

The Ointment, the Poor and the Silver

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Preacher: Phil Meulman

[0 : 00] This is the AM service on March 1st, 1998. The preacher is Phil Melman. The sermon is entitled The Ointment, the Poor and the Silver and is from Matthew 26, verses 1-16.

Help us, Father, to open our hearts and our minds as to what your word has to say to us and may we live it out in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, in our family we used to have a cat which was looked upon in a variety of ways.

My mother liked it but would never do anything to improve its lifestyle. She certainly wouldn't have spent any money on it if there was something seriously wrong with it.

You could say that mum was indifferent to our cat called Prudence. And then there was my sister. She was devoted to it. And in the early days she used to dress this cat up and carry it everywhere and pampering it.

She probably even put it in a trolley. I'm not really sure. And she probably used to hide it as well from the boys because she was scared that we might do something to it.

[1 : 20] And she was right. The reason being is that... Well, the reason... I used to hate the cat. I just didn't like it. And I often used to scheme up ways of getting rid of it and sort of all sorts of things.

And our house used to back on the bush and we used to go down the bush quite a lot. And we used to take the cat down the bush quite a lot and think of all the horrible things we could do to it.

And we had a waterfall down there and I used to dream of ways of letting the cat go over the waterfall. But we... It's all right. The cat lived till 18 years of age and nothing drastic ever happened to it.

She had a good life. Well, I'm not wanting to make a trite connection between our cat and Jesus. However, in today's reading from Matthew and you might like to look it up.

It's on page 808. We also... In today's reading from Matthew we also come across a variety of ways that Jesus is looked upon by those around him.

[2 : 26] Firstly, there are those who like him yet they seem indifferent to him in this passage. And secondly, we also see a picture of someone who is totally devoted to him.

And thirdly, we see that there is one who wants to get rid of this Jesus. Well, the scene has been set now as we read about the last days of Jesus' life.

We have heard over the past few weeks how Jesus has been worshipped by the crowds as he enters into Jerusalem. A big following. And we've also heard about and read and learned about his attack on the religious authorities.

And we've also heard Jesus talk about the judgement that is coming upon the nations and how Jesus will sort out the goats from the sheep.

Well, now in Jerusalem, verses 1 and 2 tell us that Jesus has finished all he is going to say about these matters.

[3 : 28] And our attention is drawn to the Passover festival and the Son of Man being handed over to be crucified. Now, the Son of Man is a title which Jesus uses of himself.

And it speaks both of Jesus' glory, his authority that he has over nature and people, and the equality that he has with God, as well as the state of humility and suffering that he is to endure at the hands of people in order for people to come back into a relationship with God.

And here, when Jesus talks of himself as the Son of Man, he is now speaking about the suffering that he is about to endure.

And we also see he talks about the Passover festival coming in two days. Now, the Passover festival commemorated God's rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt.

And in particular, the sacrifice of the Passover lamb to protect them from death. Now, in Exodus chapter 12, we read that the Lord gave very clear instructions about what the people were to do with the lamb that is sacrificed, with this Passover lamb that is to be sacrificed.

[4 : 50] Everyone who followed the Lord's instructions would be saved. And those who didn't would have every firstborn in the land of Egypt. Exodus 12, verse 12, says this, every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals struck down by the Lord as the Lord passed through the land of Egypt on that night, on that Passover night.

Well, for Jesus, there is an obvious parallel between the Passover and his crucifixion. He is the Passover lamb that is to be killed so that others may live.

And the symbolism is filled out in later verses as the disciples and Jesus share in this Passover meal together. But for now, and for what we read today, the disciples almost certainly don't see the connection between the Passover meal and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Well, after Jesus has finished telling the disciples for the fourth time in this gospel about his death, Matthew then takes us into the palace in the next couple of verses. He takes us into the palace of the high priest named Caiaphas.

And here are gathered the big guns of the Jewish religious authorities. And the reason for their gathering is as verse 4 says, they conspire to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

[6 : 22] And they do it, they conspire in the safety of this palace to do that. And these guys are agreed that they can't arrest him during the festival because that would incite a riot.

And Jesus' popularity among the people is still as strong as it was when he first entered Jerusalem. Remember the celebrations and the crowds celebrating Jesus as he walked, entered into Jerusalem on the donkey.

Well, the religious authorities seem to be people-driven and they're not God-centered in their living. They're not really devoted to God but they're only really devoted to their own selfish desires, their own selfish ambition and so on.

So if they are to do something, if they're people-driven, if they are to do something that is not popular among the people, they have to do it secretly because they're afraid of the consequences.

Well, verses 14 to 16, which we'll look at in a little while, show us how the opportunity is to come about sooner than they think and in a manner that they would never have dreamt of, never expected and that is the opportunity to arrest Jesus by one of being offered to him by one of Jesus' disciples.

[7 : 45] as we read on in this passage, as we read this passage, it can raise all sorts of questions as to whether or not God's plans have failed.

Has God's plan failed here? Here we see that human beings are plotting to kill the Messiah, the anointed one of God. The authorities, the religious authorities, don't like what this Jesus has to say about God and who he claims to be.

So they say, let's kill him so life will return to normal. But friends, this is all in the scheme of God's plans. Jesus, as we've read many times and as I've already said, knows what is about to become of him and he knows who it is that will betray him.

And just as Jesus describes how he is to die, that is by crucifixion, we're also reminded that it is God's plan that these events will come about this way.

God is in control when Jesus comes into Jerusalem. God is in control of that situation and God is in control now. And I think the question that we need to be asking ourselves is whether or not we believe God is in control of us now.

[9 : 08] Do we let him have control over us? Does God have a place in our retirement plans? Does God have a place in our work life? Does God have a place in our family life?

Does he have a place in our school work, in our school life? Does God have a place in our church life? Does he have a place in our leisure time if he's not these are all areas of our lives which we should be placing before God and letting him have charge over letting him be in control of if God's not in control of our lives then we're a bit like the religious authorities who might know about God but have hardened their hearts and not allowing or recognising his authority to be within their lives so what is an appropriate level of control to let God have in our lives well I think that the next few verses verses 6 to 13 give us a clue here its placement here in Matthew's gospel is curious but it serves to show us a couple of telling points I think firstly building up from verses 1 and 2 where Jesus tells the disciples that he is about to be handed over to be crucified we now see this story of a woman and John's gospel names her as Mary who pours very costly ointment worth about a year's salary on Jesus' head and this was not such an uncommon thing in Jesus' days in Jesus' day distinguished guests might have been honoured in this way but probably not with such an expensive bottle of ointment and John's gospel also names this ointment as nard and this nard was an ointment which was used for anointing the dead and the fact that this was such an expensive ointment was also an act was an act of extravagant devotion on the woman's behalf she may well have used it to express her belief that Jesus was the Messiah the anointed one of God in Jesus' words of verse 12 here where he says by pouring this ointment by pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial perhaps suggests this too this woman is prepared to give all that she has to show her complete devotion to Jesus in spite of the consequences and devotion to a person or cause can express itself in many many ways

Melbourne is full of football devotees who go to great lengths to go to an important game Paul our beloved vicar is a devoted Richmond Tigers supporter but he's also resigned to the fact that they will never ever win another grand final during his lifetime I think I heard him say that yesterday and devotion also brings to mind a young person in love willing to do anything to catch the attention of the one who is the object of their affections I recall a time when Barb and I my wife Barbara and I were separated for six and a half months while I travelled overseas had a great time but I I have never been a great letter writer hopeless at it but at that time for that six and a half months that I was away

I couldn't get my hands on enough paper to write to her to tell her all the things that were going on and to tell her how much I loved her I was absolutely devoted to her I sometimes still write letters to Barbara well Jesus wants us to be devoted to him spending time talking to him in prayer listening to him reading his word and growing into his likeness and this is more important than anything else and there are plenty of things of importance but there is nothing more important than having our own lives right before God and that means we need to devote ourselves to him looking to the cross and bringing ourselves before Jesus at the cross offering ourselves to him in every sphere of our life putting him first in everything well this woman's devotion to Jesus is seen in contrast to that of the disciples they are devoted to Jesus there's no doubt about that if they weren't they wouldn't have spent the past few years following him around would they however they don't seem to understand here what Jesus has been saying to them about the path that he is to follow to the cross and this is seen again when this very expensive ointment is poured on Jesus head they perhaps recognise this ointment as ointment which is used for burial and protest over the waste of this oil being used on him in this extravagant manner and as a result we are told that they become indignant or angry and they perhaps abuse their position to chastise this woman and in a moment of righteous indignation they say that she would have been better off selling off the perfume and giving the proceeds to the poor well Jesus is quick very quick to point out that this woman has performed a good service in fact it was a beautiful act that she carried out because it recognised the special nature of this occasion that is going on that is that Jesus is still here present with the disciples and with the people now we know that Jesus has to go the way of the cross and in a matter of days we'll no longer be with him in the form that he is there he says in verse 11 for you always have the poor with you but you will not always have me it seems that the disciples don't realise that Jesus is not going to be around much longer

Jesus is not always going to be present in human form to receive this lavish outpouring of oil whereas his followers his disciples will always find poor people to help there will always be poor people around and the reading from Deuteronomy this morning picks up this point let me just read to you verse 11 from Deuteronomy chapter 15 it says since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth I therefore command you open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land the poor will always be there we should never neglect the work amongst the poor and the needy and we should always be willing to help out in that area but primarily our devotion to Christ to Jesus is what is more important let me put it another way there are many people who work with the poor they consider this as a good work but does it lead to salvation according to the bible the answer is no but for the one who follows

[17 : 31] Jesus salvation belongs to them because they are walking in God's grace the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians says in chapter 2 for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it is the gift of God not the result of works so that no one may boast our devotion to Jesus is of primary importance and out of that devotion to him we will also be compelled to care for the poor and the needy and if we think our entry to heaven is earned by the things that we do then can I urge you to reconsider this and look to Jesus well there is a devotion to Jesus seen by this woman she is prepared to give all that she has perhaps because she understands the nature of Jesus mission and there is an indifference to Jesus displayed by the disciples because they still don't understand the mission and nature of

Jesus' earthly ministry and lastly in verses 14 to 16 we learn of how the betrayal of Jesus comes about Judas Iscariot one of the twelve is willing to accept thirty pieces of silver to hand Jesus over he is willing to betray Jesus for a paltry thirty pieces of silver to look for a suitable opportunity to hand him over to the religious authorities thirty pieces of silver now there are numerous reasons as to why Judas was prepared to betray Jesus for so little money and whatever the real reason is not important but what is important to realise here is that what Jesus says again will happen to him that is that he will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes and that he will be condemned to death and he will be condemned to death by crucifixion and that he will also be raised to life from the dead three days later well today we see how it is that Jesus is to be handed over to the religious authorities and that is through an act of betrayal by Judas

Iscariot one of the twelve disciples one of his closest followers is willing to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver well as we read on in Matthew's gospel we also see how these other predictions of Jesus are fulfilled and we will look at that over the next few weeks but where do we stand with Jesus where do we stand with Jesus now perhaps there are some who look at him like the disciples do in this story that is they don't understand the nature of Jesus and his mission and if you look into the book of Acts which talks about life for them after Jesus has risen from the dead you soon discover that these guys these disciples are far from indifferent they are on fire for him and they have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within them to help them carry on the work that he has commanded them to and that is to go and make disciples to the ends of the earth baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy

Spirit their indifference that we see here in Matthew 26 is turned into full on action by the time we get to Acts really by the end of the Gospels what stopped their indifference to Jesus I think they realized who Jesus is they realized that he is the Son of God that he is the one to whom every knee shall bow and tongue confess for them Jesus is the Christ Jesus is their Lord if you are indifferent to Jesus then look to who he says he is and act on it maybe there are those of us who are like the woman and are totally devoted to Jesus you know who he is and you have handed everything you have given everything to him praise God it's great get out there then and tell those who are indifferent to

Jesus to do something about it to go out and act on us and then finally there may be those who have betrayed Jesus in their deceitfulness or their selfishness of everyday living we do that in many ways well we read that Judas went and killed himself after his act of betrayal due to the associated guilt that goes with the handing over I imagine but friends let me assure you that Jesus went to the cross to forgive those who turned to him he gives us the opportunity in his life to stop betraying in this life he gives us the opportunity in this life to stop betraying him and devoting ourselves to him in word and in action and with our whole lives there's a great hymn when I survey the wondrous cross which highlights the life of

[23 : 35] Jesus and in the last verse it highlights just what our nature to him should be like we're not going to sing it I'm just going to read you this last verse he writes here with the whole realm of nature mine that we're an offering far too small love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all friends are we devoted to Jesus and we're prepared to pay the price that he sometimes calls for us I'll leave that with you let's pray we thank you God that you sent your son Jesus and that you were in control of everything that happened in his life we thank you

Lord that when we can turn to you you are in control Lord we pray that if we are indifferent that we would act on our indifference and look to the cross and see the way that you went and realize that you are son of God may we act on your presence in our lives may we not be afraid to tell others about you thank you that you send your spirit to help us in this area in Jesus name we pray amen amen nor you and apart you you I