

SERMON: SHE DID WHAT SHE COULD

Mark 14:3-9

(3) And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. (4) And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? (5) For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. (6) And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. (7) For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. (8) She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying. (9) Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

Introduction

This narrative has been the kindling for many classic sermons. Two readily come to mind: C. L. Franklin's *Let Your Hair Down* and Paul Tillich's *Holy Waste*. Allow me to exegete it from a slightly different vantage point. My subject explains this vantage point.

This story is very simple, yet it has great theological meaning. All four gospel writers record it, although some scholars are of the opinion that Luke's version is a separate and distinct incident. (For this sermon, I will be using details from each writer's account.) This story gives us examples of what to do and also, what not to do. There was a banquet in the village of Bethany at Simon's house. Simon was a former leper and a Pharisee, healed by Jesus. Jesus, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, the twelve apostles, and many more were there. Many were spectators and did not participate in the meal. It was customary, when a rabbi was present, others were allowed to "hang around" to hear his words of wisdom. By our reckoning of time, it probably occurred the Saturday night before Palm Sunday. At some point, Mary broke a vial of expensive perfume and anointed Jesus, from his head to his feet. She then unbundled her hair and wiped his feet with her hair. The disciples, led by Judas and Simon, criticized her harshly for anointing Jesus and said it was a waste of a valuable substance. From their flawed, fleshy perspective, the expensive spikenard should have been sold and the money used to assist the poor. This was around Passover and there was a special effort to help the poor during this time. Jesus defended her and said it was not wasteful, because it was a beautiful act of worship. In fact, he complimented her. The wording of Jesus' compliment is somewhat puzzling. He said, "She hath done what she could." Such a statement is

usually reserved when a person's contribution or actions fall short of a desired goal. She anointed Jesus with some very expensive oil. He said this because of her worshipful behavior, which was spontaneous and unusual for the customs of that culture. "How dare a woman come up here and do that? She didn't even have a towel; she had to use her hair. Who 'do' she think she is."

Exposition

1. She Did What She Could With What She Had.

(The Spikenard Was Originally Reserved For Some Other Purpose.)

(It Could Have Been Reserved To Anoint The Body Of A Deceased Loved One.)

(She Probably Was Not Gifted To Write A Poem Or Sing A Song.)

2. She Did What She Could While She Could.

(She Took Advantage Of A Fleeting Opportunity.)

(Some People Are Always "Going" To Do Something.)

3. She Did What She Could Regardless Of The Critics.

(There Will Always Be People Who Will Not Understand.)

(Make Sure You Are In The Will Of God And Press On.)

(She Had Her Priorities In The Correct Order.)

(The Primacy Of Worship – Then Service To Others.)

4. She Did What She Could For Jesus.

(When We Serve Others, We Serve Jesus.)

(Matthew 25:40.)

Closing Thoughts

I will close by reciting the familiar famous quote from John Wesley.

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can."

Related Scriptures

Matthew 26:6-13

Luke 7:36-50 (Maybe Not The Same Incident)

John 12:2-11

Deuteronomy 15:11

End Notes:

1. At a Jewish banquet, it was customary to pour a small amount of oil on the head of a special guest. It would remain on the hair and clothing of the special guest, enhancing the fragrance of the feast for the special guest. Pouring the oil on the head of the special guest was the duty of the host or the master of ceremony. It was unheard of for anyone else to do it, especially a woman. Then to compound the social breach, she went overboard.

2. She broke the box and poured out the spikenard. Some of the most reverent worship comes from brokenness.

3. Paul Tillich converted his sermon into an essay that he included in his book, *The New Creation*. He coined the term, "holy waste." This oxymoron, "holy waste," is now part of most theologians' vocabulary.

True worship is never a waste of time or talent. True worship is sacrificial.