

Bethany - our response to Him in reproach

Part 1

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:00] 1 Samuel 22 1 David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adulam. 2 And when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. 3 And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him. 4 And he became a captain over them, and there were with him about four hundred men. And then back to John's Gospel.

[00:01:01] And chapter 12, John chapter 12, verse 1.

Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper, and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone, against the day of my burying hath she kept this. [00:02:04] For the poor always ye have with you, but me ye have not always.

It's a very brief word, brethren. My thoughts came to these verses as our brother spoke, been very much impressed as we've been occupied with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, that what he is looking for from us is a response to him.

We read in 1 Samuel of David how he escaped to the cave of Adullam, and we read there that when his brethren in all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him, and the question might be in our hearts, what was it that attracted these to David [00:03:02] at that time?

He wasn't here in a place of glory.

It wasn't that anything outward attracted them to him.

He was rejected.

He was in a place of refuge, in a cave, of all places, a cave. No, it wasn't his circumstances, it wasn't the place where he was, it wasn't the comforts which surrounded him that drew their hearts to him. These weren't, as we say, fair-weather friends.

They were his brethren. They went there because of their love, their affection for him, and because of their links with him.

And we read that that little company, or that company, was made up of those that were [00:04:02] in distress, and those that were in debt, and those that were discontented. These were the sort of people that gathered themselves unto David. And I would liken this company to each and every one of us, to the believer. It is those of us who were and are in distress.

In relation to the things of this world, we should be in distress. The things that surround us should cause us heartache. We should sorrow at the conditions of the world. Our response ought to be one of distress. And we're in debt. We realize that before God we have nothing.

We're debtors to God.

We bring nothing.

[00:05:03] They brought nothing with them, those who owed to others. They had no resources in themselves.

Such went unto David, those that were discontented.

Are we content with the things of this world? Are we making ourselves cozy?

Are we, as it were, putting on our slippers in this world and are prepared to settle down in comfort?

Or do we feel that really we are pilgrims, that this place is not our home, that there's nothing for us here, there's nothing to sustain us or comfort us? It was such that went unto David.

And the wonderful thing is that we read here that they gathered themselves not so much as a band together. They didn't look one to another, but they gathered themselves unto him. [00:06:05] And he made, he became a captain over them.

And there were about 400 men. You know, if those took a little time to look at themselves, they would feel isolated.

They would feel alone.

But when they were drawn to that man David, the consequence was that they found themselves in a company of 400.

It might not be very many compared to those outside, but 400 is quite a company. And when they're in the presence of one who is a captain over them, well, what a comfort. What fellowship there was, there must have been in that cave, a place of refuge. I would like to use these little verses just to give some atmosphere, some colour to the [00:07:11] verses which we read in the Gospel of John. As we

read there that they made him a supper.

I feel that what the Lord would have us be occupied with in these days, when there is much to remind us of our discontentment and our debt and our distress, is that we might be occupied with him.

And there's a certain cost, isn't there, to be identified with him. These 400, they left the place where the eyes of the world was on, they left that place, the place where people would normally dwell, and they went to the cave. [00:08:03] And there's a sense in which, more than a sense, it's the truth, that when we gather to the Lord Jesus, there's that character of reproach, that we're outside of those things which the world considers to be of value.

But we gather unto him, why? Because we recognise in ourselves that we have nothing, and that he is everything. We would rather be, as it were, in the cave with David, than enjoying all the facilities and the comforts of the world. And so it is, in an outward way, that we do this every Lord's Day. It should be true of us, day by day, shouldn't it? In characters, our brother has been challenging us, even at work, with our neighbours and at home, we should always be conscious that in being gathered unto the Lord Jesus, it's [00:09:01] a place of reproach.

The world doesn't understand. The world looks on it and shakes their head. They cannot see the value of being gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus. But that little company, having been gathered to David, they knew the value of his presence. He became a captain over them. And those of us who have been drawn to the person of the Lord Jesus, we know, and that's all that matters. That's all that matters, is what the Lord feels about us. It's his appreciation of us that matters, not our own and not of the world. Well, this wonderful place of Bethany, a place where, perhaps of all places, the Lord felt at home.

What sweet fellowship must have been enjoyed in that place? [00:10:05] We're not told much about it. We had reason to look into the meaning of the name Bethany, and one of the happiest explanations I found was that it means house of response, and I thought this was rather lovely for it to be a place where there were those that appreciate the Lord, that there's a response.

We see it, our brothers reminded us of it in what he's just taken up, of Mary's act of this spikenard, a response to the presence of the Lord Jesus. There he was in Bethany, and there was this heartfelt response, and it was in Mary's heart.

We were familiar with the passage. She anointed the feet and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the [00:11:09] odor of the ointment.

When we gather around the person of the Lord Jesus on the occasion of the supper, it's our appreciations of the Lord Jesus that rise up as an odor to God.

It's not our intellectual ability to frame nice-sounding words of praise and worship to God, but it's the simple, heartfelt affection to Christ that rises up.

As we address the Lord Jesus, as perhaps only in the silence of our hearts, the quietness of our hearts, we think of him.

Well, that rises unseen to those around, but it rises up to God as a sweet-smelling odor. [00:12:08] The

house was filled with the odor of the ointment. I feel very much that in our occupation this week with the truth, the foundational, fundamental truth of the resurrection, particularly of the Lord Jesus, and all that follows from it, that what we are to be occupied with is the person of the Lord Jesus himself. We read that the Lord's appreciation of Mary's act was that what she did was in view of the fact that he wouldn't always be with them. Well, he's not with us physically now, but we're given that wonderful promise, aren't we? Where the twos and the threes are gathered unto him, he says, there am I in the midst [00:13:01] of them.

And to be conscious of it, never mind those outside, the appreciation of the world is summed up in Judas' response.

Why wasn't this ointment sold?

Why wasn't it used for good? We're told that Judas had no concern for the poor, but this is exactly the world's response, isn't it?

As they see us occupied on the Lord's day with the things of the Lord, they look down on us.

It's a place of reproach.

In their hearts, they think, well, what good are those doing? What possible good does it do to go to a place and to remember the Lord in that way? Wouldn't they be better occupying themselves with social work, with helping improve conditions?

[00:14:04] Well, their hearts are like Judas'.

They're not really interested in the poor. They're not really interested in the social conditions of the world. What do most people do on the Lord's day?

Have an extra hour or two in bed, mow the lawn, wash the car? They're no more occupied with social work than those of us who are occupied with the things of the Lord. But we don't do it for the response of the world. Let us bear the reproach of the world. Let us be conscious that being in the presence of the Lord Jesus is worth all the adulation and the glory of those around. Well, the Lord would have us, I believe, be more and more occupied with him, and there's a cost.

There is a cost.

[00:15:02] Those around us, they do not understand. Their assessment of it is as Judas'.

But we know that when we go to the supper on the Lord's day morning, that the Lord is there.

We might only be two or three. Isn't it wonderful how God anticipated the conditions of our day? He could have said, where a hundred or two hundred are gathered, there am I in the midst of them.

But no, where two or three, the very smallest testimony that's possible, two or three, even in such conditions, does the Lord deign to be in the presence of those of us who are found in such conditions. We should be very thankful in these days of difficulty and departure that the Lord's mind was in matters in such a way.

[00:16:04] Well, may we be helped to set aside really the things of this world, not to be concerned with the assessment of the world.

We know that as we go unto the Lord Jesus, as we're occupied with him, that there's a value that God attaches to that response, isn't it, to the Lord's desire, do this in remembrance of me. And we're told too, aren't we, in the fourth of John, that the Father seeketh such true worshippers who worship him in spirit and in truth. All that we do is a response of the heart. It's not in obedience, it's not out of duty, it's not out of a sense of habit, although it may be, but it ought to be a real heartfelt sense of each one of us in response, that [00:17:05] we recognize as these of David, that his brethren and all his father's house, when they heard it, they went down thither to him.

And it struck me, you know, in this place of Bethany, we're told in verse one that in Bethany was where Lazarus, which was, which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. Can you think of how that must have characterized that little house? There was one who had been dead and the one who raised him from the dead was with them.

What response must that have generated? Well, it's true of us. We're in that condition as we are gathered in the presence of the Lord Jesus every Lord's Day morning.

[00:18:02] We were dead, we were dead in trespasses and sins, but the Lord has made us alive. We're in the presence of dead, what we recall is death. The emblems before us remind us that the Lord went into death. And surely these thoughts would characterize the response, just as Lazarus, just as that house was filled with the overwhelming sense of wonder and affection to the Lord in relation to what he had done to Lazarus.

They were able to enjoy the company of Lazarus once more.

We're told that of Lazarus, it was the one whom Jesus loved. And when we're gathered in his presence, we're conscious that he loved us. And these things must surely unite in causing a welling up of affection and response to him.

[00:19:09] My desire, although feebly put, dear brethren, is that our occupation this week with the wonder and the truth of the resurrection, that we might be more conscious of just how wonderful a thing it is as we gather together on every occasion. We might just be two or three. We may, in need, there might be two of our gatherings, this wonderful little phrase that the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.