Jesus Was Anointed By A Woman

Matthew 26:1-16

Key Verse:26:10 “Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.”

Today’s story occurred at Bethany in the house of a leper named Simon, two days before the Passover. Jesus was anointed in Simon’s house by a woman who anointed Jesus by pouring perfume on his head. Her abrupt and unusual action caused a commotion among the disciples. But Jesus praised what she had done for him as a beautiful. Let’s study why she poured the perfume on Jesus, why Jesus praised her action, and what is the difference between the viewpoint of Jesus and that of his disciples. Through this passage may we see our lives with the view of Jesus and learn his value system over our lives.

First, the plot against Jesus (1-5) Thus far Jesus had predicted the signs of the end of the age and his glorious second coming through several parables. Jesus will come again like a thief, so we must keep watch and pray like the five wise virgins. We must work hard for the glory of God as wise and faithful servants who make profits for our Lord and King Jesus. Our rewards are Jesus’ affirmation, promotion, and celebration in the kingdom of heaven. After saying all this, he said to his disciples, “***As you know, the Passover is two days away-and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified***.” (2) The Passover is one of the three main holidays for the Jews, along with Pentecost and the Tabernacle. Passover commemorates God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt by the sacrificing of passover lambs. When God struck the Egyptians, through Moses he ordered all the Israelites to slaughter lambs, take their blood, and paint it on the door frames of their houses so that the angel of death might pass over the houses. After God delivered them out of Egypt, he commanded Moses and the Israelites to celebrate Passover every year in order to remember his grace and deliverance. This is like the celebration of Independence Day in America.

The Passover feast starts Thursday evening with the eating the Passover meal. So this passage would have taken place Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning, two days before the Passover feast started. Jesus predicted his passion and crucifixion to his disciple again. *“…and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified*.” It was the fourth time that Jesus had predicted his death. Jesus repeated his prediction to his disciples so that they might be prepared for the upcoming trials and danger at the hour of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion.

Look at verses 3-5. “***Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priests, whose name was Caiaphas, and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. “But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.***” While Jesus and his disciples were preparing for the Passover, the religious leaders were planning to kill Jesus. They tried to kill Jesus because they did not know who Jesus really was, and they did not want to accept Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. They gathered in the house of the high priest named Caiaphas and schemed to kill Jesus. But they avoided doing this during the festival because they were afraid that they might start a riot among the people when Jesus was arrested. In order to celebrate the Passover, five times as many Jews gathered at Jerusalem then on normal days. The religious leaders did not fear God, but people. When they did not live based on the truth, they became tools of Satan, who would destroy Jesus.

Here we learn that where the work of God is, there is also the work of Satan. Sometimes we wonder why bad things are happening as good things are going on. We wonder why the religious leaders tried to kill Jesus while Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover. Jesus said to his disciples that while a farmer scatters good seeds, Satan also scatters weeds at night. We don’t have to lose heart because of Satan’s work, and we must not doubt about God’s love. Satan’s work will be destroyed in the end and God will give us final victory. No matter how hard Satan tries to disturb the work of God and destroy God’s family, God will protect his children and give us final victory. No matter how hard Pharaoh the king of Egypt tried to hold the Israelites under his slavery, God punished him and liberated his people from his hand! The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, “*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Amen!

Second, she has done a beautiful thing to me. (6-13) Look at verse 6. “***While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper,…***” This was Jesus’ last visit to Bethany on this earth before he was crucified. He was in the home of Simon the Leper, who had been healed by Jesus. The name ‘Bethany’ means “the House of Affliction”. Here Jesus had raised the dead Lazarus. (Jn 11:1-43) So, some say that Simon was the father of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. And others say that he was the husband of Martha, but we are not sure who he really was. Jesus must have been invited in gratitude for his healing the leper. While Jesus was in Simon’s house, something unusual happened. Look at verse 7. “…***a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table***.” Luke’s gospel says that she had lived a sinful life. (Lk 7:37) John’s gospel says that she was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. (Jn 12:3) What is the alabaster jar of very expensive perfume? An alabaster jar is a thin-necked flask which in Jesus’ day contained perfume. Perfume is pure nard native to India, which grows in the foothill of the Himalaya. According to John’s gospel the value of the perfume the woman poured out was three hundred denarii,- a year’s wage for a working man. In modern American currency it values $ 20,000. It is said that at that time women saved perfume for the day of their marriage. In the Song of Songs perfume is the symbol of the bride’s love. Song of Songs 1:3 says, “*Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you*!” According to John’s gospel when she poured out the perfume, the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (Jn 12:3)

What was the disciples’ response to her action? Look at verses 8-9. “***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***.” The disciples criticized her. They said that she had wasted the expensive perfume for nothing. They said that it would have been better for her to sell the perfume at a high price and give money to the poor. We understand the disciples’ idea. It sounds reasonable and practical.

What was Jesus’ response to her action? Look at verses 10-12. “***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.***” Jesus praised her while his disciples criticized her. Jesus said that she had done a beautiful thing to him. Here, the word ‘beautiful’ is *kalos* in Greek, which means beautiful, right, and good. Jesus said that she did a good, right, and beautiful thing to him. According to Jesus she did this to prepare for his burial. People brought perfume for burial. Nicodemus brought about seventy-five pounds of a mixture of myrrh and aloes for the burial of Jesus. (Jn 19:39) Later, some woman brought perfume to the tomb in order to anoint the dead body of Jesus. We are not sure if she understood what she was doing, but Jesus accepted it as her preparation for his impending crucifixion and burial.

Her anointing Jesus with perfume has a deep spiritual meaning. At the initial stage of Jesus’ ministry, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River . When he came out from the water, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit came down on him like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Mt 3:16,17) At that time Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit. Now Jesus was anointed by a sinful woman with a pure nard in the home of Simon the Leper. This meant that the time had come when Jesus would fulfill God’s promise through his death on the cross. God promised to send the Messiah, the Savior of the world, from an offspring of a woman. (Ge 3:15) Now Jesus was ready to obey God’s will through his death. He was ready to pour out his whole life as drinking offering for the sins of the world. Jesus saw her action through the eyes of God’s redemption. Jesus saw her anointing as the preview of his death and burial. He would soon pour out his blood and water on the cross for the sins of the world without sparing even one drop, like this woman poured out the perfume on Jesus’ head without sparing even one drop. To the eyes of Jesus she did a really beautiful, meaningful, and glorious thing for his death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus praised her all the more so that his disciples might remember her beautiful devotion for all generations. Look at verse 13. “***Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her***.” Jesus asked the whole world to remember her and commemorate her action as a beautiful thing to him. Here we learn what Jesus really values most on this earth. Jesus’ disciples valued money more than her devotion to Jesus. Philanthropic relief is not bad, but good and admirable. So Jesus didn’t rebuke his disciples saying that they were wrong. Jesus knew how important it is to help the poor and the needy. But in this case Jesus praised her actions as one of the most valuable, praiseworthy, and beautiful things on this earth. Jesus accepted her action, her precious offering, as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. (Ro 12:1)

In the same way Jesus values our sacrifice and devotion to him more than anything else. Jesus accepts them and blesses them as a beautiful thing for him. There are some beautiful and devotional women among us who break their own perfume for Jesus. They get up early in the morning and come to the Bible house for morning devotion every day, whether it is rainy or snowy. They visit campus, pray, and invite students to Bible study. In most cases they are rejected. But they do not give up. To the eyes of unbelievers they are wasting their time! Their lives look pitiful and unrealistic. From a worldly point of view, having more sleep is better for rest, and spending time with a computer is more enjoyable. But from a Godly point of view these women do beautiful things for Jesus. No matter what men may say or no matter how they may think, these women are not wasting time, but doing good, right, and beautiful things for Jesus. In fact they are storing up heavenly rewards in the kingdom of God. They remind me of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, which says, “*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*.” Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters….your labor in the Lord is never in vain.” Amen!

Third, Judas agrees to betray Jesus (14-16) When people have wrong value systems, they make big mistakes in their lives and bring harmful influences and results to others. As history proves, Esau valued his physical satisfaction more than spiritual blessing. So he sold his birthright for a bowl of a stew. Later he regretted and grieved, but it was too late. When a Samaritan woman had a wrong value system about her happiness, she lived a sinful and miserable life. In today’s passage Judas Iscariot made a big mistake in his life. He agreed to betray his master Jesus and sold him for thirty pieces of silver. He exchanged his precious teacher and master for a little money.

We wonder how Judas Iscariot, who had followed Jesus for three years, could betray him. First of all, he did not know who Jesus really is. Jesus came to this world not to become rich, popular, or successful, but become a servant of all, who gives his life as a ransom for many. (Mk 10:45) Jesus came to die for the sins of the world, for you and me. Jesus came to this world as the Messiah. Judas did not know this Jesus. He followed Jesus for three years, but he did not have a personal relationship with him. When his expectations for Jesus were gone, he changed his mind and turned back from Jesus.

Jesus is worthy of being worshiped, honored, and praised, and to receive our devotion because he has done a beautiful thing for us. He sacrificed himself, left the glory of heaven, came down to this world, and poured out his life for us. He loved us before we loved him. Koreans call America a beautiful country. They call America this not because Americans are tall and handsome, but because they sacrificed their lives in order to help many countries around the world. When we love God and love our neighbors, we are beautiful people and a beautiful country.

The woman in this passage and Judas Iscariot show a big contrast in their relationships with Jesus. She knew who Jesus is, but Judas didn’t. To know Jesus and to know about Jesus is different. She appreciated Jesus and broke her most important treasure for Jesus, but Judas didn’t. God remembered this woman in God’s redemptive history, but Judas became the tool of Satan and ended his life in a tragic way. Who is smart and who is foolish? Who lived a beautiful life and who lived an ugly life? Who is in heaven and who is in hell? May God help us to love Jesus, bring our own perfume to him, and pour it out on him as the woman did. I pray that the fragrance of our love and devotion for Jesus may fill this house as pleasing aroma. May God raise many beautiful and sacrificial men and women of God. We may sacrifice ourselves when we save others’ lives. America may lose some money when she helps other poor countries around the world. But this is beautiful thing to the eyes of Jesus. May God make this country a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Amen!