“There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head” Matthew 26:7.

It is needful to bear in mind in this day of busy doing and restless activity that God looks at everything from one standpoint, measures everything by one rule, tries everything by one touchstone, and that touchstone, that rule that standpoint is Christ. He values things just so far as they stand connected with the Son of His love, and no farther. Whatever is done to Christ, whatever is done for Him, is precious to God. Everything else is valueless. A large amount of work may be done and a great deal of praise drawn forth thereby, from human lips, but when God comes to examine it, He will simply look for one thing and that is the measure in which it stands connected with Christ. His great question will be, has it been done in and to the Name of Jesus? If it has, it will stand approved and be rewarded; if not, it will be rejected and burned up.

It does not matter in the least what men's thoughts may be about any particular piece of work. They may praise a person to the skies for something he is doing; they may parade his name in the public journals of the day; they may make him the subject of discourse in their circle of friends; he may have a great name as a preacher, a teacher, a writer, a philanthropist, a moral reformer, but if he cannot connect his work with the name of Jesus - if it is not done for Him and to His glory - if it is not the fruit of the constraining love of Christ, it will all be blown away like the chaff of the summer threshing floor, and sink into eternal oblivion.

A man may pursue a quiet, humble, lowly path of service, unknown and unnoticed. His name may never be heard, his work may never be thought of, but what has been done, has been done in simple love to Christ. He has worked in obscurity with his eye on his Master. The smile of his Lord has been quite enough for him. He has never thought for one moment of seeking man's approval; he has never sought to catch man's smile or shun his frown; he has pursued the even tenor of his way, simply looking to Christ and acting for Him. His work will stand. It will be remembered and rewarded, though he did not do it for remembrance or reward, but from simple love to Jesus. It is work of the right kind, a genuine coin which will abide the fire of the day of the Lord.

The thought of all this is very solemn, yet very comforting. It is solemn for those who are working in any measure under the eye of their fellows, but comforting for all those who are working beneath the eye of their Lord. It is an unspeakable mercy to be delivered from the time-serving, men-pleasing spirit of the present day and to be enabled to walk before the Lord - to have all our works begun, continued and ended in Him.

Let us look at the lovely and most touching illustration of this, presented to us in "the house of Simon the leper" and recorded in Matthew 26. "Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 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."

If we enquire as to this woman's object as she walked to Simon's house, what was it? Was it to display the exquisite perfume of her ointment or the material and form of her alabaster box? Was it to obtain the praise of men for her act? Was it to get a name for extraordinary devotedness to Christ in the midst of a little group of personal friends of the Savior? No, reader, it was none of these things. How do we know? Because the Most High God, the Creator of all things, who knows the deepest secrets of all hearts and the true motive of every action was present, and He weighed her action in the balances of the sanctuary and affixed to it the seal of His approval. He was there in the person of Jesus of Nazareth - He the God of knowledge by whom actions are weighed. He sent her action forth as a genuine coin of the realm. He would not, He could not, have done this if there had been any alloy, any admixture of base metal, any false motive, any undercurrent. His holy and all-penetrating eye went right down into the very depths of this woman's soul. He knew, not only what she had done, but how and why she had done it, and He declared, "She hath wrought a good work upon Me."

In a word, Christ Himself was the immediate object of this woman's soul, and it was this which gave value to her act and sent the odor of her ointment straight up to the throne of God. Little did she know or think that untold millions would read the record of her deep personal devotedness. Little did she imagine that her act would be engraved by the Master's hand on the very pages of eternity, and never be obliterated. She thought not of this. She neither sought nor dreamed of such marvelous notoriety; had she done so, it would have robbed her act of all its beauty and deprived her sacrifice of all its fragrance.

But the blessed Lord to whom the act was done, took care that it should not be forgotten. He not only vindicated it at the moment, but handed it down into the future. This was enough for the heart of this woman. Having the approval of her Lord, she could well afford to bear the "indignation" even of "the disciples" and to hear her act pronounced "waste." It was sufficient for her that His heart had been refreshed. All the rest might go for what it was worth. She had never thought of securing man's praise or of avoiding man's scorn. Her one undivided object from first to last, was Christ. From the moment she laid her hand upon that alabaster box, until she broke it and poured its contents upon His sacred Person, it was of Himself alone she thought. She had an intuitive perception of what would be suitable and pleasing to her Lord in the solemn circumstances in which He was placed at the moment, and with exquisite tact she did that thing. She had never thought of what the ointment was worth; or, if she had, she felt that He was worth ten thousand times as much. As to "the poor," they had their place and their claims also, but she felt that Jesus was more to her than all the poor in the world.

In short, the woman's heart was filled with Christ, and it was this that gave character to her action. Others might pronounce it "waste," but we may rest assured that nothing is wasted which is spent for Christ. So the woman judged, and she was right. To put honor upon Him at the very moment when earth and hell were rising up against Him, was the very highest

act of service that man or angel could perform. He was going to be offered up. The shadows were lengthening, the gloom was deepening, the darkness thickening. The cross with all its horrors was at hand; this woman anticipated it all and came beforehand to anoint the body of her adorable Lord.

Mark the result. See how immediately the blessed Lord comes to her defense and shields her from the indignation and scorn of those who ought to have known better. "When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For ye have the poor always with you, but Me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial. 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."

Here was a glorious vindication in the presence of which all human indignation, scorn and misunderstanding must pass away like the vapor of the morning before the beams of the rising sun. "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me." It was this that stamped the act - "a good work upon Me." This marked it off from all else. Everything must be valued according to its connection with Christ. A man may traverse the wide world to carry out the noble objects of philanthropy; he may scatter with a princely hand the fruits of a large-hearted benevolence; he may give all his goods to feed the poor; he may go to the utmost possible length in the wide range of religiousness and morality and yet never do one single thing of which Christ can say, "It is a good work upon Me."

Reader, whoever you are or however you are engaged, ponder this. See that you keep your eye directly upon the Master in all you do. Make Jesus the immediate object of every little act of service, no matter what. Seek to do your every work so He may be able to say, "It is a good work upon Me." Do not be occupied with the thoughts of men as to your path or as to your work. Do not mind their indignation or their misunderstanding, but pour your alabaster box of ointment upon the person of your Lord. See that your every act of service is the fruit of your heart's appreciation of Him. Then be assured He will appreciate your work and vindicate you before assembled myriads.

Thus it was with the woman of whom we have been reading. She took her alabaster box and made her way to the house of Simon the leper with one object in her heart, namely, Jesus and what was before Him. She was absorbed in Him. She thought of none beside, but poured her precious ointment on His head. As a result, her act has come down to us in the gospel record, coupled with His blessed Name. No one can read the gospel without reading also the memorial of her personal devotedness. Empires have risen, flourished and passed away into oblivion. Monuments have been erected to commemorate human genius, greatness and philanthropy, and these monuments have crumbled into dust, but the act of this woman still lives and shall live forever. The hand of the Master has erected a monument to her, which shall never perish. May we have grace to imitate her; and in this day when there is so much of human effort in the way of philanthropy, may our works,

whatever they are, be the fruit of our heart's appreciation of an absent, rejected, crucified Lord!

There is nothing which so thoroughly tests the heart as the doctrine of the cross - the path of the rejected, crucified Jesus of Nazareth. This probes man's heart to its deepest depths. If it be merely a question of religiousness, man can go an amazing length, but religiousness is not Christ. We need not travel farther than the opening lines of our chapter (Mt. 26) to see a striking proof of this. Look at the palace of the high priest and what do you see? A special meeting of the heads and leaders of the people. "Then assembled together the chief priests and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest who was called Caiaphas."

Here you have religion in a very imposing form. We must remember that these priests, scribes and elders were looked up to by the professed people of God as the great depositories of sacred learning, as the sole authority in all matters of religion and as holding office under God in that system which had been set up of God in the days of Moses. The assembly in the palace of Caiaphas was not composed of the pagan priests and prophets of Greece and Rome, but of the professed leaders and guides of the Jewish nation. What were they doing in their solemn meeting? They were "consulting that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill Him."

Reader, ponder this. Here were religious men, men of leaning, men of weight and influence among the people; and yet these men hated Jesus, and they met in council to plot His death - to take Him craftily and kill Him. Now those men could have talked to you about God and His worship, about Moses and the law, about the Sabbath and all the great ordinances and solemnities of the Jewish religion. But they hated Christ. Remember this most solemn fact. Men may be very religious; they may be the religious guides and teachers of others and yet hate the Christ of God. This is one grand lesson to be learned in the palace of Caiaphas the high priest. Religiousness is not Christ; on the contrary, the most zealous religionists have often been the most bitter and vehement haters of that blessed One.

But, it may be said, "Times have changed. Religion is now so intimately associated with the Name of Jesus, that to be a religious man is, of necessity, to be a lover of Jesus. You could not now find anything answering to the palace of Caiaphas." Is this really so? We cannot believe it for a moment. The name of Jesus is as thoroughly hated in Christendom now as it was in the palace of Caiaphas. And those who seek to follow Jesus will be hated too. We need not go far to prove this. Jesus is still a rejected one in this world. Where will you hear His name? Where is He a welcome theme? Speak of Him where you will, in the drawing-rooms of the wealthy and the fashionable, in the railway car, in the saloon of a cruise-boat, in the coffee-house or the dining hall, in short, in any of the resorts of men, and you will, in almost every case, be told that such a theme is out of place.

You may speak of anything else - politics, money, business, pleasure, nonsense. These things are always in place, everywhere; Jesus is never in place anywhere. We have seen in our streets, times without number, the public thoroughfares interrupted by German bands, ballad-singers and puppet-shows, and they have never been molested, reproved or told to move on. But let a man stand in such places to speak of Jesus and he will be insulted or told to move on and not interfere with traffic. In plain language, there is room everywhere in this world for the devil, but no room for the Christ of God. The world's motto as to Christ is, "Oh! breathe not His Name."

But, thank God, if we see around us much that answers to the palace of the high priest, we can also see here and there, that which corresponds with the house of Simon the leper. There are, blessed be God, those who love the name of Jesus and who count Him worthy of the alabaster box. There are those who are not ashamed of His precious cross - those who find their absorbing object in Him and who count it their chief joy and highest honor to spend and be spent for Him in any little way. It is not with them a question of work, of religious machinery, of running here and there, of doing this or that: No, it is Christ, it is being near Him and being occupied with Him; it is sitting at His feet and pouring the precious ointment of the heart's true devotion upon Him.

Reader, be well assured that this is the true secret of power both in service and testimony. A proper appreciation of a crucified Christ is the living spring of all that is acceptable to God, whether in the life and conduct of an individual Christian or in all that goes on in our public assemblies. Genuine attachment to Christ and occupation with Him must characterise us personally and collectively, else our life and history will prove of little worth in the judgment of heaven, however it may be in the judgment of earth. We know of nothing which imparts such moral power to the individual walk and character as intense devotion to the Person of Christ. It is not merely being a man of great faith, a man of prayer, a deeply taught student of Scripture, a scholar, a gifted preacher or a powerful writer. No; it is being a lover of Christ.

So as to the Assembly; what is the true secret of power? Is it gift, eloquence, fine music or an imposing ceremonial? No; it is the enjoyment of a present Christ. Where He is, all is light, life and power. Where He is not, all is darkness, death and desolation. An assembly where Jesus is not, is a tomb, though there be all the fascination of oratory, all the attraction of fine music and all the influence of an impressive ritual. All these things may exist in perfection, and yet the devoted lover of Jesus may have to cry out, "Alas! they have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him." But, on the other hand, where the presence of Jesus is realised - where His voice is heard and His very touch felt by the soul there is power and blessing, though to man's view, all may seem the most thorough weakness.

Let Christians remember these things, let them ponder them, let them see to it that they realise the Lord's presence in their public assemblies, and if they cannot say with full

confidence that the Lord is there, let them humble themselves and wait upon Him, for there must be a cause. He has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst" (Mt. 18:20). But let us never forget that, in order to reach the divine result, there must be the divine condition met.

C.H.M