

JOURNEY WITH JESUS.

C. THE REDEEMER.

27. Patchwork of Black and White.

Mark 12:41-44. At the Temple, between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women there was the Gate Beautiful. It may well have been here that, after the torrid exchange with the Pharisees, Jesus had come to sit quietly before he and his disciples left the Temple precincts. In the Court of the Women there were 13 trumpet-shaped collection boxes for contributions for the daily sacrifices and expenses of the Temple. Jesus watched as many of the Temple pilgrims threw large sums of money with a loud clank into the receptacles, looking around to make sure people were watching and being impressed with their generosity. Then along came a widow, quietly, hoping not to draw attention to herself as her contribution of 2 “lepton”, the smallest coin in circulation, tinkled quietly into the collection box. I would like to add an apocryphal fancy here, that Jesus gave her a warm and encouraging smile as she quietly went on her way.

In any case, Jesus saw the true generosity behind the widow’s tiny gift, and quickly called his disciples around for an instant teaching session. “This poor widow,” he told them, “has just given a greater gift than all those ostentatious others. It is easy to give some of your extra wealth that you will never miss anyhow, but she has given something which cost her dearly: it was all she had to live on.”

Notice that the widow gave both coins: she could have been justified in keeping one for herself, but apparently her thankfulness to God was greater than her appetite for her own needs. How much does your giving cost you? In Jesus’ eyes it is not true giving until it costs us something. How much did his giving for you, cost him?

Matthew 26:1-5. But after that gleam of light comes the gathering darkness. Once again Jesus sought to instil in the minds of his disciples the reality of his coming death: it would happen at Passover, only 2 days away. The stage was set already. The chief priests and elders of the people had had enough of this rabbi who had the hide to disturb their comfortable way of life. They assembled in the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas, and plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. In their great wisdom they decided it would be inadvisable to carry this out at Passover, with Jerusalem in the turmoil of all the extra pilgrims: it reminds me of **Psalm 2:4** – “The One enthroned in heaven laughs at them.” For it was precisely at Passover that God had planned for His Son to die – and He would have the last word.

Can you think of other times when the plans and timing of evil men were used by God for His own purposes?

Oasis for Jesus.

John 12:1-8. Once again, in the midst of all the stress, Jesus resorted to Bethany, where a dinner was given in his honour by Simon the Leper – no doubt he had been healed by Jesus. The story is a gem of love and tenderness even as the dark clouds were threatening to break. It is interesting to note that Martha, true to type, was serving –but this time, with no rebuke for Mary’s extravagant gesture of devotion to her Lord. The 2 sisters with opposite personalities were both serving their Lord!

Pure nard was imported from India and so was very expensive – costing about the equivalent of one year’s wages. Ointments and spices were used to embalm the body after death, but Mary gave the perfume to Jesus while He was still alive to smell it! Today perfume is used in palliative care, with the purpose of reminding the patient that someone cares for them. This act was the epitome of Mary’s deep and understanding love of Jesus – an act beyond reason, uncalculating, utterly selfless and highly significant. The fact that she anointed Jesus’ feet shows her humility: there was no ostentation in her act.

Jesus said simply, “She has done a beautiful thing to me.” (Mark 14:6) Those without perception could say, “What a waste!” *But nothing given to God is ever wasted.* And this outpouring of love has echoed down the ages, just as Jesus said it would in **verse 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.”

Was Mary impractical in giving all the perfume to Jesus? Should she have shared it with some others in need? How much encouragement would her gift have given to Jesus at His own time of deep need?

In **Psalm 45**, regarded as a Messianic portrayal of the Divine Bridegroom, **verse 8** tells us “All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.” And in **Psalm 72**, also seen as Messianic, **verse 6** says of the Messiah, “He will be like rain falling on a mown field.” If you have ever breathed in the air of a freshly-mown lawn after a shower of rain, you will appreciate that description of the “fragrance” of Jesus! In **2 Corinthians 2:14** Paul says that we His followers spread everywhere “the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. We are to God the aroma of Christ.” And in **John 12:3** we read that, because of Mary’s gesture, “the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” Living close to Jesus, His fragrance clings to us, enhancing our lives so that we in turn may pass on that fragrance to others, even as our ministry for Him, like Mary’s, brings fragrance and joy to the heart of God.

Betrayed!

John 12:4-8. Alas, in the midst of this beautiful scene comes a black shadow. John knew Judas well and pulled no punches in describing his reason for objecting to Mary’s gesture of love to Jesus. It is obvious that Judas by this time had no love for Jesus but only for himself, and Jesus’ rebuke to his phony objection was the last straw. We hear the first rumble of thunder.

Luke 22:1-6. Some in modern times have tried to excuse Judas: “he was disillusioned with Jesus and was just trying to force his hand to show his power”: or, “he had to betray Jesus because it was foretold – he was only doing what Jesus wanted anyway.” But the Bible doesn’t say that. **Luke 22:3** puts it starkly – “Then Satan entered Judas.” That is the only reason. We shudder at the thought that any one of us who endeavour to walk closely with the Lord, could still be capable of betraying him. Only by his power can we keep Satan at bay. Jesus, while knowing what Judas would do, never ceased in his efforts to deflect him from his evil act. He warned him of the consequences in **Matthew 26:24**, “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

John 13:21-30. To the end, Jesus extended the hand of love to Judas. He was included when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet: Jesus treated Judas as a honoured guest by giving him the piece of bread. But though Judas took the bread and understood the privilege, Satan entered into him. **Verse 30** finishes ominously with “Judas went out. And it was night.”

Is it possible to still love someone who has betrayed you? Does it help to remember that Jesus went through that bitter experience too?

Passover Ritual.

Luke 22:7-23. It was Thursday, 14th Nisan, the day when, true to God’s commandment for the original Passover, the lambs were sacrificed and the Passover meal eaten. At the Temple the head of each family had to slay his own lamb by slitting its throat, thereby signifying his own sacrifice in atonement for his sins. A line-up of priests was ready to catch the blood in a bowl, throw it against the altar, extract the fat and entrails as part of the sacrifice, and hand the carcass back to the worshipper to take home and cook. Like the first Passover lamb, it must not be boiled, but roasted entire, with head and legs and tail still attached, over an open fire on a spit, for nothing – not even the sides of a pot – must touch the lamb. Jesus in His sacrifice was holy, untouched by sin: His atoning work was carried out between God and Himself alone. It is also significant that **Hebrews 9:14** talks of “Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered Himself unblemished to God”, where “unblemished” signifies “in the entirety of Christ’s being, not just superficially.” Jesus offered His whole self to God as the sacrifice for our sins.

It would be quite impossible to find a spare room in Jerusalem with the influx of pilgrims raising the population to one or two million, so Jesus had wisely pre-arranged with a friend to borrow his upper room for the Passover meal. But with Judas watching for a chance to betray Him, the location had to be kept secret beforehand, hence the cryptic directions given to Peter and John. Carrying a water jar was women’s work, so any man doing this would be an easy marker for the disciples to recognize. Like

the family in Bethany, the house owner had a very special ministry to Jesus in simply providing hospitality for what was actually the beginning of an ordinance that would last for the rest of time!

Can you think of cases where something very ordinary has been offered to God and has ended up being highly treasured for its significance?

There was quite a bit of preparation involved. Apart from the lamb, there was unleavened bread to remind the participants of the haste with which the nation had escaped from Egypt, a bowl of salt water to remind them of the tears shed in Egypt and the waters of the Red Sea through which they had safely passed, a collection of bitter herbs (horse radish, chicory, endive, lettuce, horehound) speaking of the bitterness of their slavery in Egypt, and a paste called “charosheth”, a mixture of apples, dates, pomegranates and nuts to remind them of the clay of which the bricks were made, with cinnamon sticks scattered through it as symbols of the straw! There were also 4 cups of wine, drunk at stages throughout the meal, to remind them of the 4 promises made in **Exodus 6:6,7** – “I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as My own people and I will be your God.”

Every detail of the meal was harking back to that great day of deliverance for God’s people. And Jesus ate that meal with His disciples, knowing that He Himself was the fulfilment of its symbolism, He was the timeless Lamb of God. In this meal even Judas was included – his last opportunity to renounce the call of Satan and to renew fellowship with the Lord – as **Matthew 26:20-25** records. But Judas rejected Jesus’ offer of love and Jesus, even in His deep sorrow at Judas’s treachery, told him to go and carry out his evil designs. There was no alternative for the rebellious disciple.

Does God ever give up on people? Should we ever give up on people?

The New Covenant.

Matthew 26:26-29. It was only then that Jesus turned the feast commemorating the past, into a signpost for the future, by instituting what we now call “The Lord’s Supper.” The Passover looked back to the old covenant handed down to Moses by God at Mount Sinai, a covenant sealed in blood by the sacrifice of young bulls. Jesus said to His disciples around that table, “Take this bread and eat it: it is my body.” His body would soon be broken on the Cross – the sacrificial Lamb for the whole world. Then he said, “Drink from this cup: it is My blood of the *new covenant*, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,” the word “many” meaning the Gentiles, not just the Jews. Through his death all mankind would have the opportunity to become truly the people of God, with all the blessings, and more, that were originally promised to Israel. Jesus was about to open the way for an entirely new relationship between God and man.

One man with a price on his head: 12 men who had only a vague idea of what it was all about: and the unheeding crowds in Jerusalem who had no idea that the Passover was to be fulfilled the following day. Today the Lord’s Supper is being celebrated all over the world, from cathedral to mud-brick church, by rich and poor, slave and free, in all nations, in all cultures, by all God’s children who remember and cherish the Lamb of God, His son.

Luke 22:24-30. It seems incredible to us that, at this very sacred and significant time, “a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.” How little they comprehended the great redemptive work that Jesus was about to carry out for them, as well as for the rest of the world! Yet Jesus, with patience and without anger, told them that whoever would be the greatest, must become the least, even as He Himself was among them as one who served. **John 13:1-17** tells us he proceeded to give them a demonstration of his words. Why did he do it? “Having loved his own who were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love.” John emphasises the incomprehensible grace of Jesus in **verse 3** – “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God” – so, what did he do? He adopted the stance of a menial, non-Jewish slave – despised by Jew and Gentile alike. Disciples were expected to serve the Rabbi they were following, but it was considered too demeaning for them to wash their Rabbi’s feet: even a Jewish slave was not expected to do that! Can you imagine the shame that engulfed Jesus’ disciples as their beloved Rabbi carried out this menial task for them who could not demean themselves to do it for each other?

It hurt Peter's pride, of course: perhaps he was sorry he hadn't thought of it first, and he tried to stop Jesus' ministrations. Jesus was patient with his unthinking zeal and insisted he submit to the same cleansing he had given the other disciples. In **verses 12-17** he outlined the principle behind what he had done – a principle they should adopt if they were to be his true followers. It is interesting that in **1 Timothy 5:10** “washing the feet of the saints” was an accepted figurative expression of Christian service.

Do you have a “menial” job in your church? Jesus has lifted the lowest job to the highest level by his own example: he has promised his blessing for any job that is done for love of him.