

# Masterwork of the Messiah

## Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

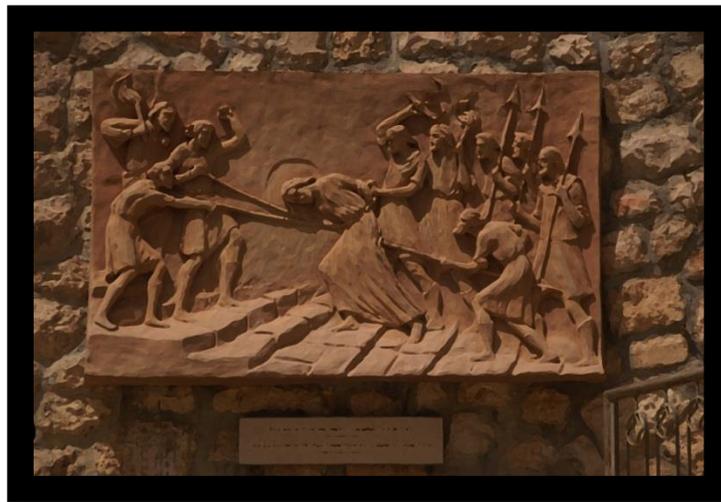
*Pour It On!*

Matthew 26:6-12

Written By

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**I**t wasn't the old, leathered-skinned, former shepherd's first ascent up the rocky, barren, seemingly lifeless mountain. On a previous ascent, God gave him the Ten Commandments written in stone with own hand (Exodus 19:18-25). Imagine holding those heavy granite slabs in your arms. Imagine just getting an audience with God, let alone a document to take back with you to change the history of your people, and the whole world for that matter. Moses enjoyed a privileged status before God which leaves us in awe.

On another day, God verbally notified Moses He wanted him and some key priestly and political leaders to come up to the chosen mount again. Moses writes about this event in Exodus 24:

<sup>1</sup> Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance" (Exodus 24).

Wouldn't you have loved to make that arduous, steep climb up into the dense cloud protecting mankind from the holy presence of God? Don't you know your heart would have been pounding so hard you could hear it with your ears?

What did God want from these men, these saints? One thing: worship. Did they sing songs? We don't know, probably. Did they verbally give God praise for His wonderful, lofty

characteristics? Wouldn't you have? Did they just stand there in total, jaw-dropping silence? I'm sure. But whatever happened that day, and no matter how long it lasted, this must have been some kind of worship service standing there near the physical presence of the shekinah glory of the Almighty. Talk about something you'd never forget. Talk about something which would change you forever.

What happened next is most instructive.

<sup>4</sup> Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. <sup>7</sup> Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" <sup>8</sup> So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24).

For the first and only time in Old Testament history, people were sprinkled with sacrificial blood. How were 2 million people sprinkled ... practical minds want to know. The twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes probably represented them, so sprinkling the stones was tantamount to sprinkling the people. What was this sacrificial action post-worship all about? Good question. By offering burnt offerings, a sacrifice designed to make a sinner acceptable to God (Leviticus 1), Moses ratified the God-given Mosaic covenant with the Israelites, transforming them into the people of God. And to think this new, amazing relationship all came about after great worship and then great sacrifice of animals divinely designed as sin substitutes.

This memorable motif wouldn't be lost in the sands of time. Far from it. What Moses number one accomplished with the Israelites on a rugged, no-named mountain and with substitutionary blood sacrifices, would be taken to a whole new level by Moses number two, Jesus, the Christ. Whereas Moses number one secured the Torah Covenant with Israel by means of animal blood sacrifice, Moses number two secured the New Covenant (Jeremiah 30-31) by means of the sacrifice of Himself as the ultimate burnt offering. And as we learn from Matthew 26, verses 6 through 12, this great redemptive work, which would give all of us the potential, as sinners, to gain access to God and to have a vibrant, vital relationship with Him, was all preceded, as in the day of Moses, with great worship. Perhaps a more memorable way to describe this concept is to state it in this fashion:

### Before A Greater Work There's Great Worship (Matthew 26:6-12)

What better way to dig into this motif than to read the text from which it arises:

<sup>6</sup> Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup> a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table. <sup>8</sup> But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste?" <sup>9</sup> "For this perfume might have been sold for

a high price and the money given to the poor.”<sup>10</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me.”<sup>11</sup> “For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.”<sup>12</sup> “For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.

Stories like this are what convince me the Bible is the Word of God. It minces no words. Instead of painting the Lord’s choice followers in the best possible light, it gives you a high definition picture of their best days and worst days. It also shows you how Jesus interacted with common people, during what had to be one of the darkest times of His life, in such a loving, tender fashion, not like some kind of thoughtless, emotionally hardened political despot. Yes, this is just one of those moving narratives designed to show you the heart of God and your responsibility as His creation.

From this colorful, moving historical narrative, God gives us four premises crafted to validate the point that before a great, memorable divine work He typically receives off-the-charts, lavish, extravagant worship. Such was true, then, as the cross loomed on the near horizon ... literally, and such is true now as we seek to be part of a great work of God. The first premise we need to acquaint ourselves with cognitively and practically naturally arises from verse 6:

### **Worship Knows Obscurity (Matthew 26:6)**

It seems from verse 6 that immediately after Jesus finished teaching the disciples on the Mount of Olives that He would, in fact, become the Passover lamb on that coming Friday, that He then took the thirty to forty minute eastern walk down the mountain to the hillside town called Bethany. Such is not proper chronological timing. We know this because of the John’s parallel account tells us this all occurred on the Saturday (Sabbath) before Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:1-11). Matthew merely used this story to serve as a bridge from the Passover discussion and the betrayal by Judas. John, however, tells us when it chronologically occurred. Either way, the event occurred in space and time making it highly historical ... and theological.

Interesting, isn’t it, that Jesus used the out-of-the-way, backwater, nowheresville place like Bethany as His base of operations before He went to the cross. Why did He go here? I can think of numerous viable reasons.

First, Lazarus was raised from the dead in this small village (John 11), displaying Himself truly as the resurrection and the life. What better place to be than where you had definitively demonstrated your messianic divinity than Bethany? With His death imminent, Bethany became the strong, stable reminder that He was the author of life and death and life again. Of course, this point would be driven home after His resurrection when He would ascend back into heaven from this location (Luke 24:50-53).

Second, when you are facing a great trial and a great work of God, getting alone with Him in an obscure setting so you can worship and hear from Him is the wisest, most logical course of action. I know the text doesn’t say it, but knowing Christ’s love for getting alone to get spiritually recharged, I think it is easy to determine why He chose this particular no-named village for His final days. This location provided the perfect setting for quiet and solitude, which are the two key components to tapping into the power of the Father. The closing of Psalm 46 is most instructive in this instance. Speaking to us, God tells us how to connect with Him in challenging: “Be still, and know that I am God ...” (Psalm 46:10a). I like Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s analysis of this statement:

“If we do our part in obedience to the command, God will be faithful to respond. If you will cease, then God will reveal. The opposite is also implied. If you refuse to be still, if you do not seek times for silence and solitude, you may gain some knowledge about God without knowing Him at all. It is through times of silence and protracted periods of stillness that He makes Himself real.”<sup>1</sup>

I'm sure the Father made Himself quite real in that solitary, obscure place as the Son took the time to draw near to Him. Don't you know that connection time with the Father placed the proper amount of fuel in His tank to give Him the emotional and physical power to actually become the Passover lamb for all of us? Bethany, therefore, gently reminds us that before God performs a great work in our lives, He looks ... really longs ... for us to worship Him in an obscure place so we can connect and be re-charged for the road ahead, be it rough or smooth. Your life problem is you've not seen the Lord move in a powerful fashion because you've been way too tied up, too pre-occupied, too engaged, and too committed, leaving yourself little or no obscure time. Bethany is a long way from here. I know. I've been there. But Bethany can be as close as a favorite easy chair at your home in the basement, or a special, private place you walk to so you can get alone and really hear from God in the silence of it all. Mark this well: Before Jesus headed to Jerusalem to secure our salvation, He took the time to have some much needed downtime with the Father.

Obscurity didn't just apply to a place to Jesus, it also applied to a person: Simon, also known around town as Simon, the leper. Talk about a nobody. This wasn't Simon, the investment banker; or Simon, the Army Colonel; or Simon, the leading real estate agent. This was Simon, you know, the man who had been a wretched, physically disfigured and distorted, alien-looking leper. Simon had been the men all the children in town pointed to and smirked, “Look, mom, there's that scary-looking man. Can we cross to the other side of the street, please?”<sup>2</sup>

But this evening, Jesus was at Simon's modest home for dinner, and according to John's parallel account, Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, were also invited. Don't you know that must have been some kind of dinner? Sitting across the table from you is a man who had been dead. I mean stone-cold, dead, for FOUR days (John 12:39), but know he's laughing, eating appetizers, and having a glass of good Jewish wine. What questions would you have asked him? “Say, Lazarus, did you see the light? Did you go through a tunnel?” And what do you think Martha did for this dinner, knowing her penchant for being a workhorse around the house (Luke 10:38-40)? Remarkably, it doesn't say she did anything, but I bet she did, knowing how she was wired.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Swindoll, *So, You Want To Be Like Christ?* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2005): 62.

<sup>2</sup> The whole appearance of the face is changed, till the man loses his human appearance and looks, as the ancients said, ‘like a lion or a satyr.’ The nodules grow larger and larger. They ulcerate. From them there comes a foul discharge. The eyebrows fall out, the eyes become staring. The voice becomes hoarse and the victim wheezes because of the ulceration of the vocal chords. The hands and feet always ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of the disease is nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma, and ultimately death. The sufferer becomes utterly repulsive—both to himself and to others.”<sup>7</sup> Michael P. Green. *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.

Why was Jesus in the home of Simon? Probably because He had healed him and wanted time to see how he was doing. Probably, also, because the home of this obscure man, who had formerly had a disease which best represented the contagion and destructive nature of sin, represented physically what Jesus would accomplish on Golgotha on Friday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. He, who could heal the physically diseased man could, and would, die for the sins of all mankind ... from the obscure to the well-known ... to place Him in a position to heal them from the spiritual disease called sin. No doubt, Bethany was an obscure place, for sure, but it was in an out-of-the-way place like this, with no-named people who loved Him that Jesus prepared Himself for the fateful events of Passover on the following Friday.

I don't know what is going in your life right now, I don't know how difficult and complex things are for you; however, I do know that as darkness seems to engulf you, as it seems as if the world is arrayed against you, God is onto something. God is preparing a greater work on the horizon. What do you need to do? Like Jesus you need to get away to a place called Bethany for some little spiritual R & R, and it might even be smart to make sure you connect with some real, close godly friends too. Sure, they might be nobodies in the world's eyes, but in God's eyes they are just the folks you need to be with the put wind in your sails, to lighten your load, and to point you to the God you know you desire to worship.

Yes, it's true: great worship knows the importance of obscurity. Sure, great worship can and does occur in well-known places; however, when a major work of God is on the horizon, like the giving of the Law, the forming of a people of God, or the defeat of sin and death, obscurity has a premium spiritual value.

In addition to this concept, we add another:

## Worship Knows Opulence (Matthew 26:7, 10-12)

To wrap our minds and hearts around this statement, let's read and then dig deeper into the text:

<sup>6</sup> Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup> a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.

The woman, according to John's account, was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. Each one of these siblings enjoyed their unique spiritual wiring: Lazarus couldn't wait to testify of God's power and to lead his countrymen to faith in Jesus (John 12:9), Martha had the spiritual gift of helps in a big way, wanting to make sure everything was just right so the needs of people were met, and Mary, well, she was always enthralled with the worship of Jesus, the Christ (Luke 10:39). Mary's worshipping ways ascended to a new height here at this dinner table.

The Jews ate around a u-shaped table called the triclinium. Typically, large pillows supported their arms and upper bodies as they reclined on the ground near the table with their legs stretched away from the table. While seated and enjoying the evening, Mary got up, broke a bottle of expensive Indian perfume scholars estimate was worth a year's salary, walked over to Jesus she maneuvered herself toward His head and began pouring. As every eye was most certainly fixed on her, she poured the remaining fragrance on His feet, quietly washing them with her long hair.

Why did she do this? We have to skip down to verses 10 through 12 for the answer. Confronting the disciples who argued about this supposed waste of funds, Jesus remarks:

<sup>10</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. <sup>11</sup> “For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. <sup>12</sup> “For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.

Once again, the Twelve didn't get the big picture of what was going to happen on Friday, even though Jesus has explicitly told them at numerous times. Although the text doesn't say it, I would lean toward thinking that Mary, the sensitive one, the one who would let the world go by so she could focus on the Lord's teaching, knew something was coming down concerning the Lord. She, who had seen Jesus raise her brother from the dead, she, who had heard Him say He was the resurrection and the life, she the sensitive one who probably picked up on the heaviness and sadness about Christ, knew darkness was descending upon Him, even death itself; therefore, she lavishly worshipped Him by preparing Him for death through a costly anointing.

Isn't this how love for Jesus and what His sacrifice means should touch and motivate us? Shouldn't our love for His death in our behalf move us to express our loving worship to Him in an extravagant fashion? Shouldn't our love for Him wearing that crown of thorns for us move us to worship Him in a profound, costly fashion? Regarding this kind of love, William Barclay observes:

Love never calculates; love never thinks how little it can decently give; love's one desire is to give to the uttermost limits; and, when it has given all it has to give, it still thinks the gift too little. We have not begun to be Christian if we think giving to Christ and to His Church in terms of as little as we respectably can.<sup>3</sup>

Take a hard look at your Christian life of worship. What's the most lavish, extravagant act of worship you've poured out on Jesus as a way to expressing your thanks for the fact He took those nails for you? What precious thing do you need to give Him as a way of showing the magnitude of your gratefulness for His substitutionary crucifixion? Your sacrificial worship can be spontaneous right now, or it can be planned, as it was with Mary. She had a plan to worship Jesus in this fashion long before they left their home and walked over to Simon's. As they walked to that dinner, a small bottle of extremely costly perfume rested secretly in the pocket of her tunic. What's in your tunic pocket? I will not identify what that sacrificial act of worship can be on your part because that is between you and Christ. But I will challenge you to worship Christ in a great way, knowing that great worship typically lives to see a greater work of God in your life.

The main motif is a proven biblical reality: A greater work of God is usually preceded by great worship in the lives of believers, and that worship knows the value of obscurity and opulence. It also should anticipate that no everyone will be tuned into the personal sacrifice made. The final verses before us teach us this sad reality:

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<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study: Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975): 330.

## Worship Knows Opposition (Matthew 26:8-9)

Mary was on track, but the disciples willingly jumped off the tracks. Shocking, isn't it? The very people who should have understood, who should have supported her loving action, exploded in a self-righteous tirade.

<sup>8</sup> But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste? <sup>9</sup> "For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor."

They, of all people, exploded all over her. "What are you doing? Are you out of your mind! Stop! Don't you know the cost of that brand of perfume! What a waste!" Ever done this? Ever exploded all over another believer for something you witnessed or heard second or third hand when you didn't have all the facts? Ever gone off the rails when you didn't fully understand what was going on at a dinner, per se? Perhaps you need to set some things straight with a person so it doesn't create a drag on your worship.

At my last church, Twin Oaks, we wanted to pay off our new building loan, so we devised a great, graphic plan. We had a carpenter in the church fashion a large set of oak trees we could set on a table. Our ladies then cut out acorns and wrote different denominations on them totaling the cost of our remaining loan of \$25,000. No sooner had they finished adorning the tree than a widow in our church came into my office with all the acorns stacked on top of each other. Believe me, it wasn't one of my better moments.

"Lilian (not her name), what are you doing? Do you know how much time our ladies put into making all those acorns?"

Innocently looking at me, I'll never forget what she said next, "Pastor Marty, I just wanted to pay for all them, and I'm going on vacation to Florida and when I return I want to give more."

Believe me when I say I know what it is like to act like the disciples in the presence of a Mary. All Lilian wanted to do was worship the Lord through giving a major gift to the work of God, and I got all worked up for all the wrong reasons. I've learned to listen more and talk less when saints are stepping out and doing things for God, His local church, and for His kingdom. I've also learned the importance of being Mary. God's greatest work in your life may be just around the corner, as it was in Christ's life, but He's waiting for great, costly, lavish worship from you.

So go ahead.

Pour it on.