

INTENTIONAL ACTS OF LOVE

MATTHEW 26:6-16

INTRODUCTION:

Was there ever a time when someone did something for you that you will never forget?

Was it an expression of their love for you?

A couple of years ago the sports pages carried a remarkable story of such a gift. Carlos Rogers of the Toronto Raptors basketball team was doing something incredible. He had worked long and hard to make it to the NBA. It was a dream come true for him. His future, all the benefits he had worked for, were right before him. Now he was possibly throwing it all away. Why? Carlos' sister was sick, very sick. She could not survive without a new kidney. Carlos Rogers left his position on the NBA team to go home and to donate one of his kidneys to his sister. He knew it would end his career — but compared to his love for his sister, he did not care. Unfortunately, his sister died before she could receive his kidney. USA Today called Carlos Rogers the most unselfish man in the NBA. His was truly an intentional act of love.

This is what happened in Bethany about two weeks before our Lord was crucified. It happened in the house Simon, the leper. Friends and family were gathered to celebrate the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus and His disciples were there. During the course of the evening, a most surprising thing happened. The sister of Lazarus, Mary,

came into the room where Jesus was seated with the men, carrying an alabaster jar in her hand. The alabaster jar represented to Mary her primary earthly treasure. The best estimates we have indicate that it would have cost in today's monetary values as much as \$30,000.00. In that day it was equal to the wages that a man would earn for almost a year of labor. While the group of men looked on in utter amazement, she broke the box and began to pour out on Jesus its contents. It was filled with a very precious and fragrant ointment. She poured it on the head and feet of Jesus and rubbed it into the texture of His feet. Then she took her hair and began to wipe His feet with her hair. It was an act of intentional devotion. She truly demonstrated her love for Him and her humility before Him for all to see.

What she did was offensive to many in the room. Judas Iscariot spoke up for those who were offended and called it "a waste." He contended that it would have been wiser on her part to have sold the alabaster box and its contents and to have contributed the money to feed the poor. The Apostle John gives us insight into the motivation of Judas. Actually, Judas was the treasurer of the group, and according to John, had been guilty of pilfering from the treasury. He was not nearly as concerned about the poor as he pretended.

Jesus came to the defense of Mary. He put her intentional act of love into the context of His life and ministry. He indicated that she had actually just anointed his body in preparation for His death. He also indicated that her deed would be remembered throughout all the ages.

It is this intentional act of love on her part that I want us to consider. It may have been a while since you performed an intentional act of love toward the Lord Jesus. It is time for us collectively and individually to consider making such a gift to Him.

I. INTENTIONAL ACTS OF LOVE ARE PLANNED.

This deed of Mary should not be seen as an impulsive act. She had been thinking about expressing her love and devotion to the Lord Jesus long before the dinner party of Simon. Love has a way of doing that — planning what it will do.

1. The plan is prompted by gratitude.

Mary had reason to be grateful. Her beloved brother was sitting at the table in health. Just a few days before she and Martha had buried Lazarus in the family tomb. They had gone through four days without him and knew what it meant when Jesus raised him from the dead. What could she do to say to the Lord, "Thank You!" She came up with this idea of taking her most prized possession and pouring it out on Him.

Have we begun to count the blessings we have received from the Lord? This would not have been the only one on Mary's list. Mary understood, better than any of our Lord's disciples, that He was facing the cross, and she understood that He was going to the cross for her. She had been allowed to gain insight into the sacrificial nature of His life and death. How do you say thanks to someone who is giving their life for you?

2. The plan is conceived in meditation.

Without a doubt, Mary had spent hours meditating on her relationship with Jesus. She knew that the end of His life was imminent. She knew that if she were ever going to express her devotion to Him publicly, she would have to do it soon. During this time of meditation, the plan was conceived in her mind to anoint His body with the precious ointment she had been saving in a public demonstration.

While Alice and I were in Brazil this summer, a part of our trip took us to Igwasue. We were able to see one of the most spectacular natural phenomenas on the planet. The waterfalls at Igwasue are spectacular. While we were there, we stayed in a beautiful old hotel on the grounds related to the Falls.

I had been thinking about my relationship with Alice and that we were approaching our 42nd wedding anniversary. I had considered my love for her and her love for me. For forty-two years, she has always been there every time I needed her. She has been my strong encourager, and helper. I conceived in my mind a plan to express my love for her in a gift. I wanted the gift to take the form of a piece of jewelry.

While we were on the trip, two different jewelers came to the hotel and offered items of jewelry for sale. They had some beautiful pieces that could be bought relatively cheap. But I wanted my gift to Alice to be something special. In the hotel in Igwasue there was a nice jewelry store. On our last day there I found my way to the jewelry store and looked over the pieces of jewelry they had available but I wanted this gift to be special. So I bought a beautiful stone set in a necklace and had it wrapped. It was a special moment to be able to take her out and sit on the steps in front of the hotel that overlooked the falls

from the Brazilian side, and to give her my gift of love. That's the way it is with love. Intentional acts of love are planned.

This next Sunday I want us to present to our Lord an intentional act of love. You have a week to pray about it and think about it. During the week let your meditation settle upon what the Lord has done for you and for those you have loved. Let it settle on the gifts He has given to you. Somewhere along the way as you prayerfully meditate, your heart will settle upon something that will be an appropriate intentional act of love. It may be money, a piece of gold, a precious stone, a stock or bond, a piece of property, or anything that can express your gratitude to Him.

II. INTENTIONAL ACTS OF LOVE ARE USUALLY EXTRAVAGANT.

What Carlos Rogers proposed to do for his sister was extravagant! What Mary did for Jesus was extravagant and He understood it. It is just the way of love — it always gives more than could be expected. The gift I gave to Alice was extravagant by our standards—but my only regret was that I could not buy one that cost twice as much.

1. Extravagant in personal cost.

I have already indicated something about the cost of this gift that Mary gave. There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this Bethany family was a family of great means. Every indication would be that this was her greatest treasure that she offered to the Lord. Could it have been something that she was saving for her day of marriage? While she never thought of it as being costly, it was. That is the way of love!

Cost is a relative thing. My gift in Brazil to Alice was costly in terms of our budget. For some of you, it would have been relatively cheap, but for the Lowries, it was a costly gift. Yet, it would have been for some of you an impossible gift. So, cost is relative. When we think about a love gift next Lord's Day, I am not interested in us comparing the value of the treasure we bring. It should be something that meaningful to us.

When a church was having a special emphasis like this, a certain woman came to the pastor and handed him a check for \$50.00, asking at the same time if her gift was satisfactory. The pastor immediately replied, "If it represents you."

There was a moment of soul searching and she asked to have the check returned to her. She left with it and in a day or two later came with a check for \$5,000 and again asked the same question, "Is my gift satisfactory?" The pastor gave the same reply as before, "If it represents you." As before, a truth seemed to be driving deeply. After a few moments of hesitation, she took back the check and left.

Later in the same week she came again with a check. This time it was for \$50,000. As she placed it in the pastor's hand, she said, "After earnest, prayerful thought, I've come to the conclusion that this gift does represent me and I am happy to give it." This is the big question, "Does the gift represent you?"

2. Extravagant in the eyes of the world.

Judas represented and spoke for the world. In the eyes of the world, it was a waste. The world looks upon all such giving through eyes of greed and covetousness. As a human family we have an itch for more — not an itch to be generous.

We must not allow the standards of the world to determine our giving. As we think about a love offering for next Sunday, do not allow the thinking of the world to control or determine your decision. Rather, let your decision be determined by your gratitude and love for the Lord. If the world counts it extravagant, so let it be! It is more a reflection of their attitude toward our Lord than anything else.

III. INTENTIONAL ACTS OF LOVE ARE REMEMBERED.

This is one of the primary things emphasized in the gospel record. Intentional acts of love are not forgotten.

1. Remembered by the one giving the gift.

Mary would ever forget this moment! The opportunity to express her love for the Lord in such a timely and appropriate manner would live in her heart for the rest of life. She would never forget.

Can you remember those opportunities you have had across the years to perform such an intentional act of love? Does not your heart warm without you as you remember?

2. Remembered by the one receiving the gift.

This is a truth that Jesus is emphasizing. He will not soon forget what Mary has done for him. It will abide in His heart as one of the best memories He took back to heaven with him after his sojourn on the earth. Haven't you received such an extravagant gift of love some where along the way?

Dr. Kent Hughes is pastor of the College Church in Wheaton, Illinois. This effective pastor tells a story about his wife, Barbara and their son, Kent, Jr. She had won a beautifully, decorated recipe box. After winning it, she had organized and filled it with all of her recipes. It was a special treasure to her. Their little son, Kent, saw her decorating the box and knew that it was special to her. It took a long time to get everything into the box in an orderly way.

On her birthday, her friends took her out for a surprise lunch. When she returned home she saw the box was missing. Then she saw Kent, and his eyes were wide, and she could see he was holding something behind his back from which water was dripping. She knew what it was, and though her heart sank, she smiled. Kent said, "Mom, I have a birthday present for you." He presented her with her wet recipe box. "Mom, I knew you liked the box." He had carefully thrown all the recipes in the trash and they were now on their way to the garbage dump. He had washed the box, scraping off all of the hand made decorations; he had cleaned it really well. When she opened it up, found the nickel, and a black plastic alligator, and a picture of himself, it suddenly became her most prized possession. Pastor Hughes said, "Barbara still holds that box. If there was a fire in the house, that would be the first thing she would pick up." The box actually has little value

in itself, but because it represented her son's love for her it was beyond value. The value of Mary's alabaster box cannot be measure in dollars and cents—it meant more than that to her Lord to whom she gave it. So it will be with your love gift to Him. He does not need anything that you may have, but He does remember our intentional acts of love for Him.

3. Remembered by the ones observing the gift.

It is noteworthy that Mary's gift is still remembered. When they went home from that gathering at Simon's house that evening, everyone present knew that Jesus was something special to Mary. It was a witness to them of the greatness of her love for her Lord.

I want us to do something like this next Lord's Day. It seems it is just timely and appropriate for us to say to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, I love you!" What ever the gift may be, whether large or small, it is to express your loving gratitude to Him. Whatever we give on the Lord's Day will be turned into support for the completion of CONQUEST. So it must be something that the church can sell in a timely manner.

Ralph Cushman wrote a poem years ago that tells of our reason for such gifts.

He wrote:

"Ah, when I look up at that Cross
Where God's great Steward suffered loss—
Yea, loss of life and blood for me!—
A trifling thing it seems to be

To pay the tithe, dear Lord, to Thee,
Of time or talent, wealth or store---
Full well I know I owe Thee more;
A million times I owe Thee more!

But that is just the reason why
I lift my heart to God on high,
And pledge Thee by this portion small,
My life, my love, my all in all!
This holy token at Thy Cross
I know, as gold, must seem but dross;
But in my heart, Lord, Thou dost see
How it has pledged my all to Thee,
That I steward true may be!

You must decide what you will give as an expression, as an intentional act of love to the Lord Jesus! Let me urge it to make it a matter of prayer and meditation this week, and to come on next Lord's Day prepared to do an intentional act of love for the Lord Jesus.