



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 26:1–16

Gospel of Matthew

“The Order of the Alabaster Box”

TRANSCRIPT

We do feel that if you attend Believers Chapel regularly, signifying in that way that it is your desire to fellowship with us, we do regard you as one of us, and we also feel as elders that you are subject to the discipline of the elders, and we mean discipline in the broadest sense: the care and oversight of the believers who have felt led of God to meet with the believers who meet in Believers Chapel. I am often asked—this was not by the way on a planned thing—but I am often asked, does Believers Chapel have a missionary program? And in answer to that, let me give you a few of the things that I personally would say if someone did ask me such.

As you know, there are many evangelical churches that have a missionary program in which a certain number of missionaries are supported by the congregation. These missionaries may be missionaries in the United States or in other countries of our world. What I am going to say has nothing, is not to be understood as a criticism of that particular guidance from the Holy Spirit that other churches have had. In the Chapel, certain individuals who are missionaries are supported on a regular basis by the Chapel. But I think it would be fair to say that the primary thrust of the Chapel in its mission program reflects what we feel the Scriptures teach concerning missions.

The Bible says the field is the world and according to Scripture, there is no distinction between home missions and foreign missions. We are sent as ambassadors, each one of us, to the world of which we are no longer a part when we become a believer in Jesus Christ. We now are

citizens of the heavenly kingdom and citizens of the New Jerusalem, and therefore our ministry is to the whole of the world. We feel that the ministry of the Chapel is a missionary ministry and primarily the missionary ministry of the Chapel has been the expository preaching and teaching of the Word of God. And I think in a sense those of you who are in this audience who have responded to that ministry, either by way of it being the means of your personal salvation, or of your Christian development and growth, you are the products of the missionary ministry of Believers Chapel.

In addition, the Chapel as you know, carries on an extensive tape ministry. I think that this year the men and the women who carry on this ministry will send out between sixty and seventy thousand tapes which is a large number of tapes that are sent all over the world. I called Mrs. Prier who was uh on the desk on the day that I called her and asked her to name some of the foreign countries to which our tapes go, and she began listing Sweden, Scotland, Ireland, Portugal, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, the West Indies, The Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, and Germany. These were the ones that she thought of in just a moment or two. So you can see that the ministry of the Word of God has a wide outreach through the tapes. We are very grateful for the volunteer workers who have carried on this ministry so beautifully and so acceptably.

In addition, of course, the Chapel maintains the Believers Bible Institute program which we regard as a missionary program of instruction in the Word of God. We're finishing up another quarter and will begin another one and Mr. Prier said in January of our continuing ministry there.

And some of you also know, who have received the congregational letter the last time, that we are also now involved in an advanced study program designed for college and university graduates who want to train for ministry of the Word, so we are training our own missionaries in a sense who are going out to preach the Word, and to establish as God directs other testimony such as Believers Chapel, in which the expository ministry of the Word of God has preeminence in the thrust of the local church.

We also are on five radio broadcasts now. This morning at 8:30, when I opened the bulletin and saw this and had been thinking about saying a word about the missionary program, I made

reference to the fact that we were on four radio stations and the radio directors came and quickly informed me and said no we are on five now we are now on the Tacoma, Washington station. So we have a broadcast in the Northwest and as well as in Alabama and Tennessee and Florida, and Birmingham, Nashville, and Jacksonville in addition to the regular program here in Dallas at 12:30 over KPBC.

I did intend to mention that the sending out of the tapes is an expense that is borne by you of the congregation. We do not receive nearly enough money from the gifts of people who receive the tapes to support that ministry, and I asked Mrs. Ray, the church secretary, to get the figure of the cost to this point this year, and she said this year the expense for the tape ministry program which you have borne is \$19,063.43. So there is a considerable expenditure of time and money which you are responsible for in the spread of the Word of God through these ministries.

This is in a sense the missionary program of Believers Chapel, and we think that it is effective. It is producing results, and you can see from the letters that have been printed this morning in the bulletin some of the responses that are received to that ministry. So in case someone should ask you, does Believers Chapel have a missionary program?, why you can tell them something of the program that is carried on here. Again we make this not to criticize in any way the different types of programs that other churches have, but we have felt as elders that this is the way the Lord would have us direct the thrust of the Chapel.

Perhaps it will change in the future. Who knows? We are certainly amenable and flexible for change if the Lord should direct. We're kind of hard—the Lord has difficulty getting through to us at times—I know speaking not only personally, but to us as group. But we want to assure you that we do want to hear his voice and be responsive to it. Incidentally, if you have suggestions we are open to suggestions. You remember we just warned you we're kind of hard to turn. [Laughter] There's an old Scots-Irish prayer my wife has Scots-Irish background, and I remind her of it every time Scots-Irish prayer is, “O God help me to be always right, for Thou knowest that I'm hard to turn.” [Laughter] Well that's the elders' prayer in Believers Chapel [Johnson, all laugh].

Now will you turn with me to Matthew chapter 26 verses 1 through 16 for our Scripture reading? I will be making a few references in the message to the passage that is parallel to this in the Gospel of John, and in case I should say something that is not found in Matthew, flip over to John chapter 12 and see if it is not there. Verse 1 of Matthew chapter 26:

“And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people. 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,”

Incidentally, this ointment was what we would call perfume, and we are to think of it as in that type of liquid form and poured it on his head, as he was eating.

“And when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? (John tells us that it was Judas who was responsible for the remark). For this ointment might have been sold for much, (John says for three hundred denarii) 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, Wherever 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. Then one of the Twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they bargained with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word and give us understanding as we ponder the things that we have just read. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we come to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We desire Lord to have our Lord in the same preeminent place in our lives that he possessed in the heart and life of Mary of Bethany. We acknowledge, Lord his sonship and his deity and his atoning work which he alone has accomplished, and we praise Thee for all of the benefits that flow to us because we have a Savior who loved us and has loosed us from our sins in his own precious blood.

We praise Thee and thank Thee for him and we pray, O God, that the ministry of Thy Word from the pulpit here and from all of the ministry of the Chapel may have the hand of Thy blessing upon it. O God, if it should please Thee, give us souls for our Lord Jesus Christ and enable us to be the means of the edification of the saints of God. Help us, Lord, to glorify Thee truly. Enable us to understand the Word of God plainly and clearly and accurately and help us to proclaim him without fear.

We know, Lord that so often we fear the world. We fear what others will say about us. We pray that Thou wilt give us spiritual courage. Enable us to have a stand for Jesus Christ that is a blessing and true to the Scriptures.

We especially, Lord, pray for each member of this congregation, that Thou wilt strengthen them and encourage them and edify them and meet their needs and especially, Lord, we would bring some to Thee today who are bereaved of a very dear member of the family. Wilt Thou strengthen and console and fill the void of loneliness with Thy presence.

And we pray for others Lord who may be sick or ill or troubled. We bring them to Thee. Thou art the great consoler of the hearts of men and wilt Thy minister to them? We commit this meeting to Thee and the meeting of the evening and the meetings that have already transpired. Again Father, we pray that the Holy Spirit may work in our hearts through the Scriptures for the glory of Thy name. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning is “The Order of the Alabaster Box.” I have a book in my library on John chapter 17 entitled, *The Holiest of All*. It is an exposition of the high priestly prayer of our Lord, and it is obviously the view of the author of the book that our Lord’s high priestly prayer is one of the most intimately spiritually precious sections of the Word of God, for he has called it, the holiest of all: a reference to the Old Testament tabernacle and the compartment of the tabernacle in which was the ark of the covenant, and the mercy seat, and the cherubim, that in that piece of furniture being symbolic of the presence of God.

I also have a book in my library which is an exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews and it, too, is entitled *The Holiest of All* and evidently the author of that volume to which I’m very much indebted feels that the Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the most important sections of the Word of God and has the right to be called the holiest of all because it is an exposition of the Old Testament theology.

In no other place, in my opinion, is it so appropriate that we, like Moses, put off our shoes from off our feet for the place whereon we stand is holy ground than this section of the Gospel of Matthew in which we have the passion, or the suffering the death and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus set forth. May the Lord give us the attitude of expectant worship as we study the passion of Jesus Christ.

There is an important lesson in the incidents of the Scripture reading today. It's a lesson for the church and a lesson also for the individual. And that lesson simply is that the true source and measure of divine service and the means for growing insight into God's purposes is love for Jesus Christ. When I was going through theological seminary a number of years ago the, Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis, a man who taught me a great deal said one day in one of the classrooms, “The tempo of modern life is in jig time.” Now there is no one who is old enough to remember what jig time is, but we would have to translate that today. We might say the tempo of modern life is in rock time or frug time or watusi time [laughter] or monkey time or whatever the newest dance invented by Killer Joe Pirro might be. But the point I'm sure has come home to all of us, and it is that we are so busy today in the things that we do and the church is infected by this that there is really little opportunity to withdraw and to have a time with the Lord Jesus that is personal and intimate and spiritually edifying.

Mary of Bethany figures in three incidents in the New Testament importantly. In each of these she is at the feet of the Lord Jesus. It's remarkable. But in Luke chapter 10, in which we have mention of Mary of Bethany, she is at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ to listen and to learn from him as he expounds the Word of God. And then in John chapter 11 in the incident of the resurrection of Lazarus she is at the feet of the Lord Jesus again to weep and to be comforted by him. And here in this incident, as John in his account makes plain, she is at the feet of the Lord Jesus again, but this time she is at his feet to express her love and then she receives that remarkable commendation from him: “Wherever this gospel shall preached in the whole world there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”

Mary had learned the meaning of what William Cowper wrote about many years later: “Tis joy enough my all in all at Thy dear feet to lie / Thou wilt not let me lower fall and none can higher fly.” It is true there is no higher place for a Christian to ever be than at the feet of our Lord Jesus listening and learning and loving and weeping.

The connecting link between the three paragraphs that I have read is the actions of Judas Iscariot. The Lord Jesus says that he is betraying him. The Son of man is betrayed to be crucified in the 2nd verse. And then we have Judas speaking out in condemnation of the action of Mary of Bethany in the 8th verse: “To what purpose is this waste? Why this ointment could have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor.” And finally in the 14th verse we read of how he went to the chief priests and covenanted with them for thirty pieces of silver to give our Lord Jesus into the hands of the leaders of his people. So lurking in the background of the darkening shadows of our Lord’s last days on the earth is Judas Iscariot.

Let me center my attention primarily on the middle paragraph but I do want to say just a few words regarding verses 1 through 5 in which the arrangements regarding his death are set forth. I think if I were looking for some theme for these five verses, I would turn to Acts chapter 2 and verse 23 [infant cries]—incidentally that does not bother me; I grew up preaching with children crying in the audience—in Acts chapter 2 and verse 23 the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost wrote, or said in his sermon, “Him being delivered by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” I think we could write over the first two verses Him being delivered by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God: the Lord Jesus says the Son of man is being betrayed to be crucified.

Now we must never forget that while it is true that Judas was the instrumentality of the activity of betrayal, it was ultimately God the Father who was responsible for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. It pleased the Father to bruise him, and the Psalmist in speaking, typically, turns to God and says, Thou hast brought me to the dusts of death—Psalm 22 the messianic Psalm. So when we look at an incident like this, we are not to think that Judas was the only means of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. There actually was the work of the Father, there was the work of the Son who voluntarily gave himself to the crucifixion, and the instrumentality of Judas Iscariot, Son of Simon. It is as if grace and sin were all working together toward the same conclusion.

Now we must not think, however, that because the death of our Lord Jesus was something that took place by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God that men are not responsible, for as Peter said, “Him being delivered by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have with wicked hands taken and crucified.” And in verse 3 through verse 5 we have the wicked hands of the chief priests and the scribes and the elders, together with Judas and they consult together in order to bring about the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. So grace and sin are moving toward the same end, and God makes the wrath of men to praise him. He is in control of these circumstances. We shall see this over and over again as we study the passion of our Lord, so we’ll drop it at this point.

We come now to an incident described for us in verse 6 through verse 13 that is remarkable in this sense. It seems strange than the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, having described something that took place on the Tuesday or the Wednesday according to Jewish reckoning of time, the Wednesday night just before our Lord’s crucifixion would now suddenly move back to the Saturday preceding. The reason for this, it seems to me, is that it is inserted to show that the Lord Jesus is right as to the time of his crucifixion, and the incident in which Mary took the bottle of perfume and poured it out of over the Lord Jesus Christ’s body in token of the fact that she had come to realize that he was soon to die, that is inserted here with our Lord’s commendation of what she did to show that he was right when he said in verse 2, that the Son of man is being betrayed to be crucified at this time.

It was a gathering on Saturday night in the house of Simon the leper, and evidently they were there to celebrate the recent raising of Lazarus from the dead. One of the Dutch commentators has called this incident, “the ministering angel among Satanic wolves.” And the Interpreters’ Bible which is not noted for its conservative pronouncements—as far as I can tell, very few of its authors belonged to fundamental churches—the Interpreters’ Bible has entitled this section, Judas and Christ on Mary of Bethany. Judas said it was waste. Jesus said it is a good work that she had done.

Well they were gathered there in the home of Simon the leper and in the midst of the festivities, Mary went over to her pocketbook, searched around for five or ten minutes as anyone would in a woman’s pocketbook [laughter], and finally came out with this large bottle of perfume. And finding the large bottle of perfume, she came and she broke the bottle, and she poured it out over the head of the Lord Jesus, and it was such a lavish outpouring of the liquid that it not only was poured out over his head, but it splashed his whole body and his feet. John makes reference to the fact that the perfume also was upon her feet.

John calls it, the ointment, an ointment or a perfume of spikenard—very precious. Nard was an aromatic perfume that generally came from Hemolian pasturelands. It was brought to the West in hermetically sealed bottles or flasks. That is what is meant when we read in the Authorized Version, an alabaster box of ointment. Now it was very expensive perfume. Judas said that it could have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor or three hundred denarii. The Lord Jesus, you’ll remember, told a little parable in which a denarius is given as the daily wage of a working man. And if there were three hundred denarii worth of perfume in this flask that Mary had, you can see that since there are approximately three hundred working days in a year it would be a working man’s annual wage.

Let’s just assume that the annual wage, and let’s assume also the poverty level to make it not too exaggerated—let’s assume that this wage of a working man for one year at poverty level is \$7500, \$9,000, perhaps \$10,000. Well you can see that this is expensive perfume. In fact, if you were to call Neiman Marcus, you would of course find that they don’t carry this; it’s too expensive for Neiman’s to carry. I don’t know what Bal de Versailles costs now—I did inquire some time ago and discovered that it cost seventy-five dollars an ounce, and since there were twelve ounces in a pound of perfume, that would be nine hundred dollars for that particular kind of perfume. Coeur Patu’s Joie fragrance is a little less expensive, you can get that or you could get that at sixty dollars an ounce, so that would only be a little over seven hundred dollars for that amount. But this perfume is perfume that was worth from \$7,000 to \$10,000.

You can see that this is no cheap perfume. Nieman’s carries the cheap stuff. [Laughter] They do not carry this. So you can see what a lavish outpouring this was when Mary took this perfume which, evidently John says, she had preserved it for this purpose, she had kept for an expression of her devotion to the Lord Jesus and a preparation for him for his burial. It was the custom in those days for the bodies that died in Palestine to be embalmed in that way. They did not know the modern embalming processes that we know today or did not use them. The Egyptians were masters of embalming, but it was a different kind of thing and in the land of Palestine where it was warm, bodies tended to corrupt very quickly, and so it was customary for perfume to be used very lavishly in the death and burial of individuals. Incidentally, perfumes are still used in the embalming of bodies. So this was an expression of insight into the fact that the Lord Jesus was going to die.

Now you know we read a lot about apostolic succession. There are some churches that claim that their ministry stands in apostolic succession, such as the Roman Catholic church and the Anglican church. Now I don’t want to say anything about apostolic succession at the moment, but I want you to know that as far as I’m concerned, I would much rather stand in the succession of Mary than in the succession of the apostles at this instance. She did not come to hear a sermon. She did not come to pray. She did not come to have fellowship with the saints. She came to worship and praise our Lord because of what had happened in the restoration to life of Lazarus. And so she expresses in her devotion and in this great lavish outpouring of devotion the fact that the thing that is preeminent with her is not the benefit that she derives from the relationship that she has with others, but rather in her relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know we each Sunday evening in Believers Chapel have the Lord’s Supper, and as we observe the Lord’s Supper here, there are times of silence from time to time. I often have people come to me, I’m sure you do too, who say well, I thought that was rather different, but I find it rather awkward that we have times of silence in the meeting. Mary would never have understood that. The times of silence are times for the expression of worship and praise. In fact I have a hunch that the apostles and others, if they sat in with our meeting, they would say number one, “Well this is

the way we used to meet in the New Testament times all right; this is exactly it you’ve hit upon exactly what we had. We cannot recognize the way most of the churches meet; but you have it here; but you talk too much in the meeting. It should be a time in which there is quietness and the opportunity for the individual to express to the Lord the thanksgiving and the praise the things that go to make up worship.

I look forward to that meeting for that opportunity to express in my poor and weak way the worship and praise for my Savior who loved me so. Well Judas was an apostle but he did not think so well of what Mary had done. She gave; the apostle would sell to give to the poor. She drew attention to the Lord Jesus. Judas draws attention away from the Lord Jesus to the poor. In the one case we have a mature affection for our Lord, in the other case a mature alienation.

And we have here again another beautiful expression of the fact that it is possible for us to be very close to our Lord and yet very far from him in our hearts. Judas was an apostle. No one could question his ordination. He had, he had been ordained, chosen to office by our Lord Jesus himself. Selected. Judas Iscariot, Son of Simon, one of the apostles—the opportunity to fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ day by day, to listen to his sermons, to hear his words of admonition, to hear his words of rebuke. He had observed our Lord from the morning through to the evening and also while he was sleeping. He had this wonderful relationship that only an apostle could have, and yet at the same time his heart was so far from our Lord that when this woman came forward with this lavish expression of love for Christ, he can think of nothing other than to object to it and to say, why such waste, why was not this ointment sold and given to poor? “Hell’s foulest vapors,” my Dutch friend says, “mingle with the incense of the spikenard.”

He thought it was sheer tomfoolery, an utter waste, for this to be poured out when the proceeds could help the poor. I have a colleague over at the seminary who used to say that while Lyndon Baines Johnson was our president, that LBJ did not invent the poverty program—JIS did; Judas Iscariot the Son of Simon. And you’ll remember that John later on says that he was a crook

and was stealing money from the common treasury. So he who invented the poverty program [Johnson laughs] was a crook. Well history tends to repeat itself. [Johnson, all laugh]

Now there's an interesting thing here that I think we should not lose, and that is that according to John's Gospel, it is Judas who made this remark. According to Matthew's Gospel, he simply says the disciples said, to what purpose is this waste? That gives us a good deal of insight into the influence that Judas had among the Twelve. He was not the kind of person that we would think of, a person who would slink into a meeting and sit on the back row—no offense back there, incidentally, to those of you sitting on the back row. [Laughter] But I grew up in a Presbyterian church, where you did tend to do that. You tend to come in; you tended to come in and sit on the back row and if forced then, of course, you had to move forward. In fact, Presbyterian ministers used to say that they longed for the day when they were able to construct a building as they would like it constructed, and they suggested that it would be nice to have a machine installed underneath the floor, which you could uh touch a button at a certain time in the service and the first three rows would sink down below and move toward the back and the three back rows would come forward [laughter].

We have not needed that in Believers Chapel, but I think we can understand what is meant. Incidentally, I said that this morning in the 8:30 service; this is not in my notes as you probably can tell, but I said it in the service and I went out and was having a cup of coffee with one who was sitting on the back row, and he corrected something in my sermon, so and he was right, too. I had made reference to the fact that Mary, when she got her ointment of spikenard, went back to her room in the house and he said, but wait she was in Simon the leper's house; and he was absolutely right. That's why I made reference at this service to the fact that she had it in her pocketbook. So it is possible for those who sit on the back row to correct the preacher and with exactness too.

But now here is an interesting thing. Here is one of the apostles who speaks as he does, and the rest of the apostles fall in to line behind Judas. In fact, this word “had indignation” is a word that was used of the snorting of horses, so this was not a mild rebuke. This was a very strong rebuke that

Judas and the other apostles exercised toward Mary. And Mark tells us that they glowered at her.

They were actually mad over what she had done, at the instigation of Judas.

Now Judas then, is a man who had influence with the eleven. He was not I say the kind of person that you might pick out immediately as only a professor. As a matter of fact, he's the kind of man who might well be a deacon, or better still, he might even be an elder, or he might even be a teaching elder who stands behind the pulpit. You can see that Satan is very anxious to have someone who has influence challenge the truthfulness of the Word of God, and it is a challenge to us to be very careful in laying hands upon anyone for office in the church of Jesus Christ.

Now in the reply that the Lord Jesus gave there are several very important things, and I want you to notice them. First of all he says, Why [are] you troubling this woman? She has wrought a good work upon me. Judas said it was waste. Jesus said it's a good work. As a Scottish friend said to me that ought to be translated, “a bonnie deed.” She hath wrought a bonnie deed upon me. For he says, you have the poor always with you.

Now that is a most interesting comment and I think that this statement. You have the poor always with you but me ye have not always, stresses the primacy of the spiritual over the social. We often have people say that evangelicals forget the social implications of the gospel. We don't forget the social implications of the gospel; the history of the Christian church is testimony to the fact that when the gospel of Jesus Christ goes forth in power and the hearts of men are changed, it ultimately issues in social good and welfare for the community. I would certainly hope that through Believers Chapel and the people who listen to the Word here, the community about us, should see some evidence of compassion and love and concern for those who have need. That is a necessary issue.

I am told, that there were never any hospitals until the time of the new covenant. Hospitals are really the product of the Christian faith. It is true that there are naturally, inevitably, issues in public welfare from conversion to Jesus Christ, but we must never forget that the primary task of the ministry of the Word of God is towards the individual new birth of those who hear the Word of God. The poor you always have with you, but me ye have not always. There is I think here a

statement clearly of the primacy of the spiritual over the social, and we must not forget, too, that our Lord Jesus was poor and yet he said it. He did not have a dollar to his name. So far as we know, the only things that he possessed were the garments that he wore. He was supported by the free will gifts of those who were with him in his ministry. The women, and some of the men. He did not have a thing, and yet it is he who said the poor you always have with you. I think incidentally, that this also is a recognition of the fact that the Bible speaks realistically. It says, the poor you always have with you because of the nature of man. But me ye have not always.

Now in the reverse of that, he says, the poor you always have with you, but me—and in the Greek text there is a great deal of stress on that little pronoun—and I’m not giving it a false rendering when I say, the poor you always have with you, but me ye have not always. He was conscious of his royal position and office. He recognized that he was a king. He recognized that it was perfectly all right for Mary to come with this expensive ointment and pour it out over him, because the principle that governs all of his actions when his office is in view is, I first then Thou. He is the king.

In the Old Testament it says, he made his grave with the wicked and yet he was with the rich in his death, and he recognized that it was perfectly appropriately that this illustration, example of the birth of a rich man, in the pouring out of this expensive ointment, should be true of him. I think this also emphasizes too that while there are some things that are important in our Christian lives, there are some things that are imperative, and it is good to have proper priorities and the interest of our Lord Jesus is supreme. True, we are interested in social implications of the gospel, but we are more interested in the salvation of souls. May it always be so.

And finally will you notice how in his answer he commends Mary for her foreknowledge, for her presence, for in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she has done it for my burial. John said she has kept it she has preserved it she knew that this was coming and she was preparing for it. It was customary, I said, to anoint dead bodies with perfume, and so in the anointing there is recognized by Mary the fact that he is going to die.

Well, after this is completed and our Lord has said, wherever this gospel shall be preached there shall also this that this woman has done be told for a memorial of her. Incidentally, that shows that our Lord knew that death would not be the end of his movement. He knew that he would be raised from the dead.

Then we read in verse 14 then one of the twelve called Judas went and covenanted for the delivering up of the Lord Jesus. It seems as if Judas, rebuked by the rebuke of our Lord, and then as the issue of this rebuke from the Lord went, saying within his own heart, it's now time to do my dastardly deed and went and made the covenant with the chief priests for thirty pieces of silver—a hundred and twenty denarii someone has said. Do you know if you read the Old Testament, you'll find thirty pieces of silver mentioned several times. We'll save one, because it will come up again in the next chapter. But in Exodus chapter 21, it is said that if the ox of a Hebrew man should gore the servant of another Hebrew man, the life of that servant should be paid for by thirty shekels of silver. In other words, Judas' price was the price of a slave gored by an ox. That's what he really thought of the Lord Jesus. Putting it in money, Judas' price was the price of a used Volkswagen or something like that. And for that price, he is willing to give over our Lord Jesus Christ to crucifixion. What's your price incidentally?

Now let me conclude. I think from this incident we learn first of all that the proper spiritual principle for evaluating spiritual actions is love for Jesus Christ. We evaluate our actions in different ways. A soldier's actions are evaluated by his obedience. His submission to his duty. Now if we're in business, our actions are in are weighed by utility. Will this produce for me a legitimate profit, and so utility is the principle by which things are judged. Mary's act was not evaluated by duty. She did not have the duty of doing this. Furthermore, it was certainly not a utilitarian thing. It was waste it was the pouring out of ointment which truly was wasted, looked at from the standpoint of business. Incidentally this is a point that many businessmen are never able to understand, because they are dominated by the principle of utility, and incidentally, I'm glad that they are while they're in business. If you own any securities in their firms that's what you want them to be—dominated by utility.

But in spiritual things it is a different principle. Mary’s actions are evaluated according to love as the expression of devotion to him, and while the world can never understand the impracticality of love for Christ, the Lord Jesus does. And he evaluates it highly. The apostle said waste. Jesus Christ said, a bonnie deed, a good work. That’s the difference between our Lord’s evaluation of something done for him, and for his glory as over against the evaluation of someone who does not understand in reality what it is to love Jesus Christ; for that which he has done for him.

Wordsworth—incidentally God shows this very definitely in his creation and in his redemption; he doesn’t act on the ground of utility in his creation. There are more flowers in the world than there are people to enjoy them. He doesn’t act on the ground of utility in redemption. There is more grace in the saving work of the Lord Jesus, more manifestation of the grace of God, in that work than there are men to appropriate it. That’s why we say the value of the death of Christ is sufficient to cover the sins of all men and for all others that might be conceived of. The value is infinite. Wordsworth has a little sonnet entitled, strangely I wouldn’t think of entitling a sonnet this: “Inside of King’s College Chapel Cambridge,” but in that little sonnet Wordsworth says, “Give all thou canst, high heaven rejects the lower of nicely calculated less or more.” When it comes to evaluating spiritual actions it is love for Jesus Christ that really matters and whether the deed is great or small it can be great in the sight of the Lord.

There is a beautiful opportunity afforded us in Believers Chapel and in our Christian life of emulating Mary. She first gave of herself and then of the things that she had, and would that we had more with the spirit of Mary in this lavish prodigality for the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And finally—I’ve said finally three times; you’re allowed three when you’re preaching in case you didn’t know that [laughter]—finally there is one last thing that I want to stress, and I think this is beautifully seen if we’ll just remember two things. First, Mary broke the flask, and second she anointed our Lord Jesus.

Now you’ll remember that the term anoint is a term that suggests the Messiah, because the term, the Messiah means the anointed one, and while the Greek term here is not the ordinary term

for that, I think it's fair to say—I've thought [about] this a great deal—but I think it's fair to say that this was an anointing in the fullest sense. And in the fact that Mary took that flask and broke it and then anointed our Lord Jesus, there was in that action the recognition that he was the suffering and dying Messiah.

Now one of the commentators whose comment I have printed in the *Believers Bible Bulletin* for today has said that her woman's intuition enabled her enter into spiritual places where the apostles themselves were strangers.

Now I want to say that I have the highest admiration for woman's intuition. I have been subject to that and I believe in it. There is such a thing as woman's intuition. But it was not woman's intuition that led Mary to understand that our Lord was the suffering and dying Messiah. There was one thing that characterized her, remember? It was, she sat at Jesus' feet and she went on hearing his Word. That was characteristic of Mary. She paid attention to the things that he said, and in paying attention to the things that he said in his word, she learned things about him that even apostles were strangers to.

And I say to you today that if we are truly to learn how great our Lord is and learn in such a way that there is provoked devotion and praise and thanksgiving to him and ultimately a lavish prodigality in the giving of ourselves for his glory, it shall come through pondering and reflecting upon the person and work of the Lord Jesus. May the lesson not go unnoticed among us.

If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus we invite you to come to him, the suffering and dying Messiah who has offered in the past and there is available today the benefit of that atoning sacrifice. If you're here and God the Holy Spirit has brought home to your heart your own sin and condemnation you're a candidate for this salvation. May the Lord so speak to your heart, that within it, in your inmost being, you simply say to him, I thank Thee Lord that Christ has died for sinners I am a sinner I do take the salvation freely offered through him. May God bring you to that decision. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord for these lessons which are inscribed in the Word of God as a memorial for Mary of Bethany, but as lessons of education and instruction for us. O God, give us something of the spirit of this lovely woman, who so thankful for what Christ had done gave a precious possession in expression of it. Speak to us, enable us, Lord, to respond in a way that will bring honor and glory to Thy name. If there are some here who do not yet know Christ, O God work in their hearts to that end. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.