

MARY'S ALABASTER BOX MEMORIAL

"Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. There came unto Him A WOMAN having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on His head, as He sat at meat. But when His disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the WOMAN? For she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For ye have the poor always with you: but Me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. 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 26:6-16.

Now John tells us that the woman's name is Mary. John also tells us that the objector was Judas. Both the deed and the misdeed are better understood by knowing the background.

Lazarus was a guest, and as his sister saw him sitting there by Jesus Christ, her heart overflowed, and she could not but catch up her most precious possession, and lavish it on His head and feet. **Love's impulses appear absurd to selfishness.**

How could Judas understand Mary? Detracting comments find ready ears. **One sneer will cool down to contempt and blame the feelings of a company of people who are always eager to pick holes in conduct which they usually feel to be above their own reach.**

Poor Mary. She had but yielded to the uncalculating impulse of her great love, and she finds herself charged with imprudence, waste, and unfeeling neglect for the poor. No wonder it says her heart "was troubled." **But Jesus Christ threw the shield of His approval over her, and that was enough.** Never mind how

Judas and better men than he may find fault, if Jesus Christ smiles and accepts.

His first Words are Words of vindication of her act of love. **Because of its motive, anything done with no regard to any end but the Lord, is, in His eyes, good.** The perfection of conduct is that it shall be referred to Christ. And that "altar" sanctifies the gift and the giver. Conversely, whatever has no reference to the Lord, lacks the highest beauty of goodness. A pebble in the bed of a sunlit stream has its veins of color brought out, lifted out, and, as it dries, it dulls.

So our deeds plunged into the great river are heightened in loveliness. **Everything which has "for Christ's sake" stamped on it, thereby is hallowed.** That is the unailing recipe of making a life fair.

Mary was thinking only of Christ and her love to Him, therefore what she did was sweet to Him. **The greater part of a deed is its motive, and the perfect motive is love to the Lord.** But further than that Christ demands the side of Mary's deed which the critics fastened on. They posed as being more practical and benevolent than she was. They were unitarians. She was wasteful. **Their objection sounds sensible, but it belongs to the low levels of life.** One flash of lofty love would have killed it.

Christ's reply to it draws a contrast between constant duties and special, transient moments. It is colored, too, by His consciousness of His near end, and has an undertone of sadness in that "Me ye have not always." There are high tides of Christian emotion, when the question of what good this thing will do is submerged, and the only question is, **"What best thing shall I render to the Lord?"**

The critics were not more beneficent, but less inflamed with love to the Lord, and the leader of them only wished that the proceeds

of the ointment had come into his hands, where some of it would have stuck.

We hear the same sort of taunt today. What is the sense of spending all this money on the ministry of our church? How much more useful it would be if expended on better dwellings for the poor or hospitals, or technical schools? **But there is a place in Christ's treasury for useless deeds, if they are the pure expression of love to the Lord,** and Mary's alabaster box, which did no good at all, lies beside the cups that held cold water which slaked some thirsty lips. Uncalculating impulse, which only knows that it would fain give all to the Lover of our souls, is not merely excused, but praised by the Lord Jesus Christ. **Lovers on Earth do not concern themselves about the usefulness of their gifts,** and the Divine Lover rejoices over what cold blooded spectators, who do not in the least understand the ways of loving hearts, find useless "waste." **The world would put all the emotions of Christian's hearts, and all the heroism of Christian martyrs, and all the sacrifices of Christian workers, in to this same class, "waste."**

But Jesus Christ accepts them all. Again, **He breathes a meaning into the gift beyond what the giver meant.** Mary did not regard her anointing as preparatory to His burial, but He had His thoughts fixed on it, and He sought to prepare the disciples for the coming storm with the alabaster box of love.

How far from the same festivities in Simon's house were His thoughts. **What a gulf between the other guests and Him.** But Jesus Christ always puts significance into the service which He accepts, and surprises the givers by the far reaching issues of their gifts. **We know not what He may make our poor deeds mean. Results are beyond our vision.** Therefore, let us make sure of what is within our horizon, namely, motives. **If we do anything for His sake, He will take care of what it comes to.** This is true even on Earth, and still more true in Heaven. "Lord when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee?"

What surprises will wait Christ's humble servants in Heaven, when they see what was **the true nature and the widespread consequences of their humble deeds.** "Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, but giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him."

Mark gives us an additional clause to Christ's Words, which brings out the principle that the measure of acceptable service is ability. "She hath done what she could," is an apology, or rather a vindication, for the shape of the gift. Mary was not practical, and could not "serve" like Martha. She probably had no other precious thing that she could give, **but she could love. And she could bestow her best on Jesus Christ.** But the saying implies a stringent demand, as well as a gracious defense. **Nothing less than the full measure of ability is the measure of Christian obligation.**

Power to its last particle is duty. Jesus Christ does not ask how much His servants do or give, but He does ask that they should do and give all that they can. He wishes us to be ourselves in serving Him, and to shape our methods according to the character and capabilities, **but He also wishes us to give Him our whole selves. If anything is kept back, all that is given is marred.**

Jesus Christ's last Word gives perpetuity to the service which He accepts. Mary is promised immortality for her deed, and the promise has been fulfilled, and here are we, all these centuries after, looking at her as she breaks the box and pours it on His head. **Jesus Christ is not unrighteous to forget any work of love done for Him.**

The fragrance of the ointment soon passed away, and the shreds of the broken cruse were swept into the dust bin, with the other relics of the feast, but all the world knows of that act of self-surrendering love, and it smells sweet and blossoms for evermore.

This *"Woman in My Life"* is Mary with the alabaster box, which speaks continually and eternally of this woman's uncalculating love for the Lord. Her Lord.