

Breaking the Alabaster Box

by John Hames

The sermon emphasizes the importance of choosing the more excellent way, which is the sanctified life, and receiving the blessing that Jesus gives to those who choose Him.

Scripture: Luke 10:42

Topics: "Surrender To God", "Spiritual Intimacy"

Description

John Hames preaches on the contrasting lives of Martha and Mary in Bethany, illustrating the difference between a life of worry and anxiety versus a sanctified life of devotion and surrender to Jesus. Martha represents a life burdened by serving and earthly concerns, while Mary exemplifies a sanctified life marked by sacrificial love, complete surrender, and deep spiritual intimacy with Jesus. Through Mary's actions of pouring costly ointment on Jesus, breaking the alabaster box, and sitting at His feet, John Hames emphasizes the importance of choosing the 'good part' like Mary did, which leads to a transformative blessing that cannot be taken away.

Transcript

"Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with odor of the ointment." - John 12: 1-3

"But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." - Luke 10:42

"And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head." - Mark 14:3

The two sisters of Bethany loved Jesus. Their home was always open to Him. Their hospitality and service of love proved irrevocably their devotion and spiritual standing. While all of this is granted, immediately on closer examination, we see a great difference in their lives. The road, so to speak, forks. The likeness changes suddenly into two dissimilar religious lives.

Martha illustrates one life. The Scriptures bring out facts about her life and conduct that find a strange response and recognition by the people who are only regenerated. Let us notice a few things said about her. "She was cumbered about much serving." Oh, that much serving, and that heavy feeling that arises often as a consequence in the Christian life! The wrinkles and care-worn expression in many Christian faces spell the sentence "cumbered about much serving." Her eyes were on her sister. One of the hardest things in the world for a regenerated person to do is to keep his eyes off his brother. Then her grief was increased by having "to serve alone." This is a great trial to the soul that has not passed into the Heavenly zone of the sanctified life. Again she was "careful and troubled about many things." Her life was full of anxiety, worry, fretting, and fear about the past, present, and future. This is true of multitudes of professed Christians today.

Mary illustrates the sanctified life. The things said about her bring out the hidden traits of her character.

1. She gave her most costly possession to Christ. Many Christians keep back the costly things. They will give of their money, but withhold their name and reputation. However, the sanctified soul feels there is nothing too good or costly for Christ.

2. Mary broke the alabaster box because she would not use it for anything else. If she had only taken the lid off, it could have been used for something else; but she made a complete sacrifice, and broke the box. When Moses smote the rock with his rod, he broke the rock, and the water poured out. Gideon's three hundred men broke their pitchers to let out the light. Jesus broke His own body on the cross that He might save the world. So those who would have the highest Christian experience must break their boxes. You will find that the saints of all ages have had to break their boxes, and the Devil does not like that.

There are many boxes we must break, if we would receive the Holy Ghost. There is the Church box, the sectarian - the ecclesiastical box, the financial box, the social box, all of which should be broken for Him. Then you must break the box of affections. Many times the affections are set on things that are wrong. Now God does not destroy our affections or freeze them. But He gently unwinds them from earthly things, purifies, and sets them on things above.

3. Notice the fragrance. When Mary broke the alabaster box and poured it on Jesus, the house, we are told, was filled with the sweet odors. When Jesus poured out His life on Calvary, earth and Heaven were filled with the fragrance of His life. The fragrant oil which she poured out is a type of the Holy Ghost. So the Holy Ghost brings to us the very fragrance and sweetness of Heaven. There is something about the sanctified, Spirit-filled life which cannot be put into print. "It is the breath of Jesus in the heart, the vapor from the river of life, the perfume of the Rose of Sharon, the elixir of prayer. This is far more in the sight of God than all the outward hulls of religious form and teaching which only serve as the alabaster box to this divine spikenard of Heavenly love." The holy anointing oil compounded of myrrh, calamus, cinnamon, and cassia made a most delightful odor. "But it was not as fragrant as Holiness itself. Think of perfect love, perfect peace, perfect faith, and perfect joy all poured into a purified heart. The fragrance of such a life soon steals through the home, is felt in the church, distributes itself through the community, and even goes around the world. The spices of Ceylon can be smelled leagues away at sea, but the perfume of a Holy life crosses seas and lands, belts the whole world, and even after hundreds of years is as fragrant as the first day it started forth to bless mankind." The sweet incense consisted of select ingredients. When these were crushed and beaten into a fine powder and finally offered by fire, the sweet fragrance arose to fill the Holy place in the old tabernacle. In like manner when God takes us and breaks us and puts us through the fiery tests, it is then our prayers and tears ascend up to God as a sweet smelling savor.

Years ago a young successful preacher became rich. He was engaged to a very wealthy lady. When she became sick and died, it broke his heart. He lay on the floor for hours each day for two or three months weeping and fasting. Later he went to India as a missionary and gave away his great wealth to those people. For forty years living in a small room he served God and those people. William Taylor met him and led him into the "more excellent way." He renounced Calvinism and joined the Arminian Methodist Church and was known all over Bombay as a devoted saint of India. God often breaks our plans and our affections that we may pour out our prayers, our love, and tears on the feet of Jesus.

4. She sat at His feet. What a picture of contentment, rest, quietness, and humility. "It was the nestling attitude of a little child sitting at a mother's knee."

There is a beautiful grace known as "Sanctification" which takes all worry and unrest out of the heart and deposits within a rest and peace which cannot be described. A sense of unmistakable fullness is realized. The consciousness fills one that every part of the soul and body has been reached. There is a sense of being inwardly healed, for an exquisite experience of purity is felt. The soul fairly melts with a baptism of perfect love, and through it all and in it all, the Spirit of God whispers to the soul this is sanctification.

5. She "heard His words." What words of comfort, words of love, sweetness, and tenderness. "She sat at His feet and drank in the deep ocean meaning of His words, and gazed into the depths of His Spirit, until she was nigh beside herself with divine fervor. She yearned to give the highest possible expression of her personal love for the Master. Her act at the banquet beautifully illustrates those believers who reach the highest state of divine contemplation and those whose love becomes a burning flame."

There is special blessing pronounced on those who have ears to hear what the Spirit has to say. Listen to the prophet Isaiah, "Hear and your soul shall live." How simple! How sublime! "The river of crystal love flowing into my panting spirit simply by listening to the ripple of its flow. Cease your useless struggling; hush the self-noise of your self-will and heart; get quiet; listen to Jesus - only let His words float into your ears, down into your heart, and it will heal. If our entire soul will but hearken to Christ, His word will heal our soul, His voice will soften and pacify us." Oh, to sit at His feet and like Mary of old, drink in the ocean meaning of His words.

6. Mary chose the good part. We are told "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Luke 10:42. Here you have the key to Mary's marvelous life. She chose the more excellent way. The word "chosen" in the above quotation explains the difference between the two sisters in Bethany. Some would try to make it appear that the difference between Mary and Martha was a purely natural one - a mere question of temperament. This is contrary to the teaching of the Bible. This would make God unjust. No person can choose his temperament. There are three factors in every life which can make or break us: heredity, environment, and willpower. Heredity has to do with our natural birth. Environment has to do with our surroundings and associates. But, if we will make God our choice forever, we can be made a partaker of Divine Nature. Then God will work miracles in our lives. God can take a Jacob with a fallen twist in his very nature and by conquering and subduing him, change him into a prince overnight.

Notice the power of choice in some Bible characters. "Ruth and Orpah go for awhile side by side, and Orpah seems much more devoted of the two.

Notwithstanding all her kisses and caresses, Orpah goes back to her heathen people and her earthly life. Ruth, with her quiet, unostentatious manner chooses the people of God and cleaves unto her mother-in-law. Thus her whole nature moves on majestically in the line of God's covenant and blessing,

and the heir of all the promises.

The secret of Moses' life can be summed up in one word "choice." He was the great lawgiver and leader of Israel. It was he who went up into the Holy Mount and spent forty days with the Lord. He brought with him a perfect pattern of the tabernacle with its golden candlesticks, the golden altar of incense, the Holy of Holies with its golden ark of the covenant. Moses gave to us a set of moral codes which has affected every civilized nation on earth. But all of this dates back to one word "choice." As he looked out over Egypt with her great wealth and pomp and glory, we are told by the Hebrew writer, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

God seems to take a peculiar delight in showing His love to the heart that wholly chooses Him. It must be a single choice. Christ describes it in the words, "One thing is needful." Saint Paul says, "This one thing I do." "If there be but one thing needful, then all other things and beings are not needful. They can come or go, can smile or frown, can be for us or against us, and all the time the soul in the enjoyment of perpetual love and presence of Christ is amazingly lifted above the force and influence of them all. The trouble about many things is gone. A great contentment and indescribable satisfaction reigns within."

7. Mary had an independent blessing: Jesus said "which shall not be taken from her." Thank God for such a blessing. The Comforter has come to abide. The Dove of Peace spreads her wings within the inner chambers of the human heart and lifts her angelic voice with Heaven's sweetest message "Peace be still." We enter into a Divine Sabbath of rest and unfailing sunshine which has no end, though the earthly sun hide its face for days. Things of time and earth fail to disturb this inner repose. All through the trying hours of the day the blessing holds good like a golden lump of honey which seems to have been lodged right in the middle of the heart dripping sweetness and tenderness into all parts of the entire being as the hours of the day go by. The blessing is with us in the morning hours, and all through the day this undergirding is realized. The cares of life and the assaults of men and devils vanish as the waves split and fall to the right and left under the irresistible prow of the rushing steamer. Christ has a blessing for each of us that shall never be taken from us without our consent. We die with it in the soul, enter Heaven with it, and go through all eternity enjoying it. No one can take it from us as long as we choose to keep it. Trouble may beat upon us; tongues may slander us; riches may take to themselves wings and flee away and leave us in poverty; old age may creep into this temple of clay; but nothing shall be able to rob us of this Pearl of Great Price. It abides with us forever.

8. One more thing about Mary's experience. The blessing came back on her own head. When she broke the alabaster box and anointed the feet of Jesus, she then wiped His feet with her hair. We see in this act that the blessing and sweetness came back on her own head. In like manner when we pour out our prayers, love, and money to bless others, the blessing to a very great extent comes back into our own lives. This will continue to draw interest as long as we live here or hereafter. In the words of a great saint I heard preach nearly forty years ago concerning the poured-out life: "The love that we pour out comes back on our own head. The love that Jesus poured out will come back on His own head. The tears you shed and the prayers you offer will come back to you. The life poured out will come back like birds coming home to roost."

Jesus said Mary had anointed Him against the day of His burial, but Mary did not know she had done that. A child of God will often do and say things he did not intend to do. A preacher will say things under the guidance of the Holy Spirit away beyond his knowledge, and things he did not intend to say because God

is dealing with the people. It is a wonderful thing to serve God. It is a wonderful thing to have the Holy Ghost in you. If you belong to God, you will write words, you will pray prayers, you will preach sermons, you will give money, you will do many things without being conscious why you are doing them. It is a wonderful thing to pray and to think and to walk and to teach and to live in the Holy Ghost. Jesus gave Mary a memorable reputation. He said, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." It is two thousand years since this incident and Mary is still remembered by this act. God tells us that the memory of the just shall live forever.

Dear friends, God wants to give you a blessing that will transform your life. Do you know there are gifts, talents, and powers lying hidden away in your soul which will never be discovered until they are quickened by the Holy Ghost? When this takes place, oh, what praying; oh, what preaching, what unction, what power, what liberty and Heavenly anointing! Your words, looks, and manners will bless people. I trust the Holy Ghost will reveal these things to your hearts and give each one of you a Mary-like experience which shall not be taken away from you.

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