

Paul H. Dixon
Breaking the Alabaster Box
circa 1980

Unedited Transcript

Paul H. Dixon:

I'm speaking tonight on the subject, Breaking the Alabaster Box. Turn with me if you will to the gospel of John chapter 12. John 12 gives us one of the most beautiful pictures in the entire Bible of an event that happened in the life of the Lord Jesus. And I'd like to read beginning with John 12:1-8.

Paul H. Dixon:

"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 odor 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 300 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. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.'"

Paul H. Dixon:

Four times, in fact, in each of the four gospels, we have the record of a woman who anoints the Lord Jesus with a very costly ointment. Some theologians would have us to believe that these would be three different incidences. In other words, that there were three different women who anointed the Lord Jesus. I personally believed that there were two different women who anointed Jesus, that Matthew, Mark, and John speak of one and the same Mary of Bethany, but that Luke speaks of another. There are some who think that all four speak of the same one, but I personally believe that the incidents in Luke differ too much to make it the same individual, but certainly we have to recognize that this place as Jesus comes to Bethany was one of his favorite spots. And he stops there just a few days before he is to die at Jerusalem.

Paul H. Dixon:

The word of God says it's six days before the passover that he comes into Bethany. And there he is at this table, and Martha, who's always busy serving, is again serving the meal. And there's Lazarus, who in John chapter 11 he had just recently brought forth from the dead. That must have been a sight to behold. In fact, if you go on in John chapter 12, people were coming from all over just to see this man who'd come back from the dead. We can understand that. And Mary just sits there, no doubt very quietly. And then, all of a sudden in the third verse, we find her at the feet of Jesus. This is not an unusual place for Mary. In fact, you'll find that three times in the word of God, Mary is at the feet of Jesus.

Paul H. Dixon:

In Luke 10:39, she is there as a learner. In John 11:32, she's there as a mourner. And here in John chapter 12:3, she's there as a worshiper. Now, if I may spiritualize for just a minute, make some applications, I think, first of all, we must find ourselves at the feet of Jesus as a mourner. We need to find that place of repentance of sin, where we realize that we've been living our lives in sin and apart from God and we're sorry for it, and repenting of our sin and receiving Christ as our savior. That's the

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first time we all need to be at the feet of Jesus. Have you ever been found there? I trust you didn't just join a church without any repentance, without receiving Christ. I trust you didn't just get baptized without getting born again. If you've never taken that place of a mourner, I pray that you'll take it tonight, but then the next place we need to find ourselves as truly as a learner.

Paul H. Dixon:

We are called disciples, Christians, meaning disciples of Christ, followers of Christ, in the New Testament. And to be a disciple is to be a learner, and too many people repent of their sin but they never learn of Christ. Paul said, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." We need to spend much time at the feet of the Lord Jesus and in the word of God, learning of him, but I'm afraid, even too many stop there. We have many who have been saved and go beyond that to be disciples and learners and Bible students who really never become worshipers. They never really become adorers of the Lord Jesus. And that's the challenge tonight. Mary became a worshiper of the Lord. As I put the gospel accounts together, here's what must have happened.

Paul H. Dixon:

While they were eating, suddenly she slipped to a closet, some nook, and she brought something out that she had been saving for a long time. It was an alabaster box. Some have said it would be better translated an alabaster bottle. At any rate, we know that it was a beautiful box or bottle that was made out of something that looked like Mexican onyx. Very priceless, the bottle or box itself. And within that, she had this costly ointment spikenard perfume. And I don't know whether she had been saving it for just this event or not, but she had it. And she was overtaken at this moment with the sudden desire to expend it upon the son of God. And possibly he did not even notice what she was doing as he was no doubt teaching truth there at that table. She slips behind him, breaks the bottle or the box open, and pours it all over his head so that it flows down over his body and gathers in a pool at his feet.

Paul H. Dixon:

So, that the next thing we find is here in verse three, she's at the feet of Jesus and with her hair, she's wiping up all of the excess that is flowing over the floor. You could smell it all over the house, and she's trying to wipe his feet dry. What a beauty picture. I'm impressed that there must have been a great quantity here. There must have been a great deal of this that she poured upon him for it to flow all over the floor and for it to spread its odor throughout the entire house. Not just the dining room or the kitchen, but throughout the house.

Paul H. Dixon:

Secondly, we know it was of great quality. Not just the quantity is impressive, but the quality. We're not indebted to Judas for much, but we are at least for something, because he told us how much it cost. Did you notice that he said in verse five, "Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence?" Now, a Roman pence was a Roman penny. And don't think of it like we consider a penny today. In that day, you worked all day long, according to Matthew 20, the average day's wage was a penny, a Roman pence. So, what she poured over the son of God was worth a year's wages.

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She was willing to take her best, extravagantly, totally to expend it upon the son of God. Now, the disciples were not impressed. The disciples immediately began to criticize her under Judas' leadership. Don't ever get the idea that Judas was some kind of a rogue. I think we would probably elect him the chairman of our board of deacons if we had him in our churches. He must have had a fantastic personality. He must have been a very good businessman. And he got all the rest of the disciples to follow him. They did not recognize him as the betrayer. They didn't know. They said, "Who is it?" And so, he had convinced them that they ought to be thinking more about the poor, and immediately Jesus rebuked their war on poverty.

Paul H. Dixon:

He said this isn't the way to go. He said I am not for the social gospel. He said you have the poor with you always, and I believe that what she's doing is just fantastic. In fact, he said, in the other gospels as it's recorded, that what she has done is going to be heard of throughout the centuries, as this is proclaimed by preachers from their pulpits. Let me ask you a question. Why do you think she did that? You ever wonder? I've been thinking about this. Maybe she did it just out of a heart of gratitude for her own salvation. Maybe if she was there enjoying that meal, she got the thinking about Revelation 3:20, though she had not read it yet, the truth must have been there.

Paul H. Dixon:

That she was going to sup with him throughout all eternity. That this one who was lost in sin was not on her way to hell, but on her way to heaven. And she rejoiced in her own salvation and wanted him to know how full of gratitude she was for what he had done for her. Maybe she did it as she looked at Lazarus. She was just overwhelmed as she saw Lazarus there and realized the grace of God working in his life and knew that not only did he know salvation, but that he had been brought back from the dead.

Paul H. Dixon:

Many times, I come into churches like this and I look around and I see people and I realized what you were before God found you. Many times, we started a meeting and we were praying for you to get saved. And then before that meeting closed, we saw you walk down the aisle and received Christ as your savior. And I come back into the church and you're in a place of leadership. Or, some of you can look at a husband or a wife or your kids and you know what they were before God found them. And sometimes it just overwhelms you with the grace of God and those who've come to Christ.

Paul H. Dixon:

Maybe that's why Mary did it. Probably, the foremost reason was because of what she'd learned at his feet. She knew more about Jesus and what was going to happen at Jerusalem than the disciples did, because she had caught the truth that he wasn't going into Jerusalem to be received as king, but to be crucified as the savior. And she realized that he was going to be hanging on a cross and that he was going to be placed in a tomb, and she was anointing him for his burial. In fact, that's exactly what he said. It's amazing when I think of Ephesians 5:2 that says this. "Walk in love, as Christ also had loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet-smelling savour." And as she anticipated that sacrifice on Calvary that all of those Old Testament sacrifices pointed to, and incidentally, did you ever study Leviticus? When the sacrifices were offered, it says that they were a sweet odor in the nostrils of God.

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Paul H. Dixon:

And all of those Old Testament sacrifices that went up into the nostrils of God as a sweet odor and that sacrifice that Christ would give on Calvary, as a sweet sacrifice unto the Lord, a sweet savour unto the Lord, that sweet savour now runs down over his body and prophesize his coming death. What an amazing thing. The Savior was so impressed that he commended her in front of everyone. He said she had done what she could in the gospel of Mark. I think that says something to us. It ought to very practically now. Number one, that tells me that it's right to show people that you love them. I think that somehow in America today we are so busy that we're not taking time to really convey to our loved-ones outwardly, extravagantly, that we love them.

Paul H. Dixon:

How about it? Husbands? Don't take me literally here, but when did you break the alabaster box over your wife's head? That's the responsibility. There needs to come that time and we slip behind our wives and we break that alabaster box and we pour that ointment over them. Outwardly, we are saying, "Hey, I want you to know that you're the greatest gal in the world." And you know what? It'll solve a lot of problems in our homes today, and we have many, if we'll just display our love. Now, there are many ways to do it. One, I would encourage you fellas, if you're not doing it much, start telling them that you love them.

Paul H. Dixon:

One fellow went into a marriage counselor with his wife. They sat down, and the marriage counselor said, "What's your complaint?" She said, "He never tells me that he loves me." And the counselor looked over to the husband and said, "Is that right?" He said, "It's not right." He said, "We were married 25 years ago, and the day we got married, I told her that I loved her and I have not revoked that in 25 years. That I told her once and that ought to do for the whole deal." Well, that's not the way it works. They want to hear it every day. And they ought to hear it every day. "I love you." But, it's not just a matter of displaying our love in words. Guys, we have responsibility to do it in a lot of other ways. We ought to display our love by buying them things. Who was that? Was that Mrs. Kruger? There was one wife who blurted out kind of jokingly there like her husband doesn't do that much.

Paul H. Dixon:

Hey fellas, look, we ought to do that. We ought to buy them things on special occasions that say extravagantly, outwardly, "I appreciate you. I love you." I have one friend who just about didn't make it with his wife. I believe your pastor knows him when I start giving a few of the facts because he has had an encounter with him. This guy would come home at night, he not only would not buy his wife anything, he would weigh the soap box to see how many of the soap powders she had used that day. That guy is so tight he takes his T-shirt off at night to keep his heart from beating a hole in it.

Paul H. Dixon:

Men, we can get caught up into a rut if we're not willing to spend. And I believe when we spend, we are saying, "I love you." That's not the only way. You may not have a lot of money, but we can spend time with these gals. Sometimes, I'm afraid that we get caught up doing the things we like to do and spend no time in the things they like to do. I think we both have a responsibility. When I got married, Pat, the Lord willing is going to be here in Scott on Friday, at least by Saturday for the service, sometime Friday night and Saturday and Sunday. But when we got married, many of you have met Pat, a great gal, we went on

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our honeymoon. And Pat didn't know much about sports. Well, I like sports. In fact, I like sports so much that I felt that we all listened to the Cincinnati Reds every night on our honeymoon.

Paul H. Dixon:

And one night, we're there and we're listening to the Cincinnati Reds, and she knew so much about baseball that the announcer said, "Robinson just hit a home run." Well, he was talking about Frank Robinson who used to play for Cincinnati who just been named the manager of the Cleveland Indians. And you know what my wife had the nerve to say? She said, "Was that Sugar Ray?" She really knew a lot about sports, or my wife has become a great sports fan. Now, let me show you what I've done. See, that's what she's done for me. I have always hated to go shopping. Fellas, are you like that? What a drag. I would rather go out and spend hours walking in the woods hunting, or golfing, or doing anything but shopping. I can walk from one end of the mall to the other and I am worn out. There's just something about those malls that just take it out of you. Well, I have worked on that, and now my wife watches every ballgame with me and I go shopping with her once a year. All right. Now, I think that is a great compromise.

Paul H. Dixon:

Seriously, the responsibility Mary would teach us extravagantly display our love. The wives have a responsibility to the husband as well to show their love. You say, "How can the wife show her love to the husband?" Well, don't let the guys fool you. They want to hear "I love you" just as much as you do. They may put on a big front like that doesn't make any difference to them, but it's a great thrill when just all of a sudden you come up and say, "I love you and I thank God for giving you to me." Another way that you tell a husband that you love him is the way you dress, and the way you look, and the way you keep yourself. Because, when you are sharp and keep yourself sharp, you're saying, "You are important to me." The way you keep your house tells that husband whether you love him or not. A clean house comes through loud and clear. "You're important to me." The way you fix that meal says the same thing.

Paul H. Dixon:

In fact, I think there's another avenue of this that many times gals have tended to overlook. The most important thing to a man, number one, should be his God. Number two should be his family. Number three should be his job. And many times I think we fail to realize how much that husband need that support that says, "I think you're doing a great job." I don't care what your husband does. He may work on the assembly line. He may be the vice president of the company. He may own the company, but whatever his job is, what he wants from the wife is that "I believe that you're a success. And you're doing exactly what I believe you ought to be doing and I wouldn't want you doing anything else." Someone has said that a wife's responsibility is to spend her life showing that she admires her husband.

Paul H. Dixon:

He may not be rich, he may not be successful, but if you treat him as a man, he's happy. But you know, it goes beyond this. Not just what we do, but what we don't do. And for both husband and wife, when we talk about breaking the alabaster box and displaying our love to one another, the unpardonable sin is ever to criticize each other in public. Don't even do it jokingly. Don't even do it with friends. Sometimes, we take advantage of the each other in a joke, but it's not a joke. We're serious. Sometimes, we take advantage when the presence of friends and we would do things that we would not do in the presence of others. Never belittle, contradict, or criticize each other in front of others. But, let's move to their

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parent-child relationship. Did you notice that I started with the husband-wife relationship? You know why? Because, the greatest mistake being made in our churches today is we've got it backwards. We're talking always about parent-child, when it ought to be husband-wife.

Paul H. Dixon:

The average home is breaking down today after the kids get out of the home because husband and wife are living for the kids and they're not living for one another. The responsibility is to be a good husband, and then you'll be a good father. To be a good wife, and then you'll be a good mother. If we want revival in our churches, it's going to have to start in our homes. When we talk about a parent-child relationship and we're talking about displaying our love, that does not mean that we stop disciplining. In fact, if you do not discipline in your home, there is no way that you could say to your child "I love you," because love is understood on the basis of discipline and justice. We must continue to discipline, but in our discipline, let's tell those children that we love them.

Paul H. Dixon:

Let's take advantage of the opportunities to respect their individuality and not compare them to others. Let's build a relationship with them. Let's listen to their questions. I spend my time as I travel around in churches and in many of the Christian schools talking to a lot of sharp kids who I think their parents have blown it. I've watched their parents blow it on occasion. I've been seated at their table and I've listened to that senior in high school ask his question and listen to dad put him down because he was embarrassed that he asked that question in front of me. I wasn't embarrassed. I'm not against questions being asked. If we're not going to ask them at home and at church, where are we going to ask them? No, listen to their questions. Encourage them to ask questions.

Paul H. Dixon:

If they don't understand what's going on, let them come to us. And if we don't understand it, let's go to somebody else. Don't be afraid to tell them that we don't have all the answers. It's refreshing to hear that every once in a while. Build a relationship with them. That tells them that you love them, when you're willing to answer their questions and spend time with them and you're willing to tell them so. Someone has said the hardest thing for a child to bear is to displease a parent he has a relationship with. I like that. Did you get that? I'll run it by again. "The hardest thing for a child to do is to displease a parent he has a relationship with." If we'll outwardly, extravagantly, display our love upon our children as parents, we can have that kind of a relationship, but let's turn it around.

Paul H. Dixon:

There's been too much preaching today on the responsibility of the parent, not enough on the responsibility of the child. I think we've taken everything today and thrown it in the parent's lap. And if a kid goes bad, we say, "Where did his mom and dad go wrong?" Maybe they didn't go wrong at all. The kid has to stand before God and give an account just as much as the parents. And children, teenagers, boys and girls, preachers, pals, have a responsibility to display outwardly your love to your parents. I know it's tough for a junior boy to kiss his mother. Right? In fact, a lot of times, there has not been an encouragement to show any kind of affection in the home because parents are afraid to show any kind of affection in front of the children. I don't think it ought to be that way. I think that the kids ought to come in and see mom and dad kissing and think it's just great. And all he want is stick around and just watch it for a while.

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Paul H. Dixon:

That's the right kind of an atmosphere, but there ought to be the willingness on the part of the children to come up and put the arm around dad and maybe he'd all like to kiss him with all this whiskers but just say, "Hey dad, you're the greatest. I really feel that way. I thank God that I was born in this home and that you are my dad." There ought to be the willingness to go up to mom and say, "Look, mom, I thank God for all that you went through during those nine months for me. I don't know that I ever told you that mom, but I want you to know I appreciate all that you went through." You see, what usually happens and I imagine me and the adults could testify that when you're a teenager and you're growing up in a home, usually, you kind of keep it a secret that you even like mom and dad. You wouldn't want the rest of the kids to know that you got along with mom and dad. Shouldn't be that way.

Paul H. Dixon:

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his son for us." And you can't understand love without experiencing the saving grace of God through the love of Christ. And the liberal has some kind of a sentimental kind of love, but it's not a biblical love. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another," and we ought to be able to go into our Bible-believing churches and there ought to be a very atmosphere of love. You ought not to just sit in the church. If there's any place where there should not be any friction and hard feelings and any envy and strife, it ought to be in our churches. Know how we ought to be willing just through our very spirit to convey to our brothers and sisters in Christ that we're privileged to be in the same fellowship with them.

Paul H. Dixon:

It goes beyond that. I believe we have a responsibility to our leaders, those who minister to us the word of God. You study Hebrews chapter 13, and Hebrews 13 teaches us that we are to honor those who have the rule over us in the word of God, which simply means this. We ought to take time to go up to that Sunday school teacher and say, "Look, it's been a long time since I told you this, but I appreciate so much the way that you teach this class. And I want you to know it." I think that we ought to write more letters. We ought to write more letters to those people who've been used in our lives. That's Sunday school teacher who even taught us as a child, maybe led us to Christ right here in this church. Maybe they're not even here anymore, but write a letter, say, "Thank you for your faithful teaching."

Paul H. Dixon:

We ought to be willing to express it to those who are teaching, who are in places of leadership, who drive the buses, who are the deacons, who are those who lead us in the choir or direct us in visitation, or our leader over the young people, a pastor, in every way to manifest to them. "We appreciate you and we're not ashamed or afraid to outwardly display our love to you." Of course, the most vital thing of all is the displaying of our love to Christ just like Mary did. What a great opportunity is ours this week. This week we're gathered here night after night. And as we come, our very presence can be saying, "Lord Jesus, I love you. I know thou art mine." "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to know himself strong in behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards him." And the challenge is to put everything else aside, all the ball games must go and all the PTA meetings must go and the bowling nights must go. This week, we have one week set aside.

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And if I know the schedule of this church, I believe I know you only do this one week a year. I realize that you have a Bible conference at another time, missionary conference, but there's only one week, special week, every night set aside for an evangelistic effort like this. And surely we can say, "Lord, because of my love for you," not because of our devotions to the pastor, not because he expects it, not because of the evangelist, no matter who it might be, but because of the Lord and all that he is to us. If Mary could expend a year's wages upon the Lord Jesus, surely we could expend that hour and 15 minutes or so each night to come and to be in the house of God. But not just to be here, but to take that time during the day to get down before God to pray with these meetings.

Paul H. Dixon:

It takes sacrifices for it. I recall what David said in 2 Samuel 24:24. He said, "I refuse to give God that which doesn't cost me nothing." And if we're going to do the right kind of praying and know the power and the blessing of God, we're going to have to do some things that are going to cost us something this week. Setting aside perhaps meals to pray. Setting aside other things that would interest us, even to television programs, to pray. To pray specifically, to pray definitely, to pray desperately, for a great moving of the spirit of God. That's the way we display our love for the Lord Jesus. But then not just praying, not just coming, but going out, bringing others in, that they might hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul H. Dixon:

In a church like this, it's great to see how many people are being used to God in so many different ways. I have no idea what the attendance would be this evening. It's excellent, but I would note that there would be several hundred people here tonight would no doubt have to honestly say that you would just be more or less a friend who's Christian. You come, you're here, you've never totally turned loose of your life for the Lord. There are couples here tonight, perhaps you've been saved just recently in the last year or two, maybe several years. When you come to church and you give possibly, I would encourage you to do that. You go home, but as far as really turning loose of your life and getting in here, getting involved in the visitation program and telling others of Christ and being used in a special way of service, you're not, because there's been that holding back, that reservation, if not totally turned loose of that life for the Lord Jesus.

Paul H. Dixon:

Brother Flex is here tonight. He could give you the testimony of a man in his church who was saved when I was in his church back in 1965, '66, who just last summer finally turned loose his life to the Lord. I'm going to tell you about it details tomorrow night. That fella, only when he did that, he came to see me some miles away back in the spring. Only when he did that, did he come to know the blessing of God, the peace of God, the power of God. Only when he turned loose of his life, saved, yes, but he had to make that sacrifice. Amazing thing.

Paul H. Dixon:

Second Corinthians 2:14 says, "Now thanks be unto God, who always causes us to triumph, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place." And the next verse, again, talks about us being the sweet savour unto God. And when we talk about breaking the alabaster box and the ointment filling the house, there would be no greater ointment to fill it and greater odor to fill this house tonight

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than for Christians to finally, totally, sacrificially turn loose of your lives without reservation to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul H. Dixon:

I read a story, moved my heart, of a man and his daughter, an only daughter. This daughter decided to go off to Bible school. He met someone like I met when I decided to go to Bible school. Many of the people at the high school said, "You mean you're going to waste your life and go to a Bible school? You're going to waste four years and go to a Bible school?" And this man said, "You're going to send your only daughter off hundreds of miles to a Bible school?" And he looked at the man and said, "Nothing I have is too good for Jesus." The girl graduated from the Bible school. And you know what she'd done while she was there at that Bible school? She had surrendered her life to be a missionary.

Paul H. Dixon:

And when the father told the man about this, he said, "You've got be kidding. You've got an only daughter. That's all you have. Your wife is dead. And this daughter is going off to a foreign field now to give her life. You'll see her once every how many years?" He looked at him and he said, "Nothing I have is too good for Jesus." This man went with the father down to the dock. The daughter got on the ship. And as the ship took off on its way to the mission fields, the man looked at the dad and said, "Now, what do you have to say?" Again, he said, "Nothing I have is too good for Jesus." He went back home. A few hours, he received a telegram. Said the boat has sunk and all are lost at the sea. When the friends heard it, "What do you have to say?" "That nothing I have is too good to Jesus."

Paul H. Dixon:

That was Mary. That ought to be ours tonight, all if we would extravagantly give each and everything we have for the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, some of you are here tonight and you cannot give Christ anything because you are not his. You have hands that could be used for God but they can't save because you're not saved yet. You have eyes that are blind and that cannot see, and ears that are deaf that cannot hear. And a life, but when reality, your dead and trespasses and sins and it cannot be lived for God. But if you tonight will come and receive Christ as your savior, oh, I would pray that you would be like Mary who give everything you have for our Lord Jesus Christ.