

Grace is a Beautiful Thing

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[0 : 00] how wrong they were, for if they had been right, we would have remembered them all. But you see, we haven't, so perhaps they weren't really as great as they thought they were.

We don't know much about the great men and women of Jesus' day. Who were the great warriors? Who were the great sportsmen? Who were the great wealthy people of the day?

We don't know their names, far as their deeds, their prominence and achievements. Are forever forgotten. But we do know about a certain woman, who in Jesus' last few days poured expensive perfume all over him.

It was, in the worldly scheme of things, such a small thing. She didn't single-handedly fight a battle and win a war. She didn't break any Olympic records.

She wasn't great in any sense of the word at all. But for as long as the Bible is read and the gospel is proclaimed, she will be remembered. Everyone else shall be forgotten, but not her.

[1 : 07] The greatness of a man, in the world's eyes, is in the eyes of Jesus, so much less significant than the grace of a man.

It perhaps isn't important that the world remembers what we've done for Jesus.

Surely what is of greatest importance is that Jesus remembers it. In Matthew 26, 13, Jesus says, Of what she did for him that day, Truly I say to you, whatever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she did will be told in remembrance of her.

Her greatness will not be remembered, but her grace will be remembered. And that's why earlier I said, perhaps it's not important that the world remembers what we've done for Jesus, but that Jesus remembers it.

Our greatness in the eyes of the world is insignificant compared to our grace in the eyes of Jesus. And yet, even here in Matthew 26, 6 through 13, and the story of the anointing of Jesus, the significance does not primarily rest in the grace of this woman, but in the grace of Jesus.

[2 : 35] And yet, first of all, I do want us to consider the woman's graces, how what she did merits a mention wherever the gospel is proclaimed. But then secondly, I want us to think through what this passage teaches us about Jesus and his grace in the gospel.

Jesus said about her, She has done a beautiful thing to me. Would we also want to be known as having done beautiful things for Jesus?

Let's look first at the grace of this woman. The grace of this woman. For all that we know what this woman did, we don't know her name. What we do know is these events happened in the village of Bethany, just outside Jerusalem.

This is where Jesus stayed during the last week of his earthly ministry, traveling as he did during the day into Jerusalem, and at night staying in Bethany.

We also know that this event took place in the house of a man called Simon the leper. It's strongly suspected that Simon the leper may have been the husband or the father of Mary, the sister of Lazarus.

[3 : 51] Who knows, perhaps Jesus had previously healed this man of his leprosy, and this is why Simon had become a follower of Jesus. What we do know with a fair amount of certainty is that this house is closely connected with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

It's while Jesus is there that this woman comes with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she pours on his head. What grace from this unnamed woman, who in the eyes of Jesus has done such a beautiful thing to him.

We will never know the deeds of the great sportsmen, politicians, or warriors of Jesus' day, but we will always remember the beautiful grace of this woman.

Seems to me that she exhibits at least three levels of grace. Giving, devotion, and remembrance. Giving, devotion, and remembrance. The grace of giving, first of all. It is difficult to overestimate the price of the perfume she poured out on Jesus' head. We read that it was an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume.

[5 : 05] Literally, it was myrrh. Remember how the wise men came to Jesus during the infancy narratives, made in gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Now, myrrh was found in the far east of Jesus' day, the vast continent of India, and it was very expensive indeed.

This amount of perfume would have cost the equivalent of one year's wages, maybe about £25,000. Imagine that. The beautiful thing she did for Jesus was to give him the most precious thing she had.

Perhaps we don't understand the significance of her gift. This was a family heirloom. It represented the family's wealth.

A family's wealth was not always calculated in terms of gold. Sometimes it was measured in terms of this perfume. And she gave it all up and poured it out on Jesus' head.

Furthermore, this bottle of perfume was, as it were, her life insurance policy. If ever she got into financial trouble, all she would have had to do was to sell this bottle of perfume, and she would have realised enough money to keep her going for years.

[6 : 27] What she gave was more than what she could afford to give. But she gave it all up and she poured it out on Jesus' head.

She gave it all up. Not just a couple of drops of this expensive perfume, but the whole bottle. You see, this wasn't the kind of bottle which had a stopper or a lid.

Rather, to get at this perfume, you needed to break the neck of the alabaster bottle. And once you'd done that, you had to use all of it, or it would go off.

And she gave all of it. £25,000 worth of it. What grace this is. But isn't giving of the very nature of grace?

If there is any grace in us, the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ, then first and foremost, we will want to give to him. And not just give in part, but everything.

[7 : 31] We'll give to him all we have and all we are because he first gave all he had for us on the cross. So here's a woman full of grace.

She gives an alabaster jar full of perfume. Secondly, her grace consists in the grace of devotion. Devotion. Whatever else you can say about this woman, she didn't lack devotion to Jesus.

She did something in her day which was highly inappropriate. She approached a man while he's reclining at the dinner table and she presumes to pour perfume on his head.

That's not just socially inappropriate in her day. It would be socially inappropriate in ours also. But then sometimes devotion to Jesus spills over into actions which others might at times find socially inappropriate.

Sometimes the things we do as Christians for Jesus are just plain weird to the world around us. Things like singing, praying. Devotion to Jesus means that sometimes we do things which others find socially inappropriate.

[8 : 51] We don't want to make a habit of being weird but sometimes our hearts are just so filled with his love we want to do something extravagant for him like pour a jar of perfume out in his head.

In fact, I wonder whether you've ever been tempted to do something like this. To give a great gift. But you haven't because you've been worried about what others might think.

Perhaps we need to be less worried. And although we don't want to make a habit of drawing attention to ourselves devotion expressed in doing a beautiful thing for Jesus is beautiful.

The disciples didn't like it. They thought the money should have been spent on the poor. They complained, why this waste this perfume could have been sold at a high price. The money given to the poor.

Why this waste indeed, we ask. Is anything truly wasted when it is given out of devotion to Jesus?

[9 : 57] Is anything truly wasted when it's given out of devotion for Jesus? Perhaps at times we are too functional in our thinking. A little like the disciples.

Grace drove this woman to give all that she had to Jesus. Would that grace draw us to a similar devotion. And then the third way in which we see her grace is in the grace of remembrance.

The grace of remembrance. Remember, we don't know what this woman's name is. And for as long as we live here on earth, we never will. One day we'll find out when we meet her in heaven.

But until then, we have to be satisfied, not with who she is, but with what she did. She did, in the words of Jesus, in verse 10, a beautiful thing to me.

That word beautiful could also be translated as good, precious, fitting, fine. That's what she's done for Jesus. Grace didn't drive her to do it.

[11:03] Grace attracted her to do it. And because of her spontaneous self-giving devotion, Jesus says of her, I tell you the truth, whatever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

There's grace here for her. But though we don't know her name, and though in the world's eyes, she was a nobody. And even the disciples thought meanly of her.

She will always be remembered by those who hear the word of the gospel preached, and those for whom the gospel of his grace is precious. Her greatness is not remembered.

Her grace is. Her grace is. That beautiful devotion of giving everything she had away to Jesus.

Perhaps we might aspire to the same, but in the first instance, as long as Christ remembers us, we are satisfied.

And then in the second instance, we're remembered not for being among the great and the good, but from being among those numbered as being blessed by the grace of Christ.

[12:21] You know, the word beautiful is not often used in the New Testament, but it's used here. It's never said of the apostle Paul that he did a beautiful thing for Jesus, although he did.

It is never said of the apostle Peter either. It is never said of King Herod, nor of the emperor of Rome, but it is said of this unnamed heroine of the faith.

She did a beautiful thing for Jesus, the grace of giving, devotion, and remembrance. Secondly, today, we want to look at the grace of the Christ, the grace of the Christ.

Over hundreds and thousands of years, there have been many great men and women, kings and queens, rich and famous, great warriors. But in the last analysis, only one man shall be remembered forever.

Not an earthly monarch, or by this world's standards, a great warrior. Rather, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the Lord of heaven and earth, the mighty Jesus.

[13:37] We must always be careful, as eager Bible students, to see him as the hero of this story in Matthew 6. Matthew 26, rather.

He is the central figure. Not the disciples, not even this remarkable woman, but Jesus. It's to Jesus and his grace, this passage ultimately points.

We're going to focus in, for the time remaining, upon the four areas in which this account of his being anointed, points to the grace of King Jesus. It is grace, first of all, undeserved, then it's grace unlimited, then it's grace unmeasured, and then it's grace unbounded.

It is grace, first of all, undeserved. Undeserved. This woman did a remarkable thing for Jesus, but then he deserves it.

He is, after all, the divine son of God, whom the angels worship, and who occupies the entire thought world and heart of both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

[14:47] The universe was created through him, by him, and for him. It is only right that she should have given all to him.

It wasn't strictly speaking an act of grace on her part, because Jesus deserves the worship of all creation. It was more her reasonable act of service, that she should have presented herself and all she had as a living sacrifice to him on account of his great mercy.

This passage is set in the context of the last week of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. In a matter of just a few hours, he will be betrayed, tortured, and crucified.

He will give all he is, and all he has, to the cruel death of the cross. But for whom shall he do these things?

This woman gave her all to the Jesus who deserved every little bit of it and more. She did a beautiful thing for him, but then he deserved it. But Jesus shall give his all for us, who deserve not the beauty of salvation, but the ugliness of judgment.

[16:05] It is one thing for us to do a beautiful thing for Jesus. But what is our beautiful thing when compared with the beautiful thing he has done for us?

Ours is no more than what he deserves. What he has done for us, sinners separated from God by our rebellion, that is grace undeserved, grace unmerited.

That's beauty. Second, it is grace unlimited. The grace of Jesus is grace unlimited. I think it's highly significant that this passage features an alabaster jar full of very expensive perfume.

As we've already seen, for the perfume to be poured out on the head of Jesus, required this woman to break the neck of the jar.

Once she had opened the jar, there was no going back, so she poured the entirety of the perfume on Jesus' head. And why I think this is significant is that in the context of the self-giving of Jesus, he held nothing back from us.

[17:26] By being in Jerusalem at Passover week, Jesus is breaking the neck of the jar. There is no turning back for him now. The cross looms large, and Jesus will embrace it lovingly for us.

And Jesus will drink that cup of wrath to the very dregs. He shall pour himself into the task of dying for sinners like us. He will give everything, and there shall be no limit to what he is unwilling to give. Every part of who he is will suffer there on that cross. He will give everything, body, mind, and soul. Emotions, torture, body agonizing, mind twisting.

He's going to hold nothing back which he could possibly give. We have an expression which coaches sometimes use to motivate their teams to try their hardest.

They say to their teams, leave nothing on the field. Leave nothing on the field. For sure, Jesus left nothing on the field. He left nothing on the cross.

[18:37] The blood and the sweat and the tears mixed in a holy trinity capable of cleansing all the sins of all his people.

Listen to that again. Cleansing all the sins of all his people. This is grace unlimited. Grace with no small print containing conditions under which this grace won't work.

Just one drop of that blood pouring down from his head, his hands, and his feet. Just one drop will wipe away all the sins of his people.

Just one drop of that holy flood will make us all new. And as we bow at the foot of the cross, that blood drops onto our head and anoints us, just as this woman anointed the head of Jesus.

It's grace, you see. Unlimited grace. Unlimited grace. Then third, the grace of Jesus from this passage is unmeasured.

[19:45] It is unmeasured. You will see that, almost by way of a sidetrack, there is in the minds of Jesus' disciples a dichotomy between serving the poor and serving Jesus.

They're outraged at the waste of this perfume. It could have been sold. The money could have been given to the poor, they said. Rightly so. £25,000 worth.

This money could have been, this perfume could have been sold. The money given to the poor, the disciples seem to have understood the message of Jesus in the story of the sheep and the goats and of how genuine faith in Jesus must be demonstrated in good works.

Well, they were right, but they were wrong because the Jesus they could see before them would not always be with them. In just a few hours from this time, he will be crucified and hanged dead on the cross.

The poor will always be with them as they're with us now, but provision must be made for extravagant demonstrations of devotion to Jesus here and now.

[21:05] The point is that it's not wrong to give to the poor. The point is in what Jesus says, the poor you will always have with you, but me you will not always have.

Jesus is going away, and his departure will involve both his crucifixion, as he told the disciples back in verse 2, and his burial, as he tells the disciples here in verse 12.

This passage is not designed to be a fighting ring between Christians motivated by social concerns and Christians who are rather more pietistic perhaps.

This passage is designed to point to the death and the burial of Jesus Christ, to his pre-burial anointing. Now in the days of Jesus, bodies were anointed with perfume after death.

It was both a mark of respect, and also it covered the smell of decomposition. The anointing always took place immediately after death. The only condition under which anointing would not take place is if that body belonged to a criminal.

[22:22] In those situations, it was illegal to anoint the body. Here then is grace unmeasured from the mouth of Jesus himself, that not only shall he be buried, but that he shall not be anointed after death because he has been executed as a criminal.

This is grace unmeasured. He shall not be treated as a king. He shall be treated as a criminal. He shall not be lifted up on a throne, but on a cross.

