

In remembrance of her

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 0 0] as we come to this 14th chapter then of Mark's in the Gospel we have a slight sort of flashback going on here because the chapter begins after two days was the feast of the Passover and of unleavened bread and the chief priest and the scribe sought how they might take him by craft and put him to death but they said not on the feast day lest there be an uproar of the people and then it's as though that particular narrative should carry on into verse 10 and 11 Judas Iscariot one of the twelve went unto the chief priest to betray him unto them and when they heard it they were glad and promised to give him money and he sought how he might conveniently betray him and the verses in between 3 to 9 well why do you need to say that's a flashback the reason is we can't say it's just two days before the Passover because we have to take God's word as a whole and one bit informs the other and in John chapter 12 we're told that this particular incident with the woman who anointed Jesus took place as John 12 tells us six days before the Passover he 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 now that's one possible way of taking it that this is a flashback from four days earlier in the Mark account or you might take it in John 12 that Jesus just happened to come to Bethany six days before the Passover and then it was four days later that they made him a particular supper where Martha served and Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat in which case it would tie in perfectly but you know there's not really a contradiction there's just two possible ways of understanding it either this is a flashback from six days before the Passover from this from verse 14 verse 1 where it says two days before and then we'll be counting something that's six days before or Jesus arrives at Bethany six days beforehand and then four days later two days before the Passover there is this particular feast that he's at where the woman anoints him that they are the same incident is not really in doubt this incident is recounted by Matthew in chapter 26 by Mark here in chapter 14 and by Luke by John in chapter 12

Luke doesn't have this incident but he has a sort of strangely similar incident in chapter 7 of Luke's account and some people have said no no there are two completely different incidents because you look at the details and they're quite different the woman is in Luke chapter 7 she's definitely a sinner a notorious sinner and she she weeps over Jesus' feet and she washes them with her feet and wipes them with her hair and so on and then anoints his feet whereas here it says that you know she anoints his head and so on so it must be completely different and the message is different it's not about waste which the disciples don't like about the fact that it could have been sold for 300 pence which was a year's wages for a labourer and given to the poor in Luke 7 the message is about the forgiveness of sin and those who have been forgiven much love much and so on so it's two completely different incidents some people say that is entirely possible its suggestion would be that it is in fact the same incident of which we have different details given one reason for saying this is that where there are two similar incidents in the gospel narrative somebody somewhere records them both take as an example the feeding of the 5000 which is recorded in every single gospel account it's the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in every single gospel account

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John but there is also the incident with the feeding of the 4000 a short while later when instead of 12 baskets taken up or 7 baskets taken up different word for the baskets different kind of baskets it's not 5 loaves and 2 fish it's just you know a small fish and 7 barley loaves or whatever that are there that are available and the number of baskets they take up as we say is different the number of people is different but if they weren't recounted more than once you could think oh it's just the 5000 or the 4000 it's just they got mixed up about their arithmetic but no they didn't because in both Matthew and in Mark the 5000 and the 4000 are both distinctly recorded as separate incidents with all their separate details where this incident of the woman anointing Jesus is concerned this is only recorded once in each gospel account

Matthew Mark Mark and John have a very similar incident almost exactly the same in each case though little details are different Luke 7 it's quite different but it is so similar can we really say that these are two completely different incidents and Matthew Mark and John just missed it completely and Luke has got it but he doesn't have the incident in Bethany let's look at some of the facts I mean I don't expect you to keep your fingers in all these different four places in the gospel accounts but let's look at the facts of it the venue for what it takes place in Matthew it's in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper that's exactly the same as it is in Mark 14 here in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper in John 12 it's just in Bethany we're not told whose house it said you might take it that it was in Martha and Mary's house but it doesn't actually say that it just says they made a feast for him and Martha served just as you might sort of help a friend or a neighbour by serving or bringing some of the food to a feast or whatever in Luke 7 it says it's in a Pharisee's house it's a Pharisee's house who invited him to eat with him and the Pharisee just happens to be called Simon doesn't specify he's called

[6 : 23] Simon the leper but a Pharisee called Simon in Matthew Mark and John Matthew it's just a woman we don't have a name we don't have any identity about her who anoints him in John we are specifically told it is Mary of Bethany the sister of Martha and Lazarus who does this anointing in Luke it says it's a woman in the city who was a sinner now that means a notorious sinner it probably means a prostitute we don't know that for certain but it's likely that she was someone whose morals were notorious in the city now if that is the case Luke places it during Jesus' Galilean ministry but he doesn't specify with the incident that it is in Galilee Bethany's not in Galilee it's not a way up in the north it's down in the south very near to Jerusalem but Luke doesn't say what it actually happens but he just places the narrative in the midst of Jesus'

Galilean ministry this woman in Luke's account weeps over Jesus' feet she weeps at his feet as he's reclining at the table and she washes his feet with her tears so copious are they and then having undone her long hair which would be shocking in that culture she wipes his feet with her hair and then she anoints them with the ointments and this is a shocking thing to all those around but Jesus just accepts her ministrations and shows how much she is showing love and devotion to heaven in Matthew and Mark there's an alabaster box of ointment it is poured on his head it's specified here in Mark that it is spikenard very costly very precious and here in Mark which is full of little remember little eyewitness accounts and details it says that she broke the box she broke whether it was a pottery box or whatever it was made of she broke it now what happens if you break a sealed box it means you can never seal it up again it means that she's not just going to put a wee few drops on Jesus that would be the normal thing if you were anointing somebody just to show respect or love you'd anoint them usually their head just put a few drops especially if something is so precious as this you know this is

John tells us it's a pound of ointment that's spiked now that's 16 ounces 16 ounces cost 300 tenths which was a year's wages for a day labourer a year's wages now if you think that when you are in work or if you are still in work what would a year's wages be for you I don't know what it is but you know yourself think what a year's wages would be and then think of buying 16 ounces of something of anything regardless of what it might be 16 ounces of anything and paying a year's wages for it now that makes that anything whatever it may be excessively precious and expensive and this woman as we are told in Mark's account she breaks the box in other words it's never getting put back together again it's like breaking a pottery vase or whatever you can't put the pieces back and if it contained any kind of liquid or oil you can't put it back in the jar if you break it you intend the whole lot to be poured out whenever you're doing it in this instance on Jesus' head and his feet well we see on his feet as well it specifies just the head here in Mark's account of the gospel she broke the box and poured it on his head a year's wages for a day laborer poured out in one instance and John tells us that the odor filled the house the scent the scent filled the house as well it might of course we don't know how large or small the particular box may be but to contain a pound of this find one it's probably not that huge a box but it's broken and it's all poured out in Jesus and the house smells of it it reeks of this sweet heavy scent of the spikenard remember how in the song of Solomon it says while the king sitteth at his table my spikenard sendeth forth the smell that of and here we have in verse 3 as he sat at me as the king of kings sits at his table this woman who we know from the other instance to be

Mary of Bethany pours out her spikenard very precious break the box pour it on his head what makes these comparisons interesting in a sense you might think why does he give us all this endless detail about this one says this and this one says that and so on it's because if you put them all together and the likelihood that they are in fact recounting one incident that it means that Mary of Bethany the house where Jesus stayed when he was lodging when he went in and out from Jerusalem was the house of a woman of notorious former reputation it means that Mary was a converted let's just say sinner a converted woman with a reputation and a past which shocked all those in the house where she was when Jesus came and ate in the house and she wept on his feet and anointed his feet and his head with his precious ointment it puts in a different context not a different light but a different context the fact that when you know after the incident in Luke 7 it's after that remember that

Jesus is going for the meal at the house of Martha and Mary at the end of Luke 10 where it says Martha was fussing about and serving and Mary just sat at Jesus feet just soaking it all up she was so taken up with him that she didn't even think to help her sister she wasn't being lazy she wasn't being sort of uncaring it's just she was absorbed in Jesus she became as it were almost in a positive sense obsessed single-mindedly obsessed with this man who alone seemed to be the means of her salvation that kind of devotion which could wash away all the stain all the sin of her past it makes the Mary and Martha incident seen in a fresh new light it means that if this is the home to which Jesus is coming in Bethany it might help to explain why is Mary engaged in this particular kind of traffic nobody chooses it as a career when they leave school why do people end up in that kind of job because economic necessity because they can't do anything else they've got a brother who is sick a brother who we never read of was able to work or do a trade he was sick and then he died and Jesus raised him from the dead of course who is providing for the family

[13 : 40] Martha clearly is somebody gifted with domestic skills and abilities and works like a Trojan but who's going to provide any money how are they going to live is it all that surprising if the one who is probably the younger of the two is reduced to perhaps the only means of economic sustenance that might have been available to her we can't stand in judgment if men were virtuous there would be no such trade plied by women it is that demand of sin which drives such a market and allowing for the possibility we may be looking at two different incidents if as is likely it's the same incident with different details this means that Mary of Bethany is the woman who is the sinner in the city if that were the case which is most likely on the evidence it's not definite and I can't say to you this is definitely what the scripture says but on balance by comparison it suggests that and that doesn't make her look any worse if she comes to the Lord she has her sin forgiven she has it washed away she weeps over his feet she anoints his feet and his head with the ointment she knows her sin is forgiven and because she has been forgiven much she loves much and that's what Jesus teaches to this

Simon the leper obviously not an ongoing leper he must have formerly been a leper who's now cleansed and forgiven and healed and he's now become a pharisee so Simon the leper Simon the Pharisee where Jesus is this is the response of Mary to someone who is able to forgive her sin and give her a fresh start and this is what we find here now on the feast day four days presumably before the feast being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper as he sat there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment and of spikenard very precious and we've already looked at the kind of cost we're looking at and she broke the box and poured it on his head and there was some that had indignation with themselves and said why was this waste of the oil been made for it might have been sold for more than 300 bucks we could have sold this for a year's wages if she wanted to just chuck it away she could have sold it we could have given it to the poor we could have done some good with it we could have helped some people and this is

Jesus response let her alone why are you you have the poor with you always he doesn't mean by that the poor don't really matter you can do that at any time what he means is if you were really concerned about the poor you could help them any time there'll be plenty of opportunity for that there'll be plenty of days when you can take anything that's in our purse Judas has got the bag you can take the money and you can give it to the poor any time this has been done for me just now and I won't always be here with you what she has done she's anointed my body to the burying beforehand now certainly we can say this woman didn't know that's what she was doing she is just pouring out devotion on Jesus she is just showing him how much she loves him she is just showing how much she means she's taking a pound of this precious ointment the most precious possession that she will own a year's wages for a day laborer soaked up in 16 ounces of something so precious and whoosh there it goes in a water now that's the kind of devotion she is lavishing on Jesus that's how central he is to her heart to her love there is nothing more precious than Jesus it's what she is saying with this action that she doesn't speak a word she doesn't say oh

Jesus I want to tell you how much I love you oh this is what I do here you have no idea how long I spend in prayer every day oh Lord I do this I do that I do the next thing not a word in Luke chapter 7 we read of her tears we don't read that she speaks a word we only read that Jesus tells her that her sins are forgiven and here we don't read that she speaks a word either just that her actions speak more loudly than anything and Jesus says whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world this also that she had done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her and of course that's exactly what we're doing tonight we're talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ and we're talking about the devotion and love of this woman who silently makes the statements of worship she has prepared my body I've come beforehand to anoint my body to the buried what is Jesus saying he's saying look I'm going to die soon if the disciples hadn't been getting it before they're certainly getting it now he keeps talking about it

I'm going to die she's anointing my body for the burial I won't be here long you've got the poor always with you you won't always have me if ever there was a time for such lavish outpouring of devotion this is it maybe she should have done it maybe she shouldn't have done it but she has done it and because she has done it I'm taking it and accepting it she has brought a good work on me she has given everything that she had for me she had done what she could that's a lovely phrase it's unique to mark she had done what she could she has come a forehand to anoint my body to the burial now remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthians verse 12 if there be first a willing mind it is accepted according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not in other words God isn't concerned with what you should have done what you might have done and what you didn't do what you couldn't do because you didn't have enough he's concerned to accept what you do have and what you can give when we are called to give an account of our lives the Lord will ask us to give an account of what he did give us none of what he didn't if somebody only lives to be 25

[20:11] God is not going to say why didn't you do this when you were 57 why didn't you do this when you were 43 you know why didn't you take that opportunity and do this it well because I never had those years if somebody's a millionaire God is going to require more of them of what they did with their funds than if somebody's a pauper he is going to examine he is going to judge according to what we have done with what we had what he gave us all that this woman all that Mary of Bethany had was this box appointment precious spikenard worth a year's wages and she pours it all on Jesus there is nothing greater nobody greater than this man who has transformed her life just as if we would let him he could and would transform each and every one of our lives because most of our sins are not public and notorious that doesn't mean that they are less sinful than the sins of this woman it just means that everybody knew what her particular sin was and they knew what she did and they probably knew why she had to do it economic necessity some people would look down on her for that

I don't quite know why unless we're going to judge all of ourselves and say what kind of society reduces people to that most of us our sins are not public most of us we can get away with a reasonable front a reasonable face to the world and although everyone say oh yes of course we're all sinners nobody actually knows the particular ones that we are mostly guilty of they can't look into our hearts they can't see into our minds just as well but we are guilty nevertheless her sins are out in the public face the public domain ours for the most part are not but they are there nevertheless now those are the sins which will keep you out of heaven unless they are washed away in the blood of christ those are the sins that will drag you and me down to hell unless we are set free through the blood of christ there is no sin so deep so dangerous so died so heinous but the blood of christ can cleanse us from all sin there is nothing that you can be guilty of that christ blood cannot cleanse you from if you will come to him by faith but having received that forgiveness it changes you it makes you a different person it gives you a new life it gives you a new as it were identity in christ your life begins as it were fresh and if the old life seemed brilliant to you that might not seem very appealing but even if the old life does seem brilliant to you it's not going to last forever and it's not going to look very impressive before god's judgment throw what we need is new life in christ this is what this woman had received and this is almost certainly it's not it's not an attempt to buy jesus favor it is a responsive love to what he has already done for her it is the response of faith the response of grace as he sat at me there came a woman having this alabaster box upon her and she break the box poured out the whole lot poured it on his head if we take the details of the other gospel accounts we recognize that it says in john's account for example when mary who specified there she anointed the feet of jesus it says that she wiped his feet with her hair which is a detail which we also have in luke 7 about the woman who was the sinner she wept over his feet and then she dried his feet with her hair and then she anointed them most women in palestine first century you distinguish between a girl and a married woman in the sense that a girl had her hair down long and a married woman when she got married she bound her hair up so it was bound up as some commentators put it now to undo your hair in public to undo your hair in any context other than the marital bedroom would be considered shocking apparently she lets down her hair in public and she uses it to wipe Jesus feet she's not doing anything sexual in that sense it's nothing you can't say inappropriate because it would shock everybody but it's not sexual but it is sensual it is that which she is the only thing she has she's got no towel she's got no cloth she's got her hair it's not something that somebody has put into her hand it's part of her that she is using she's anointing him with what she has she's using as it were herself to wipe his feet to dry his feet to anoint his feet washing them with her tears anointing

them with this precious ointment and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment John tells us it is also John that says it was Judas Iscariot who objected most to the to this opposing waste because he wanted the money for himself this is taken as one possible motive for Judas betraying Jesus and that's what we have to have to recognize also from verse 10 onwards Judas is Galat 1 of the 12 went under the chief priest to betray him onto that it has to be said that if Judas's motive was money and only Matthew specifies the amount of money that he got it's only Matthew that tells us 30 pieces of silver the other gospel accounts they say yes they agreed to give him money but they don't see how much Matthew specifies the 30 pieces of silver and he also specifies the fulfilment of a prophecy from Ezekiah and the purchasing of the potter's field and so on and sees more of the fulfilment of

Old Testament prophecy in it but nobody else specifies the 30 pieces of silver 30 pieces of silver isn't that much it's not what you know Judas wanted money he could have asked the chief priest for 300 pieces of gold and they would have paid him they would have given everything they wanted because they wanted Jesus but they didn't have a clue how to do it how they might take him by craft and put him to death that's their plan but they said not on the feast day lest there be an uproar of the people and when he goes to them when they heard it they were glad and promised to give him money that means that they were at a loss to know how to do it they wouldn't say that's okay we've got a plan already we don't trust you any way you're one of his disciples they didn't say well okay if we need you we'll come back you know they were glad they jumped at the chance because they didn't have a clue how they were going to do this and they didn't have to approach Judas we're told explicitly here verse 10

Judas is going to the twelve went to the chief priests they didn't seek him out he went to them whatever his motive was it may have been money but if it was he sold himself really short some people of course they're just money and said they love to finger it they love to be you know miser just to count it up and put it away in a drawer in a pocket and take it out and then look at it again and then count it as a certain fascination fund if that was the case that might be one reason why he settled for so little this was perhaps his weakness but if he really wanted money he could have named this price and you know that's not the sort of price you would name the likelihood is that Judas had hoped that Jesus would bring in some kind of political temporal Israelite power related kingdom and that he would be the sort of heroic Messiah that everybody was looking for and he was just he was taking things awful slowly and awful kind of humbly and talking about dying in the way of the cross and that's not the kind of kingdom that

[28 : 51] Judas was looking for here and the most likely explanation though we will never know ultimately the most likely explanation is that Judas was trying to force Jesus hand and he thought that if he was backed into a corner and if he was put on trial in front of the chief priest he'd have to say yes you're right I am the Messiah come on let's go and throw out the Romans let's all lead now the great crusade and liberate the country and everybody could have gone yeah right we're going to follow this Messiah and the chief priest was in okay right Brian this is the moment this is the guy let's follow him Judas may have thought this is the only way I'm going to force him to do it this is the only way I'm going to compel him to actually act in the way that I want him to because we read that in Matthew 27 Judas which had betrayed him when he saw that he was condemned repented himself it's possible that he didn't realize that they intended to put him to death and maybe he just meant to back him into a corner so that he would set himself up and meet the people in the way that Judas wanted he brought again the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priest and elders saying I have assumed him that

I have betrayed innocent blood and they said what is that to us see thou to that and he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed and went and hanged himself and we know the rights what do we learn from that well we can learn if the motive was money and as you say it wasn't enough money to make it worthwhile but then we look in vain for logic and reason where sin is concerned I'll say that again we look in vain for logic and reason where sin is concerned because so often there is no logical explanation for why people fall into a particular sin they don't need the thing that they fall into the temptation or think of David and Bathsheba you know the time when he goes after Bathsheba he already has at least six wives and goodness knows how many concubines he doesn't need this woman and yet he cannot get her out of his head he's got to have that one woman who is married to someone else and who is not his to have and so he takes her he causes her to be with child he then conveniently gets rid of her husband and so on so all the adultery and murder and everything else that follows from it all happens through something that there is no logical need for at all and so many sins that we fall into there's no logic to them they're just sin that's the end of the story you know

Luke describes it in this way in Luke 22 where we read that's verse 3 then entered Satan into Judas so he went his way and communed with the chief priests and captains and they were glad and they gave him much Satan entered into him that's the end of it the long of the shot Satan got in now of course Satan can only get in where we make an opening if we let him in if we make the opportunity Satan will seize it if he finds a chink in the armor he'll get in there but there is no logic rational reason behind sin there's nothing that's oh yeah that's why that's fair enough we understand that now there's no need for it you know even going back to the garden you know say you can have any fruit you want in this entire garden why do you need this one why does it have to be this particular one

I know that's where they're gone irresistibly you know if Cain didn't like his brother Abel all he needed to do was pick a fight with him or go off in the happy he didn't need to kill him why did he do that there's no logical rational explanation it's just sin sin doesn't have logic or rationale behind it you just have to look at the attitude of the world today and you think in this well you just had the referendum in southern Ireland where they voted to allow abortion of demand virtually now what people say oh they're celebrating in the streets about this about the opportunity to kill their children on their own soil and yet the same people who would say oh no this is good this is health care and so on would say it's barbaric for the state to execute a convicted criminal who may be guilty of rape or murder you know however many or few may be judicially executed we're talking single figures almost in any country that still has the death penalty but we're talking millions over the years the death of the unborn and yet people say oh the one's okay but the other that's really barbaric there's no logic to it there's no logic or consistency or reason to sin it doesn't need to be it's not coming from

God it's not coming from the order and from the work of creation and reason that the Lord gives it's coming from the prince of darkness sin comes from the prince of this world he doesn't need logic he doesn't need reason he doesn't need rationale those who deny the fact of God's creation are arguing in the teeth of the proven scientific evidence but that doesn't matter that doesn't bother them because sin doesn't need a reason Satan entered into Judas's sky one of the twelve he went to the chief priests to betray him unto that and when they heard it they were glad and promised to give him money and he saw how he might conveniently betray him why would he do this no logic no reason but perhaps one thing we might say is he may have found himself disappointed in how Jesus was in reality to perhaps the Jesus he had envisaged the Jesus that maybe he had wanted to be the powerful earthly

[35 : 20] Messiah who would lead them on from strength to strength and make the kingdom for Israel again and he had in his own mind what he wanted Jesus to do and Jesus of course was come to be a much different Messiah to that not because he wasn't big enough to take on the political dreams of Judas and all those who thought like him but because the dreams of those political zealots were too small Jesus wasn't just coming to bring a kingdom in a little independent Palestine that would chuck out the Romans he was coming to claim the world to take in generation after generation of men and women and boys and girls who had not yet been born who would be redeemed and saved by his precious blood and his sacrifice on the cross what looked like weakness what looked like the Romans were winning within a couple of hundred years the Roman Empire would crumble to dust and the Christian faith would be going on from strength to strength they couldn't destroy it they couldn't control it people became

Christians in their hundreds and their thousands and their millions and the Roman Empire just faded away Jesus is taking a long view he's taking the big view he's not just thinking in terms of the short political term day he's thinking in terms of the world now and the world to come he's thinking not in terms of how this is going to make us free in political terms how we're going to throw off the yoke of our oppressors he's talking about throwing off the yoke of sin he's talking about throwing off the yoke of that which will keep you in bondage for all eternity if you don't get it dealt with and when you discover such a saviour who can set you free from that which was going to drag you down to a lost eternity that which was going to send you to hell that which was going to condemn you and which you know in yourself was condemning you because you hated yourself and what you had become when you are finally set free from that through faith in what

Christ can offer you then nothing is too high a price nothing is too great a cost nothing is too important to sacrifice for him a year's wages a box of ointment precious spike lard break it on its head pour it all out for Jesus what this ointment represents what this scent that fills the entire house represents it represents this woman's life laid down at Jesus feet given completely to him and that is the kind of devotion we too should be seeking to have not counting the cost not saying we can top this up and make a year's wages we can do something else with it we can invest it in something else there is no investment more worthwhile more telling more true than the investment of your life in Christ he is the greatest and surest investment you will ever make because the return is not just in time it is for eternity it is not just for your life here it is for your mortal soul but the change will begin right away just as this woman discovered she was responding to a changed life now in the present time and that's what the likes of

Judas just didn't get maybe the rest of the disciples didn't get either just yet there was so much they didn't understand but Jesus said you want to help her through that's great that's fine but you can do that anytime this is something you can only do just now and this is something she has done she has done what she could she has brought a good work on me she has prepared my body for the burial because I recognize that I have to die to achieve that which must be done to set sinners free there is a moment that we must seize whether that moment is right now or whether it is yet to come that moment has passed you by pray the Lord to give you another opportunity but there is such a thing as that moment that we must seize when all must be poured out on Christ when all must be given when the most precious thing in the world whatever we have been holding I don't imagine that maybe I'd only had this spiking art for the last five minutes it had probably been kept as a treasured possession in their home it would be the most valuable thing they possessed it might be for an emergency it might be for the last resort if they had nothing else in the world they would sell that thing she has taken the one valuable thing that they have probably been laying up for years in the house and she has poured it all away by pouring it all out on Christ now no doubt there may be that which you may be treasuring as a hope for your future as part of what you hope your life is going to be maybe a hope or a dream or an ambition and the

Lord doesn't say no you can't have that he doesn't say oh you must never do that again no but what we do is we take that which we have and we lay it down at Jesus feet and we pour it out on him and the scent fills the home and everybody who walks in knows that something has changed in it we take that which is our most prized and precious and long perhaps kept and hoard in possession that thing we hold most dear and you give it all to Christ and then see what he will do with the life that he will give things because it is great to see this