

I. Our first Memento of Jesus' Passion is probably the most usual type of souvenir. An Alabaster Flask. A very beautiful jar carved out of Alabaster stone. It's the type of thing you might buy as a souvenir if you took a trip to Egypt, for Egypt is known for its beautiful Alabaster and it's likely that is where this Alabaster flask came from.

A. However, this Alabaster Flask is not a reminder of a great trip. Instead it is a memento of an incredible love story. We read about it in Matthew 26:6-13.

"6 Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. 8 And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." 10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. 12 In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This woman was moved to action by a great love. What else would cause her to pour out such an expensive perfume on Jesus? You know I'm always blown away by how expensive real fragrant oils and perfume can be. A small bottle will run anywhere from \$200 up to \$900. And that's just in a drug store. I'm told that in high end stores some perfumes sell for several thousand dollars an ounce. I can't imagine spending that on a small bottle of perfume.

But that doesn't even begin to compare to the cost of this Alabaster Flask of fragrant oil. Mark records this same account and he tells us that it was "ointment of pure nard, very costly." Nard or Spikenard is imported from India. One of the disciples tell us that it would sell for more than 300 denarii. Do you have any idea how much that was? One denarii was a day's wage for a common laborer. So over 300 denarii would be more than a year's salary. What is your annual income? \$50 or 70,000 or maybe more? Can you imagine spending that on a bottle of perfume and then just pouring the whole bottle out on someone's head? You can understand why the disciples were so shocked and indignant with such a flagrant "waste?"

Yes, this is a story of amazing love. But it's not the love that you might think. Most commentaries on this account only talk about the great love this woman had for Jesus. That Alabaster Flask was no doubt her most valuable possession by far, and she willingly spent it all on Jesus. That is evidence of a great love. But that is NOT the amazing love the Alabaster Flask is meant to remind you of. Her love that was ready to give up something so precious had to be motivated by a much greater love. And it was.

Jesus tells us why she did what she did. Jesus said to His disciples, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial." Many commentators suggest that this woman probably didn't really understand that, Jesus is just describing the affect that her action had. I get why they say that, because nobody else understood that Jesus was actually going to die. But Jesus tells us that is why she did it. Besides Jesus had told them many times in plain simple terms that He was going to go to Jerusalem and be handed over to the the Priests and be crucified. In fact Jesus had just said right before this, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." Is it so hard to believe that there was one woman out of all the disciples who actually believed what Jesus said?

This woman believed what Jesus said and His willing sacrifice moved her to give her most

precious possession, her most valuable treasure to Jesus. It was Jesus' love for her that moved her to "waste" this precious ointment on Him. That is the Love we want to focus on during this Lenten Season. You know I get a lot of emails from different religious sources. If you download something once you get on their email list. It is interesting, there seems to be a growing interest in Lent among Evangelicals and Reformed where they never used to give it much thought. That seems good, but everything that I have seen is all talking about what we can do during Lent. What will you sacrifice or give up this lent? How can you improve your Christian life and grow deeper in your love and commitment to God?

That is one of the RESULTS of Lent. Hopefully we will all grow deeper in our love and commitment to God. But that doesn't happen by talking about what you must do and what you must give up. That might produce outward actions but it doesn't change hearts. It doesn't produce the kind of love that this woman had. That can only happen by focusing our attention on Jesus and His overwhelming love for us. Remember, "We love Him BECAUSE He first LOVED US." 1 John 4:19. The season of Lent is all about focusing on Jesus' love and sacrifice, that will produce love in us. It's as we sang in our opening hymn, "**Love So Amazing, So Divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.**" This woman received that love and she gave her all for Jesus.

Jesus' love is demonstrated in several ways in this text.

First of all did you notice where Jesus was when this woman performed this "wasteful" act of love? He was eating in the house of "Simon the leper." The fact that Jesus and his disciples were eating with this man in his house indicates that he wasn't a leper anymore. Jesus showed His love and concern for this man by healing him. Now Simon was showing his love and appreciation for Jesus healing in the way he could, he prepared a feast for Jesus.

Jesus' amazing love was seen even more in His dealing with His disciples. A very similar act of love had been performed by Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus just four days before this. Mary poured pure nard on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. On that occasion the disciples, led by Judas, reacted much the same way. They became indignant with her and scolded her for wasting the costly perfume. And they tried to disguise their indignance by claiming a concern for the poor.

Jesus told them to "Leave her alone" at that time. Now just four days later they react in the same way to this woman who showed a far greater faith and love than they had. Those disciples were so slow to believe what Jesus taught them, and their fleshly desires dictated their actions instead of love. Yet Jesus dealt patiently and kindly with them. He doesn't really rebuke them, He simply defends the woman and her actions saying, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. . . . she has done it to prepare me for burial." Think about the situation. Jesus was about to die for those disciples and they were angry and even cruel to a woman for spending too much money on Jesus! And not once but twice! Talk about evil, unloving hearts. Yet, Jesus still loved them and patiently tried to teach them — and died for them.

There's more: Immediately after our text we read, "Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him." vs. 14-16. It seems that this event was the impetus that pushed Judas over the top and made him decide to betray Jesus. Judas loved money more than Jesus. Perhaps he resented Jesus pointing out his own greed and so was going to put an end to it. This woman loved Jesus above all cost or treasure because she understood Jesus' great love. Judas on the other hand was not only indignant with this woman but he must have resented Jesus for siding with her. That was it, Judas was going to put an end to it. Yet Jesus never stopped loving Judas. Jesus died for Judas also. Jesus suffered the death penalty even for Judas for betraying the Son of God. The saddest thing is that Judas never received that love of Jesus.

But WE DO! Aren't we all too much like those disciples? Aren't we often slow to believe and to

trust Jesus? Don't we at times treat one another like they treated the woman—becoming angry and indignant with other believers simply because we don't understand what they are doing or because we don't agree with what they are doing. Haven't we also betrayed Jesus in many different ways like Judas? Yet Jesus still loves us with an everlasting love. He willingly went to the cross and suffered the death penalty for our sins. He rescued us from our sinful ways so that we would not end up like Judas, but live with Jesus forever in heaven.

Love So Amazing, So Divine, demands my soul, my life my all. Such great love on Jesus' part produces great love in the hearts of those who receive His love.

The woman in our text understood Jesus' love and sacrifice, so she did what she could. She couldn't stop the Priests and Pharisees from hating Jesus, or prevent them from handing Him over to the Romans to be crucified, especially not if Jesus wanted to do so. What she could do was show her love and faith by anointing His body for burial. The disciples saw it as a waste, but she didn't see it that way. I don't think she even considered it a great sacrifice. She no doubt was thrilled that she had such a valuable commodity to give, because love knows no cost.

May the Alabaster Flask, which was used to anoint Jesus' body for burial, be a memento that reminds you of Jesus' self-sacrificing love which laid down His life for us. What treasure can we "waste" on Jesus to show our love for Him?

Love So Amazing, So Divine, demands my soul, my life, my ALL.

Amen.