**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-122**. **THE DEFENCE OF UNCALCULATING LOVE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"6.* *Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7. There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on His head, as He sat at meat. 8. But when His disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? 9. For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. 10. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. 11. For ye have the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always. 12. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial. 13. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her. 14. Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15. And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. 16. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him."*

*Matthew 26:6-16*

John tells us that the womanwas Mary, and the objector Judas. Both the deed and the cavil are better understood by knowing whence they came. Lazarus was a guest, and as his sister saw him sitting there by Jesus her heart overflowed, and she could not but catch up her most precious possession, and lavish it on His head and feet. Love's impulses appear absurd to selfishness. How could Judas understand Mary? Detracting comments find ready ears. One sneer will cool down to contempt and blame the feelings of a company. People are always eager to pick holes in conduct which they uneasily feel to be above their own reach. Poor Mary! she had but yielded to the uncalculating impulse of her great love, and she finds herself charged with imprudence, waste, and unfeeling neglect of the poor. No wonder that her gentle heart was troubled. But Jesus threw the shield of His approval over her, and that was enough. Never mind how Judas and better men than he may find fault, if Jesus smiles acceptance.

His great words set forth, first, the vindication of the act, because of its motive. Anything done with no regard to any end but Himself is, in His eyes, good. The perfection of conduct is that it shall all be referred to Jesus. That altarsanctifies gift and giver. Conversely, whatever has no reference to Him lacks the highest beauty of goodness. A pebble in the bed of a sunlit stream has its veins of colour brought out; lift it out, and, as it dries, it dulls. So our deeds plunged into that great river are heightened in loveliness. Everything which has For Christ's sakestamped on it is thereby hallowed. That is the unfailing recipe for making a life fair. Mary was thinking only of Jesus and of her love to Him, therefore what she did was sweet to Him. The greater part of a deed is its motive, and the perfect motive is love to Jesus.

But, further, Christ defends the side of Mary's deed which the critics fastened on. They posed as being more practical and benevolent than she was. They were utilitarians, she was wasteful. Their objection sounds sensible, but it belongs to the low levels of life. One flash of lofty love would have killed it. Christ's reply to it draws a contrast between constant duties and special, transient moments. It is coloured, too, by His consciousness of His near end, and has an undertone of sadness in that Me ye have not always. There are high tides of Christian emotion, when the question of what good this thing will do is submerged, and the only question is, What best thing shall I render to the Lord?The critics were not more beneficent, but less inflamed with love to Jesus, and the leader of them only wished that the proceeds of the ointment had come into his hands, where some of it would have stuck. We hear the same sort of taunt today,--What is the sense of all this money being spent on missions and religious objects? How much more useful it would be if expended on better dwellings for the poor or hospitals or technical schools! But there is a place in Christ's treasury for useless deeds, if they are the pure expression of love to Him, and Mary's alabaster box, which did no good at all, lies beside the cups that held cold water which slaked some thirsty lips. Uncalculating impulse, which only knows that it would fain give all to the Lover of souls, is not merely excused, but praised, by Jesus. Lovers on earth do not concern themselves about the usefulness of their gifts, and the divine Lover rejoices over what cold-blooded spectators, who do not in the least understand the ways of loving hearts, find useless waste. The world would put all the emotions of Christian hearts, and all the heroisms of Christian martyrs, and all the sacrifices of Christian workers, into the same class. Jesus accepts them all.

Again, He breathes a meaning into the gift beyond what the giver meant. Mary did not regard her anointing as preparatory to His burial, but He had His thoughts fixed on it, and He sought to prepare the disciples for the coming storm. How far away from the simple festivities in Simon's house were His thoughts! What a gulf between the other guests and Him! But Jesus always puts significance into the service which He accepts, and surprises the givers by the far-reaching issues of their gifts. We know not what He may make our poor deeds mean. Results are beyond our vision. Therefore let us make sure of what is within our horizon--namely, motives. If we do anything for His sake, He will take care of what it comes to. That is true even on earth, and still more true in heaven. Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee?What surprises will wait Christ's humble servants in heaven, when they see what was the true nature and the widespread consequences of their humble deeds! Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, ... but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.

Again, Mark gives an additional clause in Christ's words, which brings out the principle that the measure of acceptable service is ability. She hath done what she couldis an apology, or rather a vindication, for the shape of the gift. Mary was not practical, and could not servelike Martha; she probably had no other precious thing that she could give, but she could love, and she could bestow her best on Jesus. But the saying implies a stringent demand, as well as a gracious defence. Nothing less than the full measure of ability is the measure of Christian obligation. Power to its last particle is duty. Jesus does not ask how much His servants do or give, but He does ask that they should do and give all that they can. He wishes us to be ourselves in serving Him, and to shape our methods according to character and capabilities, but He also wishes us to give Him our whole selves. If anything is kept back, all that is given is marred.

Jesuslast word gives perpetuity to the service which He accepts. Mary is promised immortality for her deed, and the promise has been fulfilled, and here are we, all these centuries after, looking at her as she breaks the box and pours it on His head. Jesus is not unrighteous to forget any work of love done for Him. The fragrance of the ointment soon passed away, and the shreds of the broken cruse were swept into the dust-bin, with the other relics of the feast; but all the world knows of that act of all-surrendering love, and it smells sweet and blossoms for evermore.