



COSTLY DEVOTION

TITLE SLIDE

This story is about the value of things. It's easy to put a value on many things, (HOW MUCH WOULD YOU PAY?) but it's much more of a problem when we attach values to people. This week we saw how a young boy Sahil Saeed was kidnapped in Pakistan. His family were asked for a ransom of £100,000 unused notes. That was what Sahil's life was worth - £100,000. The family did not hesitate to scrape together to pay the ransom to get Sahil back. Fortunately of course, the police were on to the gang who kidnapped him from the start and when the boy was released they were captured.

WHAT WOULD YOU PAY?

Hopefully none of us will ever be asked to be put in that position but in small ways we put value on people. This coming week it's our wedding anniversary – 28 years. I can remember that time about 30 years ago when I expended what was for me the largest amount of money I ever shelled out on someone else – over £300 for an ENGAGEMENT RING – most of my savings. It was a lot of money in those days. My Mum thought I was mad to pay that amount, but as a lovestruck student, I thought it was well worth it.

One man's treasure is another's waste. For example this is a RADLEY HANDBAG. Would you pay a few hundred for this? Some people will. Or what about a nice new Merc – not much change out of about £80,000 for this model for example. Worth it or a waste? Or maybe a pair of EXPENSIVE TRAINERS? Worth it or a waste? No what about this – a bottle of IMPERIAL MAJESTY? As you can see, it's perfume. But it's not just perfume, it's the world's most expensive perfume. How much do you think it's worth? It's \$215,000! Worth it or a waste? Actually I'm told there's a guy on Felixstowe Market who sells it for a fiver a bottle – the bottle may look the same but I'm sure the contents aren't!

Stupid? Our story this morning is about perfume – how Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus with a bottle of expensive perfume. *3 Then Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house.* It was a remarkable thing to do. As you probably know, it was common for servants to wash people's feet in those days. The most lowly servant, not the woman of the house did it and certainly not with expensive perfume. And the servant would use a towel – Mary used her own hair. In those days it was unseemly for a woman to let her hair down in public, let alone wipe perfume into someone's feet with it.

Why did she do it; what did it mean? Mary's family (her, Martha and Lazarus, were close friends of Jesus and it's clear from the gospels that Mary in particular was strongly drawn to Jesus spiritually. What brought this on though was the fact that in the previous chapter Jesus had raised her brother Lazarus from the dead. Within that Jesus had expressed His love for that family and this was Mary's way of responding to that.

The perfume in question was NARD or Spikenard which was an incredibly expensive perfume from India which was used at important functions. Mary obviously kept it for important occasions – possibly even for the burial of family members. The amount she used was outrageous – equivalent to a year's wages worth – by modern standards that amount of nard was about £25,000 worth. The family obviously weren't poor – they could afford their own tomb – but still, they would never have used that amount in a burial. It was an outrageous use of that perfume. Yet to Mary it didn't matter. **MARY ANOINTED JESUS** In this act she wanted to express her devotion and love for Jesus. She was already a devoted disciple, now Jesus had shown His love for her family by restoring her brother to them. Anointing Jesus and using her hair was a clear act of submission to Jesus – “you have rescued my brother from death, now my life is yours” is what this act expresses.

But as people looked on amazed, Jesus saw a much more prophetic significance in what Mary had done. The Good News is a bit obscure about how Jesus describes her act of devotion. Let me give you it from the Message: *Jesus said, "Let her alone. She's anticipating and honouring the day of my burial.* I'm pretty sure she didn't have His burial in mind, although what she did speaks volumes for her devotion.

It's rather the same as parents who give their children money and say “I'd rather have the pleasure of seeing you spend my money now, rather than leaving it for you when I die. The nard could have been used

for Jesus' burial but she had no expectation that Jesus was going to be dead six days later. But she was giving Jesus the benefit of knowing her devotion but anointing Him with this perfume that she would have used in a burial to show her devotion to whoever had died.

But Jesus saw the prophetic in her devotion. He did know He was going to be dead in six days. Ironically, the women who were devoted to Jesus had little time to anoint Jesus on Good Friday because of the Sabbath – He was buried with minimal preparation and that's why the women visited the grave on the Sunday morning – to do what they should have done on the Friday. They never got to show their devotion in that way – but Mary did because she did it earlier.

We can look back at this scene and see the significance of what was going on. Those at the feast did not. JUDAS certainly didn't his attitude was WHAT A WASTE – surely it would have been better to spend that on the poor. The irony of that is not missed on John who comments that this moralising comment came from a man who EMBEZZLED money. It's funny that isn't it – that many rich and famous people people who want to show their philanthropy can usually afford to give far more to the poor that they actually give!

Judas wanted to impress people with his financial wisdom but Jesus saw Mary's heart in her act of devotion. She desired to honour Him in offering up that which was precious to her – a jar of perfume. She seized her opportunity to show her love and submission to Him as a disciple.

The words Jesus rebuffs Judas with are some of the most misunderstood in the Bible: *Jesus said, "Leave her alone! Let her keep what she has for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have poor people with you, but you will not always have me."* Some have suggested Jesus didn't care about the poor, others have used it to suggest that giving to the church is more important than giving to the poor. It's nothing of the sort. It's another one of those strange ironies of the passage.

MARY GOT THINGS IN THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

It looked to the likes of Judas that Mary had wasted her money on Jesus by showing her love and submission in this way but its that very surrender to Christ that has caused Christians to surrender their lives and all they have for the benefit of the kingdom of God down the centuries and which have always put Christians in the forefront of helping the poor and disadvantaged – people who are continuing victims of the poverty and injustice created by the likes of Judas Iscariot.

MARY'S LOVE REFLECTS

Mary did what she did because she considered Jesus was worth it. What she did was so prophetic because six days later Jesus did more than show His love for her family, He showed His love for the whole human race by giving His life for the human race when He suffered and then died on the CROSS.

Let me ask you a question? WHAT ARE YOU WORTH? What price is on you head. Let me give you a brief answer – it's a FIVER! Yes a fiver! Because that's what our composition in CHEMICALS is – all of which can be obtained from your nearest hardware store!

Seriously though, the world places value on people's lives for SAHIL it was £100,000. Just as a ransom was paid for Sahil Saeed, Jesus paid a ransom for the human race when He died on the cross. So let me ask you again – in ransom HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK YOU ARE WORTH? I'm going to answer this question for you by playing this song by GRAHAM KENDRICK called *What do you think you are worth?* Which answers this questions.

TITLE

You know the value that god placed on you, and the ransom that was paid for you. Let's hear the final challenge again:

*What do you think He is worth, boy
Will anyone stand up and say?
What are you willing to give Him,
In return for the price He has paid?*

Preached by Mark Reid
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