

I Tell You the Truth . . . Fruits of Faith Will Be Remembered



Perfume Bottle
Holy Land
Roman period
1st Century AD

Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. ² “But not during the Feast,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Look! You received an invitation! **Pre-Passover Party at my house. Tenth of Nisan. Supper served at the 12th hour. You won’t want to miss it. Cordially, Simon, also known as “the Leper.”** How fun! Pre-Passover get-togethers are always fun to attend. Good food and a good time are guaranteed. Plus, with all the out-of-town relatives pouring in, you never know who you’re going to run into. You wonder if any of Simon’s cousins are going to be there. It’s been a while since you’ve seen Hannah. It would be great to catch up with her again. As you’re reading your invite, Jacob comes running up to you, excited to show you the guest list; he’s been helping Simon prepare for the big event.

Your eyes scan the list. Oh, good, Hannah is going to be there, or at least she’s invited. And what a relief—sister Martha and brother Lazarus are going to be there too. So you don’t have to feel bad if you ask Martha to do your hair. Plus, you know Martha will whip up some amazing snacks to take on your behalf. Oh, look at this—Peter is invited. So are James and John. You continue down the list and then you see it. Jesus. Jesus is going to be there! Any thought of responding “Maybe” for your RSVP quickly changes to a definite “Yes.” Simon was right—you won’t want to miss it.

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I. The preparation for the offering

II. The presentation of the offering

III. The response to the offering

IV. The reason for our offering

I.

Party day arrives. You get decked out in your finest Passover dress. You have Martha do up your hair. Just before you head out the door, you go to splash on some perfume. But as you grab it off the top of your dresser, your eye catches the beautiful alabaster jar. The white, marble-like flask is so pristine as it sits there with its long neck. The container itself is worth more than you care to admit. Coupled with its contents of the world’s finest perfume, you’re staring thousands dollars. You know that when you use it, it will be for a special occasion. Wait, can it get any more special than this?

Oh, you're not super-excited to see Simon the Leper, although you never tire of hearing the story of how Jesus healed him. And while you're looking forward to seeing Peter and the "Sons of Thunder," they certainly aren't worth breaking open the alabaster jar for. But one of the guests *is* worth it. The One who defended you in front of your sister and encouraged you in your spiritual growth when he said: **"Mary's chosen the one thing needful."** The One who felt your pain and wept when he saw your tears as you grieved over your brother Lazarus' death. The One who was then compelled to call your brother back from the grave. Have you ever thanked him enough? Could you ever thank him enough for defending you, encouraging you, empathizing with you, and giving you the joy of the resurrection? Without any more hesitation, you grab the alabaster jar, careful not to drop it. With a smile on your face, you head out the door. You can't wait.

II.

The laughter from the Leper's house can be heard as you turn onto Simon's street. They're all there. You can see Judas and James through the window. You walk in and the feast is sprawled out on the table before you. But you hardly notice the warm bread and variety of olive oils for dipping. The *"Hello Marys"* and *"May I get you something to drink?"* float right past your ears. Your focus is on the One reclining at the table. Perhaps when you left home you were just going to use a splash or two for what you were about to do, but as you look at this One who has changed your life, your appreciation and your love well up. With no concern of a shard cutting your hands, you break the neck of that jar and you pour the whole amount over his head, every last drop so that it drips even to his feet.

III.

In an instant the aroma of the freshly baked bread is erased by this fragrant offering. For many, it's the sweetest scent they have ever smelled. In Jesus' own words, it was a beautiful thing that Mary did. But that's not how everyone viewed it. How would you view it? How would you view it if your parents' will read, "Upon our death, we leave our entire estate for the benefit of the World Missions of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod"? *"Are you kidding? I've got kids to get through high school and college. Couldn't it be used for that?"* That's happened. How would you view it if your mom walked out of church one Sunday and was so moved by the gospel that she told the pastor on the way out, *"I'd like to donate \$10,000 for the big project our church is undertaking."* Things like that have happened. How would you view it if your son gave up his successful career so that he could pay eight years of tuition to become a pastor, a career that would give him the earning potential of about one quarter to one half of what he was making in his former job? That's happened.

We might be tempted to say, *"What a waste!"* Missions. The church. The Ministry. Couldn't \$10,000 be spent better to give a helping hand to the poor instead of a church project? Wouldn't a successful businessman be better off giving \$50,000 to pay for someone else to be a pastor and still have \$150,000 to live off of every year? Maybe those thoughts have some merit. Similar points were made in Simon's house that night. But what other people think isn't why we give what we give or do what we do. We give and we act for the Lord. The Lord who defends our actions. The Lord who

calls our gifts, as big or as small as they are, “**a beautiful thing.**” The Lord who said of Mary, “*She did what she could. . . . **I tell you the truth**, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.*” As we talk about her tonight, these words of Jesus are fulfilled once again.

IV.

In the end, doesn't it all come down to this question, “*Is Jesus worth it?*” Is Jesus worth our time? Is Jesus worth our money? Is Jesus worth our sacrifice? The world in which we live shouts, “*No!*” The selfish voice inside of me shouts, “*No!*” And, unfortunately, my past words and actions shout, “*No!*” as I've looked at things that would give God glory as a waste. But then we come here on these Wednesdays in Lent. And when God's Word compels us to repent, the center stage is cleared for the One who alone is worthy to be Lord.

As we hear the familiar passion history read week after week, we are reminded that it was not Mary who went too far with her offering, but God himself. He went overboard not by breaking open an alabaster jar full of perfume, but by pouring out completely—his only Son. When he did that, the fragrance of “**Father, forgive them**” filled the world. From the soft cry in the manger to the agonizing cry on the cross, God was saying something to the devil, to demons, and to death itself. God was saying he was determined to save the world, no matter the cost. God was saying he was determined to save *you*, no matter the cost. Appreciate these words like you never have before: “*God so loved the world that he **gave** his one and only Son.*”

Love gives. Love is not love if it neatly calculates the cost. When the Holy Spirit leads us to fathom and appreciate the cost of God's love for us, something miraculous happens. Like Mary, we love—without calculating the cost—we love, because he first loved us. With smiles on our faces and joy in our hearts, we break open our own alabaster jars, being less logical and more generous, less analytical and more compassionate, less self-centered and more Christ-centered, less concerned about others' thoughts and more anxious to honor the One who loved us.

As we see ourselves doing just that, know that it won't just be Mary's fruits of faith that will be remembered by her Savior. Yours will be remembered as well. When he comes back—amazingly enough—Jesus will applaud your acts of love: “**When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you invited me in**” (see Mt 25:35). And for many of those times, we're not even going to realize we did it. Why? Because our focus was on our Savior who loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. It was only his love that drove him to the cross. It was only his love that kept him on the cross.

And that is why when we survey his wondrous cross this Lenten season, we sing,

*Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all. Amen.
(CW 125:4)*