

Tributes Of Love.

Text: John 12:1-11

Suggested Hymns:

603, 202, 236, 85T264, 367

- 1) If Given In Humility And Faith,
Are Acceptable And Pleasing To The Lord
- 2) Wicked People Are Offended By The Tributes Of
Love Given To The Saviour

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 12:1-11, ¹ *Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.* ² *There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.*

³ *Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.* ⁴ *Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said,* ⁵ *"Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"* ⁶ *This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.*

⁷ *But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.* ⁸ *"For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."*

⁹ *Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.* ¹⁰ *But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also,* ¹¹ *because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There are certain memorable days in every person's life. These are days that we can and ought never forget, because they stand out bright and clear. Such a day for the Lord Jesus and His disciples was Palm Sunday. It was the day on which the gates of the Holy City were thrown open and the

multitudes streamed out in glad welcome with palms and hosannas to greet their long-expected Messiah and King. This happened just as the Prophet Zechariah had said it would.¹

Such a memorable day in our lives was the day of our confirmation. It was on this day when you renewed and confirmed with your own hearts and lips the solemn covenant of Holy Baptism. You renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways. You felt the hand of the called and ordained servant of the Word in benediction upon our heads. You heard all the congregation join in prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit upon you and you pledged allegiance to the Triune God and to Christ, your Saviour, even unto death.

When Sir James Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform, was asked: “*What do you consider your greatest discovery?*” he answered promptly, humbly, and simply, “*That I am a sinner and that Christ is my Saviour!*”

The people who say, “*All roads lead to heaven,*” might as well say, “*All roads lead to success,*” or, “*All roads lead to honour, victory, happiness.*” We of course know that, that is not true. However, in the dark all roads seem to be more or less alike, but when the light of saving truth shines on the soul, there is only one way, and that way is Jesus Christ.

To become our Saviour, it was necessary for the Son of God to fulfil the Law which we had broken, and to pay the price of our transgressions. He had to become poor among the poorest, humbled, ridiculed, and persecuted. One day His own townsmen thrust Him out of Nazareth to the brow of a hill, intending to throw Him down over a cliff, but His hour had not yet come.² Of late the Jews had tried to stone Him, and openly plotted His death.

God has made us capable of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, and freely uses these emotions to draw us closer to Him, to polish us and prepare us for heaven. When sanctified by His Word and Spirit, our happy days and our sad days give us cause to trust our Saviour, confess Him, serve Him, and demonstrate our love for Him. Let us consider today, *Tributes of Love*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Tributes Of Love
If Given In Humility And Faith,
Are Acceptable And Pleasing To The Lord

Our text takes us back to the evening before Palm Sunday, to the house of one of the Saviour's grateful friends. It was the house of Simon, the leper.³ There were happy days in the Saviour's life, such as when He took up the little children in His arms and blessed them, or when with His disciples He admired the lilies of the field, or when Peter confessed for them all, "***We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.***"⁴

However, there were also days of much sorrow! When Simon first discovered signs of leprosy in his hands and feet and body, a great anguish began to gnaw at his heart. It was a disease which took him away from his work, his friends, his home, and his church. It compelled him to live and walk in isolation, in the restricted areas imposed by the laws of the land.

It was a disease considered incurable in that day. His outlook was utterly hopeless, until Jesus came into His life, and what a day of rejoicing that was! His soul came up from the depths. He was no longer forbidden to enter the Temple. He was free to return to his house in Bethany, which was only a forty-five minute walk from the gates of Jerusalem.

Free from the burden of his sins, and learning that Jesus had come for the Passover at Jerusalem, Simon invited Him and His disciples and other friends to a dinner. It was the least he could do. It was a humble tribute of his love. And the Son of God was pleased to be there.

Mary and Martha and Lazarus, also residents of Bethany, were among the honoured guests. Martha, adept at serving, was quick to lend a hand, paying her tribute of love to her Saviour by doing for Him what she knew best how to do. These two sisters had only recently emerged from a period of great sorrow. They had tasted the pain of parting. They had seen the health and strength and life of their brother fade away. There was no earthly help for him. In their hour of need they sent for Jesus, but He was far off in another province and did not reach Bethany until four days after the burial of their brother.

Though extremely tried, Mary and Martha did not lose faith. Mary fell at Jesus' feet, saying, "***Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.***"⁵ And Martha, having said likewise, added, "***I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.***"⁶ and, "***I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.***"⁷ and, "***Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ,***

the Son of God, who is to come into the world."⁸ It was after they had made these magnificent declarations of faith, that they were privileged to see the glory of God. At the Saviour's command, "**Lazarus, come forth!**" their brother was recalled from the grave.

There was rejoicing that night in Simon's house. The Sabbath was over, having ended at six o'clock, and they were free to enjoy the evening of friendship and fellowship, and the food prepared by a gracious host. We can imagine that there was godly conversation and holy joy and heartfelt devotion. Was not Lazarus, who had been dead, sitting with them at the table, enjoying the full surge of life and restored to good health? Was not their host a former leper? Jesus, the Son of God, was their honoured Guest.

We all have many reasons to thank God and rejoice. Maybe you have been seriously ill, or in danger, and the Lord mercifully spared and restored you. Maybe death has come close to you, or a loved one, but here you are in the house of God today! Is it certainly fitting that you should pour out your heart in thanksgiving.

And if, like Mary and Martha, you have suffered bereavement, and the grace of God has sustained you so that you were able to say with Jesus in Gethsemane, "**Not my will, but Thine be done,**" or with Job, "**The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD**"⁹ then you have every reason to bring your tributes of love to your Saviour's feet.

Christians have a right to be happy. Knowing that their sins are forgiven by grace through faith in Christ, and that under God the separation of believers is only for a little while, Christians have more reason than anyone else on earth to be happy.

Neither church membership nor the various types of Christian fellowship need ever dim or endanger that God-given right. In the second chapter of John we read that **there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.** ² **Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.**¹⁰

The early Christians often rejoiced and ate together at their love feasts, their friendly fellowship gatherings, without any distinction of class or means. Whether the rich brought much, or the poor little, the things they brought were tributes of love, given for Jesus' sake, in evidence of mutual love and esteem.

On the occasion of that wondrous feast at Simon's house in Bethany, Mary brought a special gift, a real sacrifice, as her tribute of love for Jesus. The text says that she took *a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus*. It was a precious, aromatic perfume used in royal households and by the very rich. When calculated at the cost of wages in that day, it meant a long period of saving for Mary. It was worth 300 days wages.¹¹

Removing sandals from hot and dusty feet and offering a refreshing footbath was a mark of thoughtfulness and hospitality in the Holy Land. Mary did much more. Not satisfied with breaking the seal on the container and freely bathing the Saviour's feet with the precious fluid, she pressed her knees to the floor and dried His feet with the hair of her head, filling the whole house with fragrance.

And her heart was glad that, in addition to her regular tithes and offerings, she could thus demonstrate her loving devotion and gratitude to her Lord. This, her tribute of love, made in all humility and faith, was acceptable and pleasing to God.

When we have made our regular contributions for the establishment, maintenance, and extension of God's kingdom to and through the congregation, there will still be room for additional, special gifts.

The opportunities today to bring acceptable and helpful tributes of love to Jesus are wide and varied. Such examples include giving to missionary, educational, and charitable programs. Hospitals, homes for the aged, special schools for the deaf, the blind, the disabled and research organisations.

When moved by the Spirit of God to make a special gift, we ought not ask, "*Isn't it too much?*" but rather, "*Is it good enough for the Lord, and is it to His glory?*"

Just as God designed the costly Tabernacle of the Old Covenant, and the even more costly and beautiful Temple, and accepted them as tributes of love from His people, He will also accept and be pleased with our sacrifices of today, whether they be flowers or other appointments to beautify His house and service — as long as they are given in humility and faith.

2. Wicked People Are Offended By The Tributes Of Love Given To The Saviour

The last illness and death of Lazarus had been no secret. Many Jews of Bethany and near-by Jerusalem had come to the funeral when he was buried, and many were present when Jesus, four days later, wept with the others at the graveside, prayed, and recalled His friend from the grave. What was the effect on the people? We read in John 11:45, ***“Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.***

In the meantime two or three months had elapsed, and Lazarus was still very much alive and could be seen and interviewed. So on the night before Palm Sunday, according to our text, when the people learned that Jesus had come to Bethany, they came ***not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.*** Then ***on account of [Lazarus] many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.*** Sadly, not all believed in Jesus, not everybody had some measure or tribute of love for Him.

In the parable of the rich man, Abraham’s answer to the plea in behalf of five unbelieving and worldly-minded men was this, ***“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. ... If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”***¹²

This was true of some of the Jews who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead. They would not believe their own eyes and ears, but quickly went to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done.¹³ The Pharisees, hard, blind and hateful in their prejudice, from that day on took counsel together to put Jesus to death.¹⁴

We read about this in John 11:57, ***“Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.***

But as a crowning insolence, the chief priests, who should have been the first to recognise and worship the Lord of the Church, ***“plotted to put Lazarus to death also, ”*** because ***on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus***” as our text says.

On Palm Sunday morning, the Pharisees stood haughtily on the city walls and looked down with scorn on the happy multitudes, highly incensed that so many had followed Jesus. In their unbelief and bitterness they withheld all support, recognition and every tribute of love to the Lord. They were totally unmindful of

the warning Jesus had voiced much earlier in His public ministry in John 5:23, ***all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.***

Next we look at the insulting behaviour and rudeness of Judas. When Mary had brought her tribute of love to her Saviour, very much like the Wise Men from the East had once placed their gifts at the feet of the newborn King, there was one guest who had the audacity to voice a loud protest.

‘Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, ⁵ “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” How arrogant of him to want to determine the use to which other people should put their money! How unkind of him to intimate that Mary, a fellow guest in another person’s house, had been inexcusably wasteful and made a terrible mistake in presenting her special gift to the Lord! What claim did he have on her money? What right did he have to judge her conscience?

Judas had received better training. Sadly, it was good training lost. He had been in the school of Jesus for nearly three years. He had seen many miracles and heard wonderful words. But there remained in his heart a root of covetousness that could not be removed. It was not his purpose to do anything for Christ and His kingdom. His thoughts were of himself.

There is no evidence that Judas ever did anything for the poor out of his own pocket. Rather, St. John exposes the traitor’s base hypocrisy by declaring, ***This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.***

It has been said, *“Faults are always thick where love is thin.”* It may take years to plan and erect a beautiful building, but only a few days for the wrecking crew to bring it down. Those who do least for a cause are often its hardest critics. No talent is required, no self-denial, no character, no concern about the truth, to set up in the fault-finding business.

The lesson that we learn from Judas is that fault-finding is as dangerous as it is easy. Let us examine ourselves whether we are in the faith. Are we members of the Saviour’s flock? Are we active in His Church? Are we more active and more faithful than the ones we would criticise?

Let us make sure that our fault-finding and judging and criticism of others may not grow into a kiss of Judas planted on our Saviour's cheek, a cruel spear of unbelief and ingratitude thrust into our Redeemer's heart.

Mary was only human and she was deeply hurt. She had meant so well. True, she did not ask for anyone's advice, but she had planned and saved a long time for this gift. She had intended it only as a warm tribute of love for her Saviour, given cheerfully, in all humility, and in child-like faith.

But now it seemed, for an awful moment, that her only reward should be that stinging, public rebuke from the lips of Judas. And, according to Matthew and Mark, some other disciples and guests were also indignant as we read in Matthew 26:8, ***8 But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste?"***¹⁵

On a previous occasion, when Martha was busy serving, Mary chose first to sit at Jesus' feet and hear His Word. Jesus who searches the heart came to her defence, saying, ***"But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."***¹⁶

In this instance, Jesus did not yet expose Judas, but before them all, He again came to Mary's defence, not merely saying, but commanding, in our text ***"Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. 8 "For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."*** And in Mark 14:9 we read, ***9 "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."***

Judas was resentful and takes the fateful step. The rebuke administered to him certainly had been necessary and well deserved. Blinded by greed, envy and anger, he could not find it within himself to bring any tributes of love, or gain any victory over himself, for his Saviour's sake.

As Cain was angry with his brother because Abel's offering was acceptable in God's sight but his own was not, so Judas, being thoroughly wicked, was offended by Mary's goodness and by the fact that her tribute of love was acceptable and pleasing to the Lord.

Incensed, too, by the fact that Mary had spent her money on the Lord, instead of entrusting it to his questionable custody, Judas took another step on the

downward path to perdition and ***“went to the chief priests to betray Him to them.”***¹⁷

Unlike the wicked, let us rejoice and be encouraged by the tributes of love which other Christians bring, and by the grace of God lay increasing gifts at the feet of Jesus, on the first day of the week, and on special occasions, willingly, humbly, and in faith. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Zech. 9:9

² Luke 4:29

³ Matt. 26:6

⁴ John 6:69

⁵ John 11:32

⁶ v. 24

⁷ v. 22

⁸ v. 27

⁹ Job 1:21

¹⁰ John 2:1-2

¹¹ Mark 14:4

¹² Luke 16:29, 31

¹³ John 11:46

¹⁴ John 11:53

¹⁵ See also Mark 14:4

¹⁶ Luke 10:42

¹⁷ Mark 14:10