TITLE: Do we really love Him?

TEXT: MK. 14:3-9; Lev. 20:7-8; 1 Co. 1:2; Mt. 25:34-40; Mk. 9:41

INTRODUCTION: How would you describe your love for God this morning? I know all of us would say that we love the Lord but to what degree? What evidences does our love for Him reveal on a day to day basis?

 I am almost always convicted when I read works by men such as Oswald Chambers.

In Chambers devotional “my Utmost for His Highest” he has this to say about the subject of our love for God:

 *“If what we call love doesn’t take us beyond ourselves, it is not really love. If we have the idea that love is characterized as cautious, wise, sensible, shrewd, and never taken to extremes, we have missed the true meaning. This may describe affection and it may bring us a warm feeling, but it is not a true and accurate description of love.*

 *Have you ever been driven to do something for God not because you felt that it was useful or your duty to do so, or that there was anything in it for you, but simply because you love Him? Have you ever realized that you can give things to God that are of value to Him? Or are you just sitting around daydreaming about the greatness of His redemption, while neglecting all the things you could be doing for Him? I’m not referring to works which could be regarded as divine and miraculous, but ordinary, simple human things— things which would be evidence to God that you are totally surrendered to Him.*

 *There are times when it seems as if God watches to see if we will give Him even small gifts of surrender, just to show how genuine our love is for Him. To be surrendered to God is of more value than our personal holiness. Concern over our personal holiness causes us to focus our eyes on ourselves, and we become overly concerned about the way we walk and talk and look, out of fear of offending God. “*

*. . . but perfect love casts out fear . . .” once we are surrendered to God. We should quit asking ourselves, “Am I of any use?” and accept the truth that we really are not of much use to Him. The issue is never of being of use, but of being of value to God Himself. Once we are totally surrendered to God, He will work through us all the time.’*

Challenging and maybe even convicting words!

 A question every believer should contemplate about their own lives----

 “Have I ever been driven to do something for God not because I felt that it was useful or my duty to do so, or that there was anything in it for me, but simply because I love Him?”

We see an excellent example of this kind of love displayed in the book of Mark.

**Mark 14:3-9(NIV)**  **3While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.**  **4Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume?**  **5It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.**  **6“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.**  **7The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.**  **8She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.**  **9I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”**

This woman is identified as simply Mary in John's account of this event in John chapter 12.

What is it in the act of Mary of Bethany here that shows a genuine display of her love for the Lord?

First we need to understand some things that are revealed in these verses of Scripture.

 In this day perfume was very expensive, as it can be in our day as well. The main difference is that there were no cheap imitations back then.

 This perfume was the best of the best! Those criticizing her actions said that it could be sold for a year’s wages and the money given to the poor….

 Just think of what a year’s wages for the middle class person is today and that would probably be proportionately the cost of this perfume.

 In a lot of cases this kind of perfume was probably more of an investment, possibly inherited and not intended to be used by the one who owned it but to be sold to the rich if one got desperate enough.

 Maybe kind of like a 1st century IRA account intended to get one through their golden years.

Something else I learned about this perfume made from Nard was when I looked up the word Nard on Wikipedia.

*Spikenard also called nard, nardin, and muskroot ) is a* [*flowering plant*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flowering_plant) *of the* [*Valerian*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valerian_%28plant%29) *family that grows in the* [*Himalayas*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himalayas) *of* [*China*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China)*, also found growing in the northern region of* [*India*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India) *and* [*Nepal*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal)*. The plant grows to about 1 meter (about 3 foot) in height and has pink, bell-shaped flowers. It is found in the altitude of about 9000–15000 feet. Spikenard underground stems can be crushed and distilled into an intensely aromatic amber-colored* [*essential oil*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_oil)*, which is very thick in consistency. Nard oil is used as a* [*perfume*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perfume)*, an* [*incense*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incense)*, a* [*sedative*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sedative)*, and an* [*herbal medicine*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbal_medicine) *said to fight insomnia, birth difficulties, and other minor ailments.*

Now this is what I found interesting:

The oil was known in ancient times*; In* [*Rome*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome)*, it was the main ingredient of the perfume nardinum which was part of the* [*Ketoret*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ketoret) *used when referring to the consecrated* [*incense*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incense) *described in the* [*Hebrew Bible*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible) *and* [*Talmud*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud)*.*

 *It is also referred to as the HaKetoret (the incense).*

 *It was offered on the specialized incense altar in the time when the* [*Tabernacle*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabernacle) *was located in the* [*First*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon%27s_Temple) *and* [*Second*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Temple_period) *Jerusalem Temples. The ketoret was an important component of the Temple service in* [*Jerusalem*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem)*.*

For the Jews it seems that this costly perfume was mainly used when offering a sweet smelling fragrance to the Lord in temple worship.

This thought adds volumes to what Mary did here!

 Jesus is relining in the house of Simon the Leper when Mary, a devout follower of Jesus, comes and opens this very expensive jar of perfume, mainly used for the worship of God, and literally anoints the head of Jesus with it.

 Do you see the significances of her act here? I don’t know that she realized it herself at this time but she was using the perfume for its intended purpose---worshiping God! Pouring out an incense offering unto the Lord?

There were those who criticized her for what she did…

**4Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume?
5It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.**

You can almost hear their rebukes: you foolish, stupid woman, what in the world do you think you are doing?

 What a waste!

Now notice Jesus response: **6“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.
7The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.**

 **8She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.**

**9I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”**

Jesus said:

**Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.
7The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.
8She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.**

We do not know a lot about this Mary or for certain which Mary this is referring to. Some think it was Mary the sister to Martha and Lazarus. But many others think it was Mary Magdalene, the ex-prostitute in which Jesus had cast out 7 demons.

I would go for Mary Magdalene as it might better explain how she obtained such costly perfume---possibly a benefit from her former occupation….

Jesus said that she did a beautiful thing for Him and that she did what she could!

 Mary, just being a woman in a very male dominant society probably didn’t have a lot of opportunity to serve her Lord in any “Big” way. Probably never be allowed to hold a tent meeting or revival service. Her past may have interfered with her “credibility” when talking to others about the Lord.

 Unmarried and giving up her former occupation she probably didn’t have a lot of money to offer financial help…..But she did what she could!

 She worshiped Jesus by anointed His head with costly perfume unaware that what she was doing was actually in preparation for His burial.

 Jesus said:

**9I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”**

We are actually fulfilling the prophetic words of Christ this morning by remembering what Mary had done…

Back to the insightful words of Oswald Chambers---

*“If what we call love doesn’t take us beyond ourselves, it is not really love. If we have the idea that love is characterized as cautious, wise, sensible, shrewd, and never taken to extremes, we have missed the true meaning. This may describe affection and it may bring us a warm feeling, but it is not a true and accurate description of love.”*

What Mary did was not looked upon as wise, sensible or shrewd by many in the house that day, but as extreme.

 And it was the extreme of it that identified it as a true act of love…

 Chambers then challenges us:

 *“Have you ever been driven to do something for God not because you felt that it was useful or your duty to do so, or that there was anything in it for you, but simply because you love Him?”*

 How many times do we do things for God only because we think that God expects us to do them, that it is our duty to do them but our heart is not really in it?

 I find this happing to me at times…I may find myself doing useful things but my primary motivation is not always simply my love for Jesus but that I look at it as my duty, something expected of me to do rather than my desiring to do it simply because of my love for Christ…,

 How many realize that you can do good and useful things for the Lord but not necessarily do them with the right motives?

So Chambers goes on:

*“Have you ever realized that you can give things to God that are of value to Him? Or are you just sitting around daydreaming about the greatness of His redemption, while neglecting all the things you could be doing for Him?*

 *I’m not referring to works which could be regarded as divine and miraculous, but ordinary, simple human things— things which would be evidence to God that you are totally surrendered to Him.”*

I believe that the things that we do that are of the most value to God is not what we do out of a sense of duty or service, but those things that we do that reflect a heart that has be changed by God’s grace, Often the little, unnoticed, everyday kinds of things that reflect our love for Christ.

 Showing love and kindness to those the world may view as unlovable.

 Seeing someone in misery or pain and desiring to share in that pain or misery in order to help relieve it.

 I remember one day shortly before I left Dahl’s a young boy was pushed into the store in a wheelchair by his mother. The young man was paralyzed, whether from accident or disease I don’t know, but he could barely hold his head up, his arms lay apathetic at his sides, his legs were shriveled. Yet he smiled.

 His mother had wheeled him in and left him over by the checkouts just behind the manager’s booth where I was sitting, while she went over to our courtesy counter to cash a check or pay a utility bill or whatever she had to do.

 As I watched the people passing by this young man it was interesting how many would not look at him when they passed by. They may have stared on their approach but would not make eye contact when passing.

 I can remember my heart breaking for this your man and being moved to go over and talk with him until his mom returned-- and found that he was in my prayers for many weeks after that.

 Before I came to Christ I would have been one of those staring on approach but just passing him by refusing to confirm his presence or value as a person.

 Anyway, I think that it is those little things that we do that show our true love for Christ and are of most value to Him.

 *There are times when it seems as if God watches to see if we will give Him even small gifts of surrender, just to show how genuine our love is for Him. To be surrendered to God is of more value than our personal holiness. Concern over our personal holiness causes us to focus our eyes on ourselves, and we become overly concerned about the way we walk and talk and look, out of fear of offending God. “*

 We should all be concerned about our personal holiness. After all we have actually been called to personal holiness…

**Leviticus 20:7-8(NIV)
7“‘Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God.
8Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.**

 **1 Corinthians 1:2(NIV)
2To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:**

We have been called to be holy but if we become consumed with our personal holiness all of our attention will be upon ourselves, concerned about how we walk and talk and look to others…..

 If our primary concern is simply “loving God”, surrendering our all to Him because of the love that we have for Him, our love will be manifest, almost

Un-consciously, as we do the little day to day things that please Him, and in the process we will also be becoming Holy as He is Holy.

 There are things that I do out of my love for Christ today that I would never have even thought of doing before I came to Christ. I know the same is true with many of you also.

 When we do these kinds of things I do not believe it is because we are consciously striving to perfect our holiness, but we do them simply because we love the Lord and this is how that love if often manifest in us, by reaching out to others…

 Some time ago I heard that someone I knew was going through a difficult time financially and was moved to send them some money.

Several years ago a woman was walking by our house dragging a suitcase as I was out in the front yard shoveling. She came over and asked if I knew where she could get a room for the night for around 45.00 as that was all she had. She was from New York and trying to get to relatives in Illinois.

 I found myself taking her out to the Super 8 and paying for her room for the night.

 Before I came to Christ there is no way I would have done those kinds of things.

 In the grand scheme of things these are really pretty small things but it is most often in these little things that we do that are of the most value to God.

 God often encourages us to do the little things…

**Matthew 25:34-40(NIV)**  **34“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.**  **35For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,**  **36I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’**

**37“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?**  **38When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?**  **39When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’**  **40“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’**

**Mark 9:41(NIV)**  **41I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.**

 Giving someone a cup of water, someone hungry a bite to eat, someone needing clothing a shirt, or just visiting someone sick or in prison may seem like a small, even insignificant thing, but when we do it out of our love for Christ it is of great value to the Lord.

He actually sees it as our doing it for Him…

Do we really love God?

 If so then that love will find ways to manifest itself within our world.

The question for us is: How will we show our love for Christ today, this week, and this year?

 This is an area where the little things really do matter for all things, regardless of size and scope, are pleasing to the heart of God when done out of our love for Him.