



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 11:55-12:11

“The Supper at Bethany”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Returning to John chapter 12 for our Scripture reading and reading verses 1 through 11. John chapter 12, verse 1 through verse 11,

“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. (In the parallel passages, for example in the Gospel of Mark it is stated that Mary poured the pound of ointment of spikenard over the head of the Lord Jesus and evidently there were so much of it that it also was over his feet as well.) 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? (I remember hearing a message some years ago by a friend of mine on this and it was during the time of Lyndon Johnson's poverty program. And he, the preacher, said that you can see from this that LBJ was not the inventor of the poverty program, it was JIS, Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And he added, and he was a crook. [Laughter]) This he said, (John says,) not that he cared for the poor, (and a great deal of a comment of a political nature might be made there too,) but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bear what was put therein, (that word,

incidentally, “to bear” is a word that sometimes in other contexts, not in the New Testament but outside the New Testament, means to pilfer. So it means he was bearing it away, he was stealing.) Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this, (in the other accounts, again the Lord Jesus says, ‘She has wrought a good work.’ And I heard a Scottish preacher say with regard to this that that would have, could have been, translated, ‘She has wrought a bonnie deed.’ So it was a bonnie deed, a good work. Verse 8): 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.”

May the Lord bless this ministry and reading from his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of the ministry of the word and for the privilege of the fellowship that we have in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we ask Lord that as we meet today that the word may go forth in a way that will be a blessing to each one of us. If there should be some here who have not yet the assurance of everlasting life through Christ we pray Lord that through the preaching of the word that may come, for many who know him and have the assurance of everlasting life. We pray that this may be a time of spiritual edification and growth in grace and of communion and fellowship with Thee.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the power of the word of God. And we know that Thou hast said in the Scriptures that it will accomplish that where unto Thou hast sent it. And so Lord we pray that that may be our experience today that it may accomplish the purpose that Thou hast in the sending of it.

We pray for the sick. And especially for those who are bereaved we bring them to Thee and ask Lord that Thou ought encourage them and console them and comfort them and fill up the

loneliness that exists by reason of the loss of loved ones. We pray for the families involved and their friends and we commit them all to Thee. We pray for those who are sick and we pray Lord that Thou ought minister to them as well. We pray for our country and especially Lord do we pray for the church of Jesus Christ. That in these days in which we live and which the tendency so often seems to be to that which is lighter and more frivolous, that there may be a deepening of the spiritual life of the body of Christ and that the faithfulness that the church should exhibit may be the experience of the church.

And may, Lord, we be an instrument for the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ, an evangelistic agency for the proclamation of the gospel by life as well as by word. We thank Thee that we can turn to Thee for the solution to the everyday problems of life as well. And Father, as we consider the problems and the difficulties and the trials that many in this auditorium are experiencing and many of our friends are experiencing, we pray Lord that Thou wilt enable them to overcome and find the solution in the will of God. We commit this ministry to Thee. The singing of the hymn to Thee, may it be an opportunity for spiritual fellowship and proclamation of Thy word. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] In yesterday's paper there was a very brief little note. In fact, it was just one sentence long in the religion section of the *Dallas Morning News* and the headlines of this very short article of one sentence are the words, “Theologians cite fault of Christianity.” And in Madras, India an East German theologian says, “The reason Western young people are flocking to Eastern religions is that Christianity has neglected its contemplative dimension. Its contemplative dimension is certainly one of the things that evangelicals and Christians generally have been neglecting, there is no question about it. And that may have something to do with the reason that Western young people are turning, in measure, to Eastern religions.

Some years ago when I was going through theological seminary, over thirty to be exact, the New Testament professor who later was professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary

in California, said, “The temple of modern life is in jig time.” Now that’s a strange statement because to say the temple of modern life is in jig time seems a contradiction because jig time very few of you in this audience probably remember. But at any rate what he was simply trying to say was that so far as the church was concerned he went on to say it was infected by the same kind of thing. So far as the church was concerned, well, the superficial and the shallow has become an integral part of it. Well I’m sure that if my New Testament professor who is still living, incidentally, were to comment today he might put it in a slightly different way. But he would say, essentially, the same thing. Because it is true that the church has become infected with the things that the world is interested in. And what it needs is a fresh acquaintance with the Lord Jesus and a fresh experience of communion with him. We are so much interested today in doing certain things that we are forgetting that it is really important that we are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and attempt to be something that might be pleasing to him.

The 12th chapter of the Gospel of John has an incident in it which speaks very much to this question, I think. Remember that in John chapter 12 after the apostle has now given us his seven signs designed to set forth the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God and that we might have life through faith in him, tells us that the ministry of the Lord Jesus outwardly was a failure. He says in the 37th verse,

“But though he had done so many signs 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 saith again, 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.”

So the ministry of the Lord Jesus outwardly is a failure. He has performed his signs and Israel has not responded. And yet at the same time there are some encouraging notes and John 12,

the chapter in which he says the ministry was a failure, that is a failure so far as outward results as the nation is concerned. In this 12th chapter there are some encouraging notes. There is this vivid incident involving Mary of Bethany in which wonderful devotion is expressed toward the Lord Jesus, surprising even the apostles, for that matter. There is the enthusiasm of some who when the Lord makes his triumphal entry shortly they will shout out, “Hosanna, blessed is he, the King of Israel who cometh in the name of the Lord!” And then there is also a prophetic suggestion of future success in our Lord’s words in verse 24, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

And one further note of encouragement is the word of the Father. When Jesus says, “Father, glorify Thy name,” there comes a voice out of heaven, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” So there is a lot of failure but at the same time there are some encouraging notes and we know from the future of Christianity that there is a remarkable recovery of the glory of God and the great work of the church of Jesus Christ down through the years, traceable to the sovereign power of God.

The chief figure in this little incident that we’re going to look at is Mary of Bethany. She figures in three scenes in the New Testament. In one scene in Luke chapter 10 she is at the feet of the Lord Jesus, listening to his word while Martha is busy in the kitchen and the Lord Jesus commends her there. And then in another place in John chapter 11 when Lazarus had died, Mary goes out to meet him and she falls at his feet and she says, “Lord, if you had been here my brother should not have died.” And so again she is at his feet, this time not to listen and to learn but to weep and to be comforted by the Lord Jesus. And finally here, she is at his feet again. This time, loosening her hair and wiping our Lord’s feet. She is here to express her love for him and to be rewarded by some of the most glowing tributes that the Lord gave to anyone.

The situation is described for us in the opening verses, the Interpreter’s Bible, not always known for orthodoxy, entitles this section Judas and Christ on Mary of Bethany. And that’s a good title because what it really is, is Judas’s attitude toward the act of Mary and Christ’s attitude toward

the act of Mary and the contrast between the two. For Judas, after Mary has broken her pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, is very indignant over it. So indignant that he cries out, “Why was not this ointment sold and the proceeds given to the poor?” That was his response. And interestingly enough, it is the response of the others of the apostles also. And then there is our Lord’s response, “Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.” “She has wrought a good work,” Mark says that he said. “The poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.”

I like the title of one of the Dutch theologians that I have profited from. He calls this, “The ministering angel among satanic wolves.” And of course, Mary is the ministering angel and the Satanic wolves are Judas and the other are the apostles. Evidently this took place on the Saturday night after the resurrection of Lazarus and they gathered in Simon’s house, we know that from the other accounts, in order to celebrate the fact. And we read, “That they made him a supper; Martha served, as was her custom.” No blame was attached to that here at all; it’s perfectly all right to serve the Lord but service should flow out of communion and fellowship with him. And evidently Martha has learned her lesson which he has sought to teach her in that incident which happened earlier described in Luke 10. And Lazarus, it is said, is one of them that sat at the table with him. So this is a banquet in celebration of the resurrection. Not many people can sit down at a banquet in order to celebrate their own return to life after death, but Lazarus had that remarkable privilege.

Then Mary performs this startling act. We read in verse 3, “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.” Nard was an aromatic herb from Himalayan pasture land. It was extremely expensive. It was brought West in hermetically sealed bottles and evidently some time in the past Mary had come into possession of this very expensive perfume. Now I don’t know whether you ever buy perfume or not, I know some of you men go out and buy perfumes like Tabu and you never notice, of course, what your wives do with it after they bring it. They probably never wear it at all. I don’t buy anything but the best, you understand, so I

go out and buy Joy and Nahema, I try to keep up with the latest, you know. Forty-three dollars for a quarter of an ounce, that’s fairly expensive. I could remember when you could buy a whole ounce for that or less.

Now an ounce of good perfume costs about, oh, one hundred and seventy-five dollars or so. That’s pretty expensive. You’d think that’s really very expensive. And when you remember that a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, would cost about twenty-one hundred dollars, you can see it’s expensive. But wait a minute, it’s more expensive than that. For Judas says, “This could have been sold for three hundred denarii and could have been given to the poor.” Now we don’t know exactly what a denarius would be worth in modern money but we do know this, that the Lord Jesus tells a little story in which workmen are said to be working for one day for one denarius. So it would be fair to say that a denarius is a workmen’s wage for one day.

Now in the United States the poverty level is around ten thousand dollars and since three hundred pence could be procured by the ointment that Mary poured over the Lord Jesus we can assume that this was one year’s workmen’s wage. So let’s just assume that a workman is working not at the poverty level but just, well let’s make it on the low end of the scale, let’s just say fifteen thousand dollars. That’s not much money by our scale of things. So here is a three hundred pence, fifteen thousand dollars. That’s quite a gift and it’s quite a waste. Three hundred pence. Now you see, if you think of the most expensive perfume today as costing, well one hundred and seventy-five dollars for an ounce, twelve ounces was a pound, that figures up to twenty-one hundred dollars. Twenty one hundred dollars would be a pretty nice little thing to waste but just multiply it by five or six or seven and you have, in essence, the gift that Mary gave.

And so she takes this extremely expensive perfume worth, evidently, about five times what a workmen’s wage would have been, weren’t worth a workmen’s wage for a year but so far as we can tell, the money is about five times or more what it would be today for similar perfume, it’s quite a gift. You can say this about Mary’s gift, that neither quantity nor quality because it was the best of quality. And this she took and came and broke the bottle in which it came and poured it out over the

Lord’s head and his feet; neither quantity nor quality lacking in her expression of her devotion. It was a very unexpected thing because Mary was a quiet, contemplative type. Martha was different; she was outgoing, she did not mind complaining to the Lord Jesus about Mary, she was interested in serving him. But Mary is quiet and contemplative.

Furthermore, it was a disgrace for a Jewish woman to unloose her hair and she did that. And she unloosed her hair and she wiped our Lord’s feet. You know, in the 11th chapter, 1 Corinthians, Paul says, “A woman’s hair is here glory.” So symbolically, at least, she takes her glory and wipes the feet of the Lord Jesus after she’s poured this expensive perfume over him. Sometimes we talk about apostolic succession. Well, apostolic succession has had a very interesting history in the history of the church. We know, of course, its importance in the Roman Catholic Church but it is also important in some Protestant churches too who claim, for their ministers, apostolic succession. Well apostolic succession may have some benefits. I’m sure that it would have been appropriate to take pride in the fact that someone has succeeded the apostles in the life and history of the church, although the sense in which apostolic succession has ordinarily been set out is not in accordance with Scripture.

But I would rather personally be in the secession of Mary than in the secession of this whole crowd of apostles because when Judas says, “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” in the other accounts it is said that not only is Judas indignant but the apostles also were indignant. Evidently, he had such influence upon them that they followed him. And in fact, in the other places after saying that they were indignant over this, the Scriptures also said that they glowered at her. Now that’s a word that is used in classical Greek of the snorting of horses. So they were very angry at what she had done, wasting all of this ointment.

What I like about Mary, of course, is that she was expressing devotion to the Lord Jesus. She did not come into this meeting in order to hear a sermon, or to pray at a fellowship with the saints, or to be refreshed, but she came because she really had one thing in mind, being with the Lord: to worship. Now that’s a very important thing. That’s the contemplative dimension of

Christianity and I think maybe our East German theologian is correct, it's one of the missing notes in evangelicalism today. The contemplative dimension. You know, Sunday nights we observe the Lord's Supper here and we have a time in which we quietly wait upon the Lord and then we observe the Lord's Supper.

I have a friend in a nearby state who's involved in the starting of a new church. And they're starting right, mind you, they're calling the church Believers Chapel. And he calls me quite frequently and tells me some of the things that are happening in the church. And they have a little meeting like that too in which they gather round and they seek to observe the Lord's Supper with an open kind of meeting in which the men get up and lead in prayer and call out hymns and give some ministry from the word of God. And he said to me a couple of weeks ago, he said, “Dr. Johnson we do have some complaints every now and then and one man who is a fine Christian man, one of his complaints is, ‘I cannot stand the silence.’” That's very revealing. I cannot stand the silence. What an opportunity silence is to express praise and worship to God.

I can remember when I used to feel that way too so I sympathize with him. But I like silence. Silence is good in a meeting in which worship is the preeminent activity. We need some times of silence and we ought to have some times of silence as a group and we ought to have times of silence by ourselves in which we worship the Lord Jesus. Well Mary was that kind and she wanted to express her worship and also her appreciation for the Lord Jesus by which she did.

Now John says that when she brought this in the whole house was filled with the odor of the ointment. Mark doesn't say that, Matthew doesn't say that, John says it, however, and I think that John says it because John loves the symbolism of actions. You'll find many references to this in the Gospel of John. He's the one, of course, who gives us the great book of symbols, the Book of Revelation later on. But he says the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. Now that is not mentioned in the other gospels but one thing is mentioned in them that is not mentioned here and that is the Lord's words that wherever this gospel shall be preached into the whole world, this that that woman has done shall be told for a memorial of her. I submit to you that perhaps this is John's

way of saying the same thing. That when a person expresses devotion to the Lord Jesus as Mary did then there is the spreading of the testimony that flows from devotion to Jesus Christ. The house was filled with the odor of the ointment.

Well now Judas is indignant. I find that interesting because one might ask, “Why is Judas indignant.” And then one might also ask, “Why do the apostles follow Judas?” Because the other accounts tell us that not only was Judas indignant but they were too but Judas took the lead.” Judas was a man who had great influence among the apostles. That’s interesting, isn’t it? You wouldn’t think that he would. Most of us have, I believe, most of us have the idea that Judas could be easily picked out among the twelve, at least that’s the way I thought. Perhaps it’s not the way you thought. I used to think that if I could see the twelve apostles living I could surely pick out Judas. But the chances are that I couldn’t of had. He was the only Judaeon among the apostles so far as we can tell. Now the Judaeans were the elite, they were the cultured. They were the more educated. They were the more urbane of the peoples of the land. The Galileans were the rural folk and isn’t it striking that Judas has made the treasurer of the twelve? Now it’s striking because, of course, he was the Judaeon. Well one might say, “Well yes, he would give it to a person who is more urbane, perhaps a little better acquainted with the culture and educated people of the land.”

But remember that Matthew who was a tax gatherer was one of the twelve also. And he was used to handling sums of money. It would have seemed that he was ideally suited to be the treasurer of the apostolic band. But it is Judas who is selected and that seems to be an indication of the influence that Judas had on the others and surely in this case he did have influence among them. So I’d just like to suggest to you that most of us would have been completely fooled by Judas. Even at the last Passover and the first Lord’s Supper when the Lord Jesus marks out Judas as the one who will betray him, they still when he leaves the crowd they still do not think that it’s really Judas. They think he’s gone out to buy something for the poor.

Now I’d like to suggest to you that the enemies of the faith are not the common people as a general rule. They’re not the people who sit out in the pew. The enemies of the faith are those that

are influential, the elders. Not speaking of you Mr. Prier, elders [Laughter], the deacons. It is in this company that the greatest damage to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is found. And particularly in the ministry those whose work it is to open the Scriptures, expound the Scriptures, and carry on ministry in the Christian church. It is they who of all people have been the enemies of the church of Jesus Christ; of course, some of the greatest supporters of the church, some of the greatest sources of blessing to the church, but just because of that, some of the greatest enemies of the faith.

So Judas is indignant. He glowers, the apostles chime in with him, they're very indignant over Mary, they snort at what she's done, and so the Lord Jesus must speak. What you see here, of course, is the mature devotion of Mary as over against the mature alienation of Judas. A person can be very, very close to the Lord Jesus by position and very, very far in heart from him. It's very easy for a person who is very prominent, very much seen, very visible in the things of the Lord to be in heart very, very far from him. Think of the Pharisees, think of the Sadducees. She gave, he wanted the ointment sold. She drew attention to the Lord Jesus, he, Judas, drew attention away from him to the poor. My Dutch theological friends have [said], “Hell's foulest vapors mingled with the incense of the spikenard.” Judas was thinking, “What sheer tomfoolery it is for one to waste all of this expensive perfume by pouring it out over the Lord Jesus. It is not only senseless waste, it's culpable, it's blamable. She ought to be blamed for what she's done.” And so the Lord Jesus must speak up.

Before he does, of course, John adds the words, “This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and he was stealing what was in the bag.” This, of course, is added later on. He did not know that at the time. He was really a thief, he was a pilferer, and that's why he was so interested in this money. He thought that of course if he could have had all of that he would have had a great deal more than he was taking.

Now, the Lord vindicates Mary. And he has a word for her, he has a word for Judas, and he has another word about her. Notice in the 7th verse the Lord Jesus says, “Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.” Let her alone, it wasn't sold in order that she might keep it for my burial. In other words, Mary had planned for some time, she had learned a great deal at the

feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. She evidently had come to know that he was going to die. She had really taken that in. It therefore was a bonnie deed which she performed.

But for Judas, look at the words that he has for Judas, “The poor always ye, (and notice the plural,) ye have with me; but ye have not always.” And that is a refutation of socialistic dreams. Down through the centuries we have had people who like to make a great deal of political hay for themselves by saying, “We just care for the poor.” Now no one questions that it is proper to care for the poor. I dare say that if you were to go back and study the evangelical church you would find that there is no company of people who have done more for the poor and downtrodden than the Christian church. We often have people within the Christian community belaboring evangelicals for their lack of concern for the poor. That is all nonsense. They show that they do not have any sense of history. If you will go back and study the history of the Christian church, many things that we take for granted today arose out of evangelical concerns. There was no hospital, for example, until evangelicals came on the scene in New Testament days. It’s foolish to criticize the church for this. Of course, we may urge the church on to greater things.

But notice what our Lord says. He says, “The poor you will always have with you.” There is no poverty program whatsoever that ever has hope of elimination of poverty. It is well for Christians to be realistic and furthermore, just as my preacher friend said, frequently those who make the loudest claims for us to help the poor really have ulterior motives behind their claims and what they want is to keep themselves in office and to feather their own nests. The poor you always have with you.

But now notice what our Lord adds, “But me ye have not always.” Oh, the conscious preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you can see here too the prominence of the spiritual over the social. Now one might say, well hunger and other problems, housing problems, were not as prominent then as they are now. No, they were worse then. But the Lord Jesus says we need to keep our perspectives. We must have proper priorities. It is me first and then the world so far as the Christian is concerned. You have the poor always with you but me, and incidentally that has

emphasis in the original text. “But me ye have not always.” I think this is an expression of, “I first and then thou.”

Now it’s a startling thing when you think about it that the Lord Jesus should say, “But me you have not always. We tend to think of the Lord Jesus as being humble, reserved, but so far as truth is concerned he doesn’t hesitate to say, “It is I first and then the poor.” It’s a magnificent claim for deity. I like the statement that Horace Bushnell once made concerning the Lord Jesus, he said, “Take the range, if you will, of all the great philosophers and saints and choose out one that is most competent or if by chance some one of you may imagine that he is himself upon a level with the Lord Jesus, let him come forward in this trial and say, ‘Follow me, be worthy of me. I am the light of the world. Ye are from beneath, I am from above. Behold, a greater than Solomon is here.’ Take all of these transcended assumptions and see how soon your glory will be sifted out of you by the detective gaze of others and darkened by the contempt of mankind, why not. Is not the challenge fair? Do you not tell me that you can say as divine things as Jesus of Nazareth? Is it not in you, too, of course, to do what is human? Are you not in the front rank of human development? Do you not rejoice in the power to rectify many mistakes and errors in the words of Jesus? Give us then this one experiment and see if it doesn’t prove to your truth that is of some consequence that you’re a man and that Jesus Christ is more.”

I’ve always thought that was a fair challenge and so I throw it out to my liberal professors who are friends, constantly. If it is true that you have the right to judge the words of Jesus, if you can in, by reason of your own intelligence and by reason of your own understanding, be critical of him then give us something on the level with that that he has given to us. No one has ever done that. No one has ever been able to write a paragraph and add it to the word of God and gain the consensus of the church that it is on a level with the Holy Scriptures. It never has been done, it never will be done. When Jesus says, “I first and then thou,” he is expressing an absolute truth of the dignity of the Son of God.

C. S. Lewis used to put it tersely something like this, many of you have heard this but I'll repeat it because I know that some may not have heard it, “I'm trying to prevent anyone from saying the really silly things 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 Mr. Lewis says you mustn't say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher, he'd be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg. Or else he'd be a devil of hell. You must take your choice, either this man was and is the Son of God or else a madman and 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, and he was right because this one whom men liked to say was a great human teacher but not God, is one who taught very plainly that he was God. That he was supreme in his dignity.

So he says, “Leave her alone: she has wrought a bonnie deed.” And furthermore, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the whole world that tells you our Lord expected that his movement would not end in his death and burial. Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the whole world, what Mary has done shall be told for a memorial of her. Well, the reaction of the people is described in verses 9, 10, and 11. This was kind of a semi-public occasion just as events like this were in the East. Many 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 priest 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. What did Lazarus say? What was it that the chief priests were so fearful of? Why did they want to put him to death too? He didn't say anything. So far as we know Lazarus never uttered a word. Well I'm sure he must have spoken but no word of his is recorded in Scripture. We like to say it's because he had two sisters and never was able to get a word in edgewise [Laughter] like I mentioned a few weeks ago but that's quite unfair. I think.

[Laughter] But he didn't say anything. What made Lazarus such a testimony? Why was he such a fearful person so far as the chief priests were concerned?

Well, the reason that Lazarus is, as W. F. Howard put him, Christ's most unanswerable witness, is not because he said anything but simply because he was alive and had been dead. In the final analysis, that's the greatest testimony that anyone can give to Christian faith, that he is spiritually alive. It isn't so much what we say, it is what we are. And what people can see in us, the transformation, the life of God, the expression of the love of God. Of course, the love of God guarded by the light of Holy Scripture, not sentimentalism but the love of the Scriptures, the love in the truth. It is Christ's most unanswerable witnessing when an individual has been dead spiritually and is now alive spiritually and lives accordingly.

Now we have just a moment or two but I'd like to draw just two or three conclusions from this incident. In the first place we have here the proper spiritual principle for evaluating our actions. Men tend to evaluate actions by the principle of law or duty and the principle of utility. For example, if you're in the army your actions are evaluated by how dutiful you are, how much you obey your superiors. That's very good in an army, very important in an army. Now when you're in business, your actions are judged by how profitable they are for the company, the utility of your actions. And that of course is a good principle too, no company can stay in business if it does not make money. I don't know why anyone thinks that there's anything wrong with making a profit. Now I don't make any profits much but I think it's perfectly all right to make a profit. In fact, I like to see a profit made because it means so much to our society. But business is business and in the Lord's work it's different. It's not how much profit you make. Think of what Lazarus could have done; the Lazarus Evangelical Society. The Lazarus Evangelistic Association, we mentioned that the other day.

Just think, he missed the opportunity of a lifetime, a wealthy man. Why, he would have been wealthy in just a short time: the Lazarus Evangelistic Association will be holding a seminar on life beyond the grave next Saturday. Price, oh not cheap: forty, fifty, sixty dollars that these half-baked evangelistic associations charge now for their seminars but he could charge some real bread.

[Laughter] It wouldn't be long before all of the evangelicals would be flocking in because they like that sort of thing. After all, silence kills them, open Bible disturbs them. But oh, to go to a seminar on life beyond the grave by someone who's been there, well he really missed a tremendous opportunity, didn't he.

Well it's perfectly all right to make a profit in business. It's perfectly all right to do your duty. But did you notice that the Lord Jesus said of this expression of self-sacrificial, Judas says senseless, self-sacrificial love, Jesus commends it. “She hath wrought a bonnie deed.” Now that tells me a great deal about what pleases the Lord God. We like to say, you know, if we're going to have something we have to do now, the thing we ought to do is to get out a piece of paper and here's the problem, shall I do this or this. Pro and con, draw a line down the page, put pro. These are things that we can think of that might be favorable for this course of action and these are the things that we might say are favorable for this course of action and write them down. Pro, breaking my ointment of spikenard, very costly, and pouring it over the Lord Jesus. Pro: can't think of hardly anything pro. Well, it would be an expression of love. Love for the Lord Jesus. Con: senseless, wasteful, could be given to the poor, I might need it in my retirement, I might get married one day and might need to have a little perfume. Could pass it on to my heirs, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. But she did the strange, the unusual, what the apostles thought was the foolish thing. She came out and wasted it all over the Lord Jesus Christ and then got down upon her knees with her hair, loosened her hair, and wiped it up with her hair.

You see, there are other ways by which we may judge actions other than duty, other than utility. Love, the world never understands the impracticality of love for Jesus Christ. God doesn't act on the ground of duty, nor on the ground of utility. Let me show you. He doesn't act on the ground of utility in the creation, there are more flowers than there are people to enjoy them, more beautiful things to see, he doesn't act on the ground of utility and redemption, there is more grace in the saving work of Christ than men ever appreciate. Wordsworth has a sonnet, it's entitled “Inside of Kings College Chapel, Cambridge.” “Give all thou canst, high heaven rejects the lore of nicely

calculated less or more.” That’s one thing, we evaluate actions by their expression of love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then, of course, there is the opportunity afforded us of emulating Mary. We may express this love in many ways. The love of service, the love of self-sacrificial giving up in order to devote ourselves to him. We can even do it in a material way, most of us can, especially in our affluent society. Or if we do not have that we can at least give ourselves as those people in Corinth gave themselves first to the Lord and then to the apostles in their gifts for the poor in Jerusalem. We need more of the spirit of Mary. Some of the lavish prodigality for the work of God. In fact, if we gave everything it would be too small. We often sing, I wonder if we ever carry it out, “Were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. It’s a great sentiment. Perhaps we ought to carry out some of these things that we sing about. But finally the last thing and the thing that seems to me to capture this incident particularly is the fact that when we sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus we come to insights that are life transforming.

Now I had a teacher once, I used to sit in some of his classes. And in the course of an exposition of this passage he said, “Her woman’s intuition brought her into spiritual places where even the twelve were strangers.” For you see, what she did was she went back and she got this little flask and she broke it. Now by breaking it, and remember she had kept it for his burying, by breaking it she was signifying that he’s going to die. And then by anointing his body, she anointed his body, the other passages point that out, she anointed his body, she was saying in effect, “He is the suffering Messiah.” He’s the anointed one, for Messiah means anointed one. He’s the anointed one who is going to die. And in that sense she had penetrated into places where the eleven were spiritual strangers because they do not yet grasp the fact that he must suffer and die before the kingdom comes.

So, I agree. She was in places where the apostles were at this moment strangers, but it was not because of her woman’s intuition. I believe woman’s intuition, I’ve seen enough illustrations of

that to know that there is something to that. It's kind of strange but nevertheless there is something there. But I suggest to you that the reason that Mary entered into the experience of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus that the apostles apparently did not have it this time is because she sat at his feet and went on hearing his word. That's why. That first incident in which she was sitting at his feet and listening to his word is the clue to the knowledge that she had of him and also to the great appreciation that she had for him which led to the outpouring of his sacrificial gift in gratitude for the love that she had come to know and experience.

What a great thing it would be for Believers Chapel if as a congregation something of the grip of the sovereign love of God should lay hold upon us and should result in similar impractical expressions of love for the glory of God in Christ. May God help us to that end. If you're here this morning we invite you to put your trust in the Lord Jesus. It is true, as Mary learned, he is the suffering Messiah and by his death on Calvary's cross he has made it possible for men to be saved. That work of the Lord Jesus is for sinners and if by the grace of God you have been brought to the place where you recognize that you're a sinner and if you can get down upon your knees and say, “Oh Lord, I am a sinner and I wish the salvation that Jesus Christ has provided, he has died for you.” May God bring you to that place.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the testimony of Mary of Bethany. She did work a great work, a bonnie deed. O Father, may we too learn from the devotion that she expressed. And may Lord it have an effect upon our lives, help us to remember that while the poor are always with us and should receive ministry from us, it is even more important that the relationship with Thee shall be nourished and cherished...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]