



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

TRANSCRIPT

John 12:1-11

“Miscellaneous Topics #14: The Ministering Angel Among Satanic Wolves”

[Audio begins] For the Scripture reading today I’m asking you, if you will, to turn to John’s gospel chapter 12. John chapter 12, and I’m going to read verses 1 through 11. This passage has been entitled by one scholar “The Ministering Angel Among Satanic Wolves.” And I think as you read through the section with me you will discover that that title is a very good one,

“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 the odor of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. (that word translated “there” may be translated pilfer, because the meaning is that he was taking away what was put therein, Judas was a thief. Now we read in verse 7) Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For

the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always. Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.”

Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] We are thankful to Thee Lord that we are able to gather in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ whose supremacy over the material is so obvious from this incident in his life, which we have just read of. We do thank Thee that our Lord is the preeminent one and that in him we have that which is the supreme delight of God. And we pray Lord that through the ministry of the Scriptures today we may be drawn closer to him, come to understand him in a more intimate way, and have a relationship with him that is more satisfying than ever before. We thank Thee that he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and that in the wonderful grace of the gospel he has come near to us as the Son of man and has through his saving work, made it possible for us to be reunited with Thee. We thank Thee Lord that he is the representative man, the last Adam, and having been triumphant over death he has ascended to the right hand of the Father and there he waits till his enemies have been made the footstool of his feet. And we thank Thee Lord for the wonderful truth that he is our mediator, one who stands for us, the surety of all who have believed in him, the evidence that we too shall one day be in Thy presence.

And so Lord as we conclude another year and look back over the past, we bless Thee for all of the ways in which Thou hast favored us with material and above all, spiritual blessings, and we pray as we look forward to the new year that we may go into it, if it should please Thee that we enter it, in a deeper relationship to Thee and with

richer experiences of Thy mercy and Thy grace. Lord we would particularly remember reach in this audience, and we pray that Thy blessing may be upon them. May they walk in the center of Thy will. We thank Thee Lord for the tragedies of the past, the disappointments of the past, the sorrows of the past, as well as the victories and the joys. And as we face the future, and in the experiences of life, may find these again, we pray that Thou wilt enable us to look to a loving heavenly Father knowing that he is sovereign and omnipotent. And may Lord we learn to accept Thy will for us. Bless this assembly of Christians and friends. May Thy blessing rest upon the elders and the deacons of this church. Wilt Thou give guidance and direction to us, for we need it. Now we commit this ministry to Thee, of this hour, and we pray Thy blessing upon it for Christ's sake. Amen.

[Message] The incident that I want to call to your attention this morning, and use as the basis of the message of this hour, is an incident that contains a lesson for the times and also a lesson for the church of Jesus Christ. About twenty or twenty-five years ago when I was studying the New Testament under a New Testament scholar commenting upon this passage he said that, “The tempo of modern life is in jig time.” Now some of you who are older in the audience will recognize the term and you will of course recognize that that comment is a dated comment. But I think if we were to change it and say the tempo of modern life is in rock time, we would still be expressing a truth which is just as true now as it was true then. And I think it is also true to say that the church has been infected and it needs a deeper acquaintance with our Lord Jesus Christ, which leads to a deeper love for him. And this incident, I think, above many of the incidents in the Bible stresses that fact. John's account of the public ministry of our Lord seems to end upon a very disappointing note, for in this same 12th chapter and the 37th verse, in concluding the major argument of his book, he says,

“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.”

And it would seem, if we read simply that, that the ministry of our Lord Jesus, according to John, is something of a failure. But there are some encouraging notes. There is the enthusiasm of some as expressed in the untriumphal entry referred to in verse 13, “for many of them took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet our Lord and they cried out, Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” And then there is a prophetic suggestion of future success in the ministry of our Lord in the 24th verse, for we read there, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone but if it die,” and in those words our Lord refers to the fact that it is within the will of God that he do that, “if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit,” and so there is an encouraging note in that.

And I think the most encouraging note perhaps of all is the statement of the Father in verse 28 that in spite of the fact that men have not responded to the ministry of the Lord Jesus, he says, “I have both glorified the name of the Son and will glorify it again.” Now the final encouraging note is this little incident in John chapter 12, verses 1-11, because I think suggests that there is to come a time when men shall finally recognize that the ministry of the Lord Jesus is a success. Now if you read through these verses you will surely discover that the important person in these eleven verses is not the men of the chapter, you I’m sure could make an argument for our Lord being the important person in any passage in which he appears in Scripture, but it does seem as if the important person in this particular section is that very remarkable biblical character, Mary of Bethany. And

that is why I think that title is so good, and I’m going to steal it for this message, “The Ministering Angel Among Satanic Wolves.”

Three times Mary appears in the Bible. And in each of the three instances in which she appears she is at the feet of our Lord. In Luke chapter 10, verses 38-42 she appears, and remember, it is then that she sits at the feet of Jesus and hears his word. Martha is in the kitchen serving, but Mary is at his feet listening to the things that our Lord has to say. And so in that particular instance she is at his feet to listen and to learn of him. In the 11th chapter of John, just preceding this 12th one, she is also at the feet of our Lord, but this time to weep over the death of Lazarus and then to receive comfort from our Lord. And finally, in the 12th chapter she is again at his feet, anointing his head and his feet, wiping his feet with her tears. Here she is at his feet to love and to be rewarded by him. The situation in which this incident is placed is in the last week of the earthly ministry of our Lord. Lazarus has just been raised from the dead and apparently the little group of disciples, led by Judas, and Mary of Bethany meet in the home of Simon the leper. I think the incident in Mark 4:14 is the same incident as that found here. They meet in the home of Simon the leper on Saturday night to celebrate the resurrection of Lazarus. And there Judas and Jesus Christ express their views concerning Mary of Bethany. When Mary performs her sacrificial act Judas says it’s a waste. When Mary performs her act Jesus says that it is a good work.

When I was on Scotland I heard a Scottish preacher preach on this incident and he said, “I think that we Scots would translate that, ‘She hath wrought a good work in me which Mark gives us the account, she hath wrought a bonnie deed for me,’” and I think that that is probably just as nice an expression of what she did as we could find from the human standpoint. But here is the ministering angel among satanic wolves, and we’re going to see that it is truly among satanic wolves that she is. Now her action is described in verse 3 in a very interesting way. They were there in the home, they were celebrating the resurrection of Lazarus, having some last fellowship before our Lord, on the next

weekend, shall be raised upon the cross and crucified. And apparently in the midst of the supper that Mary and Martha were making for Lazarus and those who were there, Mary arose from the table, went into the back part of the house, went into her bedroom, went over to the dresser in which she had her things, and reached back into the back part of one of the drawers and took out a little bottle of perfume. It contained twelve ounces of ointment of spikenard, very costly.

Now the term ointment is a term that refers to perfume in general. In other words, that would include Guerlain and Jon Patu's, as well as Revlon's. And I'm sure that from the description that is given of this that this was very, very expensive perfume. Nard was a particular kind of perfume. The nard plant, the Nardoos plant was an aromatic herb from Himalayan pasture land, although there was some grown in the west, it was brought west in hermetically sealed bottles. And this is, if I read this account correctly, this is about as expensive a perfume as it is possible for us to imagine, because when Mary breaks that bottle and pours it out over our Lord Judas says, “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?”

Now we know from a little story that Jesus told that a denarius, translated pence, a denarius was a working man's wage for one day. And three hundred pence would then be the equivalent of about three hundred working days, or an annual wage of a working man. For example, it would compare with what we have today in the annual wage of a working man. Let's just presume that the annual working wage of a man in the United States the average would be say, I guess this is probably on the low side, forty-eight hundred dollars. Now, I know that it is possible for us to argue that their standard of living was not quite as ours, and perhaps this is exaggeration, I do not know enough to know, and frankly I don't think that anyone really knows enough to compare these two cultures in this way economically. But I think you can see that if this perfume did sell for that which was the equivalent of a working man's wage for one year it was very expensive perfume. It was a lot more expensive than Jon Patu's Joy fragrance.

I first, when I first spoke on this passage years ago I picked up the telephone and called Neiman Marcus and asked for the perfume department and asked the girl, “What is the most expensive perfume that you sell?” and she said, “Jon Patu’s Joy fragrance.” And I said, “How much was it?” She said, “Well it’s forty-five dollars an ounce, and if you buy two ounces you can have it for seventy-five dollars.” And that was about fifteen years ago and I said, “No thank you” then. But I called, I was just curious and so a couple of years ago I think, I down there again and I found out that Joy fragrance was now thirty-three dollars for half an ounce, sixty dollars for an ounce, and I didn’t even bother to ask what two ounces was. [Laughter] But when I called I said, “What is the most expensive perfume that you have?” and she said, “Bal A Versailles.” And I said, “How much is that?” Well that was seventy-five dollars an ounce now, and I guess it’s far more than that at the present.

Well now if this is a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, that is twelve ounces. And so let us just assume that twelve ounces of Bal A Versailles is bought, that would be about nine hundred dollars. Now I know that with my mathematical mind I’m too quick for most of you, [Laughter] but you’ll have to accept my word for it. Nine hundred dollars, well now that’s expensive perfume. I want to tell you that is a great deal more expensive than I used to buy my wife. I would be more in the category of Revlon’s Intimate I think, [Laughter] which seems to be popular today with some. But you can see that this gift that Mary made was an outstanding gift. And in fact, if someone from Neiman’s were listening I’m sure that the thing that Stanley Marcus would like to do next year is to get some of this ointment of spikenard, very costly, and offer it to you as that which Mary poured over the head of our Lord for forty-five hundred dollars or whatever it may be.

Well you can see then that neither quantity nor quality was lacking in this expression of the devotion of Mary. This was something that she had treasured for many months, no doubt, and in anticipation of the fact of our Lord’s coming death and burial.

Well she came and she anointed the feet of Jesus. She poured it out over his head, she anointed his feet, and she wiped his feet with her hair. Now that it was a disgrace for a Jewish woman to loosen her hair in public, but no sacrifice was too great for Mary. Paul tells us that a woman's hair is her glory. And by the way men, it says a woman's hair is her glory, not a man's hair [Laughter] is his glory. Now a woman's hair is her glory Paul said. It is an expression of her difference. It is an expression of the fact that she is designed by God to be subordinate to the man, and that is the glory of her position. And it is a wonderful glory to have that position. But Mary, in a sense, takes down her glory and wipes the feet of our Lord in humble expression of her devotion to him.

If you were an Anglican you would of course be very much interested in apostolic succession, because it is one of the views of the Anglican church, as well as of the Roman Catholic church. G. Campbell Morgan, one of our fine Bible teachers of a generation ago, however said, “One would rather be in Mary's succession than the whole crowd of the apostle's suggestion, because she is the ministering angel among these men who are led astray by Satan.”

You will notice too that Mary, in this little gathering, was not so much interested in hearing a sermon from the Lord, though she did whenever the opportunity took place, I'm sure, loved to sit at his feet and hear his word, that is expressed of her. But here she was not there to hear a sermon, she was not there to pray, she was not there to fellowship with the saints, she was not there to be refreshed herself. She was primarily in this act expressing her devotion of our Lord Jesus in the personal worship of him.

And it seems to me that in many of our services we have lost this note. We come to hear a man preach, and of course that is wonderful, we should be responsive to the word of God. God has given us gifted men, they do not have anything in themselves. But God has given them the gift of the exposition of Scripture, and we are in dependant upon it for edification. It is very important that we come together to pray. It is extremely important that we come together to have fellowship with one another. But it seems to me

that a service is never really complete if there is not a response in worship. And if as a result of the preaching of the Word there does not arise from your heart some expression in response by which you glorify the Lord and praise him we have not really experienced all that God has for us.

Now I do not think that worship takes place only in a so-called worship meeting. It may take place here. The very moment that you hear some truth from the word of God that spurs your heart and you speak to the Lord, “Thank you Lord for this wonderful truth,” that moment you worshiping. And it seems to me that this is the proper response of all of the ministry of the word of God, it should lead us to worship. Our knowledge is not an end in itself. Well Mary came to worship, and it’s good that there is that aspect of the ministry of our Lord.

Now John adds something that is peculiar with him. He says, “and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.” When Mark tells the story he gives the word of our Lord, “Leave her alone, she hath wrought a bonnie deed. Wheresoever the gospel is preached throughout the whole of the world this that this woman hath done shall be told for a memorial of her.” And by this Jesus expresses the idea that down through the centuries to come Mary’s action would be a cause for praise and glorifying of the Lord to the uttermost parts of the earth. John doesn’t say anything about that. He simply comments upon the fact that when that ointment was broken, when that perfume was broken, the loveliness of its fragrance spread from room to room in that house.

Now I’ve learned a lot from the study of John. I told the audience at 8:30, and I was perhaps a little rash, that I’d been studying John for a long time and that there were very few people that knew as much about the Gospel of John as I thought I knew. Now I’m not going to say that at 11:00, I’m repenting. [Laughter] I’m repenting of what I said in the 8:30 service. But I have studied John for many years, and have taught it many times, in the Greek text. And I have discovered something about John. He is a little different from the others of the apostles. He’s the mystic. He’s the man who is interested in the

more spiritual aspects of things. For example, when Judas is in the presence of the apostles in the last, at the last supper and Judas leaves the presence of our Lord, John adds that it was darkness.

In other words, he sees not only the historical facts of John's actions, but he sees that in the fact that Judas left the presence of the light of the world and went out into the darkness of that night, he sees that as an illustration, as a figure of the fact that when a man does leave the presence of our Lord Jesus spiritually he goes out into spiritual darkness. In other words, he likes to see the parallels between the physical and the spiritual. And here, when he says that the house was filled with the odor of the ointment, he is trying to express in his own symbolical way the things that Mark expresses when he gives the words of our Lord, “Whosoever this gospel shall be preached, this that this woman hath done shall be told for a memorial of her.” So he is expressing the fact that whatever is done in worship of our Lord Jesus Christ brings fragrance to all who are in contact with it.

Now I think that this is particularly true because the rabbi's had expressions that were very similar. For example, one of the rabbi's said in the 3rd Century, commenting on Genesis chapter 12, verse 1, “To what is Abraham to be likened? He is like an alabaster flask, containing oil of nard, which lay in a corner and its fragrance was not dispersed. Then came one and took it out of its place and its fragrance was dispersed abroad.” And so this little statement by John is just an expression of the fact that when things are done in glorification of Jesus Christ the fragrance of that act is a lasting fragrance.

Now you would expect that when the apostles saw this they would be very happy over what Mary did, but they were not. Judas spoke up, according to the Johannine account. And according to the Markan account the others chimed in afterwards and Judas said, “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?” And we have an illustration on the one hand of Mary, a woman possessed of a mature

affection for the Lord Jesus, and on the other hand Judas, a man possessed of a mature alienation from our Lord. In the case of one we have one who is living in close fellowship with our Lord, in the other we have one who is close by the Lord, but who is thoroughly alienated from him. It illustrates for us a statement that Jesus made in his earthly ministry. Speaking of the generation of his day he said, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” You know it is possible for us to attend meetings like this, in Believers Chapel, hear the word of God proclaimed and have our hearts far from our Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible to regular in our attendance, it is possible my dear friend to even be a quote, Christian worker, unquote, and still have one’s heart far from God. That is what Judas was. He was a Christian worker in that sense. A man who had heard Jesus preach for three years, who had seen the miracles that he performed, had lived in his presence, but his heart was thoroughly cold, for he had never even been born again. And also the apostles who had been born again, they follow the leadership of Judas.

By the way, from this we know that Judas was probably the natural leader of the twelve. There are other instances of this, and it seems evident that Judas being the only Judean, the only cultured man of the crowd, for those who came from Judea were very proud of their culture. They were like the Charles Stonyans of that day. [Laughter] Being the cultured man of the crowd, and also being apparently a man of great influence and ability, they leaned upon him. In several places it seems evident that he was the man who was their leader. If you will only think for a moment that he was the treasurer of the twelve and yet he never, so far as we know, knew anything about handling money, but Matthew was a tax gatherer and had had experience, but yet they elected Judas the treasurer. We can see that the men who were followers of our Lord regarded Judas very highly. And when he spoke up and said, “Why wasn’t this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?” they said, “Yes, why wasn’t it?” and Mark tells us that they even became indignant, and finally he said, “and they” and he uses a word

which was used of the snorting of horses, “and they snorted at her, why wasn’t this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?”

Shielder, a Dutch theologian commenting upon it says, “Hell’s foulest vapors mingle with the incense of spikenard.” And Judas, no doubt, could’ve made a very good case for his actions because he would’ve said, “Isn’t it sheer tomfoolery to waste this expensive perfume, when we could sell it and give to the poor? Do you not have any social conscience at all? Do you think that it is good for us to pour out this ointment and waste it when so many people have, do not even have food by which to live, clothing to put on or a house to live in?” And would they not, would he not also say, “Do you think God is happy over our wasting the great material wealth that we have, and in the light of the fact that so many are going without food and clothing?” Judas could’ve made a very good case. In fact, I would almost expect if I didn’t know what follows, that Jesus would’ve sided with Judas. But the case is just the opposite. In his answer in verses 7 and 8 he has a word for Mary, and then a word for Judas, and a final word for Mary. He says first of all, “Let her alone. Against the day of my burying hath she kept this.” In other words, “Leave her alone, it wasn’t sold Judas in order that she might preserve it to use in my burying.” Mary had plans for that ointment of spikenard. She had waited for the day when the time would come that Jesus would die and she could take that ointment of spikenard and put it in his sepulcher and express in that small way her devotion to him. She had learned much sitting at his feet, because she had learned that Jesus was going to die, which seems to be something that the apostles themselves did not know at this point. And then he has a word for Judas. And he says to Judas, “For the poor always you have with you, but me ye have not always.”

Now I want you to notice something about this. There are two things I think that are important here. In the first place, there is a refutation of the socialistic dreams of men. The poor you always have with you. When our Texan was president I used to say this was a verse for Lyndon, and it is. It’s a verse for anyone who fails to recognize the true

character of human nature. Much as we would like for men to have food and clothing and shelter, the facts of human nature are such that it is always true the poor you always have with you. And we shall never reach the day when men are clothed and fed and have adequate shelter until the time that our Lord Jesus Christ returns again and rectifies the radical sin at the heart of human nature. And all we have to do to see the truth of this is to study history. Jesus said, “The poor you always have with you.”

But now, even more significant than that statement is the one that follows, “But me.” Now in the Greek text in Mark there is a great deal of stress on that me. And I am not mistranslating at all to say, “The poor you always have with you, but me you do not have always.” Now let’s stop for a moment and think about this. This is a tremendous statement on the part of our Lord. Suppose I were to enter in the pulpit today and say, “You have had the opportunity to hear expositors of the word who were fairly good in the past. You’ve had the opportunity to hear Mr. McCrae. You’ve had the opportunity to hear Mr. Waltke, and you’ve had the opportunity to hear Johnson, for whatever that may be worth. But, you’ve never heard an expositor such as you’re going to hear today.” Well you would say, “That guy’s bread is not done” [Laughter] or “He’s gone bonkers” or something like that. But these are the types of statements that Jesus made, “The poor you have always with you, but me ye have not always.” Now just analyze that statement for a moment. How is it possible for anyone to make a statement like that? If you’ll think about it for a moment you will see that Jesus Christ made outlandish claims for himself, if he was not really what he claimed to be. Take the range if you will of all the great philosophers and saints and choose out one that is most competent.

Or if perhaps some one of you may imagine that you are on the level with our Lord Jesus Christ then we’d like to make a little trial of you. Let’s just suppose for the sake of argument that you in the audience are an outstanding leader in the human race and you think that you qualify to be placed on a level with Jesus of Nazareth. And so I’d like for you to come forward with crowds of humanity about you and I would like for

you to make some statements. First of all I would like for you to say to a great crowd, “Follow me.” And I have a hunch that there would be a great number that would not respond too well to that. Or if perhaps you would make a statement like, “Be worthy of me.” And people would wonder what in the world has happened to you. Or if you were to say, “You are from beneath, I am from above” then you would probably receive some rocks and eggs. Or if you were to say, “Behold a greater than Solomon is here.” What would men say? Suppose you were to say, “I am the light of the world, I am the way the truth and the life, no man come unto the Father but by me.” What would you say? Why no one would dare do that, because beneath the detective gaze of humanity we would know they would find us out for what we really are.

Now is this challenge unfair? I don't think it's unfair. If you think that Jesus was only a man, why is this challenge unfair? But don't you tell us sometimes, you New Testament scholars, that you can correct the sayings of Jesus, that you can detect things in the things that he has said that are immoral, that are not right? Or is it an unfair challenge to challenge you to write some incidents that are worthy of the New Testament? If you think there are so many errors in the New Testament and that it is not a book that comes down from God ultimately, can you give us some literature that is comparable? Can you even write one incident which is purported to have come in the life of our Lord which should gain credence among men as reflecting the level that we find in the New Testament? I challenge you to do that, challenge anyone to do it. The challenge has been there down through the centuries, and no one yet has constructed a chapter that could be possibly placed along side of the accounts of our Lord's life in ministry that would compare with them. I think if you will allow yourself to face this one experiment you will discover a fact of some consequence, that you are a man and that Jesus Christ is more.

May I read a familiar passage from C. S. Lewis, he has put it very tersely. He says, “I am trying to prevent anyone from saying the really silly thing that people often say

about him, ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That’s the one thing we mustn’t say. A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn’t be a great moral teacher. Would I be a great moral teacher if I should say to you, ‘I am the light of the world’ and I were not? Would I be a great moral teacher if I should say to you, ‘I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto God but by me’ and I were not? Would I be a great moral teacher if I should say to you, ‘You are from beneath, I am from above’ if it were not true?” Lewis continues, “The man who would say things like that wouldn’t be a great moral teacher he’d be a lunatic on a level with a man who says he’s a poached egg. Or else, he’d be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a mad man or something worse. You can shut him up for a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but don’t let us come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He hasn’t left that open to us.” That is fair I think.

Now we read, “Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there they came not for Jesus’ sake only but that they might see Lazarus also whom he had raised from the dead.” And so the occasion became a semi public occasion and there were two responses. W. F. Howlett has said about this, “Lazarus was Christ’s most unanswerable witness.” Why was he? He never said a word. Lazarus never even uttered one word. Now I know I have a friend who says the reason he didn’t say one word was because he had two sisters, Mary and Martha and he was never able to get a word in edge wise. [Laughter] But it’s rather striking that in these two chapters in which Lazarus appears he does not utter a single word. But he is Christ’s most unanswerable witness perhaps because he is alive. They knew the difference. They knew that Lazarus had been dead, and they now saw him alive. And they knew that it was because Jesus had said, “Lazarus come forth.” And therefore, they knew that the change that is vital, the change from life to death had occurred in him. My dear friend, the most unanswerable witness for Jesus

Christ is not the man who goes around giving the four spiritual laws to people. The most unanswerable witness for Jesus Christ is the man who in his life gives evidence of having been dead and of having been brought to life by Jesus Christ. It is that life that is the ultimate unanswerable testimony to the power of Jesus Christ.

Now before we close, I want to suggest two or three lessons that appear in this incident. The first one is a very important lesson particularly for 1971 and this is the reason I've chosen this passage for our exposition this morning. And in it, in this incident, we learn the proper spiritual principal for evaluating actions. Jesus called this a good work. He said, "She hath brought a bonnie deed, Judas." In embalming me she is embalming herself, for wherever the gospel is preached this that she has done shall be told for a memorial of her." By the way, in that he acknowledges that he knows that his movement is not going to end with his death. It was an implicit statement of his resurrection.

Now actions are judged by, if we are in the army, actions are judged by principles of law or duty. For example, if a man does his duty ordinarily he is a good soldier. If a man is in the business world, as I was in the business world, if his actions are utilitarian they are good. In other words, if my actions produce an honest profit they are measured from the standpoint of utility and they are regarded as acceptable. Now Mary's action was not an action that was produced by duty. It was not an action that we should, that we see was determined by utility. It was an action that flowed out of the love of her heart for the Lord Jesus. The world never understands the impracticality of love. That's why Judas didn't understand. That's why the apostles did not understand. Love seems so impractical. It's not utilitarian, it's not according to duty necessarily, but you will discover that in God's world he does not always determine actions by duty, though there is a place for duty. He does not determine the good or ill of actions by utility, although I think in the final analysis we shall see that the things that God has done are fruitful in themselves. But in God's world he often acts on the principle of love.

For example, take the creation about us. There are more flowers in the creation about us to be enjoyed by men than there are men to enjoy them. There is more beauty in the natural creation than we could ever possibly exhaust. God has acted overflowingly in his creation, and if we were to look at the cross of Jesus Christ and see God's revelation of his love there, in his redemptive program, then we should see that there is more expression of the grace of God in the cross of Jesus Christ than shall ever be understood by men either on earth or in heaven. Throughout the ages of eternity we shall come into deeper understanding of what it meant for God to give his Son, his supreme gift, the supreme Lord for our sins. There is more love in redemption, more grace in redemption than men could ever appropriate. Wordsworth, in one of his sonnets entitled Inside of King's College Chapel Cambridge, caught something of this when he said, “Give all thou canst, high heaven rejects the lore of nicely calculated less or more.” You see, God often judges us by the expression of love in our heart. And often those actions which seem impractical, which seem utterly non utilitarian, which seem at times to have no expression of a sense of duty within them, but are simply impulsive expressions of love, they are the things often that please God.

Now the second thing I think we learn is the opportunity afforded us of imitating and emulating Mary. We may express this love in a material way. I think I expressed for the elders our appreciation to you in Believers Chapel. It is remarkable to us really to see what happens here. I believe with all my heart, and I'm a long way on the way to the presence of the Lord now, I believe with all my heart that the man who proclaims the word of God and the church that ensures that there is always a ministry of the wonderful grace of God in the word of God shall not have needs. And I believe that there will be a response within the hearts of Christians like Mary's response, sometimes expressions, radical expressions, of love and gratitude which will enable the work of God to continue. And I think I have seen evidence of that in Believers Chapel. Many of you who sit in this audience and do nothing, people would say, “What's he doing?” I happen to know that

many of you like that are really the ones responsible for the continuation of this ministry. It is not mine. It's not Mr. McCrae's, it's not the elders. It's you, many of you. Some of you never say anything. When it comes to the judgment seat of Jesus Christ we shall be surprised. Some of you may laugh when you see that I have to take a back place there. But we are grateful. We are appreciative. I believe this with all my heart that when the grace of God is proclaimed God meets the needs of the saints of God. And it is an opportunity for us to express in lavish prodigality our love for Jesus Christ. It would be strange for me that a person should really love Jesus Christ, really love him, and should not occasionally do something that was senseless, but yet an expression of love for him.

But of course it isn't that necessary that you give money. Paul praised the Thessalonians not because they gave money only, though he did say “You gave beyond yourselves. You gave out of your deep poverty.” He said, first of all “You gave yourselves.” And if you are sitting in the audience and you have been here, and you have prayed for us, and you have labored that the gospel go forth through Believers Chapel, and you have been a definite part of this ministry, even if you've never been able to give one penny in the collection plate. It's just as important in the sight of God.

Now the last lesson is the tremendous insight that comes from sitting at the feet of Jesus. Isn't it strange to you that Mary, this woman from Bethany, was able to understand things that the apostles did not understand? Let me remind you of two things. Number one, she broke that flask. Now in ancient times, particularly in the east, it was the custom for a bottle of broken perfume to be placed in the sepulcher of someone who was dead. In other words, the fact that Mary came out and broke that ointment of spikenard and poured it over our Lord was a conscience testimony to the fact that she believed that Jesus was going to die. She had come to understand that our Lord would suffer and die and it was something that even the apostles did not understand. But not only that, but it is stated that she anointed the feet of Jesus.

Now you know, of course, enough about the Bible to know that the name Messiah means simply “the anointed one.” And you know of course, that the thing, the message that the Bible gives us is the message of a suffering Messiah, a Messiah who will be King and Lord over all, but who on the way to his throne will suffer and die for the sins of men. Now it is evident from this that Mary of Bethany has come to understand by this anointing that Jesus was the suffering Messiah. In other words, Mary of Bethany has entered into spiritual places where the twelve were strangers. Why? How? Well, a New Testament scholar that I know, an outstanding one has suggested it was by her woman’s intuition. I don’t believe that for one minute, though I greatly admire and fear often woman’s intuition. [Laughter]

There is only one explanation for this. Mary loved to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear his word. That was the secret. That’s why she knew him in this way. That’s why there arose within her heart this sense of a need to express in the prodigality of this tremendous gift, her gratitude. And I will never cease to believe too that gratitude is the greatest force in the entire Christian movement. Men do not respond in duty to Jesus Christ because we tell them they ought to. Men respond because they have to, since they’re grateful for what Christ has done. And it is only through the study of the holy Scriptures that we come to know him and out of the knowledge of who he is and what he has done there comes by the Holy Spirit this tremendous sense of gratitude to Christ, which is a force that can move the world. And if I have one thing that I should like to say to you for 1971 and to me, may 1971 be a year in which I sit at Jesus’ feet, hear his word, come to love him more, appreciate him more. And may the power, I express this as a prayer, may the power of the love of Jesus Christ make me grateful enough to break the horizons of the life of 1970.

If you’re here today and you have never yet believed in Jesus Christ, we point you to the cross where he died for your sins. You may have life when you come to him in

“The Ministering Angel Among Satanic Wolves” by S. Lewis Johnson
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your heart saying, “Thank you Lord for dying for me. I take you as my personal savior.”

May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father,
the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, so fill our hearts...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]