

## John 12:1-8 “Gifts of Love”

Intro. As we move into chapter 12 today, we read of an incident that took place on the Saturday evening before Jesus died. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jewish leaders quickly determined that Jesus must die. But God was not going to sacrifice His Son at the time that evil men wanted to, but at the time appointed by God. So as 11:54 indicates, Jesus withdrew to a desert place for a while, for the time had not come. But now, six days before Passover, Jesus comes back to Bethany, which was only 2-3 miles from the place He would soon die. You see, the time had come for Jesus to sacrifice His life for our sin. He would do so on Passover, the feast that celebrated God’s provision of a sacrificial lamb. Indeed, Jesus gave His life on the cross as the Lamb of God.

When Jesus came to Bethany He accepted an invitation to a special dinner. There, He was surrounded by His disciples, and others who loved Him very much. What a blessing to be surrounded by loving friends at a time when Jesus was facing the hatred of the Jewish leaders. And I must say that when you are going through a difficult time in your life, you should not withdraw from family and friends, and *we* should not withdraw from those going through difficulties. That is when we need the support of family and friends more than ever.

Now in our text of Scripture today, we see some true expressions of love for Jesus. After all, Jesus Himself taught that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And we have seen from our study of John abundant evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, and so our highest obligation is to love Him. And hasn’t He shown His great love for you? So I hope you will be challenged to follow the example of Mary, Martha, and others, and express your own love for Christ in the ways we will talk about today. It is not enough to *say* you love Jesus. It is not enough to sing about your love for Jesus. Your life should *demonstrate* love for Jesus. So I want you to compare your love for Jesus with the love we see expressed in our text today.

Notice some of the ways we can express our love for Jesus that I see in our text today. In each case, love is expressed through some form of giving. First of all, we see that they showed love for Jesus with:

### I. A GIFT OF A SPECIAL SUPPER

One way we show our love to someone is by inviting them to share in a meal. Vv.1-2 says this: “Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper....” Now why did they give a supper for Jesus and His disciples? There are several reasons and they all relate to showing love. First of all, they gave the supper:

A. To Show Honor and Appreciation – One important need that we all have is a sense of significance. We need to feel that our life matters; that we are valued and appreciated. I believe this supper demonstrated to Christ how much He was appreciated and valued. In v.2 an important word is left out by some translators (KJV, NKJV). V.2 actually begins with the word “therefore.”

Clearly, there was a connection between the resurrection of Lazarus mentioned in v.1, and the meal mentioned in v.2. Lazarus had been raised from the dead. Jesus had returned to Bethany. Therefore they gave Jesus a supper as an expression of deep gratitude and praise for the raising of Lazarus. In fact, note that this supper was made for (*eis*) Him, as indicated in the original Greek. Jesus had withdrawn to Ephraim soon after raising Lazarus from the dead, and so the family had little opportunity to thank Him for what He had done. So Mary and Martha certainly wanted to give the supper in His honor when given the opportunity. They wanted to celebrate what Jesus had done for Lazarus and his family.<sup>1</sup>

When a member of our weekday staff has a birthday we take him or her out for lunch to celebrate, and to express our appreciation for the work they do. Here is a picture of when we did so for Drew. Giving a meal to show honor and appreciation is a wonderful act of love.

Furthermore, we give a meal of sorts in remembrance and gratitude to Jesus when we have an observance of Lord's Supper. You can show your love for Jesus by attending, and participating in this memorial supper that we give in remembrance of Him, and in appreciation to Him for His sacrifice on our behalf.

B. To Provide Fellowship – God created us to be social creatures. We need fellowship. We should not isolate ourselves from others. Nor should we allow our members to be isolated, such as our homebound. So here we see that Christ was there to share their happiness, and to enjoy fellowship. In the previous chapter, we have seen Him weeping with those who wept. Here we behold Him rejoicing with those who rejoice! That's exactly what Paul said in Romans 12:15 that we are to do!

They must have had wonderful fellowship around that table. In Eastern fashion, the guests around the table seem to have all been men. We know from our text that Lazarus was there. He would gaze on Jesus, whom he had probably not seen since the day of his resurrection. The disciples of Jesus were there (v.4; cf. Matthew 26:8). And from Mk. 14:3 (and Mt. 26:6) we see that the supper was at the home of Simon the leper there in Bethany.<sup>2</sup> It doesn't clearly say that Simon was actually there, but that they met in his home. If he was still a leper he would not be there, but he offered the use of large home. I prefer to believe Jesus had healed him and he was there! I wish I could have been there to listen in on the conversation. The conversation not only met the need for fellowship, but I believe the conversation reinforced the honor and appreciation they wanted to express to Jesus. So imagine what a testimony meeting they could have had! If Simon was there his heart was full to overflowing for the mercy that he had received. He could have testified, "I was an outcaste, a leper. My skin was full of leprosy. But Jesus came, and healed me. Oh, how He changed by life." Then perhaps Matthew spoke up. "I was a tax collector. All I cared about was money. I cheated, and took advantage of people. But Jesus came to me, invited me to follow Him, and He changed my life. I now love people. He's given me a better purpose for living." Then Peter could have stood up to say, "I was a foul-mouthed sinner. All I cared about was fishing and making money. But Jesus has changed my life. He's cleaned up my language. I love Him, and I would die for Him." Then, Lazarus could have given a more dramatic testimony of what Jesus had done for him. And what a testimony he had! He was dead for 4 days! Then, he heard the voice of Jesus say, "Lazarus, come forth!" His spirit returned to that old, dead body. Jesus restored

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<sup>1</sup> It was a **brave tribute** to pay Him in the face of the Sanhedrin's commandment (11:57). They were going against the command of the leaders of Israel. This reminds me of **Psa. 23:5** which says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." That is exactly what they did for Jesus. What devotion they had in giving this meal to Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> There are no other reference to this Simon in the New Testament.

life to him. So he obeyed the voice of Jesus, and came forth from the grave! What proofs were Lazarus and Simon the leper of the Lord's power and goodness! Only God could heal the leper; only God could raise the dead.

C. To Provide Food – Let's face it. We all need food to live. Giving a meal certainly meets that need as well. But notice I mentioned this obvious need last. Too often some churches and ministries focus more on meeting physical needs than on social and spiritual needs. So don't limit your expression of love to meeting physical needs.

Some years ago when Jewel Bennett was recovering from surgery, people offered to bring her a meal. That was a loving gesture. She had an excellent idea. Instead of just dropping off food, she invited each one to stay and eat the meal with her and Clyde. In addition to food, she needed and desired fellowship! In fact, I read an article in *Reader's Digest* entitled, "Which Superheroes Fight Tumors?" The answer? "Your friends! They make it easier to endure the ordeal of cancer, and friends may also thwart progress of the disease." A University of Iowa study showed that patients with strong support had lower levels of a protein that fuels blood vessels needed for cancerous tumors to grow (January, 2003, p.44).

I want to encourage each of us here today to show your love for others by meeting needs in giving the gift of a meal, especially to show appreciation or at a time of need, such as recovery from sickness. And remember. Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." When you give a meal for a child of God Jesus views it as an act done unto Him!

So some showed their love for Jesus by giving Him a supper in His honor. But in v.2 we see another way to show your love for Jesus, and that is by:

## II. A GIFT OF SERVICE

Serving others is a good way to show your love for others. It meets needs in very practical ways. Now we see this truth:

A. Illustrated by Martha – We read in the middle of v.2, "And Martha served." Evidently Simon the Leper was a neighbor, friend or relative of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. And Martha was more than willing to offer her services on this occasion. This wasn't the first time we read of Martha serving. It seemed to be her characteristic method of showing her love and affection. In fact, this reminds us of a story from the Gospel of Luke 10 (vv. 38-42). Martha invited Jesus over to eat. She was working so hard to provide a special meal for Jesus. She had the gift of service. She was a worker. And here in John 12 we see Martha serving once again. No doubt, she worked many hours in the kitchen getting the food prepared for this meal. She was probably among those who brought the food to the table and served the guests. No doubt, Martha would serve on the Hospitality Committee in a church if she were with us today.

So Martha enjoyed serving Jesus by giving and serving a meal. But not all of us are into that. Paul wrote, "There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord" (1 Cor. 12:5). There are also different spiritual gifts. There are different ways that God designed for us to serve Him. We are not to judge others for not participating in our own form of ministry. Instead, we are to serve Jesus according to the gifts and temperaments that He has given us. In fact, the apostles said in Acts 6:2, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." You know, it's time that we stopped comparing ourselves with other people. There are so many that say, "Oh, if I could

just sing like some of those folks in the choir or praise team! Oh, if I could just play the guitar like Derek or play the piano like Susan! Friend, let me tell you something. The question is not what *they* can do. The question is, “What are *you* going to do to serve Jesus with the gifts and abilities that you have?”

B. Application –Do you show your love for Jesus by serving Jesus? How are *you* going to serve Jesus? Are you serving on a committee of the church? Are you serving in the teaching ministry, or worship ministry of the church? Are you serving in the outreach ministry of the church? Will you work in the nursery? Will you work in our children’s ministry? There are many different ways to serve Jesus. The question is, “Are *you* serving Jesus? Do you love Him, or do you just *say* you love Him?” In fact, Paul wrote that we are to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). I might add that there is good reason to serve Jesus, in addition to being an expression of love. Jesus said in John 12:26, “...If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.”

Finally, you can show your love for Jesus by:

### III. A GIFT OF SACRIFICE

This is really the focus of our text today. Everyone else was occupied with either serving, or enjoying the meal and fellowship. Now Mary had considered how *she* should show the love that welled up in her heart as she looked at Lazarus sitting there beside Jesus! Besides, she had other reasons for loving Jesus. He had saved her soul, and forgiven her. He had changed her life. So, without thinking of anything but of her love for the Lord, we read in v.3, “Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.” By the way, John is the only Gospel writer who identifies the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus on this occasion.

What Mary had in her hand was a new, alabaster jar or vase. In order to pour its contents on Jesus, she broke it at the top opening (Mark 14:3). Now keep in mind that it was customary to recline at meals on short couches that would surround a low table in a U shape. The feet of the guest would usually extend over the edge of the couches. So the feet of Jesus would have been easily accessible to her as she ministered to Him.<sup>3</sup>

Now it is clear to me that her deed was motivated by love. In v.3 it is likely that the connective translated “then” should be translated “therefore” (*oun*). Because Lazarus had been raised from the dead and was now reclining with Jesus, *therefore* Mary performed her noble deed. She poured out the ointment on Him as a testimony of her deep affection, her unutterable attachment, her worshipful devotion.

If your love for Jesus is not as strong, it’s probably because you haven’t fully realized how much Jesus has done for you. Do you ever reflect upon what Jesus has done for you? We will remind you to do so when we observe the Lord’s Supper together. You could be dead and in hell right now, but all of you are alive by His providence and grace. Most of you have already received forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Most of you have received many other blessings from His good hand. Do you love Jesus anywhere near as much as He has loved you?

Now I want to make a few observations about this expression of love. First of all:

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<sup>3</sup> Both Matthew and Mark tell us that she anointed the head of Christ. This is no discrepancy. Evidently, Mary anointed both His head and feet, but most appropriately was John led to notice only the latter, for as the Son of God it was fitting that this disciple should take her place in the dust before Him!

A. Great Love Is Willing to Make Great Sacrifices – The more we love someone the more we are willing to make sacrifices for them. In vv.3 & 5 we see several indications of the great sacrifice Mary was making for her Lord. First, v.3 says the ointment was “very costly”<sup>4</sup> (*polutimos*). One reason left untranslated by the NKJV is the fact that it was “pure” spikenard, meaning it had no additives. You know, perfume is sold by the ounce, because it is generally so expensive. Spikenard was an aromatic herb grown in the high pasture-land of the Himalayas in northern India. In view of the fact that it had to be harvested, extracted and imported on donkeys and camels from a region so remote, it was very high-priced. Furthermore, she did not pour out just a little bit. V.3 also indicates that she had a pound of ointment. This was a Roman pound, equivalent to 12 ounces. She evidently poured it all out on Jesus, for John says in v.3, “the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.” The other Gospels tell us that she also anointed the head of Jesus. She probably anointed His whole body as Jesus implied in Mark 14:8. She covered Jesus’s feet with an amount of ointment so abundant that it had to be dried with her own hair.<sup>5</sup> After seeing the way it was all used up on Jesus, Judas quickly estimated that the cost of her lavish sacrifice was equivalent to a whole year’s wages of a laboring man working 6 days/week (cf. Matt. 20:2)! Today this would be worth perhaps thousands. What a great sacrifice for Jesus!

What about us today? Do you love Jesus enough to make a great sacrifice for Him? Do you value Jesus enough to make sacrifices to support His work in the world? We just set a Lottie Moon Mission offering goal of \$20,000. It will take some sacrificial giving on the part of a good number of families to reach that goal. In Phil. 4:18 Paul called a missionary offering sent to him, “...a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” Furthermore, are you willing to sacrifice your personal time for Jesus? You know, in this world, Jesus has no hands but our hands. He has no feet but our feet. He has no voice to speak His Gospel but our voice. Jesus wants to save souls, change lives, and minister to people. Yet He chooses to do this great work through His Church. We must make the sacrifices necessary to serve Him. What sacrifices have you made for Christ? No gift can be too great that shows gratitude for what Jesus has done. Any sacrifice that we offer to Him will be less than the sacrifice that He made for us.

B. Sacrificial Love for Jesus Will Be Criticized by Others – That’s what happened here. In vv.4-5 we read, “Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’” There are some people who think their calling in life is to criticize what other people do for Jesus. Their selfish hearts just can’t understand such love. So the disciples, led by Judas, called this “a waste.”<sup>6</sup> Wherever Mary looked she was met with angry glances and looks of shocked disapproval. The world will never understand or approve of great expressions of love for Christ. The selfish person cannot understand the unselfish individual.

Adrian Rogers told this story: There was a man in a particular church, a smaller church, who opened a broom closet and inside he found five brand new brooms. He hit the ceiling over such extravagance. He went to whoever it was that was in charge of buying supplies for the church and said, “Who authorized somebody around here to buy five brand new brooms at one time?”

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<sup>4</sup> Surely Mary was from a wealthy family.

<sup>5</sup> Women did not let down their hair in public. Mary is acting with extravagant abandon, hoping that the close circle of friends will understand.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 26:8 tells us that “When his disciples saw it (Mary’s tribute of love), they had indignation, saying, ‘To what purpose is this waste?’” But John shows us who was the one that had injected the poison into their minds. Judas was the original protester, and his evil example affected the other apostles.

We're not even meeting our budget! We don't need five brooms at one time! That's a waste of money!" And he was very angry. The man couldn't satisfy him, and finally, the man went into the pastor's office to see the pastor. Of course, the pastor didn't have anything else to do except talk about five brooms. And the pastor tried to pacify him. And the pastor said, "Well, I don't know. Maybe we use a lot of brooms! Maybe there was a sale on brooms. I don't understand. But don't fall out of fellowship over it." But the man never was satisfied, and he left the pastor's office in a huff! After a while, the pastor was having coffee with the church treasurer, and the pastor told the church treasurer about this. The church treasurer just smiled. "Ah," he said, "Pastor, that's easy for me to understand why he was so upset." Well, the pastor said, "Would you please explain it to me?" And the treasurer said to the pastor, "Well, how would you feel if you saw everything you had given to the church in the past year tied up in five brooms?"

You're going to be criticized if you pour your life out to the Lord Jesus Christ. Unbelievers will not understand why you give up several hours every week in Bible study, worship, and Christian service. Many people would not understand why we have a good number of people in this church who give a tithe (10%) of their income plus even more to support the work of God!

Now generally speaking, you should consider what your critics have to say. They might be right. But you also need to consider the source. If the criticism is spoken from someone who loves you, and who walks with the Lord, you should certainly listen to what they have to say. But look's who's leading the criticism. Judas! It wasn't Mary that had a problem; it was Judas who had a problem. Notice the comment that John gave about Judas in v.6, "This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it." He doesn't care for the poor; he cares for himself. He was misappropriating funds for himself. He wants Mary's money given to the treasury so he can handle it and take out his percentage. A noble individual, this Judas! How deeply concerned about the poor is he! Don't be fooled by people like Judas. Furthermore, have you noticed how easy it is for some people to spend other people's money? Politicians do that all the time. I want to tell you, there are a lot of politicians today talking about poor people who don't really care about poor people. All they care about is votes. All they care about is money. The contrast between the loving selflessness of Mary and the selfishness of Judas is striking. Mary delighted to give, while Judas is only eager to get.

C. The Sacrifice Will Be in Proportion to the Value Placed on the Individual – Not only did Mary here express her own love, but she bore witness to the inestimable value of the person of Christ. This was not too costly to lavish upon the Son of God. You see, by this great sacrifice, she expressed the inestimable value of Christ to her soul. We see another evidence of this by way of contrast. Judas looked upon what was happening and exclaimed, "What a waste!" We also measure waste by worth.

For example, if someone were to buy a Rembrandt or a Van Gogh and spend one, two, or three hundred thousand dollars for it, few would say that it was a waste. Most would agree it's an investment because it's worth so much. But if a person were to spend fifty dollars for some poorly done painting by a novice, somebody would say that's a waste. And well they might. You see, waste has to be measured by worth. So Mary was expressing how much Jesus was worth to her.

How much is Jesus worth to you? Does your offering reflect that? Does your service reflect that? Judas called it a waste because he no longer valued Jesus. Oh, what a contrast she was to Judas. She freely gave what was worth three hundred pieces of silver; and right afterwards Judas sold Christ for just thirty pieces of silver!

D. Sacrifices Given Out of Love Please Jesus – Mary didn't please Judas, but she very much pleased Jesus. In v.7 Jesus said, "Let her alone...." Only one comes to her defense, but that One was the greatest of all! He vindicates the act of His censured servant. It would seem an extravagance. But Christ knew her motive and commended her deed. Then, in Mark 14:9, Jesus adds the following that is not recorded by John, "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." This prophecy has been fulfilled through 2,000 years of preaching, including *this* very day!

Don't you know that Jesus was pleased with her? The scent of her ointment probably remained through the time of His suffering. He had a daily reminder of her love and devotion! Even so you can be sure that Jesus will be pleased with your sacrifices for Him.

E. Sacrifices Given Out of Love Meet Needs – Here is another example of this truth. In v.7 Jesus explains, "She has kept this for the day of My burial." This devotion of Mary was prompted by no sudden impulse. Do you know what she had saved it for? She did not use it on the body of her brother Lazarus. Originally, she may have intended to use it on her own body. Instead, she had decided to keep the ointment for the day of her Lord's burial. Now she pours it all out on *Him*. Mary, perhaps more than any other disciple of Jesus, must have been convinced that the day of Christ's death and burial was rapidly approaching. This was becoming public knowledge (11:57). Plus, Jesus had often predicted His approaching death. Some of these predictions must have reached Mary's ears. The events of the last few months clearly pointed in the direction of the fulfillment of His predictions. Her faith had laid hold of the fact that He was going to die. Unlike the disciples, she actually believed that before long Jesus would be put to death by his enemies.<sup>7</sup> Who gave Mary that insight? I really don't know, but I have an idea. You know, Mary had a very favorite place at the feet of Jesus. You read about it here, and in Luke 10:38-42. She senses that He is to die for the sins of the world and she anoints Him ahead of time. Before any enemy's hand is laid upon Him, love's hands first anointed Him!

F. Sacrificial Love Seizes the Opportunity - Mary had embraced her opportunity. Jesus just returned to Bethany. Passover was soon approaching. She felt it was now or never. Hence, Jesus, adds in v.8, "For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." She will have other opportunities to show compassion for the poor, but Jesus was to be with them only a short time longer. She sensed this. And if the enemies of Jesus arrested Him, and if they killed Him, she might not have an opportunity to anoint the body of Jesus for burial. She must do it now, while the opportunity is present. Galatians 6:10 says, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." How much better it is to show love to people *before* they die! Don't wait until it is too late! Don't put off timely opportunities to give and make sacrifices.

By the way, there's nothing in this Scripture that says we ought not to take care of the poor. Indeed, we should, and this Scripture teaches that. Yet we always should prioritize our giving also based on present opportunities that may soon pass. In the 1980s doors for the Gospel were open in Russia, but now they are closing.

Conclusion: What love we see manifested here! Let us reflect upon our own love for Jesus. Do you love Jesus? Do you love Him enough to confess Him as your Savior, and follow Him in baptism?

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<sup>7</sup> Some commentators do not believe that Mary understood the purpose of her sacrifice of love. It was Jesus alone who recognized the purpose of what she was doing.

Do you love Jesus enough to honor Him with your presence on a regular basis at church services, including the memorial supper we observe each month? Do you love Jesus enough to serve Him? Do you love Jesus enough to make sacrifices for Him in time and money? In light of what He has done for you, you certainly should be willing to make sacrifices for Him.

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Dr. Adrian Rogers (notes from his sermon on Mark 14:3-9). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Warren W. Wiersbe read, but nothing significant to add.

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