

Love Jesus

Matthew 26:6–13

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Our love for Christ compels us to make Him known. We want to plant churches, we want to teach their leaders, and we want to serve with compassion those who are in need. Malawi has lots of churches but very few that actually preach the gospel. Most of the churches focus on legalism and add to that the prosperity gospel that has come in to confuse people about what the Bible teaches. Fifteen percent of Malawians are Muslim and many, despite their professed religion, remain involved in witchcraft or African traditional religion. We love getting to partner with local pastors in order to plant new churches that will be biblical witnesses to the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Planting these churches gives us a responsibility to teach them, to teach the pastors, the leaders, and even the pastor's wives. Biblically, teaching is more than instruction it's discipleship—pouring your life into the lives of others, and that requires committed presence among the people you are discipling. We want to see pastors in these churches who know God's Word and have a humble spirit to serve Him. There is no way that you can live in a place like Malawi and see needs all around you without showing the compassion of Jesus Christ. Malawi has very few doctors for the number of people in the country, and a lot of areas are extremely rural so people have no access to medical clinics or hospitals. People in these rural areas die regularly from easily treatable things like malaria and infections. We have the joy of seeing people's lives not only saved literally through health care, but we also see their lives transformed through the preaching of the gospel at our mobile medical clinics. It's typical for Christians to think of missionaries as superheroes, but that gets you off the hook because you can just use the excuse that you are not a superhero. We are just normal people. We serve here just because we love Jesus and we want to give Him our lives as an act of love. We want to waste our lives to show how valuable He is. The truth is that everyone is wasting your life for something. What are you wasting for Jesus? That is

the question I want to have on our minds this morning. What are you wasting for Jesus?

It is such a blessing and honor to be here, to be home, or I should say one of my homes around the world. Hardin Baptist will always be home to me and you are a part of it whether you have realized it before this Sunday. You are a deep part of everything we do. Gospel Life is not some organization way out somewhere distant from here. Gospel Life is an organization that is simply an extension of Hardin Baptist Church. It's an organization that was founded by Hardin Baptist. Four out of our five board members are members of Hardin Baptist. Last year we had total contributions of three hundred thousand dollars and thirty percent of that came from this church. That's not even counting the gifts and donations that many of you have given as individuals and families, covering not just my salary, but last year this church purchased a pickup truck for us to use in the necessities of our ministry. Even more importantly is the prayer that you give us, not just every Wednesday night but also in your adult Bible Fellowships and in your home as individuals. We know that you are praying regularly for us. Someone has said about the Apostle Paul that his only true strategy in missions was prayer and we believe that. We believe that prayer is what gives us the power of God to do the things that we are doing. We also experience, from this church that loves us and that we love, that care for us as we are so far away, often feeling isolated, often feeling alone, often missing family and friends. It's those texts that come in just at the right time, "How are you doing?" "Praying for you." It's those replies to our prayer updates every month. "We are just thinking about you?" "Praying for you." "What can we pray about?" Those are the things that keep us going even as we face often difficult times. We are so thankful to be a part of what you do here, but just an extension of it as we are Hardin Baptist in Malawi doing the work that we are doing. So thank you so much.

We get such a privilege to partner with a hundred and seventy Baptist churches in Malawi, eighteen Baptist Churches just across the border into Mozambique, as we do three things: we plant new churches, we teach their leaders, and we serve with compassion to those who are in need. That's what we have been doing the last four years. On July 2018, my

wife, my five kids, and I moved to Zomba, Malawi to start this new life. As we look to our next four-year term, we just pray that we will be able to do that even more and expand the things we are doing. We are hopeful that we will begin, in this next term, to send out Malawian missionaries to plant churches among unreached people groups in Mozambique. We are prayerful that we will begin training leaders not just in our school but in partnership with a US Bible College to get some of our best and our brightest associate degrees through online learning. We are prayerful that we will be able to start a publishing ministry, both digital and print, to bring biblical resources to the country of Malawi. We are hopeful that we will also get to expand our compassion ministries in many ways as we see so many needs around us.

Of course, you know that in any ministry you do you are often more blessed by the people that you are ministering to than you feel like you are blessing them. One of the people who come to my mind is a pastor named Patrick Matope. His face is on the banner in the foyer this morning. Patrick became a pastor when he was about twenty one or twenty two years old. One of our other pastors in our network came and started the church in his village, and after discipling Patrick, he was appointed as the pastor of that church at a young age. He began coming to our modular pastor trainings and learning about the Word of God, learning about the gospel, and the urgency of the gospel to the nations, and he was just filled with a passion to take the gospel to people that needed to hear it desperately. So what Patrick did was he took his own money and he bought a motorcycle, and he put fuel in that motorcycle and he began to go on these trips to the district just north of him, the district of Machinga. The primary religion in Machinga district is Islam, so most of the people are Muslim there. He began going there to preach the gospel and he faced opposition. He has been chased out of villages as people had been warned—whenever you see this preacher coming on a motorcycle, don't listen to him. Despite all the opposition, all the difficulty over the last three years, Patrick has planted three churches in Machinga district by the grace of God. And yet, he has paid a personal price for it. Patrick has grown up in a family where both of his grandfathers on both sides are witch doctors and it was always assumed that Patrick would go into the family business. From the time he

was ten years old they begin to initiate him into those demonic ceremonies that they practice. But when he became a pastor, his grandfathers were okay with it because they figured that being a pastor was another good way to make money, so they let him do it. That was until about a year and a half ago when Patrick's mother became ill. They took her to the hospital and the doctors looked at her. She had seen the doctor several different times and tried a few different treatments, but nothing seemed to solve the problem that she had. So the family came together in a family meeting and they resolved to make contributions as a family to hire the most powerful witch doctor they knew of in Southern Malawi. Patrick refused to make a contribution. He refused also to participate in those demonic ceremonies that were going to be taking place in their family compound. As a result, Patrick's own family chased him, his wife, and his six-month-old baby away from their home, away from their farm, away from everything they had. When I finally got the chance to talk to Patrick about this, I asked him, "How did you get to the point that you made the decision to make this kind of sacrifice for Christ?" He looked at me and he said, "That wasn't a decision that I made in the moment. That was a decision that I had made long ago and this was just the consequences of that decision" So, when I get to serve men like Patrick, it is a challenge to me—what am I willing to waste for Jesus?

This morning, in Matthew chapter 26 we are going to see another example of someone who is willing to give everything for Jesus. We are going to read verses 6–13, a story that I think will be familiar to many of us.

Scripture

"Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, 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. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.' But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, '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. 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."

The Gospel of Matthew is a gospel that is about mission. Of course, when you think of mission and you think of Matthew, the first thing that probably comes to mind is the Great Commission in Matthew chapter 28. I know that probably even some of the people sitting here this morning taught me that Great Commission from the time I was three or four years old in this church. I don't remember memorizing it I just know I have always had it memorized, Jesus says, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." If you think that mission just pops up in the three verses of Matthew there at the end, you haven't been reading the gospel of Matthew very carefully because mission is all throughout the gospel of Matthew. It goes all the way back to the beginning to chapter 1 where we get the family tree of Jesus, which is not just made up of Israelite men going from Abraham to David to Jesus. It is made up of four women, four Gentile women, giving us a hint that the Savior who is going to be born from this family is not just for Israel but for the entire world. We see it in chapter 2 where Magi from the east all the way from the Persian Empire travel to Bethlehem and bow down in worship before the child Jesus, the King of the Jews, while the scribes and the Pharisees and the king in Jerusalem stay put. It is the Gentiles who come and worship Jesus. We see it in chapter 3 where John the Baptist says to the scribes and the Pharisees that God is even able to make children for Abraham out of the stones, which is a hint that God is about to do something that will seem even more miraculous to them. He is going to make children for Abraham out of the pagan Gentiles. We could go chapter by chapter. We could talk about Matthew chapter 24 verse 14 where we get the promise, not the command, the promise that this gospel of the Kingdom **will be** proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.

But of all the mentions of mission in Matthew, it is this one in verse 13 that I find the most curious, the most intriguing—truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in all the world, what this woman has done will be told in remembrance of her. Of all the things that people do for Jesus in the gospels during His earthly ministry, all the acts of love devotion and thanksgiving that we read about, what is it about this woman and what she has done that gets this commendation from Jesus, that draws this connection between the mission Jesus is about to give His disciples in Matthew 28 and the action of this woman here in Bethany? Bethany is that village two miles east of Jerusalem, that village of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, that village that Jesus would most often stay in when visiting Jerusalem. We read so much about it in the gospels, and here Jesus is in Bethany. He is at the house of a man named Simon the leper. We know nothing else about Simon, the leper. The Bible tells us absolutely nothing about him except that he lived in Bethany and Jesus was dining at his house. Perhaps, Jesus had healed him and this was some sort of Thanksgiving feast that he was offering to thank Jesus for what He had done. We don't know, but Jesus is there.

While Jesus is at Simon's, a woman walks in and in her hand is an alabaster flask or an alabaster jar. Alabaster is this white stone that looks like marble but it's much softer. They mined it in Egypt. They would mine this Egyptian stone, this alabaster, and because it was soft, they could carve it into these beautiful containers like the jar or the flask that this woman is holding. It is a beautiful container because what is inside it is very precious—Matthew says it's a very expensive ointment. Mark tells us a little bit more about this. He says that what is inside is pure nard. Has anybody put on their pure nard this morning to come to church? Did you decide to skip a shower and just put a little extra nard on this morning? Anybody? I didn't know what nard was so I had to look it up in my Bible dictionary and I found out that nard is this ointment that is made from the roots of a flower that grow in the Himalayan mountains of Nepal, and here it is two miles east of Jerusalem in the village of Bethany—having come either by caravan across the deserts of Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq to the land of Israel, or through the Indian Ocean by ship, all the way from the Himalayan Mountains in Nepal, here it is! Because it has traveled so far,

(you know this with gas prices a way they are) the farther something has to travel to get to you the more expensive it becomes, so here is something precious, something expensive. In fact, Mark tells us that it is worth three hundred denarii. One denarius is what your average laborer would receive for one day's labor on the farm or the construction site, so three hundred is the yearly salary for your average Joe.

This woman has a flask with this ointment that is worth a year's salary. Why does she have this? Is she a wealthy woman who just has fifty of these back home? Probably not. You have to understand that during this time, banks were not FDIC insured so you were not necessarily safe to take your money and put it in the bank. Also, if you took your money and all your savings and you just buried it at home, not only could someone easily find that and steal it, but the longer it's just sitting there it's losing value, isn't it? What some people would do during this time period is they would take their savings and they would invest it into a small item like this that would retain its value. They could take it, they could keep it safe, they could hold onto it in a secret place, and then whenever the time came, that rainy day, that emergency came up, whenever they needed it, they could take it and sell it, and it would retain its value no matter what happened to the currency. So, what this woman has in her hands is not just a bottle of perfume, she got from the gas station or even from Dillard's or Macy's, this is her entire life. This is her safety. This is her security. This is what helped her to sleep at night as she was thinking about what could happen to her in the future. And what does she do? She walks in and she pours it on the head of Jesus. Mark tells us that to open it she actually has to break the flask, one use only. She pours it and anoints the head of Jesus.

Why does she do this? This is her profession of faith in Jesus Christ. She is pointing Jesus out and saying He is the one that we have been waiting for. He is the Anointed One. He is in Hebrew, the Messiah, in Greek, the Christ. She is saying to everyone around, I believe the one that the scriptures told us was coming, the one we have been reading about in the synagogue from the law, and the prophets, the king in the line of David who is going to save His people, He is here! He's reclining right here. It's Him! What do the disciples do? They criticize her—why this waste? Isn't it funny that

often when someone makes a sacrifice for Jesus, somebody gives everything for Jesus, often it's the people in the church who are less understanding than the people in the world? Why this waste? And of course, they have their reasons, don't they? *We could have taken that. We could have sold it and when we sold it, we would have had that three hundred denarii. What a budget! Think of all the widows we could have fed, all the orphans we could have clothed, all the good we could have done to the poor with that kind of budget!*

Then it says, "...Jesus, aware of this." It doesn't say whether He overheard them or this was through His divine understanding, or if like a lot of pastors if somebody in the church is having one of those holy huddles, you know what they are talking about. But Jesus knew, and what He does is He corrects the disciples and He commends the woman. They call it a waste; He calls it a beautiful thing, "Why do you trouble this woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me." And then He explains it. He says the poor you will have with you always. You live in a broken creation, a creation where sin abounds and because of that, you will always have poverty in this world. There will never be a utopia. There will never be a place or a time where it all goes away, and so, poverty you have with you also. Jesus isn't saying you shouldn't do something for the poor. He isn't saying you shouldn't care for the poor, but He is saying that you have to have your priorities in the right order...*the poor you have with you always, but Me, I'm only here for a little while and what she has done has been to prepare Me for My burial.*

There's a little bit extra to help us understand what this woman has done. Matthew puts this story exactly where it's supposed to go because if you look up in Matthew 26:1–2, we get Jesus's prophecy...*I'm going to Jerusalem and when I get to Jerusalem, the Son of Man is going to be crucified and on the third day, rise from the dead.* Then, in verses 3–5, we get the leader's plan where they are actually planning to do what Jesus said they were going to do...*let's kill Jesus but we just have to figure out this one little wrinkle in our plan. We gotta iron that out and that is somehow we have to do it secretly, somehow we have to do it stealthily or we might have a riot on our hands.* Now, I don't know if this woman was

there when Jesus made the prophecy but I could just imagine that among Jesus's followers, among His disciples, they had been whispering about this. They had been trying to figure it out...*did you hear what the rabbi said? He's going to be crucified. Now, how does that make sense? We thought He was the Messiah!* We are going to see in the following chapters how His disciples are not going to get it, but this woman gets it. Instead of saying this can't be the Messiah because He said He was going to be killed; she comes to prepare Him for His burial. She comes out of faith. Maybe she doesn't understand everything we understand now that we have the book of Romans and know how Jesus' death is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, but she gets it. That this Messiah has not come just to rule and have victory over their enemies, but He has come to achieve His victory through His death. That He is going to be the murdered Messiah. He is going to be the crucified Christ and even though that blew up her expectations, she still says I believe in this act of pouring this ointment on Jesus. And Jesus responds to this act of love by saying wherever the gospel is proclaimed, what she has done will be told in memory of her. What is it she has done? She has loved Jesus. If you don't get anything this morning from this sermon, I hope you get those two words. That's the main point this morning. Love Jesus. Love Jesus. She has loved Jesus and she has loved Jesus with everything she has, and she has loved Jesus as He has revealed Himself to be.

Four years in Malawi...Sometimes people will begin to hear about some of the challenges we face day in and day out. For example, usually almost every day we go six hours of the day without electricity. It's scheduled. We get the schedule at the beginning of the week. We went six weeks once without water. We have malaria. We have parasites. We are sick half the time. And of course, with COVID I didn't get to see my parents for three years. They didn't really care about seeing me; they were more worried about not seeing the grandkids, who during those three years grew much taller. You should have seen, as we pulled up to the house we are staying at in Murray, when we got out the hugs that were happening there on Fourth Street in Murray that day. But sometimes when people hear about those kinds of difficulties, they will ask me the question, how do you stay? Or, why do you stay? Early on, I would reference my calling to answer that

question, "I stay because this is what God has called me and called my wife to do." But the longer that I'm there, the more I realize that that answer won't cut it, because if I'm just staying and doing what I'm doing out of duty, because that's what I'm supposed to do, I'm not going to stay. I'm going to pack my bags and I'm going to be back here. I'm going to worship with you guys every Sunday and I'm going to spend the week on the lake. Why do I stay? This woman reminds me of why I stay—because I love Jesus. That's the answer. In fact, that is the mission. The mission is to love Jesus. Yes, the mission is to proclaim the gospel. Yes, the mission is to plant churches. Yes, the mission is to train leaders. Yes, the mission is to show compassion to the poor. But the mission is first and foremost to love Jesus, and that's what motivates everything else. We preach the gospel not because we are supposed to preach the gospel; we preach the gospel because we love Jesus. We plant churches not because somebody somewhere said you are supposed to plant churches; we plant churches because we love Jesus. We teach their leaders because we love Jesus. We show compassion to the poor because we love Jesus.

This is the connection between what this woman has done and the vision that Jesus has given us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. There's no way that we can fulfill the Great Commission of Matthew 28 without the devotion of Matthew 26. I don't think Ricky or Kory have changed what they have taught through the years, so I'm going to assume here that at Hardin Baptist we still believe in an omnipotent God, an all-powerful God, amen? And if God is all powerful, then you have to understand that God does not need us. That is an important word, need. God does not need us to preach the gospel to all the world. He could do it however He wishes. He could put the gospel in everyone's mind in a moment if He wanted to, and yet He invites us into His work when He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Why does He invite us into His work?

Sometimes, I have these honey-do projects that just build up, and finally I have to do one of them, right? Amen? And so, you know, I have to hang the picture, I have to fix the leaky pipe, so I'll go and get my toolbox. Because I have five children, I will call one of my kids to come and help me with the project. Now, the truth is I don't really need them to help me. In

fact, there are a lot of times that they are actually hindering me. I could get it done a lot faster, a lot easier if I just went and did it myself and got it done, but I called them to help me. Why do I call them to help me? Because when I was a kid, my dad called me to help him. We would spend time tinkering on cars, putting up fencerows, cutting trees. We would do all these things together, even though at the time I knew I was holding him back. In my mind, even as a child, I knew that I wasn't helping him, really, but it was in those moments of shared work that our relationship grew to be what it is today. And now, my dad is one of my best friends because of the work we had.

That is what God is doing in inviting us into His work. The mission is to love Jesus because it is in sharing the mission of God that we are both expressing and experiencing our love for Christ. That's the mission, and everything else flows from that. That's why we must remember what this woman has done, and we must imitate what this woman has done. We are on mission to love Jesus by sharing the gospel around the world, but we have to love Jesus the way He has revealed Himself to be. We don't get to reinvent Jesus for our American culture. We don't get to reinvent Jesus for the Malawian culture. We don't get to interpret Jesus in some way that we want Him to be. No, we get Jesus the way He has revealed Himself to be in the Word. And that Jesus is God, the Son, who left the glories of Heaven to enter into the womb of a virgin named Mary, was born into the world with you and I—who walked in the same dust that we walk in, was tried and tempted in every way just as you are except with this one exception—He was without sin. And yet, He died...not for His sin, but for our sin, and not for our sin only but for the sins of all the world. He died on the cross. He suffered in shame. He suffered in the bloody horror that was called crucifixion in the Roman Empire. They buried Him, and then three days later, He rose from the dead. He ascended into Heaven and at this very moment, while we are sitting here, He is seated at the right hand of the Father. At any moment, He will return to judge the living and the dead and bring about a new creation. That's the Jesus that the Bible reveals to us. Not a Jesus who skips straight to victory, but a Jesus of suffering, a Jesus who dies in order to get to glory, a Jesus who demonstrates that the only way to truly express love is through sacrifice. If we are going to believe

and we are going to love a crucified Christ, it's going to demand a crucified life from us. The only way to love Jesus is by giving Him everything.

That is what we see in this woman, don't we? Everything she had, all of her security, all of her hopes and dreams, she destroys it to express her love for Jesus. And did you notice something? The gospel of Matthew does not even record her name. Oh yeah, this is happening at Simon the Leper's house, but in walks a woman. Jesus says wherever the gospel is proclaimed, what this woman has done will be remembered. I think this is a reminder for us that we don't love Jesus to get something we love Jesus simply because we love Jesus. We love Jesus simply because He is lovely. We love Jesus because the Holy Spirit has come into our hearts and taken the Word of God and molded it with His power to open our eyes to see what was in front of us the entire time! To open our ears to hear what we may have been hearing for years and years without understanding, that Jesus is everything! Sometimes we can sit in Sunday school or our small groups and we can have these little debates...*how much is a Christian supposed to give? You know, in the Old Testament, the people of Israel gave ten percent, but now in the New Covenant, are we still supposed to give ten percent, or is that just the starting point of what we are supposed to give to God?* This reminds us that that is not the conversation! You may give ten percent, but one hundred percent belongs to Him! You may give one day a week here, but seven days a week belong to Him! You may give him one hour in the morning but twenty-four hours a day belong to Him! He is worthy of everything and it is that love that we see in this woman. It is that love that we see in men like Patrick Matope in Malawi. It is that love that drives us and motivates us to fulfill that commission to go and make disciples, not just here but of all nations. And it involves us all, no matter what gifting, no matter what our calling. As a body, it is our commission to go together to the ends of the earth and it's going to cost us. It will cost us everything. What are you willing to waste for Jesus?