

A rose among thorns

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back now to the passage we read together in Matthew's Gospel and chapter 26.

I'd like us to read again from verse 6. It says, Now Jesus, when he was in Bethany, he was in a house of Simon the leper, and there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box, a very precious ointment, and poured it out on his head as he sat at meat.

But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor.

But when Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? For she has wrought a good work upon me.

Matthew has been writing his Gospel to tell us the story of the life of Christ. He tells us about the birth.

[1 : 22] He tells us about the ministry of Jesus. He tells us about the miracles of Christ. We read all about the things that Jesus said and did as he ministered through the various regions.

He has now come almost to the end of his Gospel. And he tells us about Christ's entry into Jerusalem. And at that time, he records for us something of the teaching of Jesus at this point.

And as we listen to the words of Jesus, you find that the words are full of pleading and warning.

There's a real intensity about what Jesus has to say and the message that he seeks to deliver.

And it all builds up and builds up until we come to this point when Jesus announces his own death.

He says, It's the Passover.

It's the Passover. In two days time. And it is then that the Son of Man will be crucified. And it's at this point that Matthew tells us really three stories.

[2 : 39] Three stories that really grab our attention here. The first story we read really in verses 3 to 5. And it is a story of rejection.

He tells us that the chief priests and the scribes and the elders of the people, they all gathered together in the palace of the high priest who was called Caiaphas. And there they consulted so that they might take Jesus by his subtlety and kill him.

They were thinking of some sneaky way in which they could get rid of the Christ. It is an ugly story.

Because these are the Lord's own people. These are the people that Jesus came to live among.

These are the people that he has ministered to over the past three years.

These are the people who had heard his teaching. Who had witnessed his miracles. Who had seen something of his great grace and love.

[3 : 51] And now here they are gathered together. In a wee huddle. Hidden away. Conspiring as to how they can rid this world of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the apostle John when he writes his gospel. He tells us about how the light came into the darkness. But the darkness just did not understand it.

Speaks of how the word that was made flesh came to his own. But his own just did not receive him.

And so we read here about this horrible ugly story of rejection.

Where his own people rejected the Christ. And then we have this other story. Which we have from verse 14.

And if the first story is ugly. Then this verges on the grotesque. Because this is the story of betrayal. One of the twelve.

[4 : 59] Called Judas Iscariot. Went to the chief priests. And said to them. What will you give me? And I will deliver him to you.

And they covenanted with him. For thirty pieces of silver. Two thousand years have passed.

And the church still has not come to terms with the fact. That Judas betrayed Jesus. It remains something that confuses and disturbs the people of God.

That this man, part of the inner circle. Part of that close and intimate circle of friends that Jesus had. That he for thirty measly pieces of silver.

Would betray his master. And what I think disturbs us even yet. Is not just what he did. But the way he did it.

[6 : 05] Later on in this very chapter. We read that Judas. One of the twelve. Came with a great multitude. With swords and staves from the chief priests.

And the elders of the people. Now he that betrayed them. Again. Look at the way that the gospel writers record it. He who betrayed him. Gave them a sign.

Saying. Whosoever I shall kiss. The same as he. Hold him fast. With that sign of affection.

With that symbol of love. He betrayed his Lord. Into the hands of those who would then take him. And seek to destroy him.

It is the most awful story. Of betrayal. A story of rejection. A story of betrayal. A story of betrayal. And sandwiched between them.

[7 : 08] Like a rose amongst thorns. There is this most beautiful story. Of love. Of a woman.

Who took an alabaster box full. Of precious ointment. And anointed the Christ. Before he went to his death.

And it is at that rose amongst thorns. That I want us to look this evening. And I want us to consider. Just a few things. As we look at this story together. The first thing we are going to see. Is a lady.

Who listened. The second thing we are going to see.

Is a lady. Who loved. Then we are going on to look at a critical crowd. And then finally. We are going to look at a story.

[8 : 04] That must be told. First of all then. A lady. Who listened. The lady. That we read about. Here. That stands out.

As a rose amongst thorns. Is none other than. Mary. The sister of Martha. And of Lazarus. We know this.

When we compare this account. To that. Given by. The apostle John. And as you know. Mary really was. A lady. Who knew.

How to listen. In Luke's gospel. He records for us. The occasion. When Jesus. Went to. The house of Mary. And Martha. And Lazarus.

And do you remember. What happened. That there was. Martha. Very busy. Trying to get. The food ready. And to get the house clean. Almost as if it was a. Communion weekend. Everything.

[8 : 58] Had to be. Absolutely. Just. Right. And while she is busy. And while she is trying to get. Everything just so. What is Mary doing.

She is sat. At the feet. Of Jesus. And she is listening. To his every word. She is hanging on. To everything.

That comes. From his mouth. And Jesus. You will remember. Said to Martha. That Mary. Had chosen. The best thing. That was the good.

And the right thing. To do. To sit. And to listen. To the words. Of Jesus. We see the same thing. Happening. In John's gospel.

When. We read about. The resurrection. Of Lazarus. If you remember. On that occasion. Also. You have Mary. And Martha. At their home.

[9 : 57] Jesus. Has been delayed. Before he comes. To their village. But. The moment. The moment. That Martha. Hears. That Jesus. Is coming. She is up. And off. And she goes running.

To meet him. And she starts. Immediately. Spouting out. Words. To Jesus. If only you had been here. My brother. Would not have died. And so. She goes on.

And where is Martha. Where is Mary. Well. Mary's back home. Sitting. Waiting. Waiting. And then word comes. The master.

He is coming. And he is asking for you. He is calling for you. And it is only once. She hears those words. That she gets up.

And goes. And meets with Jesus. She is a woman. Who is waiting. Until she hears. The call. Of Christ. To her.

[10 : 55] A woman who listens. Jesus. Himself. Stresses to us. In his teaching. The need. To listen. But he does.

Tell us. That there are levels. Of listening. In the. Sermon on the Mount. People were. Listening. Intently. To all that he had.

To say. But when he comes. To the end of the. Sermon on the Mount. He makes it. Clear. That. There are those. Who listen. And there are those. Who really listen. And to express that. He tells the story. Of the two men. One was wise. And one was foolish. The wise man. Built his house. On the rock. The foolish man. Built his house. In the sand. When the storm. Came. The wise man's house. Stood firm. The foolish man's house. It collapsed. To the ground. Jesus said.

[11 : 49] The wise man. Was the one. Who listened. To his words. And put them. Into action. The foolish man. Was the one. Who listened. But then.

Did nothing. About it. Different levels. Of listening. You see. The wise man. Really listened. And then. Put what he heard. Into action.

James. The brother of Jesus. He stresses. The same thing. In his epistle. He tells us. Not just to be hearers. But also. To be. Doers. Of the word. So about long ago. I heard.

Two men. Being described. In this way. One doesn't hear. And the other. Doesn't listen. You understand. What is meant. There was one. Who was a bit deaf. There was one. Who heard everything. But. Didn't take anything in. Jesus. Is talking. He is talking. In this room. And there are loads. Of people there.

[12 : 44] His disciples. Are all gathered around. And he is talking. About important things. He is telling them. About. The fact. That he is going to be. Betrayed. And he is going to be.

Crucified. He is telling them. That the son of man. Is about to go. To the cross. And be offered. As a sacrifice. For sin. He is speaking to them. About solemn. And serious. And important. Things. And they are all. Listening. But it is only Mary. Who is really. Listening. She is the only one. Who seems to be. Really taking in.

What Jesus is saying. And as he talks. About his death. She is the one. Who takes action. She is the one. Who responds. Because she is the one. Who has really heard. What he has said. And off she goes. And she gets this ointment. To anoint Jesus. For his death. For his burial. She is a lady.

[13 : 38] Who listens. The second thing we see. Is that she is a lady. Who loved. Luke records for us. In his gospel.

A story that is very. Similar. To this one. And it is a story. Of a lady. Who comes and. Anoints. The feet. Of Jesus. And the thing about this lady.

Is that she was. Looked down on. Because she was a lady. With a past. A lady with. A bit of a history. And when people saw her.

Anointing Jesus. Feet. They were horrified. That Jesus. Would let such a person. Touch him. And minister to him. In this way.

But Jesus. If you remember. Rebuked those. Who were. Critical. Of her. And. He. Pointed out. To them. That the reason.

[14 : 36] That she was doing this. Is because. She was very. Conscious. That she had been. Forgiving. Her sins. And because. She had been.

Forgiving. Much. Said Jesus. She also. Loved. Much. And what she was doing. Was an expression. Of her.

Love. For Jesus. In response. To his. Forgiveness. For her. Now. I suggest. To you. That in this. Event.

Here. Matthew's. Gospel. 26. It. That we also. See. A woman. Who is. Expressing. Her love. To Jesus. She too.

Has this. Real. Sense. Of indebtedness. And thankfulness. To the Christ. For all. That he is. And for all. That he has done. And even. For all. That she is appreciating.

[15 : 30] He is about. To do. But with this. Love. In her heart. We see. That first of all. She has. To make it. Known.

It is not. Good enough. For this lady. To keep. This love. Harbored. In her heart. It isn't. Good enough. For her. To have.

This secret. Love. For the Lord. Jesus. It is something. She must. Make public. She must. Make known. And here is this.

Room. Full. Of Jesus. Followers. There are all. All sorts. Of people there. And yet. Maybe. She is unhindered. By all these things. And she comes.

And she wants. To give. This very. Public. Demonstration. Of how she. Feels. About Jesus. Christ. It is a love.

[16:25] That needs. To be shown. It is also. A love. That. Had to give. Service. She had to. Do something. For her Lord. Lord. And this.

Is. The thing. That she thought. Was the best. Thing. To do. The strange. In Mark's. Gospel. When he records. This. Story. Jesus.

When he is speaking. To the disciples. Says to them. Leave her alone. She has done. What she could. She has done. What she could. And that is.

What. Jesus. Appreciated. Is that. Mary. Did. What she could. By way. Of service. To him. I can remember.

When. I keep saying. When I was little. I'm still little. But when I was younger. I can remember.

Hearing. Hearing. A minister. At a communion. Weekend. And I wish I could. Remember. Who the minister was.

[17:21] I know he came from. This island. But. Who he was. And which part. He came from. I don't recall. But I can remember. As a child. Hearing this. Minister. At a.

Communion. McKenna. Giving the table. Address. And describing. A painting. Of. Christ. On the cross. And.

Saying. That underneath it. Was this. Caption. That said. This. Is what I have done. For you. What. Have you done. For me.

This. Is what I have done. For you. What. Have you. Done. For me. Mary. Mary. Would say. I did. What I could.

I took. My jar of ointment. And. Anointed Jesus. With it. Her love. Had. To give. Service. And her love.

[18:19] Had. To make. Sacrifice. This. Is an. Extravagant. Thing. This. Is. Something. That. Is. Extravagant. In the extreme.

And perhaps. We don't. Appreciate. It. So much. In our own day. Elsewhere. We're told. That this. Alabaster jar. Of ointment. That it was worth. About. Three hundred. Pence.

And when they say. Three pound. Well that. Is not a lot. But we're told. That was about. A year's wages. I believe. That the average. Wage. In Britain. Today. Is something like. Twenty five. Or. Twenty six.

Thousand pounds. So. If we were to put it. Into modern day terms. We're talking. About. A jar of. Perfume. Of ointment. That was costing. Something like. Twenty five.

Twenty six. Thousand pounds. It is. An incredibly. Expensive. Ointment. But Mary takes it. And she anoints.

[19:13] Jesus with it. This is the sacrifice. That she makes. It was probably. The family heir room. It was probably. The only precious thing. That was in the family. And yet.

She gave it. Up. For Jesus. Jesus. I'm not sure. What you think. Jesus wants. From you. But I think. It. Can really.

Get put down. To that one word. He wants your love. He wants your love. He wants your love. To be made known. He wants your love.

To motivate. Your service. He wants. Your love. To be at the heart. Of every sacrifice. That you will make. For him. I'm always moved. By the conversation.

That Jesus has. With Peter. After the resurrection. And if you remember. He meets with. With Peter. There on the seashore. And Peter. Has had.

[20:08] Quite a trek. Or past. By this stage. Even as a. A follower. Of Christ. And yet. Jesus only has. One question. For him. Simon. Son of Jonas.

Lovest thou me. Lovest thou me. Lovest thou me. And Peter. Says. Yes Lord. I love you. In fact. More than that. He says. Lord. You know. I love you. And Jesus. Did know. That Peter. Loved him. But Jesus. Wanted to hear it. It was important.

That that love. Be made known. And you remember. What else. Jesus said. To Peter. Then go. Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs.

Show your love. In the service. And in the sacrifice. Of service. That is how you will show your love for me.

[21:06] And I believe that the Christ asks us. As today as well. Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Well if you do.

Do you love me? Do you love me? Don't make it a secret love. Make it known. Make it public. And take that love that you have in your heart for Christ.

Obey him. Serve him. Sacrifice yourself. For him. A lady who loved. The third thing we see here. Is a critical crowd. Jesus said that. What Mary did here. Was. A good work. Is how it's described here.

In the authorised version. Other versions. Would put it this way. They would say. It's a beautiful thing. She has done to me. A beautiful thing.

[22 : 03] Not everybody saw it that way. The crowd. Were highly critical. Even the disciples. As they looked on.

At Mary. They were looked with. Critical eyes. They were murmuring voices. They were saying. Could this ointment.

Not to be sold for much. And given. To the poor. They're saying. What Mary has done. Is excessive. Is wasteful. They're perhaps.

Even suggesting. That like the story. In Luke. That what she's doing. Is inappropriate. That her. As a woman. Coming. And anointing. Jesus. In this way. Is highly. Inappropriate.

They're saying. It would have been better. If Mary. Had just sat. Quietly. Without going. To such excess. They're beginning. To feel. That Mary. Has let this. Jesus thing.

[22 : 56] Get out of hand. In her life. That she's just. Going too far. Now. With such. Excessive. Expressions. Of love. And devotion. To the Lord.

You know. This. I believe. Reflects. Very much. The environment. In which. We live. Ourselves. You see. The society. Around us. Perhaps. Do not mind.

If we have. A bit. Of Jesus. In our lives. But let's not. Let it get out. Of control. Let's keep it. At an appropriate.

Level. An acceptable. Level. A comfortable. And unchallenging. Level. The crowd.

If you like. Of the world. Around us. Would say. Have your Jesus. But don't let it. Take over. So that you become. Obsessed.

[23 : 53] With the Christ. Perhaps. Even. And maybe. This is the way. You feel. Especially. In our. Communion. Weekend. And especially. If you have not. Made that.

Step. Of professing. Your faith. Perhaps. You consider. That people. Around you. Would think. That professing. Faith. Was a step. Too far.

That professing. Faith. Would be excessive. Or maybe. Even for you. You think. That. Folk. Around you. Would be so. Critical. That they. Would consider. You professing.

Faith. As inappropriate. You're not. The kind. Of person. That should. Do it. And perhaps. That critical. Crowd. As you would. Perceive. It. Holds.

You back. From. Really. Expressing. What you have. In your heart. For Christ. Which brings us.

[24 : 49] On to our. Final point. As I'm aware. That time. Is going. And that is. That Jesus. Tells us. That here. We have a story. That is to be told.

As the crowd. Are criticising. This lady. Jesus. Says. Verily. Truly. I say to you. Wherever. This gospel. Shall be preached.

In the whole world. There shall also. This. That this woman. Has done. Be told. For a memorial. Of her. There is a story. That must.

And will. Be told. Jesus. Describes it. As the gospel. It's the gospel. That. He instructs. His church. To take. To the ends. Of the earth. It is good news. And in this story. Of good news. We have. The incarnation.

[25 : 47] We're told. About. The Christ. Who came. And became. One of us. As that babe. And an angel. It's a story. Of the ministry.

Of Jesus. That tells us. All about. His teachings. And his works. During his years. Here on earth. It's this great story.

About the death. Of Jesus. As the lamb. That was slain. For sin. On the cross. Of Calvary. It's a story. About the burial. Of Jesus. As he's put.

Into the coldness. Of our tomb. It's a story. About the resurrection. Of Jesus. Destroying death. And him. Who had the power. Of death. It's a story.

About the exaltation. Of Jesus. Being raised. In the right hand. Of the majesty. And high. Where he sits. Ever making intercession. For his people. It's a story. About the return.

[26 : 42] Of Jesus. Coming. As the one. Who is king of kings. And lord of lords. It is the most. Fantastic. Story. And it's not a story.

As you know. It is truth. And Jesus says. That his church. Whatever they go. With that message. Of the gospel. That good news.

About the Christ. Who became one of us. And died for us. That whatever that news goes. That the story of Mary. Must also be told.

That it must be told. That Mary anointed him. With oil. In preparation. For his journey. Why?

Why is it so important. To Jesus. That this story. About Mary. Be married. To. The gospel itself.

[27 : 39] I think. For a simple reason. It's to. Tell us. What a beautiful thing. It is. To have our hearts.

Abandoned. To Christ. Simply that. That when you hear. The gospel. You must also hear. That it's a beautiful thing.

To abandon your heart. To Jesus. It's not excessive. It's not wasteful. It's not inappropriate. It is just. Simply. Beautiful. To abandon your heart. And to give. All your love. To the Christ. Who so loved you. That he gave.

Himself. For you. Mary. Did what she could. Jesus. Gives to us.

[28 : 37] Many ways. In which we can. Express our love. But over this weekend. He gives you. A very simple way. Do this. He says. In remembrance of me.

If you love me. Keep my commandment. Take a wee bit of bread. A wee sip of wine. Just to remember. The fact that.

I loved you. And died. For you. Let's pray. Let's pray. Our God. And our.

We give thanks. To the great love. Of his Christ. Has loved us. And we give thanks. To things. Who have hold. And hard hearts. You have given.

To us. Love. For Jesus. We mourn. For God. The fact. That that love. Is often not what it should be. But we rejoice.

[29 : 34] That there is love there at all. And we pray. Lord God. That more and more. Our hearts. Would be abandoned. To Jesus. That more and more. We would love him.

With all our heart. Mind. Soul. And we ask. Lord God. That even this time. And over this weekend. That we would. Be able. Together. To say. I love. The Lord. Lord God. Hear us now. For the praise. In Christ's name. Amen. Thank you.