wonders for Christ have always been called eccentric and fanatical. Why, when Whitfield first went on Bennington Common to preach, because he could not find a building large enough, it was quite an unheard of thing, to preach in the open air. How could you expect God to hear prayer, if there was not a roof over the top of the people's heads? How could souls be blessed, if the people had not seats, and regular high-backed pews to sit in! Whitfield was thought to be doing something outrageous, but he went and did it; he went and broke the alabaster box on the head of his Master, and in the midst of scoffs and jeers, he preached in the open air. And what came of it? A revival of godliness, and a mighty spread of religion. I wish we were all of us ready to do some extraordinary thing for Christ—willing to be laughed at, to be called fanatics, to be hooted and scandalized because we went out of the common way, and were not content with doing what everybody else could do

or approve to be done.

And here let me remark, that Jesus Christ certainly deserves to be served after an extraordinary manner. Was there ever a people that had such a leader or such a lover as we have in the person of Christ? And yet, my dear friends, there have been many impostors in the world, who have had disciples more ardently attached to them than some of you are to Christ Jesus. When I read the life of Mohamed, I see men who loved him so, that they would expose their persons to death at any moment for the false prophet, dash into battle almost naked, cut their way through hosts of enemies, and do exploits out of a passionate zeal for him whom they verily believed to be sent of God. And even that modern delusion of Joe Smith lacks not its martyrs. When I read the history of the Mormonite emigrants, and of all the miseries they endured when driven out of the city of Nauvoo; how they had to pass over trackless snows and pathless mountains, and were ready to die under the guns of the United States marauders, and how they suffered for that false prophet, I do stand ashamed of the followers of Christ, that they should permit the followers of an impostor to suffer hardships, and loss of limb and life, and everything else that men count dear, for an impostor, while they themselves show that they do not love their Master, their true and loving Lord half so well, else would they serve him in an extraordinary manner, as he deserves. When the soldiers of Napoleon performed such unexampled deeds of daring in his day, people ceased to wonder. They said, "No wonder that they do that, see what their leader does." When Napoleon, sword in hand, crossed over the bridge of Lodi and bid them follow, no one wondered that every common soldier was a hero. But it is wonderful when we consider what the Captain of our salvation hath done for us, that we are content to be such every day nothings as the most of us are. Ah! if we did but think of his glory, and of what he deserves—if we did but think of his sufferings, and of what he merits at our hands, surely we should do something out of the common; we should break our alabaster box, and pour the pound of ointment on his head again.

But not only does an extraordinary thing cease to appear extraordinary, when you think of the person to whom it is done, but surely when you think of the person who is bound to do it, an extraordinary thing becomes very ordinary indeed. My friends, if I should leave this place, and go into the midst of the abode of some wild Red Indians, and there be exposed to cold and hunger, and famine, and nakedness; if through long years I should preach the gospel to a people who rejected me, and if afterwards I should be roasted alive at the stake by them, I do acknowledge and confess that I feel it were but a slight thing I should have done for him to whom I owe so much. When I think of what my Master has done for me, surely the stripes and imprisonments, the perils, the shipwrecks, the journeyings, which even a Paul suffered, seem to be less than nothing and vanity compared with the debt of love I owe. Now, I do not expect all of you to love Christ as I think I ought, for perhaps you do not owe him so much as I do; perhaps you have never been such great sinners as I was, perhaps you have never had so much forgiven, and have never tasted so much of his love, and have never had so much fellowship with him, but this I know—if every atom of my body could become a man, and every man so made could suffer and be cut piece meal, all that suffering would not be a worthy recompense for what he has done for me. Methinks there are some of you that might stand up and tell the like tale. I can look round on some of you that were drunkards, that were swearers, but you have obtained mercy; and, my dear friends, if you do something extraordinary for Christ, while other people wonder with a vacant stare of astonishment, you may say, "Do you wonder at me?"

"Love I much? I've more forgiven;

I'm a miracle of grace."

You for whom Jesus has done little, if any such there be, love him little; but I do beseech you—those of you whom he has loved with an extraordinary affection, and who feel that you owe much to his grace, that he has done “rest things for you, whereof you are glad, do not be content with doing what other people do. Think of others thus. “I have no doubt that what they do is their best, but I must do more than they, for I owe him more than they do.” And oh! if every one of us could feel this, we should account labor light and pain easy, and be disgusted with ourselves that we spend so much of our lives doing nothing for him who has bought us with his most precious blood.

I have but one more reason to add. It seems to me that Jesus praised this woman, and handed down this memorial, because her act was so beautifully expressive. There was more virtue in it than you could see. The manner, as well as the matter of her votive sacrifice, might well excite the rebuke of men, whose practical religion is mercenary and economical. It is not enough that she pours out the ointment with such reckless profusion, but she is so rash and extravagant she must needs break the box. Marvel not, beloved, but admire the rapt enthusiasm of her godly soul. Why! love is a passion. If ye did but know and feel its vehemence, ye would never marvel at an act so expressive. Her love could no more tarry to conform to the rubrics of service, than it could count the cost of her offering. A mighty impulse of devotion carries her soul far above all ordinary routine. Her conduct did but symbol the inspiration of a grateful homage. A sanctified heart, more beautiful than the transparent vase of alabaster, was that hour broken. Only from a broken heart can the sweet spices of grace give forth their rich perfume. “Love and grief, our heart dividing,” we sometimes sing—but oh! let me say it—love, grief and gratitude, the spikenard, myrrh, and frankincense of the gospel blend together here; the heart must expand and break, or the odors would never fill the house. Every muscle of her face every involuntary motion of her frame, frenzied as it might appear to the unsympathising looker-on, was in harmony with her heart’s emotion. Her every feature gives evidence of her sincerity. What they could coldly criticize, Jesus delivers to them for a study. Here is one on whom a Saviour’s love has produced its appropriate effects. Here is a heart that has brought forth the most precious fruits. Not only admiration for her, but kindness to us, moved our Lord, when he resolved henceforth to illustrate the gospel, wherever it is published, with this portrait of saintly love, in one instant breaking the delicate vase, and bursting the tender heart. Why, that woman meant to say to Christ, “Dear Lord, I give myself away.” She went home; she brought out the most precious thing she had; if she had had anything worth ten thousand times as much she would have brought that; in fact, she did really bring him all.

II. Having described this woman as so well worthy to be remembered for ever, I NOW INVITE YOU TO LOOK INTO THE FACE OF THE LOVING LORD. Hark! what is all that muttering about? What are they saying to one another over yonder? Why, there is Judas, he has been taking out a little scrap of paper, and casting up a sum, and he makes out that that box of ointment is worth just three hundred pence. And what are Peter, and Thomas, and the other disciples talking about? “Oh dear,” they say, “see what a waste; I am very sorry; if I had known what she was going to do I would have taken that box away from her; indeed I would, I would not have allowed that, what a waste! and all for this little smell—it is soon gone, and a little of it would have done. What multitudes of hungry mouths might have been filled, if it had been sold and given to the poor, “Oh!” says one of them, “I never saw such an insane thing in my life. I wonder the Lord Jesus was not angry with her. Do you hear that talk? Do you hear it? I have heard it many times before, and I hear it now. It is a kind of talk that is sometimes very rife in the church of Christ. If there is a man that does a little more than any one else, people say, “There is no occasion for it at all, there is no need for it.” If some one gives more than any one else to the cause of Christ, they say, “Ah! I cannot understand such a motive as would lead him to do that; there is a medium in all things; there is a limit to

which people should go, and they ought not to exceed it.” And so they begin chatting and talking one with another, and if there is anything done that seems extraordinary, they will begin to pick a hole in it. Instead of emulating superior devotion themselves, they begin to murmur, and to consider how much might have been done with the same effort, if it had been conducted in an orthodox manner. That young man, instead of preaching at the corner of the street, if he taught in a Sunday School, how much good might he do? If—instead of rambling all over the country, some would have said, “If Whitfield had kept to his own congregation, or to his own parish, he might have done a great deal of good.” Yes, I dare say; but you and Judas talk that matter over together; we have no time to trouble ourselves with it this morning; let us look at what Jesus Christ himself says. He says, “Trouble her not, trouble her not. I have three very good excuses for her; only listen to them.” And the three interpretations our Lord gave of the woman were these.

She hath wrought a good work upon me.” Note these two last words “Upon me!” “Why,” say they, “it is not a good work to go and spill all that ointment, and perpetrate so much waste.” “No,” says Jesus, “it is not a good work in relation to you, but it is a good work upon me.” And, after all, that is the beet sort of good work—a good work that is wrought upon Christ—an act of homage such as faith in his name, and love to his person, would dictate. A good work upon the poor is commendable, a good work upon the church is excellent; but a good work upon Christ, surely this is one of the very highest and noblest kinds of good works. But I will be bound to say that neither Judas nor the disciples could comprehend this; and there is a mystic virtue in the acts of some Christian men that common Christians do not and cannot comprehend. That mystic virtue consists in this, that they do it “as unto the Lord, and not unto men,” and in their service they serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Moreover, our Lord protects the woman with another apology. “Do not trouble her; do not reflect upon what might have been done for the poor, ‘for ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always.’ Ye can always do good to them, whenever you please.” Why, he seems here to retort upon her accusers. “If there are any poor about, give to them yourselves; empty that bag of mine out, Judas; don’t be hiding that away in your girdle. ‘Whensoever ye will, ye may do them good.’ Don’t begin talking about the poor, and about what might have been done; go you, and do what might have been done yourselves; this poor woman hath done a good thing for me; I shall not be here long; don’t trouble her.” And so, beloved, if you murmur at men because they do not go in your ordinary ways, because they venture a little out of the regular line, there is plenty for you to do; your errand perhaps is not there exactly, but there is plenty for you to do, go and do it, and do not blame those who do extraordinary things. There are multitudes of ordinary people to attend to ordinary things. If you want subscribers to the guinea list, you can have them; it is those who give all they have, that are the varieties. Do not trouble those men. There are not many of them. They will not trouble you. You will have to travel from here to John o’Groat’s house, before you knock against many dozen. They are rare creatures not often discovered. Do not trouble them; they may be fanatical, they may be excessive; but if you should build an asylum to put them all in, it would require but a very small sort of a house. Let them alone, there are not many who do much for their Master—not many who are irrational enough to think that there is nothing worth living for but to glorify Christ and magnify his holy name.

But the third excuse is the most extraordinary that could be given. Saith Christ, “in that she poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.” What! did this woman forestal the Messiah’s death? And had she the fond idea that, since no loving hand might embalm him, she would anoint his sacred body by anticipation? Did her faith just then penetrate those deep shades of mystery about to be gradually

unravelling? I think not. I think her love was more conspicuous than her faith. It strikes me that in these words we have rather the construction that Christ put upon her act. If so, the virtue of her action was derived from him on whom it was wrought. "Your righteousness is of me," saith the Lord. Sometimes when your heart prompts you to go and do such-and-such a thing for Christ, you cannot tell what you are doing. You may be doing a very simple thing in appearance, but there may be some wonderful, some matchless meaning in it. Christ may be but sending you, as it were, to take hold of one golden link—mayhap there are ten thousand links that are hanging to it, and when you draw out that one, all the ten thousand will come after it. This woman thought she was just anointing Christ. "Nay," says Christ, "she is anointing me for my burial." There was more in her act than she knew of. And there is more in the spiritual promptings of our heart than we shall ever discover to the day of judgment. When first of all the Lord said to Whitfield, "Go and preach out on Kennington Common," did Whitfield know what was to be the result? No, he thought, doubtless, that he should just stand for once on the top of a table, and address some five thousand people. But there was a greater intent in the womb of Providence. The Lord meant that to set the whole country in a blaze, and to bring forth a glorious renewal of Pentecostal times, the like of which had not been seen before. Only seek to have your heart filled with love, and then obey its first spiritual dictate. Stop not. However extraordinary may be the mandate, go and do it. Have your wings outstretched like the angels before the throne, and the very moment that the echo vibrates in your heart, fly, fly, and you shall be flying you know not whither—you shall be upon an errand higher and nobler than your imagination has ever dreamed.

III. Now I come to the conclusion, which is this,—TO APPEAL PERSONALLY TO YOU, and ask you whether you know anything about the lesson which this woman's history is designed to teach.

Imagine your Saviour, who has bought you with his blood, standing in this pulpit for a moment. He lifts up his hands, once rent with the nails, he exposes to you his side, pierced with a spear. Now picture him. Lose sight of me for a moment, and see him! And he puts to each one of you the question—"I suffered all this for thee, what hast thou ever done for me?" Answer him now! Like honest followers of the Lamb of God, look back and see what you have ever done. You have gone up, you say, to his house. Was not that for your own profit? Did you do it for him? You have contributed to his cause. Ah! you have, and some of you have done well in this thing; but think, how much have you given in proportion to what God has given to you? What have you done for Christ? Well, you have perhaps, some years ago, taught children for him in the Sabbath school, but it is all over; you have not been a Sunday-school teacher these last many years. Jesus asks you, "What have you done for me? In three years," he says, "I wrought out your redemption; in three years of agony, of toil, of suffering, I bought you with my blood; what have you done for me in these ten, twenty, thirty years, since you knew my love, and tasted of my power to save?" Cover your faces, my friends, cover your faces. Let each man among us do so. Let us blush and weep. Lord Jesus! there was never such a friend as thou art; but never were there such unfriendly ones as we are. Christ has some of the most ungrateful followers that man ever had. We have done little. If we have done much, we have done little. But some of you have done nothing at all for Christ.

That question answered, there comes another. I beseech you, let the vision of that crucified One stand before you. He says to you this morning, "What will you do for me." Putting aside the past—you have wept over that, and blushed,—what will you do now? Wilt thou not now think of something that thou canst give him, something that thou canst do for him, something thou canst consecrate to him? Come, ye Marys, bring out your alabaster box! Come, ye loving Johns, lift your heads for a moment from his bosom, and think of something that you can do for him who lets you lean your head upon his heart. Come, come, ye

followers of Christ! Need I press you? Surely, if you needed it, my pressing would be in vain. But no; instinctively inspired by the Holy Spirit, you will each of you say, "Lord Jesus, from this day forth I desire to serve thee better; but, Lord, tell me what thou wouldst have me to do." He does tell you now. I do not know what it is. The Spirit shall tell that to each one among you. But I do entreat you think not about it, but do it.

To the whole church of Christ I have one word to speak. I do feel—and I speak here of myself and of all Christians as in one mass—I do feel that the church of Christ in these days too much forgets her obligations to her Master. Oh! in the early church how did religion spread! It was because no man thought his life his own, or counted anything dear to him, so that he might win Christ, and be found in him at last. Look how the ancient church, which was but a handful, within a century had stormed every known nation, and had carried the gospel throughout the length and breadth of the entire known world. But now we stay at home, penned up in England, or cooped up in America. We go not abroad where heathens dwell. Though we send here and there a man—one drafted as it were out of thousands; we do little or nothing for the evangelization of the world, and the sending forth of the ministers of the truth. Why, the early church, if it were here now, and we were gone, would within another fifty years sound the trumpet of the heavenly jubilee throughout the entire earth. With our means of travelling, with our appliances, with our books and helps, give such a church as the first Pentecostal one but fifty years, and the whole earth would be covered with the knowledge of the Lord, God the Holy Spirit going forth with them. But no, we cannot spend our lives for Christ, we are not like the soldiers who marched to victory over the dead bodies of their brethren. We shall never sow the world with truth till it is sown with our blood again. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." I would that the church would burst forth from all her bonds, and send out her chosen warriors to do battle against the infidel hosts. And what if they should fall? What if they should die? With the Spirit of Christ inflaming our hearts, we should go forward, our courage nothing damped nor our ardor abated for all that—each one counting it an honor to die for Christ, each one throwing himself into the breach determined to win for Christ, and spread his name through the whole earth, or else to perish in the attempt. God give to his church this zeal and ardor; and then the time to favor Zion, yea her set time, shall have come.

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