

Matthew 22-09-11a

Good morning again. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 11th day of September 2022.

We continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 26. Chapter 26. We saw the first five verses last time and we pick up this morning in verse 6, which is the anointing at Bethany.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study and we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for this time of fellowship and opportunity to be nourished through the teaching we find in your Word, looking at the last few days of the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry in the Gospel of Matthew. We're grateful for the presence and power of your Holy Spirit to not only help us understand and remember and apply the things that we learn, but also to energize our fellowship, to activate our gifts, and to enable each one of us to be a blessing to those around us and to those in our fellowship.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word together, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to each of our hearts, help us to see its pertinence and its application in the hours and days that remain to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's read our passage. We've already seen in this final Passion Week, we're on Tuesday of that week, Jesus had finished with his sayings and he said to his disciples, you know that after two days is the Passover and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified. Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill.

But they said not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people. In looking at this meeting between the Sanhedrin members that is done offline and out of sight, it's not at their usual meeting place, and their plot to take Jesus by trickery, we looked at that word trickery last time, and Stanley Toussaint was a professor that I really enjoyed at Dallas Theological Seminary, and he has a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, and he had this to say, he has very few comments on this entire chapter, but this is one that he made that I thought was good. These religious leaders knew that they could not take him by argument, and he cites Matthew 22 46, and they dared not take him by force, Matthew 21 46, therefore they had no recourse but deceit if they were going to put him out of the way.

They couldn't take him by argument, 22 46, and this is where when Jesus says, if David calls him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, and nor from that day did anyone dare question him anymore. They had tried several times to discredit him publicly, and that failed. You go back a chapter to 21 46, and they did not lay hands on him because they feared the multitudes, because the multitudes took him

for a prophet.

So they could not take him by argument, they dared not take him by force, so they had no recourse but deceit if they were going to put him out of the way. And the reason I emphasize this is we have a similar kind of opposition in the world as representatives of the Lord Jesus, and those who cannot answer the truth of the Word of God, those who do not yet have the power to put us away by force, will use trickery and deceit. And this happens on social media by representing people of faith and people who speak truth as those who are in various categories of their definition of evil.

So you're a bigot, you're a racist, there is the ad hominem argument which is deceitful, and they know this. If they were objective, they would know that the things that are spoken come from our identity as believers in the Word of God, and there is a generous spirit and an outward-looking heart among faithful Christians that doesn't harbor the desire to harm, hurt, to overcome and control, to be guilty of the things of which we are so often accused. This is a deceit, and it is a trick to disable us from speaking, from having a voice, from representing God's viewpoint.

And this is what the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests, the elders of the people have essentially done. They've exhausted legitimate recourse, and they can't really take him by force because he's not guilty of anything. They can't out-argue him because he's right and they're wrong, and so all they can do is resort to subterfuge.

And you can expect, as a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there will be times, even in this country, when we are going to be the recipients of hostile behavior on the part of those who share a disdain for the Word of God, who love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, and it should not be a great surprise. They treated the Lord Jesus this way, and it is not unusual for us to be treated this way either. So the anointing at Bethany is very interesting because it is referred to in three of the four Gospels.

It's here, it's in Mark, and it is in John. There are those who like to say that it is also in Luke, but as with the cleansing of the temple and the distinctive details that pertain to the cleansing at the opening of Jesus' ministry and just a few days prior in this account, those two anointings are different, and we're going to note the differences. It's very interesting, and it helps us understand why this account is included.

So when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on his head as he sat. This is, of course, reclined. They didn't use chairs.

They had a low table. And Oriental people have a low table, and they generally kneel. In the ancient Near East, there was a low table, and they would recline.

So he is reclining, and a woman came to him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil. It is very interesting because Matthew knows who this woman is, and he knows what kind of oil it is because he was there. He was a witness, and he does not name the woman who performs this anointing.

And it's an interesting point. Liberal scholarship says that all of the gospels were written quite late, decades after the fact, but it is possible that the reason Matthew and Mark withhold the name of the woman is because she was still alive at the time of their writing, and giving the name and location might have endangered her in the days of persecution that followed after Pentecost and in those opening chapters of the church age. It would seem that the reason would otherwise be somewhat obscure.

John, however, writing many decades, everybody recognizes that John's gospel is the last to be written and is independent and organized along very different lines. John does mention it, and it is perhaps because by that time there was no danger. So keep your finger here or put a marker in 26 of Matthew.

We know the story here that the disciples see it and are indignant saying why this waste, this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor. And you remember Jesus' words. Turn over to John chapter 12, where we have a much higher resolution account of this episode.

So John chapter 12, verse 1, six days before the Passover. And as we mentioned last time, looking at this meal in Bethany, we've gone backward from Tuesday to Saturday night. The Sabbath ended at sundown.

And so there is this feast. This is the evening meal before he will make the procession into Jerusalem. So six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, who had been dead, whom he had raised from the dead.

There they made him a supper and Martha served. Lazarus was one of those who sat at table with him. Matthew tells us and Mark that this was at the house of Simon the leper.

And so speculation is that perhaps Simon is the father of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. It's also possible that he was someone whom Jesus healed. One of several lepers mentioned in scripture that were cleansed and that he resides in Bethany and that Mary and Martha and Lazarus came over.

Just because they're all three there doesn't necessarily mean it has to be at their house, but it is in Bethany. So it is close by. The idea has been floated that if this was at the house of Mary and Martha, it wouldn't be necessary to say that Martha served.

That would go without saying in their own house. But Simon might have been a widower. He may have hosted because there was enough room for everyone.

We're not told what the relationship is. Simon Shimon is a very common name. You go to Acts and you have Simon the sorcerer.

You have Simon Peter. You have several Simons mentioned in scripture. Simon the Pharisee is mentioned.

So it's hard to pin down exactly who this individual was, except that he resided in Bethany and was close enough that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus would all come to this venue. They made him a supper in verse two. So then in verse three, Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard.

We're given the type of perfume here, and it is very valuable. And she anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

One of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son. Is this another Simon? Is this Simon the leper's son? He's from Kerioth, evidently. So it wouldn't appear that his father would live in Bethany, but this is yet another Simon.

That would be a good Bible trivia question. What's Judas's father's name? Not sure any of us could have pulled that out of our resident trove of knowledge, but Judas is a son of a man named Simon. And he says, why was this fragrant oil not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? Why is this spikenard so expensive? There are only a few locations where nard or this particular kind of flower, it's a cousin to honeysuckle.

And this oil comes from a part of this plant, but it only grows in the Himalayas. It's found in India and in a couple of other places. This was most likely imported from India.

And you have to climb the mountains to find these plants. 12 ounces of the, just the blossoms before they are distilled, cost a hundred denarii, according to another early source, a contemporary source around this time. So just the blossoms, less than a Coke can full was a third of a year's wages.

And by the time you distill it and create this exceptional perfume. Another interesting fact about spikenard is it's called a costly oil, but the word is *muros*, M-U-R-O-S. I'm not sure if the people that make *murine* got the name from this Greek word or not, but *muros* is not an oil.

It is something that evaporates very quickly and doesn't leave a residue. And one of the features that made this prized and desirable was that it very quickly effervesced. And this is why it says in verse three of John 12, that the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil because it evaporates like any good perfume.

There's not a residue left behind and a very powerful and sweet perfume, very pleasant aroma. And so this is the first episode that creates the issue of money in the mind of

Judas first. And then his idea catches on with the other disciples so that they say in our passage, Matthew 26, eight, when his disciples saw it, they were indignant.

This indignation starts with Judas, according to John, and it infects the other disciples. And it is a reminder that we have to be careful about the weight that we assign to ideas and the subterfuge with which they are presented. Judas, we're sure, has little to no interest in the poor.

He's interested in this money because if it had been sold and the money brought into the treasury that he holds, he is going to be able to thief it away. So the representation sounds good to the disciples at a superficial level, and they don't stop and think. It has the sound and the appearance of righteousness.

Doesn't the law of Moses exhort the people of Israel over and over again to look out for the poor, the widow and the orphan? This is a very costly possession. And the implication from Judas is, how dare this woman have this very costly thing and not sell it and give away the money? Isn't this a feature of charity and selflessness and humility? How did she come upon something? I think the median income in the United States is somewhere, I've lost track of it because of inflation, but somewhere \$45,000 to \$65,000 a year, probably closer to \$45,000. I think the last time I saw it, it was \$45,000.

So maybe let's say that a denarius is a day's wage for a worker that maybe it totals up to \$35,000, \$36,000. We'll say \$2,000 a month, \$36,000 a year gross. That would be the cost of this alabaster vessel of perfume.

It's a lot. It's over \$30,000 worth of perfume. It just sounds outrageous to our ears.

And you could understand how someone would A, be in shock to smell this that is associated only with the very rich. And many people despise the rich. Some of the tax collectors have made themselves rich.

And perhaps you would smell this perfume passing by their house as it filled their atmosphere. And so Judas is able to appeal to their sense of indignation and a superficial morality and a superficial assessment that doesn't take into account why someone might do this. They smell the perfume.

They see the alabaster box. They know its value. Judas lights the spark in the tinderbox, and they all get inflamed with indignation.

So there is a lesson here for us. There is a way that seems right. There are words that are spoken that seem biblical.

There are viewpoints expressed that appeal to a quick knee-jerk analysis. And it would be helpful for us as representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ to slow down, to stop and think, to look a bit deeper into situations, words, actions. How long do you think the

disciples have known Mary and Martha and Lazarus? Remember John 11, the preceding chapter, where Lazarus was evidently a dear friend, and the disciples knew this when he falls ill and Jesus delays until there is a report of his death.

And people said when they saw Jesus weeping in John 11, 35, see how he loved him. So there is a history going back. How can they not give Mary the benefit of the doubt? Lazarus has been raised from the dead by the Lord Jesus not long before.

Martha is serving, as she does on another occasion, where Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet. They know that Mary loves the Lord Jesus. They know that Martha and Lazarus, this whole family, are close to Him.

And to immediately accuse and deride and criticize the decision that she makes here, benefiting no one but the Lord Jesus with this action. And they say, well, shouldn't this have been given to the poor? If you stop and think for a moment, remember when there was a young man who said, Lord, I will follow you anywhere. You remember Jesus' reply? Birds have nests, foxes have dens, but the Son of Man does not have a place to lay His head.

He didn't own anything, didn't carry anything with Him. He had His robe woven of a single piece, or as a single piece, but the Lord Jesus was not well off. And it is tragically misguided to make this criticism, and it ought to be evident.

One might also reserve judgment about the opinions and attitudes expressed by someone who is a known thief and has to have had some other evidence of not full loyalty and not full, wholehearted service. He's certainly not invited with Peter and James and John to those leadership areas and those exclusive venues, such as the upper room when the little girl is raised from the dead and so on. So it is a caution to us to not make snap judgments, superficial evaluations, fail to stop and wonder if there might be a valid reason, if there might be an understanding that exceeds our own.

And that is the case here. Mary understands something that Jesus' own disciples do not. They are the men, they are the chosen, they are the called.

Jesus invited them by name up the mountain to make them the 12. Mary is not an official disciple, and yet Mary understands more than the rest of the disciples put together. Significantly, we do not see Peter or John or James speak up in Mary's defense.

They, at best, are silent. They may or may not have joined in to the criticism, but they don't speak up. They're the advanced group.

They're the extra credit question guys. And no one amongst the 12 comes to Mary's defense. Instead, they join Judas in criticism.

We don't want to be these people. Wouldn't it be great to have the understanding that

Mary expresses here? And Jesus points this out. We're told in verse 6 by John that Judas launches this criticism, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box and he used to take what was put in it.

But Jesus said, let her alone. She has kept this for the day of my burial. For the poor you have with you always, but me you do not have always.

She has kept this for the day of my burial. This is Saturday night and she has broken the flask. When you break one of these alabaster flasks, the perfume will evaporate in very short order.

You break the flask. That's the reason it was sealed in alabaster. It isn't just to make a fancy package.

It has to be sealed up or it will evaporate. When you break the flask, that is the occasion of its use. There will not be one wet spot of this left on the alabaster by the time Jesus is actually entombed.

And yet he says, she has kept this for the day of my burial. It is a reminder that time references in scripture are flexible and we need to be careful about putting modern Western ideas backward in time. The day here is at best a week long.

This is Saturday night. Jesus will be laid in the tomb Thursday, just before sundown. So six days at most, if you count Saturday, Jesus traveling just as the sun is going down and arriving at this.

And so you have Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and then Passover begins in earnest six days before the feast. So let her alone, Jesus says. None of other disciples say this.

She has kept us for a good reason. The poor you do not have with you always. If you look at the parallel in Mark, we pick up an additional detail, turn back to Mark 14.

We often hear the quote, the poor you have with you always. The anointing at Bethany in Mark's account begins in verse three of chapter 14, being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came having the alabaster flask, very costly oil of spikenard. This is where we find out that it is spikenard.

She broke the flask and poured it on his head. John only mentions Jesus' feet, and that she anointed his feet and wiped his feet with her hair. Mark tells us that she poured it on his head.

There were some who were indignant among themselves and said, why was this fragrant oil wasted? It might have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor. They criticized her sharply. There wasn't just murmuring.

This was outright vocal, sharp criticism. But Jesus said, let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for me.

For the poor you have with you always. And whenever you wish, you may do them good. Whenever you wish, you may do them good.

And we should wish and we should do good. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint my body for burial.

Remember what Jesus said in verse two of Matthew 26. He has told them that in two days he's going to be crucified. Mary took this to heart even before that statement.

This is six days before, five days before. But Jesus has given this information on at least three previous occasions. And they haven't taken it to heart, but she did.

And she senses, she somehow knows that this is the time. Wherever this gospel is preached, what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her. So the lesson for us, take our time, reflect, be prayerful, be humble, be sensitive to one another, allow for the fact that there might be something going on in someone's heart of which we are not aware.

And it may actually be a higher and better thought than what we have had. Let's pause here and take our break.