

The Densest Moment | *Jesus Christ's Farewell Conversation* *My Two Scents*

John 11.45 - 12.11

1.22.23

Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.

⁴⁷ *Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸ "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." ⁵¹ Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.*

⁵⁴ *Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples.*

⁵⁵ *Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him.*

CH 12 *Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. ³ Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" ⁶ Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. ⁸ "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."*

⁹ *The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. ¹⁰ But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.*

We are, from Christmas 'til Easter, looking at the major speeches/discourses of Jesus Christ. Last year we looked at the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matt 5-7) and this year, the *Upper Room Discourse*. This week and next we hope to get us INTO that room (set the stage). If John is using the ancient art of rhetoric/persuasion, this week we look at the *Pathos* (emotion) next week *Ethos* (ethic/credibility of the speaker) and then the *Logos* (the content/logic).

This bit of John's Gospel is packed with pathos (emotion) and it's a watershed (peak of a roof) ... the line is crossed and Jesus Christ is now marked for death (v.54). There's a lot going on here... a number of different characters ...very intriguing storytelling ... BUT IN the drama and IN the unfolding plot, some really important things are being communicated about the spiritual life.

One way this section can help us is in providing us a sense, a feel or a more-vivid-understanding of some of the words and concepts we know to be important in the spiritual life... and yet, even though we know the priority of these words/ideas, we also know that merely being able to define them is NOT the same as grasping or being moved/motivated/liberated by the ideas. We know that spiritual growth and freedom comes, at least in part, by having a truer grasp on these truths. But HOW?

John the Gospel-Writer helps us NOT to take these key ideas for granted by his use of a literary device or technique called *JUXTAPOSITION*. To clarify vital ideas and concepts, he places them next to their opposites for the purpose of clarity... AND so we'll be moved.

That's juxtaposition: placing things, words, ideas, options side by side, for the purpose of contrast in order to turn information into FORMation. He adds to the pathos/drama in order to persuade us more deeply. In a series of contrasts, a collection of juxtapositions, John shows us what TRUE spirituality looks like ... Between CH 11 and 12 there's ONE big contrast (a kind of guiding or overarching metaphor) ...and then by a series of contrasts John takes elements and core ideas of the spiritual life, often used but often poorly understood, and clarifies them vividly and powerfully. Our points are:

1) One Big Contrast 2) Three More 3) What For?

Before we observe the ONE BIG contrast that sets the tone, let me make sure we all know something about juxtaposition as a communication technique. See if you CATCH it in this well-known poem:

*I bet there's rich folks eating in a fancy dining car
They're probably drinkin' coffee and smoking big cigars
Well I know I had it coming, I know I can't be free
But those people keep a' movin'
And that's what tortures me*

See? You wouldn't THINK a train-whistle is the opposite of prison but the songwriter makes you feel the despair and misery of incarceration by juxtaposing the concept of a fast-moving train and the carefree freedom of travel – eating, drinking, smoking big cigars and KNOWING that HE will never do that – that contrast makes the concept of freedom appear exponentially more valuable and dear! Captivity isn't too bad if one totally forgets the possibilities and joys of travel...but... that blasted whistle!

Now, here's the BIG contrast John uses to set the tone for the whole section: stench and fragrance. At the end of CH 11, Jesus Christ raises a man from death and that man (Lazarus) was not "sort-of-dead" ... HE WAS GOOD AND DEAD...four days dead!

And when the Rabbi tells them to roll away the stone so He can look into the tomb, the cave, the MOUTH OF

DEATH ... a sister of the dead man says "NO! ... By this time there will be a stench!"

And THEN at the beginning of the NEXT chapter we read about a fragrance... Jesus is anointed with perfume and the sweet scent of extremely EXPENSIVE oil fills the entire house... One section ends with the stench of death; the other side of the watershed begins with the fragrance of life: a clearly identifiable contrast! Death and life ... foulness and fragrance... the assaulting smell of rotting flesh and the welcome scent of priceless perfume ...

John apparently recognized the disparity/juxtaposition and sees it setting the tone for a series of responses and realities contrasted to one another. AND it's IN THESE contrasts that the dry kindling wood of religious data can be emotionally ignited. THREE significant contrasts:

Contrast #1 has to do with THE SELF ... the identity, how we see ourselves, where the self is rooted or founded. It's the contrast between faith and the opposite of faith (Do you know the opposite of faith?) FAITH vs. SINFUL FEAR... John's very interested in faith or belief and believing and, here, John draws our attention to the sharp divide between believing and being held captive by sinful fear.

The text begins with this very contrast. Some people SAW this miracle, Lazarus raised, a dead man COME TO LIFE AND AS A RESULT, they believed.

Others saw the same event, saw the man dead, wrapped up in cloth, his face wrapped in a way that would prevent a living man from breathing ... and then RAISED ... And this second group ... ran to the religious authorities and tattled ... they're informers trying to score points!

AND WHY were they informers and not followers? Because they were afraid ... John's been exploring that idea through the whole book: fear of exclusion keeps people from doing what they want to do (see 9.22) ... In John's mind what holds people back from believing is not their commitment to science or rationality or to philosophically sophisticated arguments or lack of evidence ... *they're enslaved by fear.*

Frequently, when people say, "I just *can't* believe ... I'm *not* that kind of person, I base *my life* on *science not* on faith ... I make my life-commitments on the basis of evidence, seeing ... not believing" ... So often that's just a cover for fear... afraid of what people would say... how my dad would react...afraid of what changes would come... afraid to lose my present identity as a smart skeptic or a self-sufficient, modern woman...

These people *had* the evidence... but wouldn't see it to its rational end for fear of exclusion ...They're rooted in the standing they have in their community (in this case a religious community)... And they're bound by the fear of being excluded ... They were not rational and they were not free ... Whatever you depend ON is your MASTER ... AND everyone depends on someone or something: *they* were not depending on God. In fact, they were depending on the Romans and on their positions in society, their social standing...THEY TRUSTED IN THOSE THINGS and they lived in fear of losing them.

See, 'truth is: everyone believes in something ...the question is, "Can what you believe in BE TAKEN away from you?"... If it can be, then you MUST live in fear of whatever can take it away. (Judas believed in money as we'll see in a minute ... and he fears when that it's threatened).

Second CONTRAST: Has to do NOT with the self but with our orientation to others *And the contrast is Love vs. Greed.* Faith depends ... faith *rests on or roots itself in some SOURCE*: believing is receiving ... But LOVE, on the other hand, LOVE is essentially giving ... or at least love seeks to express itself by giving... And in the second part of today's text ... Mary has been receiving grace and it leads her to love, but Judas is NOT receiving, not believing...he depends on himself and therefore he's insecure and greedy ...

Mary's love comes out of awareness ... Of all the people at that dinner party she's the one who's AWARE ... She's been listening; she'd been actually receiving the words Jesus Christ had been saying all these months ... She was the believer ... SHE WAS, BY FAITH, receiving His promise and His grace and His forgiveness and love, receiving the fullness ... and having *BEEN LOVED* by Jesus ... she's now overflowing with love *FOR* Jesus ... She understands that Jesus Christ has come to LOVE ... and to LOVE is to GIVE ...

He has come, the infinitely valuable ONE, the precious OIL ... came to be GIVEN, came to be poured out... in a lavish act of God's PRODIGAL LOVE ... wasteful in its extravagance ... and MARY GETS IT! Jesus Christ loves the poor more than anyone who ever lived but something even more important than the poor is going on ... the Son of God is taking a last, deep breath before plunging into the sea of JUSTICE we deserve ... And Mary gets it!

She's been loved ... therefore she loves in return and her love enables her to feel with the Beloved... She senses the urgency of this moment ... that Jesus will not pass this way again... He'll be spilled out for the sins of all the lost children of God... and for HER sins!!

She's become self-forgetting and enabled to focus on the needs of the Loved One... She sees what others don't see (not even the disciples!) ... She took the love of Jesus seriously and it made her forget about money (that was her savings!) And she's free to love... creatively and lavishly! Her self is not rooted in money so she's unafraid to part with it. She's NOT even being obedient... (to what law?) Her act is more than obedience...it's LOVE.

Judas, by contrast, is NOT aware of the infinite weight and urgency of the moment ... HE'S DULL and religious and full of himself. He's a liar and trying so hard to LOOK holy.

He did not take seriously the love that Jesus Christ was giving... He didn't see his own need and sinfulness and therefore didn't see the infinite value of God's gift ... Judas is not receiving love, so he has no love to give... He can't give at all ... He's NOT secure and he has to hold on to all he can get ... For Judas, it's all up to Judas.

3rd CONTRAST: this one has to do, NOT with my view of self (identity) and NOT with my posture toward others but with GOD and my relationship to God Himself. The contrast here is between DIVINE GOODNESS and HUMAN EVIL ... and this one's a bit more involved. The question is: if God is good and all-powerful, why doesn't He stop evil?

There is in this passage a lot of evil. The clergymen are plotting double-murder and cover-up. Judas is a thief and betrayer ... pretending to be a humanitarian! Some of the eyewitnesses are complicit in the murder by snitching and denying the truth ... fear is twisting people ... power is abused... AND...in the midst of it all, God

honors the priesthood He established and He puts the truth into the mouth of the high priest (Caiaphas). God takes human evil and God bends it for His own purposes. The words of fear and malice from Caiaphas simultaneously express God's goodness and love. Unwittingly Caiaphas ... predicts that in the death of Jesus Christ the nation of Israel will in effect die and will, with Him, be raised ...

IN Christ, IN the New Israel, will be Jews and Gentiles: "not the nation only, but gather into one the children of God" i.e. Jesus Christ and everyone who's IN Him. These guys were racists ... murderers ... fear mongers and manipulators and God is revealing through their leader (Caiaphas) how the world will be healed (see Eph 2-3!). And the other clergymen have prophesied too, v. 48: *"If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him."*

And as YOU think of TRUE SPIRITUALITY ...you have to see this dynamic. These fearful religious leaders thought that they could do a little pragmatic evil and hold on to a lot of good (choose the lesser of two evils – i.e. "it's better for ONE man to die...") "If we just kill this one good man, we'll preserve what's really important: the Temple and the Nation and the people who respect and look up to us!"

So, they killed the Good Man and in less than a generation ... the Romans destroyed the temple, disbanded their nation; took away their "place" and the Good Man's movement was spreading like wild fire, will outlive the Roman Empire and *"all men will believe in Him."*

Caiaphas and the clergymen were telling the whole story. The Point is: I may think (at points) that God is taking something good from me and "if I just do wrong this once I'll save this thing, that I HAVE to have ..." BUT IN THE END we'll find: that thing or person or situation is NOT ours after all... and we'll be only bitter and hardened and dominated by the idol which, at last, is taken from us ...

This text screams to us: "God will work out His will with or without us, and it will be infinitely better than our fearful selves imagine! ... "so, get with God's program; rest, trust in the God and Father of Jesus Christ!"

God's Kingdom, His will and His Reign cannot be finally resisted... but it can be enjoyed and pursued and we *can* come to delight in it and participate in it ... and sometimes it costs us dearly to seek God's way ... but eventually we'll see, in this life or the next, GOD'S WAY was infinitely better and didn't really cost us at all!

When I see that God took the world's greatest injustice: the One truly good and perfectly loving Man, arrested, mocked, showered in human spit and then separated from the Father He'd loved for all eternity... AND I REALIZE that this Greatest Human evil was also God's greatest display of grace and love... when I see that, it really helps me make sense of the hurts and difficulties in my life ... The Cross and Resurrection assure me that my pains and the pains and sins of planet earth will not have the final word ... God will turn it all to good.

That's the meaning of Jesus Christ: God will overrule. God will have the last word ... faith will triumph over fear ...love will overcome greed... divine goodness will prevail over human evil ... the Cross of Jesus Christ will be the moment of His glory ... God will bring life out of death ... the stench of death will give way to the costly fragrance of life filling the whole house ...grace filling the whole world!

In the meantime, to the extent that YOU like Mary, tune IN and believe, you also are made a fragrance of Christ to God (you remind God of His Son who walked this earth) and you even remind your neighbors and friends

and family of Jesus... To some (who don't believe) you'll stink like death and they'll want to get away from you. To others, ready to believe the Gospel, you'll smell like LIFE and Heaven... It's a big calling, one that can only be carried out by depending moment-by-moment on Jesus Christ.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

(2nd Corinthians 2.14-16)