

INTRODUCTION

Have you noticed some people tend to be negative about everything? A man visited his barber every Saturday. One Saturday he announced he was planning a trip to Rome where he hoped to see the Pope. The barber was one of those people who is sour and critical about everything. He said, "Rome? Don't go there; that's the dirtiest city in the world. And don't fly Delta because the food they serve is awful and the seats are crowded. You'll never get within a mile of the Pope—you're just wasting your money."

A few weeks later the customer returned and told the barber he had returned from his trip to Rome. He said, "You were wrong about Delta. The food was good and the seats were comfortable. And I found Rome to be a beautiful and charming city. And I not only visited the Vatican, I was able to walk right up to the Pope. I knelt down and he placed his hand on my head and spoke a personal word to me." The cynical barber was dumbfounded. He said, "Well, what did the Pope say?" The man said, "The Pope said, 'My son, you need a new barber because that's the worst haircut I've ever seen!'"

In our passage today, we're going to meet some critical and negative people. The setting of this passage is in the home of Simon the Leper. Obviously, by this time, Jesus had healed him because lepers weren't allowed to interact with non-lepers.

It had been a long week for Jesus. Since entering Jerusalem on the previous Sunday, He had battled wits with the religious leaders all week and taught seven of the most powerful parables ever recorded. Jesus knew the cross was only a couple of days away. So in these final hours He chose to gather with some of His friends in Bethany for a meal. It's a place where He could relax and literally put his feet up. It's the last supper before the real Last Supper that would take place the next night.

Matthew 26:6-16: "While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman [we know from other accounts that this is Mary of Bethany] came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. 'Why this waste?' they asked. 'This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.' Aware of this, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.' Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?' So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over."

There isn't an obvious parable or miracle in this passage, but when you dig below the surface you see the miracle of Mary recognizing the need to anoint Jesus' body for burial. And there is a parable Jesus spoke about this act being retold wherever the gospel is shared throughout the world. But I wanted to teach on this passage because it gives us some valuable insight into the

nature of worship. In Mary's simple act of anointing Jesus, there are five important lessons we can learn about worship.

1. Worship is a personal act of love

Matthew, Mark, and John recorded this act of worship. In John's account, we discover several more details about who was present at the meal. "Jesus arrived in Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." (John 12:1-3)

Forget the picture of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of Jesus and His disciples sitting at a table for the Last Supper, European style. Meals were enjoyed while the men were reclining on their left elbow, using their right hand, the clean hand, to eat and drink.

I like to imagine what might have taken place that evening. Just think about the people at the meal. Maybe the artist formerly known as Simon the Leper said, "I was a hopeless leper until the Master touched me and made me clean again. Simon says this is the Messiah!" Simon Peter says, "I was a poor fisherman when Jesus chose me—He even gave me my nickname, Rocky. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Matthew says, "I was a former IRS agent for Rome when the Master called me. I left my successful career and I've been following the King. Now I have a new life recording what Jesus does and what He says." But then Lazarus speaks up and says, "That's nothing, guys. I was stone cold dead for four days when the Master called my name—and here I am alive! He's the author of life!"

Of course, Martha was serving. That was her gift. Martha was one of those women who had a subscription to *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Southern Israel Living*. In Luke 10 we read about Jesus visiting Mary and Martha in their home. Martha was in the kitchen banging the pots and pans wanting Mary to join her, but that wasn't Mary's gift. She was content to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him talk.

So Mary begins to wonder what she can do to show her love for Jesus. She slips out and goes to her house around the corner in the tiny village of Bethany. She uncovers her most prized possession: an alabaster container of spikenard – an expensive perfume. She returns and boldly approaches Jesus. Women in this culture were to stay in the background. She commits a social faux pas. She approaches Jesus and pours out the perfume on Him as an act of worship. No words are recorded, but from the look Mary gives Jesus she surely was saying something like, "I recognize that you are God in the flesh. Thank you for changing my life. This is my offering of worship for you." Matthew and Mark tell us Mary anointed Jesus' head, and John said she poured it on Jesus' feet. So which was it, head or feet? Both. It's easy to imagine that Mary started pouring the expensive perfume on Jesus head, and some of it remained, which she poured on His feet. There was so much excess perfume that she took her hair and wiped His feet. What a beautiful picture of worship.

Matt Redman wrote such songs as "Blessed be Your Name" and "The Heart of Worship." He

knows a little about worship, and in his book *The Unquenchable Worshipper* he writes: "It was the worship of a woman who didn't know the rules—an unpredictable, untamed heart on a quest to see Jesus glorified...People in love do lots of crazy things." (*The Unquenchable Worshipper*)

Mark records Jesus responding to the critics with these words, "Leave her alone. She did what she could." Worship is my personal response of love to my Creator. There are many different ways to worship, but worship is primarily a personal act of love. Have you done what you can?

2. Worship is a precious act of surrender

Worship is not coming to God to GET something; it is coming into the presence of God to surrender something. The perfume Mary poured out on Jesus was very expensive. But when you truly love someone, you never think about how much it costs to show your love.

I heard about a man who stopped by a perfume counter in a department store to buy some perfume for his girlfriend's birthday. The sales lady showed him a bottle of perfume that cost \$100. He said, "Can you show me something a little cheaper?" So she showed him a bottle that cost \$50. He said, "I'm still looking for something a little cheaper." The sales lady patiently produced a \$35 bottle of perfume. But the man shook his head and said, "Do you have anything cheaper?" So she brought out a tiny bottle of perfume that only cost \$15. The man said, "Yeah, we're getting close now. But can you show me something even cheaper?" The sales lady smiled and said, "I sure can," and she handed him a mirror. Obviously, he didn't love his girlfriend very much!

Mark tells us Mary doesn't just pour a little of the perfume on Jesus. She broke the jar and poured it all on Him. "While in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head." (Mark 14:3)

We know from John's account that the perfume was worth 300 denarii, which is equal to a year's wages. So figure your annual salary, and you begin to have an idea about how expensive this gift was. But she poured it all out on Jesus in an act of worship. To Mary, no expense would be spared. Her great love for Jesus could only be expressed by giving her most prized possession. Breaking the bottle symbolized her brokenness before the Lord.

Several years ago Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote a great song called "Broken and Spilled out." The lyrics say: "One day a plain village woman; Driven by love for her Lord; Recklessly poured out a valuable essence; Disregarding the scorn; And once it was broken and spilled out; A fragrance filled the room; Like a prisoner released from his shackles; Like a spirit set free from the tomb." The chorus says: "Broken and spilled out; Just for love of you Jesus; My most precious treasure; Lavished on thee; Broken and spilled out; And poured at your feet; In sweet abandon; let me be spilled out; And used up for thee."

3. Worship is a persecuted act of sacrifice

You might think everyone would applaud such an act of worship, but just the opposite happened. The disciples started saying, "What a waste!" They criticized Mary for her costly worship. There are always going to be people who criticize the church and some of those people are IN the church.

A church was having a business meeting. A committee recommended the church purchase a chandelier. There was an old man in the church who was very critical about everything. He stood up and said, "I'm against this recommendation for three reasons. First, I've heard that chandeliers are very expensive, and I think we can use the Lord's money for something more practical. Second, if we bought a one, we don't have anyone who knows how to play a chandelier. And third, what this church really needs is some light!"

When Mary poured out the costly perfume on Jesus, there were people present who criticized her. They said the perfume could have been sold and the money used to help the poor. This was a smokescreen. John gives us some insight into this criticism—and he identifies the chief critic: "But one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it." (John 12:4-6)

Those who pour out their love to Jesus are still criticized today. When the world looks at what we do, they say, "What a waste!" As people are driving by right now and they see these hundreds of cars parked in our lots some of them are thinking, "What a waste!" Why are these people giving up their Sunday to sing songs and to study an ancient out-of-date book? They just don't get it. They think worship is a waste of your time, a waste of your money, and a waste of your energy. But worship is *never* a waste.

Building buildings is not our goal; our mission to reach people and train them to be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. But you need buildings for this to happen. I can imagine many people have driven by our campus and said or thought, "What a waste! All that money could have been used to help the poor." Sound familiar? These complainers aren't giving their money to help the poor; they just think we should!

My friend and mentor Adrian Rogers said, "There is no contradiction between an extravagant love for the Lord Jesus Christ and love for the poor. You show me a person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ with a reckless, holy abandon, and I'll show you someone who will love the poor and take care of the poor. But, God deliver me from these people who sit on the sidelines and carp about the poor, and they themselves never give anything. They want to tell the church how the church should spend its money. The critics were quick to say what ought to have been done with Mary's ointment. She was criticized, and so will you be, and so will anybody who serves the Lord." (Adrian Rogers, *How to Have a Life that Lasts*)

When I was 17, God called me to preach. I announced it to my home church, and almost everyone was encouraging. But there was one businessman in the church for whom I worked one summer selling Dale Carnegie courses. I can remember the look of disappointment in his eyes. He said, "David are you sure you want to be a preacher? You could really BE something."

Translation: "What a waste!" It's been a great ride over the past 41 years and I don't think I've wasted my life. I've invested it. Remember, worship is never waste.

4. Worship is a prophetic act of recognition

Mary's act of worship was more than just an act of love. She was also anointing the body of Jesus for His burial in two days. In response to the criticism leveled at Mary, Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them at any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." (Mark 14:7-8)

Jesus didn't say ignore the poor. He stated that caring for the poor was an ongoing concern, but the window of opportunity to anoint His body for burial was closing fast.

In the next message we're going to study how Jesus often predicted that He was going to be crucified. But of all the people present, Lazarus, Martha, and the Twelve, Mary is the only who connected the dots. She was the only one who took His predictions seriously. That's because she had been at the feet of Jesus.

In a sense, our worship today is a prophetic recognition. We aren't here to remember or mourn a dead religious founder. We are worshipping a living Savior. And every time we worship Jesus, we are announcing to the world that we recognize that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We believe that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord—so we do it now!

There is a certain sense of timing that goes along with extravagant worship. If Mary hadn't poured the perfume on Jesus at this time, she would have missed the window of opportunity. The Bible tells us that on the first Easter morning, some other women make their way to the tomb in the early morning hours. They are carrying spices to anoint the corpse of Jesus. He had been buried so quickly that His body hadn't been properly anointed. But when they arrived, the tomb was empty. They never got to anoint His body—but Mary had!

There's an important lesson there for us: Never miss the opportunity to worship. You never know when will be the last chance to worship God. This lesson also applies to showing love and appreciation to people as well. Never miss an opportunity to tell someone you love him or her, because you never know when you'll have another chance.

I've stood by the casket of a loved one many times and heard family and friends say with regret, "I never really told him/her how much I loved him/her. And now it's too late." They often try to make up for that by buying a large arrangement of flowers. But someone once said, "Dead noses smell no roses." Mary took advantage to show her love to Jesus, so don't put it off.

5. Worship is a permanent act of inspiration

The disciples said, "What a waste!" Jesus said, "What an investment!" They said, "What a foolish thing!" Jesus said, "What a beautiful thing!" The disciples could only see the cost, but Jesus could see the value.

Jesus announced that this act of worship would be commemorated all around the world. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (Matthew 26:13)

I love the fact that Jesus KNEW the gospel would be preached throughout the world. Today we're over 6,000 miles from where this took place in Bethany, and it's 1,981 years later—but we are STILL fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus. Today, we are telling this story in Mary's memory. Mary's act of loving worship has immortalized her. Do you want to build a life that lasts? Then get at the feet of Jesus and worship Him with all your heart.

If you went up to someone in the Roman Empire in the first half of the first Century and asked them, "Who will have a greater impact on the future? Nero or Mary?" No doubt they would have said, "Nero, of course!" But today we name our daughters Mary and we name our dogs Nero!

In our passage we read that after this beautiful act of worship Judas went to the Jewish religious mafia and offered to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. What a contrast! What's Jesus worth to you? To Mary, He was worth everything she had. To Judas, He was worth thirty pieces of silver. Can you say today that Jesus is worth everything to you, everything you are and everything you have? Or is He worth a couple of hours each week and a few dollars that you drop in the offering bag?

Mary surrendered all she had to Jesus and that act of worship inspires us today. As Isaac Watts wrote in that great hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, "Were the whole realm of nature mine; That were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

CONCLUSION

Jesus recognized the purity and value of Mary's worship, and He accepted it. The disciples didn't recognize real worship but Jesus always does. So, never make the mistake of judging someone else's worship.

A woman who enjoyed making wax figurines wanted to improve her skill so she attended a night class taught by a local artist. This teacher however, took an immediate dislike to her for no apparent reason. This dislike soon took on the form of harsh criticism of her work, no matter how good it was. Each week she tried harder than the previous week to make a wax figure better than before. But the teacher criticized more than ever.

On her very last week she approached the teacher and placed her final project, an apple, on the teacher's desk. The teacher looked at it with disdain and immediately set about criticizing her work. It was not red enough, not round enough, not shiny enough, not big enough. When the

teacher finally finished, the lady silently took the apple and ate it. It was real. We might not recognize real worship, but Jesus does!

There's one final lesson I take away from this beautiful act of worship. Worship isn't about coming to get something from God; it's all about giving Him something. When you bless the Lord, you can't help but be blessed in return.

Did you notice what happened when Mary poured out the perfume? John writes that the fragrance filled the house. And when Mary wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair, that fragrance that was on Jesus was now on her. What she had poured out on Jesus came back to her as a blessing. For the rest of the night and most of the next day wherever Mary went she carried with her the fragrance of worship. You can usually tell when you're around someone who has poured out their life to Jesus. There's a certain fragrance about them. There is a beautiful perfume that accompanies their life. Paul wrote, "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." (2 Corinthians 2:15)

Remember, what you give to Jesus always comes back to bless you. (Sniff) Say, what's that you're wearing? Is it the fragrance of worship?

OUTLINE

Worship is a...

1. Personal act of love
2. Precious act of surrender
3. Persecuted act of sacrifice
4. Prophetic act of recognition
5. Permanent act of inspiration

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —



David O. Dykes
Pastor, Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David***

Dykes in Texas.” This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes