Everything for His Own Account — Fragrance at the Table

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Every Way Right in Its Own Eyes — But the Lord Weighs the Heart

Proverbs 16:2 and 21:2 carry the same observation in nearly identical words: every way of a man is clean in his own eyes — but Jehovah weigheth the spirits, and Jehovah weigheth the hearts. We tend to remember the time of the judges as a time when every man did what was wrong in his own eyes. But the text does not say that. It says every man did what was right in his own eyes. We rationalise. We convince ourselves that what we are doing is right, that the ends justify the means, that our motives are good even if the method is questionable.

This applies not only to obviously sinful behaviour. The apostle Paul had a desire to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, to his brethren in the flesh. What could be criticised about that? And yet it was not what the Lord had for him at that time. He had a good desire that was his own rather than the Lord's. The Lord weighs not just the act but the spirit behind it, not just the words but the heart that produced them.

Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2 says it plainly: God is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed. He sees what we do and He sees why we do it. It is possible to be doing something that is not wrong in itself, but with a wrong spirit — or with a heart that is engaged with something other than the Lord in that thing. The Lord's assessment of those things is not the same as ours.

Jehovah Hath Wrought Everything for His Own Account

Proverbs 16:4 is one of the most searching verses in the book: Jehovah hath wrought everything for his own account — yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. God has a purpose, and that purpose is to bring glory to Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything He permits, everything He allows, everything He ordains — all of it serves that overarching purpose. Even what the wicked do, even what the enemy of our souls does, is used toward that end.

This was on display in the book of Job. Satan presented himself before the Lord and pointed to Job as one who only feared God because God had protected and blessed him. The Lord put Job forward and said, consider my servant Job. And then He permitted Satan to strip Job of everything — his wealth, his children, his health. The Lord's credibility was on the line. He had, so to speak, publicly vouched for Job before Satan.

Job's wife told him to curse God and die. Job refused. He was not sinless — later he cursed his own birth, and his friends stirred up responses in him that were not right. But throughout all of it, the Lord's purposes were working, and at the end, Job arrived at the place God had been moving him toward all along: I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee — wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.

> *Jehovah hath wrought everything for his own account, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. — Proverbs 16:4*

When I am under difficult circumstances — when everything seems to be going wrong, when the pressure is such that, like Job's wife, the only advice I receive is find a way out — what must I hold onto? The same thing the Lord held onto in Gethsemane: not my will but thine be done. He had wrought everything for His own account. There was a glory to be brought to God through the path the Lord was walking, a glory that could not have been reached any other way. And what He purposed in His servant Job, He will accomplish in each of us who submit to His hand.

The Song of Songs — The Table and the Spikenard

Song of Songs 1:5 gives us the opening self-description of the bride: I am black but comely. She sees herself as darkened by the sun — the sun has looked upon her and scorched her. She is not yet in the full enjoyment of who she is to him. The book traces her growth from this point of partial self-consciousness toward the end, where it is all about him and nothing about herself or her love for him. It is the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's — it is about his love, not primarily hers.

In verse 12, a moment of particular beauty: while the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. Spikenard in the ancient world was obtained at considerable peril — one had to descend by rope over a cliff face to retrieve it from between the spikes of the nard plant. It was costly and it was risky. And she brings it to the table. At his table, in his presence, that fragrance rises.

The Lord's table is a table of fragrance. It is not about the outward ceremony or the order of service; it is about what rises from our hearts as we gather around him in his memory. Can the Lord perceive a fragrance by our presence at his table? That is his own measure of these things. The spikenard does not speak itself into existence — it is drawn out by the warmth of his presence and by the cost of coming near.

She Hath Done What She Could — The Anointing at Bethany

Mark 14:3 describes a woman who came to the Lord at table in Bethany with an alabaster flask of very costly pure spikenard. She broke the flask and poured it over His head. Those present were indignant: why this waste? It might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor. And Jesus said: let her alone. She hath done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for burial. Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the whole

world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

She said nothing. No words are recorded for her. She did something. And the Lord's estimate of that act was: she hath done what she could. Not a great deed by the world's standard — it was what one woman, with what she had, could offer to the Lord. And He received it, defended it against all criticism, and declared that it would be remembered wherever the gospel was proclaimed.

This has an application to every believer who gathers at the Lord's table. The sisters do not take part publicly in the way the brothers do. But their presence is not a lesser thing. They bring a fragrance. The Lord's estimate of a quiet act of devotion — a life brought to the table, a heart occupied with Him — is: she hath done what she could. That is not faint praise. It is the Lord's own word of commendation.

The House Filled with the Odour — Mary of Bethany

John 12:1–8 gives us the companion scene. Six days before the Passover, in the same village of Bethany, Mary took a pound of very costly ointment of spikenard and anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair. Where the woman in Mark poured the ointment on His head, Mary anointed His feet — the place of humility and service. And John records: the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

Again she said nothing. Judas Iscariot spoke — and his words were a complaint about waste, motivated by greed that he disguised as concern for the poor. The Lord silenced him: let her alone. Against the day of my burial has she kept this. The Lord knew what lay ahead. Mary did not — or if she did, it was by instinct of love rather than clear understanding. But the ointment she had kept, perhaps for a long time, she gave entirely when the moment came.

Two things stand together in these scenes. In Mark: she hath done what she could — the completeness of her giving in proportion to what she had. In John: the house was filled with the odour — the effect of that devotion on the whole atmosphere around the Lord. When believers sit at His feet, when they bring what they have to His table without holding back, the room is filled. Others sense it. The fragrance spreads beyond the one who brought it.

The house was filled with the odour of the ointment. — John 12:3

So it is when we gather around the Lord in remembrance of Him. The question for each of us is not how much we can say or how eloquently we can say it, but whether we come with something to pour out — whether the alabaster flask is broken at His feet. He hath done what he could for us; He gave everything. May He find in us those who, like Mary, have done what they could — and may the house be filled with the fragrance of worship that rises to Him.

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