

John, Part 47: Extravagant Worship

John 12:1 ESV Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. **2** So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. **3** Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. **4** But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, **5** “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” **6** He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. **7** Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. **8** For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.” **9** When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. **10** So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, **11** because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

- I. As we enter chapter 12 of the gospel of John, events that have been set in motion by a sovereign and gracious God are now coming to a seemingly tragic, but ultimately glorious and triumphant conclusion. Everything else that has transpired in this book have pointed to where we are now. Jesus’ 7 specific miraculous, prophetic signs; as well as 5 revealing “I AM” statements, have clarified both his true identity, and the nature of his appointed mission.
 - A. Chapter 11 concluded with Christ’s enemies making the final determination to put him to death. There was no turning back now.
 - B. Yet we find Jesus back in Bethany, at the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. They are still in awe, remembering how Christ raised Lazarus from the dead (after 4 days!), so they decide to throw a banquet in his honor.
 1. Martha, who, (as we learned back in Luke 10) could almost be considered the New Testament’s “Matron Saint of Hospitality” is found doing what she did best: serving other people. Cooking; refilling their wine glasses; generally making sure that everyone else in the room was comfortable.
 2. Lazarus, we are told, is reclining at the table with Jesus. In those days in the Middle East, when people would eat together, especially at an important dinner, they would lay on their side, with their head toward the table. They would prop themselves up on one elbow and eat with the other hand.
 - a) In my mind’s eye I imagine a lot of joy and laughter in this gathering of close friends. Everyone, including Lazarus’ family, and the 12 disciples are there, commemorating Lazarus’ resurrection and Jesus’ power!
 - b) Although Jesus is certainly the center of attention, can you imagine everyone leaning in more closely to hear the story of Lazarus’ resurrection from his own perspective? Everyone wanted to hear what he had to say!
 - C. I wonder if it occurred to anybody present that what Lazarus just experienced was not merely a miracle, but rather, a promise! Jesus had made that very clear when he had said to a brokenhearted Martha “I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25)

1. In reality, Lazarus had become a vivid picture of every member of the Body of Christ, soon to be born through Jesus work on the cross! **Ephesians 2:4 ESV** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5 even when we were dead** in our trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6 and raised us up** with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Leave this passage on the screen until I get to roman numeral II)
 2. Before we met Jesus Christ, you and I were not just bad. We were not just "making mistakes". We didn't need to simply try harder, or "get our act together". We couldn't! The scriptures clearly say that we were **dead** in sin!
 - a) Dead people can't do **anything** on their own. When you die, the morgue drops you off at the funeral home (you certainly don't drive yourself!) and somebody there cleans you up, dresses you up, and boxes you up.
 - b) That's how we were in our sin! Dead people! Alienated from God, and incapable of "fixing" ourselves.
 3. John 11 says that Jesus **loved** Lazarus and his sisters. Similarly, Paul tells us here that, "God...because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ"
 - a) Lazarus sat dead as a proverbial doornail in a cold, dark tomb for 4 whole days, until that awesome moment when he heard the voice of the Savior beckoning from beyond the stone that had sealed his mausoleum, from beyond the great gulf that separates the land of living from the domain of the dead, saying, "Lazarus, come out!" He had no choice! He came out!
 - b) Just like Lazarus, you and I once lay in the crypt of sin; not sick, but dead beyond all remedy; rotten and stinking, until that day! Do you remember? The ground shook! The heavens trembled! Angels covered their mouths as the King of the universe said, "Sinner! Come out!" And you had no choice! The King had spoken! You had to rise up to new life!
 4. Paul says that now God has "raised us up and seated us with him in the heavenly places". We don't get resurrected so that we can continue to sit idly in our graves, or even to go back to our old lives. No!
 - a) In the days following his own physical rising from death, Lazarus found himself reclining at a banqueting table with Jesus.
 - b) Now we too have been raised up by God so that we can be seated together with Christ in the heavenly realms at a great celebration!
 - c) And this is for right now! Notice that Paul phrases this amazing declaration in the **past tense**! Through believing faith, you **have been** "raised up" and "seated with Christ"; and this long before the day when you see him face to face! The banquet has begun! And it only gets better!
- II. So we've taken note of Martha and Lazarus at this celebration, but where is their sister Mary? She is about to make a grand entrance!
- A. Have you ever been the witness to an expression of love so pure and intimate that you felt out of place (like an intruder) in the presence of something so holy?

1. Years of smoking had destroyed my Father-in-Law's lungs and polluted his final years with repeated hospital visits. All of his family grieved deeply as we watched this strong, earthy man slowly fade away, weak and emaciated.
 2. I vividly remember the day of his death. But it's not his mere passing that is etched into my memory. More than anything, I will never forget how my wife's 81-year-old mother, knowing the end was imminent, climbed into the hospital bed as he lie unconscious, just to be near him one more time.
 - a) She couldn't care less that they were surrounded by three generations of family. She felt no shame at this public display of her affection. She just needed a final touch, to feel his heartbeat before he lay still and cold.
 - b) It was hard to watch without feeling like an intruder, a foreigner. All the sudden all of us in the room felt as if we did not know the man, or could come close to a real understanding of grief, or love, or commitment, but **she** could. This was their moment. We were only amazed spectators.
- B. So at the banquet for Jesus, Mary finally enters the room. She is not swept up in the wine and laughter of the others. Neither is she sad or depressed. She is laser-focused and beautifully solemn. I imagine her trembling as she approaches the men at the table. They look up. She stops. Everyone grows quiet, wondering what is coming next. She carries a small alabaster box.
1. The air is suddenly sucked out of the room as she reaches up to her head and lets down her hair. This was a major faux pas in their culture! It was an intimate act, and considered an act of humiliation and immodesty.
 2. Then she breaks open the sealed box in her hand. A fragrance begins to fill the atmosphere. It is the scent of expensive and pure nard. It is an aromatic perfume that was to be used for her own burial. This was not Chanel No. 5 or something to dab on the back of her wrists for a night on the town, but a valuable family heirloom. Once it was opened, it could not be resealed.
- C. Everyone at the table but Jesus gasps as she bows down and begins to pour the ointment, every bit of it, on the feet of Jesus, filling the entire house with the beautiful fragrance. Taking her long, black hair in hand, she uses it as a towel, wiping the perfume all over the feet of Jesus.
1. No one seems to understand. Their laughter and revelry is silenced by this act, making everyone in the room feel awkward, and a little embarrassed.
 2. But Jesus understands. What he sees is a heart of extravagant worship that is compelled and determined to make much of her Lord, no matter who is looking or what they might think think.
- D. What has happened in the natural realm is a picture of what happens spiritually every time people truly worship him.
1. Worship always requires that something is broken and not spared, lavished upon our worthy Lord, without regard for the cost to ourselves.
 - a) When King David threw aside his kingly garments to dance before the Lord when the ark of the Covenant was being brought back into Jerusalem, his wife Michal, watching from a balcony, rebuked him for his lack of decorum.

- (1) He responded to her: **2 Samuel 6:21b ESV** I will celebrate before the Lord. **22** I will become *even more undignified* than this, and *I will be humiliated in my own eyes*.
 - (2) True worship doesn't pair well with decorum, dignity or protocol!
 - b) True worship **always** gives away too much, is way too emotional, and has no regard for "self-awareness"!
 2. You may cry foul, and say that is an unfair representation of the nature of worship, that there's no need for such a display, but take a quick inventory of your own life in order to discover your heart's true object of worship.
 - a) On what do you spend too much? Your car or house? Your wardrobe? Your favorite sports team or entertainer? Or entertainment in general?
 - b) For what are you too emotional? A reputation or relationship?
 - c) For what do you throw away your sense of self awareness? What do you talk about the most? What role does your own pride play?
 3. Everyone is a worshipper (we've said that many times). But I will add this morning that everyone is an **extravagant** worshipper of something. Is there any other kind? Worship is, by nature, extravagant.
 4. In order to become an extravagant worshipper of Christ, ask the Lord to reveal where your truest worship is channelled, then ask him to turn your heart to recognize only him as worthy of your praise and devotion.
- III. But how will others respond in the presence of true worship, though? **John 12:4 ESV** But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, **5** "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"
- A. The silence that occurred during Mary's act of worship is broken by Judas' religious protest. "What the heck! Do you recognize what she's done?!! She just poured the whole bottle on your feet, Jesus! Your **feet!** And that wasn't the Dollar General knock-off, no-name brand either, but the good stuff!"
 1. "The good stuff"...it was that mentality that revealed the wickedness and idolatry in Judas' heart. He saw the "stuff" as good, while Mary esteemed Jesus alone as all-surpassing in his greatness and worth.
 2. What was a bottle of perfume worth compared to the Lord? She wished she had 100 or 1000 bottles to pour out on him and for him. She could say like Asaph: **Psalms 73:25 ESV** Whom have I in heaven but **you?** And **there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.** **26** My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and **my portion** forever.
 - B. Judas was only concerned with monetizing her expression of adoration and devotion. He assesses that her gift was worth 300 denarii (or 300 days of an average working man's salary - in modern American terms, about \$40,000).
 1. Surely pouring it out on the feet of a man (even a great man like Jesus) was a waste! "It's OK to worship, but let's reign in the extravagance just a tad, Mary! Just think of all the good your gift could have done!"
 2. He was focused on what the gift "could have" done, but because of a wicked and hardened heart, he missed entirely what her gift **had** done; it had brought glory and honor to the Messiah, the King, the Savior!
 - C. Judas' protest was in the name of "the poor" - not anyone in particular, just the unnamed, unknown poor as a **concept**. But the scriptures expose his protest as

nothing more than a disgusting rouse, to distract from his greedy and selfish desires. **John 12:6 ESV** He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but **because he was a thief**, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

1. Judas assumed that a \$40,000 contribution could help him in a pinch! Why, he could skim off of that for several months and no one would ever notice!
 2. It's a "law of the universe" that whenever religious people protest about how someone is demonstrating extravagant love for the Savior, it is a cover-up for an unmoved, anti-gospel, non-praising heart. They just don't "get it".
- D. The cover-up may be expressed as the fierce defense of a tradition, ritual, value, or ceremony. This becomes apparent when the protest begins with someone says, "But we've always done it this way."
1. It may be the insistence on a moral standard that is completely divorced from Biblical holiness. The Pharisees made sure they washed their hands several times a day, and wouldn't pick up a piece of trash on the Sabbath, but they had no issue with plotting the death of an innocent man!
 2. Or, as in the case of Judas and Mary, it maybe that someone is demanding that an act of charity is more necessary than an act of sincere, heartfelt worship. This is what the "social justice" movement is all about; acts of service that are not rooted in extravagant worship and sacrificial devotion.
- IV. Now watch Jesus' response. Three simple words: "**Leave her alone**". Jesus points out what should have been obvious to 12 disciples and two faithful friends: that whatever is poured out and lavished on him is impossible to waste. You can never cry too many tears of joy or petition. You could never shout loud enough. You could never sing or dance too enthusiastically. You can never give too much money or time. You can never cross the boundary of how much of your life is acceptable to give away to him. When it's for Jesus, it is never wasted, even if it's everything.
- A. On the contrary, what is done for self-gratification and vainglory, what's done out of fear or greed, is always wasted, no matter what the temporary returns seem to be in this life.
1. John Piper describes a plaque that hung in his home as a child with these enlightening words: "Only one life, twill soon be past; Only what's done for Christ will last."
 2. Do you believe those words? Really? Do you believe them as **truth** or a **mere concept**? Does your bank statement reflect that truth? Do the toys and possessions cluttering your home show your absolute belief in those words? How about your expression of worship this morning? Or your financial giving? Or the way you serve your family at home or identify with Christ at work?
- B. **John 12:7 ESV** "**Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. 8 For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.**"
1. When Jesus says, "Leave her alone" he is saying that she is beyond the reach of their judgements because what she has done, she has done from a pure heart for him. She has prepared his body symbolically for his coming death and burial, only about a week away from this point in the story.
 2. He also says that they will always have the poor with them. No matter what government initiative is concocted to deal with poverty, or how generous a

billionaire philanthropist is toward the homeless, or how many well-meaning celebrities post new hashtags to raise awareness of the problem, no one will ever fully stamp out the inequity of poverty.

- C. So instead of encouraging Judas' indignant objection, Jesus points every one present to his impending death. "...you do not always have me."
- V. There are two particular things that I want you to take with you from this story.
 - A. First, notice that while true worship, selflessly lavished on Christ, is never wasted, it also secures a great benefit for the one who pours it out.
 - 1. Both Mathew and Mark add an amazing detail in their accounts of this story.
 - a) **Mark 14:9 ESV** "And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."
 - b) The proof that Jesus meant what he said is evident here this morning. We have determined to preach the gospel of Jesus today, and in so doing we have brought this story to your mind. Hasn't it served as a memorial to Mary's worship of her Lord more than 2,000 years later?
 - 2. Music may grow silent, lyrics may be forgotten. Tears may cease. The deep awe produced in us when we're in God's presence may eventually subside; but a single act of extravagant worship is never forgotten by God.
 - B. Secondly, take another look at Judas. John tells us point-blank that he was a thief. But may I ask you, what was it he stole?
 - 1. The passage told us that he helped himself to ministry funds to line his own pockets. But can I suggest to you that there was a far more heinous robbery being committed by Judas?
 - 2. Judas was fine with stealing not only money that belonged to Jesus, but worship as well. If he had his way, Mary would have pulled herself together and put that money to "better use". But as I said earlier, what better use of our time, our money, our blood, our sweat, our tears than to be poured out on Christ?
 - C. Don't get caught standing in the way of worship! If someone's worship makes you uncomfortable, as long as it doesn't violate a clearly revealed Biblical principle, **leave them alone!**
 - 1. If they make a scene, if they give too much, if they get too loud, if they can't stop crying, if they have a merry heart just stand back, respect the devotion of the moment, and let Jesus receive what is rightfully his! It's none of your business!
 - 2. And if you can't imagine yourself worshipping God with such reckless abandon, ask him, plead with him to free your heart! Don't let anyone rob you of the joy of pouring out the perfume of your life on his precious thorn-pierced brow; his nail-scarred hands and feet, his wounded side!