

# Small Beautiful Things You Can Do For Jesus

*John 11:55-12:11, Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9*

Good morning, men! So I was at the gym, and at my gym all of the dumbbells are in front of a giant mirrored wall, so I had picked up a couple of dumbbells and was doing dumbbell front raises. Well, there's a row of chairs and benches behind where I was standing, and I noticed when I picked up the two dumbbells that I was partially obstructing the view of a guy who was sitting in one of the chairs. He was one of those kinds of guys who are very tense when he's in the gym. You know the kind of guy, they get all amped up and there's a certain intensity about them. I appreciate that, I respect that, and as I was doing my dumbbell front raises, I noticed that this guy had not begun his set of dumbbell bicep curls, and he was getting more and more agitated as I was going through my reps. I knew, because I am aware of my environment, unlike a lot of guys, that I was standing in his way so he could not watch his form in the mirror. I responded to that out of a part of me that, at least at that moment, was not fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ! It would have been so easy for me to take a step to the right, but he was so agitated that I kind of thought I would just tweak him a little bit, so I just continued to finish up my set. When I was done and I walked by him, he was practically growling, and he muttered, "You don't have a clue." I said, "Excuse me?" And then he said, "You don't have a clue!" And I probably then said some things I shouldn't have said. A, I shouldn't have said them because he was pretty amped up, and B he was a lot bigger than me. I walked away, it didn't come to anything more than words, and as I was walking away, I said, "Oh my gosh! God put you in this gym for a reason. You're not here by random circumstance, and you have committed yourself to be a witness for Christ in this gym. Get back over there and apologize." So I did, I turned around and I walked back and said, "Look, I'm really sorry, I was way out of line. I'm a Christian, and I don't usually talk like that." And he said, "Yeah, I was a little over the top myself." He introduced himself as Mark, and so I made a new friend. Postscript, two weeks later I see Mark in the gym again, and he comes up to me and he said, "Are you a Christian author?" I said, "I think you've got the wrong guy!"

## **A Dinner Party To Honor Jesus**

Well, that is related to our message this morning, it'll show up in just a moment, but first let's do a shout out. We have a new group joining us today. Nigel Mahoney has put together a group that's meeting in his house in Frederick, MD, six guys at various stages in their walk with God. So I wonder if you would join me in welcoming these guys to the Man in the Mirror Men's Bible Study. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're glad to have you with us!

So the title of today's message is this, *Small Beautiful Things You Can Do For Jesus*, unlike my gym experience. If you're like me and most Christian guys, as you mature, you have this growing sense of gratitude as you begin to plumb the depths of the meanings of grace, God's love, and his forgiveness. You have just seen him work in your life so many times, and you develop an ache, a literal ache, to do outward acts, as brother Lawrence was saying, to mediate this ache, this longing that you have, to show your gratitude to God. So we're going to look at a story this morning where something like this takes place. It shows how average guys can actually do things that express their gratitude and appreciation to God, and honor Jesus Christ and help spread his Gospel. The story we're going to look at this morning is a dinner party that takes place to honor Jesus, and I'm going to actually show you two versions of this story. Let's a look at the story as it appears in Matthew 26:6 first. This is now the beginning of the final week of the earthly life of Jesus, and notice we're in Matthew 26 which has 28 chapters, so Matthew will

not say a lot about that final week and post resurrection appearances of Jesus. But in John you'll see it is only up to chapter 12, and there are only 21 chapters in John. So most of John takes place in the last week of Jesus. Just a sidebar, verse 6:

While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man named Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked.

When the disciples saw this small beautiful thing that this woman was doing for Jesus, what was their response? They thought that it was a waste. They thought that this good deed was being wasted.

Reading on:

... "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

That has the right sound to it, doesn't it? In fact, Jesus has just talked about the importance of taking care of the poor, and so the disciples are responding to that. But look what Jesus said in verse 10:

Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.

We don't always know the full impact of the good and beautiful things that we do. I'm sure this woman didn't really understand it herself, but Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." She has done this small beautiful thing.

Now if you would turn over to John 12. I want to show you the other version of this, which is a much more intimate account of the exchange. So it's almost time for the Jewish Passover, it says at the end of John 11. People are looking for Jesus, the chief priests and Pharisees have given orders to arrest Jesus, and chapter 12 verse 1 says this:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany...

Now in the previous passage, we didn't look at it, but a few verses before the story, it was two days before the Passover when this event took place, this beautiful thing. So Jesus arrives, and he's staying at the home of Simon the Leper, that's what we just learned in the previous passage, and it says:

... Jesus arrived at Bethany where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner party was given in Jesus' honor.

So what was the purpose of this dinner party? It was to bring honor to Jesus. What are the different encounters we have? My encounters with guys at the gym, or gals at the gym, the purpose of these from my perspective is to bring honor to Jesus. They were having dinner to honor Jesus. Why were they honoring Jesus? Because he had raised Lazarus from the dead. At the end of this passage, which we will not look at, we find that a lot of people, a crowd gathered after this occasion because they not only wanted to see Jesus, but they wanted to see Lazarus! They had heard about this incredible miracle, and

these miracles are part of the proofs of the deity of Jesus. So they were there to honor Jesus because of Lazarus.

Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Remember in chapter 26 of Matthew it said that a woman anointed him, and here we learn the identity of the woman. Verse 3:

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, and expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair...

So she put some on his head, we know from the previous passage, and put some also on his feet and then wiped his feet with her hair. This has happened before; an immoral woman in the home of a Pharisee has anointed the feet of Jesus, and then wept over them and wiped his feet with her hair. And then it goes on, it says:

... And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

We are the aroma of God; to those who are perishing, the aroma of death. To those who are being saved, the fragrance of life. Verse 4:

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

So Judas charges this woman with wrong doing, he objects to it, the disciples object to it. He scolds her, and what is the charge? That you've wasted this good deed, that you've wasted this money. It's been my experience, and I'm sure it's been your experience too, that there is no shortage of people who are willing to tell you what you should and shouldn't do in your leadings to serve God. So that's basically what's going on here. They're basically scolding this woman. Look at what Jesus says though, he says in verse 7:

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was meant that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial..."

Now this word save, it means guard, it can mean to be like a warden, but basically this woman had saved this perfume, or somehow gotten a hold of this perfume and she was given custody of this perfume to save it for this thing that Jesus called beautiful, and elsewhere he has called a good deed in the Matthew and Mark passages. "What she has done for me is a good deed. She has done a good deed. You call it a waste, but what she has done is a good thing." So she was given custody of this so that she could anoint me for my burial. "You will always have the poor among you," he says, "but you will not always have me."

So, the conclusions that are relevant to us today. The first conclusion is that this was no random event. This didn't just happen, it had been sovereignly orchestrated that she would have custody of this perfume for this occasion even though she probably didn't know it. Men, you have been given custody of things, too. It might be that you have a special skill that God has allowed you to develop, a competence. It might be that you may have certain spiritual gifts that the world desperately needs right

now. Maybe gifts of encouragement or gifts of wisdom. Or maybe it's that you have time to give to people in service. It could be driving somebody to their cancer appointment to get chemotherapy, or you have resources. Perhaps you have finances and there are people all around us who need them, and you have been given custody of these resources. In every encounter you have with people, these are not random events that are taking place, these are events that have been orchestrated and you've been given custody of these resources, these skills, even these relationships. You've been given custody of these things so that you would be able to do some beautiful thing for somebody.

Hopefully we are aware of ourselves and our surroundings, and we do know the things that God has entrusted to us. Now it is required that to whomever has been given a trust, he must prove faithful 1 Corinthians 4:2. You know what that is, and you don't want to waste it. But here's my experience, even in myself. I'll say, "You know, what can I offer? What do I have to offer? I'm not the preacher, this is the preacher's job. I can't do some great thing for God." Guess what? What this passage is all about is that it's not necessarily about doing a great thing for God. Often the greatest things that have happened in our own lives are what other people would think are the smallest things. That word of encouragement that somebody gave us that absolutely came at the perfect moment that transformed the way we were looking at a major problem! So, the first conclusion is that this was certainly no random encounter. Verse 7 again says it was meant that she should have custody of this thing for this time.

The second conclusion is that this is by no means a waste! The disciples thought that this was being wasted, and I think what we can take away from this text is that any good deed that you do, no matter how small or insignificant or even appearing to be wasteful it is, it's not when done for the glory of God, to bring honor to Jesus, which is why they were having this dinner party, which is why she has done this. Her motivation was to honor Christ, and so anything that you and I do today, this week, this month, this year, for the rest of our lives, anything that we do motivated by a desire to bring honor to Jesus Christ, no matter how small it is, it is not a waste and it is a beautiful thing! Anybody who wants to tweak you about it, you tell them to come see me and I'll set them straight! ... No, don't do that.

This is the Big Idea for the day: **Since no encounter is ever random, no good deed is ever wasted.** No encounter that you and I ever have is ever random. My little tête-à-tête with Mark, that was not random! I operated out of the flesh; God redeemed that. Actually, my theory is that God is going to do more in that relationship because I lost it than if I hadn't. Maybe I'm just playing word games here, but you also know that when you have a conflict with somebody and you resolve it, usually the bond with that person becomes stronger not weaker. The Big Idea today: **Since no encounter is ever random, no good deed is ever wasted.** That's what this little text is telling us.

### **No Encounter Is Ever Random**

So let's just talk about this idea that no encounter is ever random. What is the main thing that is always happening in the world? The main thing that is always happening in the world is this: God is sovereignly orchestrating all human events and encounters, even the ones that seem random. God is sovereignly orchestrating all human events to bring us into a right relationship with him and each other. That's what's going on in the world. We know from scripture when you distill it down, loving God, a right relationship with God, loving each other, a right relationship with each other, and we know that God is great, God is good, he is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, omnibenevolent, omni-everything; because we know that, then we know that God is in charge. We know that he had given this woman custody of this perfume for a future event. He was sovereignly orchestrating this whole thing! This was not some random thing! This story is not in the Bible because it was some sort of random encounter.

This was something that God was sovereignly orchestrating to bring them and us in a right relationship with him and each other.

So today, when you are out there doing what you do, just remember that every encounter that you have today, every encounter with every person that you have today, whether in traffic or in a restaurant, at the office, at the house, wherever it is, every encounter that you have today is an opportunity to do something beautiful. Some small beautiful thing for Jesus.

Another gym story. So there's a trainer at the gym, he's been working there for about a year. He was finishing up his education at UCF, and I struck up a relationship with him. I am fairly confident that he does not yet know the Lord, I could be wrong about that, but the language forms indicate the unawareness of spiritual things. So by the time I got down to giving him a copy of *Man Alive* and then a copy of *Is Christianity for You*, I found out he wants to be a writer among other things. So that was a point of contact, and then we built a little relationship around that. He's getting ready to graduate, so I said, "What do you want to do for a career?" He said, "I want to work for the Orlando Magic." I've heard that about a hundred and fifty times, I mean who wouldn't want to? But, the Holy Spirit prompted me, and gave me a desire to want to help. Now there are circumstances that contributed to that. Pat Williams, when he came to town we became acquainted, we've done a few projects together, we're neighbors, and I know him quite well. So I was thinking, well I have one shot that I could help this young man with. So that particular day I said, "Bring me your resume the next time, or email it to me." I wanted to see how he presented himself, and it was amazingly well! So long story short, I contacted Pat Williams at the Orlando Magic and got them together and they talked, and I don't know if anything will come of that or not, but was it salvific? I don't know maybe. Was it redemptive? Yeah, absolutely redemptive, and do you think it is something that will make a difference in the history of the world? Well you know what, I'm not sure everything has to make a difference in the history of the world, but I'm pretty sure it has a good chance to make a difference in the history of his world. It was just a small beautiful thing to do, and I did it because the Holy Spirit prompted me to do it. That's how it works!

When you see a man at the interstate ramp and your spirit is closed to ten of those guys in a row, then that's fine. But on the eleventh time when your spirit is opened, listen! I saw a guy one day on the ramp I take, and I've seen hundreds of them there, but my favorite was on Christmas Eve, a guy going across the intersection bobbing and weaving with a sign that says, "Why lie, I need beer." But this eleventh guy for me, and this was recent, he had a sign that said, "I'm hungry, please help." On that occasion the spirit prompted me, instead having my spirit closed to guys that I feel are professional beggars not taking advantage of the social services available. That's prejudice on my part I'm sure, but that's just the way I think. So this day I was just wide open to this guy, so I gave him probably more money than I should have, but it was something that was a small beautiful thing for me that day. I did it to honor Jesus. Why? Because of this reason; no encounter is ever really random, and therefore no good deed is ever really wasted! That was not wasted! Now, did he waste money? He could have, but did I waste the good deed? Absolutely not!

### **No Good Deed Is Ever Wasted**

Not only is no encounter ever random, but no good deed is ever wasted. Wherever the Gospel is preached, what this woman has done will be talked about in honor of her. That little good deed sure wasn't wasted! Here we are, two thousand years later talking about it! That's pretty amazing! It's like the two copper coins that the widow put in and Jesus said she's put in more than all of the other people. All of the rich people.

So how do we honor Jesus today, because we don't have Jesus with us in the physical sense anymore? In fact, he said. "... that you will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me," so we don't have Jesus today. So how do we honor Jesus today? Jesus said if you see somebody who is hungry and feed them, or if you see somebody who is thirsty and you give them something to drink, or if you see somebody who is naked and you give them clothes, or if you see somebody who is in prison and you visit them, or if you see somebody who is sick and you take care of them; when you've done it to the least of these, you've done it to me. So one of the ways that we honor Jesus today is by taking those people that are created in his image, especially the least among them, and we do the things that Jesus would do if he were here. Instead, he has chosen to use us to do these beautiful things, all the beautiful things that Jesus did he has now delegated to us. He has given you custody of something and he wants you to understand that when you have an encounter, it is not random, and when you are prompted by the spirit to do a good deed, it will not be wasted. It will bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ, in big ways maybe, but probably in a small way.

One more story and then we're done. On Monday I had lunch with my father-in-law, and one of the things that I consider to be in my custody is the willingness to engage people with compassion. The gift of encouragement. So anyway, I love finding out the stories of those who wait on us, and so I said to our waitress, "How are you today?" She said, "Oh I'm doing all right..." And she was on the verge of tears. I said, "Oh I'm sorry, what's going on?" She said, "Well, we had a flood in our parking lot in front of the restaurant yesterday and my car won't start." She was completely overwhelmed by this. For me, a car that won't start would be a minor inconvenience, but when I found out she was a single mom who has never been married because the guy was such a bad act you don't want him in the lives of your children, and you have an eight year old boy and a six year old boy, your mother died when you were fourteen, and your father has never done anything decent, and you have a twenty year old brother who is on the verge of following his father's footsteps, and then to top it off your car won't start and you're working for tips, it becomes a big deal! So I said, "I'm so sorry, when we say grace over our lunch we'll say a prayer for you too." She said, "I would really appreciate that, thank you so much." So, I'm leaving some things out, but she went away and brought back the food, set it down, and she was about five or six steps away, and I said, "Would you like to join us in prayer?" So I prayed for her situation and circumstances, and she seemed to feel encouraged. I did give her a copy of a book that she could give her brother, and a relationship had begun. I don't know where that will go, it may go no further than that, but it's very possible I'll have more opportunities to do small beautiful things for this woman. That's what it's all about! And the reason I know that is because of the Big Idea today! **Since no encounter is ever random, then no good deed is ever wasted.** Let's pray.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our dearest father, Lord, there's a good man inside each of us that wants to get out. He's coiled up, he's pressed down by the worries and pressures of life. Everybody's like that, the people we encounter today, they are coiled up, too, and they want to let that better person out. So, I pray that we would be the releasers, that we would be the ones who would do the small beautiful things that bring honor to Jesus, in whose name we pray, and everybody says amen!