



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 26:1-16

Topic

Jesus praises a woman whom the disciples accuse of wasting a precious resource

Title

"Waste Management"

Introduction

In a classic round of verbal sparring, Rocky Balboa wanted to know why trainer Mickey Goldmill treated him so disparagingly.

Here is their on-screen exchange:

Rocky: "You know, I been coming here for six years and for six years you been sticking it to me. I wanna know how come."

Mickey: "You don't wanna know."

Rocky: "Yeah, I wanna know."

Mickey: "You wanna know?"

Rocky: "I wanna know!"

Mickey: "Okay, I'll tell ya! Because you had the talent to become a good fighter! And instead of that you became a leg-breaker for some cheap, second-rate loan shark."

Rocky: "It's a living."

Mickey: **"It's a waste of life!"**

I think we'd give that round to Mickey. Rocky was wasting his life.

But on what planet would we think that a washed-up, two-bit fighter-turned-trainer of third-rate boxers wasn't *also* wasting *his* life?

Which begs the question, "What constitutes a wasted life?"

That's an incredible question, if for no other reason than this: I don't want to get to the end of my life, look back over it, and see that it has been wasted. None of us do.

Our text in Matthew twenty-six can help us answer the question of what constitutes a wasted life. A woman will break a costly alabaster jar of fragrant ointment on Jesus, causing His disciples to say to Him, "Why this waste?"

Jesus will come to her defense, letting the guys (and us) know that what they deemed a *waste* He received as a *work* that deserved recognition and reward.

Let's look at our own lives in terms of waste and work. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Look At Your Life And Ask, "Why This Waste?", and #2 Look At Your Life And Ask, "Why This Work?"

#1 Look At Your Life And Ask,
"Why This Waste?"

(v1-5 & 14-16)

The religious leaders of Israel would reject Jesus as their promised Messiah. As a result, the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth that the Messiah would established would be postponed until His Second Coming.

Jesus had been predicting His death at the hands of the religious leaders. The time for Him to die was at hand.

Mat 26:1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that He said to His disciples,

Jesus had just "finished" His talk on the Mount of Olives about the future of the nation of Israel, and about His Second Coming.

This word "finished" also indicated He was done with His formal teaching ministry to the nation. He was being rejected and the hearts of the religious leaders were set against Him; there was nothing more He could say.

Something precious about the grace of God. Although Jesus was "finished," after He rose from the dead, He sent His disciples right back to those same religious leaders to preach the Gospel.

Mat 26:2 "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

Crucified? Really? That was a Roman punishment, not Jewish. Yet Jesus was confident His death would be a shameful one on a Cross.

Mat 26:3 Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,

Mat 26:4 and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him.

Mat 26:5 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

I read all that together because Matthew meant to emphasize something important. Jesus said He'd be delivered up to be crucified on Passover. The religious leaders - the ones who would do the delivering - were committed to taking no action until *after* the Passover, fearing the crowds with whom Jesus was popular.

Matthew is letting us know that Jesus was confident that the events of His death would unfold just as they were prophesied. God's providence would see to it that, without violating anyone's free will, Jesus would die by crucifixion, *on* Passover rather than *after* it.

You might or might not know that there are different timelines for the events of the final week of the life of Jesus. Whatever timeline you prefer, know this: Jesus had to be killed as the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple.

It had to be so because, as John the Baptist had three years earlier proclaimed, Jesus was "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world."

The penalty for sin is death. In the Garden of Eden, when God came to Adam and Eve after they had sinned, He slaughtered an animal to provide them a temporary covering for their sin. He promised to Himself come into the world, to provide a permanent solution to the problem of sin.

That permanent solution would be His own death, as a man, in our place, on the Cross.

We're not told that God offered a lamb in the Garden; but the son of Adam and Eve, Abel, offered lambs, and so did all the patriarchs and priests after him. Every lamb that was slain, millions of them over a period of some four thousand years, pointed ahead to the one final sacrifice of God Himself as a man - the Lamb of God Who took away the sins of the world.

Caiphas, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of Israel were the recognized political and spiritual leaders. They had positions of power and authority; they were well-off. They travelled in the best social circles. They dressed nice and had all the most modern conveniences. Their lives made a difference in daily Jewish society.

From a purely physical perspective, they were the guys you aspired to be like.

Ah, but there is no such thing as a purely physical perspective. They were plotting "to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him." They feared the crowd, not their Creator.

For a variety of reasons, they preferred their own relatively comfortable life in an occupied Israel over the promised Kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

We would say that they wasted their position, their power, their possessions, on pursuits that were not just empty, but evil.

These guys are an extreme example of wasted lives. Don't let that keep you from examining your own life.

We aren't the ones who crucified Jesus to preserve wasted lives, but neither was He crucified so that we could live wasted lives.

*Only one life, will soon be passed;
Only what's done for Christ will last*

Do you hold some position? In your family? Or in society?

Do you have power over anyone? For example, parents have power over their children.

Your possessions, and your pursuits - are they a waste in the long run?

Let's jump ahead to the most wasted life of all - that of Judas.

Mat 26:14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests

Mat 26:15 and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver.

Mat 26:16 So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.

I normally don't like to skip ahead, but in this case, the verses are not in chronological order. Verses one through five, and verses fourteen through sixteen, take place on the Tuesday of Jesus' last week on earth. The dinner described in verses six through thirteen took place before this, even before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Judas Iscariot is an incredibly complex character. Listen to this summary by Warren Wiersbe:

Judas is a tragic figure. He was called to be one of Christ's disciples and was named an apostle along with the others (Mark 3:13–19). He received power to heal (Mathew 10:1–4), and he probably used this power. It is not the power to do miracles that is proof of salvation (Matthew 7:21–29), but obedience to God's Word.

In spite of his affiliation with the band of disciples, and his association with Christ, Judas was not a true believer. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He made it clear that one of them (Judas) was not cleansed (John 13:10–11). Like many professing Christians today, Judas was "in" the group of believers but not "of" them.

Jesus called him "son of perdition" (John 17:12) which literally means "son of waste." For three and one-half years, he heard Jesus teach, saw Him perform miracles, witnessed amazing things. He remained hardened against God. In fact it hardened him all the more, until he was wanting to cut his losses and get at least some financial gain from the situation.

It is popular, in extra-biblical literature to sympathize with Judas, making him a misunderstood hero. One such approach suggests that Judas wanted to provide Jesus the opportunity to confront the religious leaders once-and-for-all, thinking that since Jesus was the Messiah, He would surely defeat them and establish the kingdom.

Judas was not a hero. A nonbeliever, Judas was influenced by Satan, then possessed by Satan.

Neither was Judas misunderstood. None of what we read about him takes away his personal responsibility to accept Jesus. In fact, Jesus gave Judas many genuine opportunities to be saved.

I don't think it's going too far to suggest that Judas is a warning to nonbelievers, and especially ones who have some knowledge of Jesus and the Gospel of salvation. His life was supremely wasted, ending not just in his suicide, but in being separated from God for eternity in Hades, then, later, in the Lake of Fire.

No matter your achievements in this life; no matter the relative 'good' you do *to* and *for* others. If you gain the whole world, but lose your soul, you have wasted your life.

Let's face it, most of the world's heroes and heroines lived or are living wasted lives - at least from the standpoint of God's final judgment on them in eternity.

We like to think that, when nonbelievers stand before the Great White Throne for their final judgment, that their entire lives will be played back before them. I can't say that with any certainty. But if they are, facing eternity separated from God, I think an appropriate comment once the replay is over would definitely be, "Why this waste?"

Without Jesus Christ... Without having a personal relationship with Him... Without having their sins forgiven by Him, and having His righteousness imputed to them... "Why this waste?"

#2 Look At Your Life And Ask,
"Why This Work?"

(v6-13)

I can't say why Matthew chose to insert the story of Jesus' anointing at a dinner in Bethany in the middle of these verses... But I'm grateful that he did. They are like a refreshing drink of living water in the midst of the darkness and deceit of those working to betray and kill the Lord.

Mat 26:6 And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper,

The very fact that so many people were eating a meal at his house - at least seventeen people - tells us that Simon was a *former* leper - otherwise all of them would be rendered ceremonially unclean.

(The twelve disciples... Simon... Jesus... and John tells us in his Gospel Mary, Martha and Lazarus - 17).

Besides, can you imagine Jesus encountering a leper and not healing him or her?

Simon kept the designation, I say, as a witnessing talking point. He was introduced to people as Simon the leper - but no longer afflicted by leprosy because of His encounter with Jesus Christ, the God-man.

I often suggest we think of nicknames for ourselves. Or that we nickname each other. What would a good one be for you, as a person who was saved by Jesus?

Gene the high-functioning sociopath is my current favorite.

What's yours?

Mat 26:7 a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table.

In the Gospel of John we are told that the woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus - the same Lazarus who had recently been raised from the dead by Jesus.

Getting back to verse seven, from putting all the accounts in the Gospel's together, we know this "fragrant oil" was nard, called also spikenard, and that it was from India. It was incredibly costly - probably worth at least a year's wages. Scholars suggest it may have been Mary's dowry.

Why did she pour it on Jesus? It was the most costly thing she had in her possession; He was the most precious person in her life. It seemed good.

Jesus will tell us in a moment exactly why Mary broke the alabaster jar and anointed Him. Mary may not have realized the symbolism. She may simply have been led to do it, from love for the Lord.

God is not obligated to explain to us the significance of our obedience. His leading is enough; we are to obey, and leave any further significance to Him. Obedience is its own reward.

That's harder than you might imagine in an age in which we think everything must have greater significance. I often think my suffering, for example, must result in something greater - some foundation, some fund raiser - or else it seems to society to be a waste.

But if it is as unto the Lord... If He alone is aware of it... That becomes its significance.

Mat 26:8 But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste?"

Mat 26:9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor."

It was customary at Passover to give alms to the poor. From that perspective, most people would agree that Mary ought not to have wasted the oil by pouring it out upon Jesus when its sale could have helped so many.

We just got done with the ALS bucket challenge. No one would deny the amount of positive awareness the viral “Ice Bucket Challenge” has raised for ALS or Lou Gehrig’s disease, but some are now criticizing it for wasting water, especially in drought-stricken areas like California.

They might have an arguable point. By conservative calculations, over 6 million gallons of water have been poured out. The average American household uses 320 gallons per day, which means that based on this estimation, nearly 19,000 homes’ daily water usage has been wasted.

I'm not making a value judgment about the challenge or telling anyone they were wrong to participate. I'm just pointing out that people are always critical of wasting something precious.

Each year, during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, the priests daily drew water from the Pool of Siloam. On the last day of the feast, the priests poured-out, on the ground, the water they had gathered, to symbolize thanks for the harvest.

Jesu, at this feast, claimed to be living water. We are right now nearing the end of the Feast of Tabernacles for 2014; it ends on October 16th.

I wonder if Christians suggested a challenge in which we all poured-out water on the ground, like the Jews did, in order to proclaim Jesus, would we be well-received? Would it go viral?

Or would we be accused of wasting an increasingly scarce resource?

Mat 26:10 But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me.

Jesus came to her defense. *I love that!* If you are following God's leading, and you've heard His voice, as it were, it really doesn't matter what others say in criticism.

Let me say that in a different way. You can't be overly concerned about criticism when you know you're doing what God wants you to do.

Truth is, most of us dismiss criticism too soon. We get defensive and don't learn from it. But, having said that, not all criticism is valid; and we can't really say that there is always something positive in every criticism. There are times your critic is just wrong and vindictive.

If Mary had run this idea past the disciples, she never would have broken the flask.

Would it have mattered? If verses six through thirteen never happened, would it affect our salvation?

Maybe not. But it mattered to Jesus. It brought Him joy.

I wonder how much joy we deny Jesus because of the fear of being accused of being too extreme in our work and our worship.

Mat 26:11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.

Jesus' statement about the poor has caused unnecessary confusion. He wasn't minimizing the plight of the poor; quite the opposite. He was talking about priorities. They could (and should) always minister to the poor, but they would only get one shot at anointing His body for death.

Mat 26:12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial.

Did Mary know that this was what she was doing? Hard to say, but I doubt it. She was simply following God's leading - offering her best, and her all, to her Lord.

After death, the Jews wrapped the body and in-between the wrappings placed oils and spices. Jesus seems to be indicating that after His upcoming death, there would be insufficient time to properly anoint His body. Thus, anointing Him was much more urgent than feeding the poor.

In fact, His body was taken down from the Cross hastily and entombed before the Sabbath began. There was not enough time to properly anoint Him. That's why early the Sunday following that Sabbath the women come to the tomb to anoint Him; but He had risen!

Mat 26:13 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."

Did you catch that? Jesus was confident He would rise from the dead, because the "Gospel" would be preached "in the whole world." Gospel means *good news*. It wouldn't be good news to proclaim that Jesus was dead, now would it?

No, the good news is that He has risen.

Jesus said Mary would be remembered, memorialized. Here we are, today, memorializing her.

Jesus called her deed "a good work for Me." The disciples called it a "waste." What Jesus calls *work* can never be considered *waste*, no matter how it appears to others.

This suggests so much to us. If led to do something out of the ordinary, something that might be considered on the surface to be a waste - would we have the spiritual courage to go through with it?

I know that my poor dad never came to grips with my decision to go into full time Christian work. He considered it a waste of my education (that he paid for), and a waste of my life.

Have you **ever** done something like Mary did? Have you **ever** given something, of yourself or from your substance, that was extravagant and seemingly wasted, but dedicated to Jesus?

Can you think of a time you *almost* did - but talked yourself out of it, or let others talk you out of it?

Let's get down to it. Mary isn't alone in seemingly wasting her life and her substance on Jesus. All the guys and gals in the Bible had a moment, or moments, when they had to follow God's leading in a way that seemed to be a waste.

Why should it be any different for us? The Lord doesn't love us any less. We don't love Him any less.

There's an expression people use when they come to some astounding discovery. They call it their "Aha!" moment.

There was a guy on *Shark Tank* the other night. It's that show where you pitch your idea or invention to investors in order to take it to the next level.

He told them it was an "Aha!" moment when he came up with his product. He invested **everything** he had in it - his life and his life savings.

Shouldn't we be willing to invest everything we are, and everything we have, for Jesus?

In fact, you ought to want to do a work for the Lord that is so extreme, so extravagant, others will call it a waste.

Guess what? They might call it a waste out of fear. They might fear God wants them to be extreme, to be extravagant.

And you know what? He does!

"Why this work?" Because Jesus deserves our extreme extravagance. He lavished His love on us; how can we not do the same to Him?