

## Sermon Notes

### **MARY'S WORSHIP (John 12:1-11)**

Tom Koontz

Given at Blacksburg Christian Fellowship, Blacksburg, VA February 19, 2012

<http://www.blacksburgchirsitanfellowship.org>

We have come to John chapter 12 in our sermon series. By the end of the chapter we will have come to the end of Jesus' public ministry. We have read about Lazarus' sickness, how Jesus was called to his side, but waited until Lazarus was dead before He left for Bethany. When Jesus arrived Lazarus was already entombed. Jesus told Lazarus' sister Martha that He, Jesus, is the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Jesus shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Jesus shall never die. These are extraordinary statements. Frankly, they are the words of a delusional soul, unless Jesus really can raise the dead.

To prove His point Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb, had it opened, and called for Lazarus to come out. Lazarus had been in a state of irreversible decay for four days. Nevertheless, Lazarus came forth by the life giving power of the Word of God. The chief priests and Pharisees became concerned. What were they to do with this Jesus who is working so many signs? Caiaphas, the high priest, convinced them that Jesus should die, and that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they were to turn Him in.

In contrast to the leaders' callousness, Jesus friends prepare a dinner for Him in chapter 12. Matthew tells us it is held at Simon the Leper's house.

<sup>1</sup> Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. <sup>3</sup> Mary therefore 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. <sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, <sup>5</sup> "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to poor people?" <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Jesus therefore said, "Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial. <sup>8</sup> "For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me."

<sup>9</sup> The great multitude therefore of the Jews 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. <sup>10</sup> But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus to death also; <sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews were going away, and were believing in Jesus. (Jn. 12:1-8)

## PRAYER

This is an extravagant love story of affection and gratitude. Through her worship, Mary demonstrates her grateful astonishment at the death of death. While Mary worships the resurrection and the life, the authorities plot His death. It is six days from the Passover. It is the most popular national celebration on Israel's calendar, and the authorities hope Jesus might be among the multitude of pilgrims coming to Jerusalem. If He comes to Jerusalem, maybe someone will point Him out, or turn Him in, and they can put an end to Him.

In spite of the threat to His life, Jesus voluntarily exposes Himself to the wrath of His enemies and comes to Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus is determined to celebrate the Passover in His time and in a way that will change the world and our lives forever. From Bethany He will go to Jerusalem and then to the cross. Jesus has proven in Lazarus, and will prove again through the Passover, that He really is the resurrection and the life.

Thus, Jesus sees the dinner as a farewell while His friends celebrate the risen Lazarus. Lazarus reclines at the table. His sister Martha serves, the disciples are at the table or in the room when Mary brings out a jar of perfume, about the size of a can of soda. She breaks the alabaster jar and pours the perfume on Jesus.

Matthew and Mark remember her pouring it on Jesus' head. They viewed her anointing of Jesus as one a king would receive. There is too much perfume for just His head. Matthew and Mark heard Jesus saying that Mary had poured the fragrant oil *on His body* for His burial. Jesus says that Mary anointed more than His head, more than His feet. He is after all, the Messiah, the anointed One of God. Mary is displaying His anointing just as the prophets often acted out the lessons they taught.

We remember John the Baptist expressed his unworthiness to untie Jesus' sandal (Jn. 1:27). He wouldn't go near Jesus' feet. But Lazarus' resurrection drives Mary to Jesus' feet where she takes the position of a servant. Her humility and love for Jesus is a striking contrast to the religious authorities' murderous pride.

After pouring out the fragrance on His feet Mary loosens her hair, lets it fall free, and wipes Jesus' feet with it. At this time, a woman who untied her hair in public was considered to be of loose morals.<sup>1</sup> Paul considered long hair on a woman to be her glory (1 Cor. 11:15). Mary's adoration of Jesus will not be restrained by social conventions. She cares more for Jesus than she cares for her honor or her glory.

---

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris. *The Gospel According to John* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing 1992) pp. 576-577.

The pure nard (spikenard) she pours out on Jesus is a costly perfume due to its purity, its large quantity, and its source having originated in the Himalayas.<sup>2</sup> As she wipes His dirty feet, the perfume's fragrance permeates the room focusing all attention on Mary and the aroma of her worship.

The aroma of worship agitates Judas. Matthew and Mark remember that the *disciples are indignant*, but I suspect that Judas fueled their indignation. What is an aroma of adoration to Mary and Jesus is a stench of loss to Judas. Notice where his sensitivities lay, of all the disciples Judas is the one who knows the cost of the perfume, 300 denarii, a year's wages.

John explains Judas' contempt. Hidden behind his veil of benevolence for the poor Judas is experiencing a personal loss. Judas is a thief. He steals from the disciples' treasury. Judas' interest in the poor is a sham. If they could have sold the perfume, he knew what he would do with the money. He could have profited. Judas values money more than he values Jesus.<sup>3</sup> His concern for the poor is a cover for his covetousness.<sup>4</sup>

While Mary's heart overflows with adoration for Jesus, Judas' heart is all cramped up in self-centeredness. His desire to cash in on his association with Jesus is so strong that before the end of the week he will betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, about \$1,000.00.

Jesus defends Mary, and tells Judas to leave her alone. What she has done is not wasteful. It is wonderful, and Jesus accepts her worship. This is a symbolic anointing for His burial. Mary has anointed Jesus out of gratitude for Lazarus' resurrection. Jesus sees a greater significance in His anointing. His death as the final Passover Lamb is on the horizon. He is about to lay down His life as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. In doing this Jesus tells His disciples again that He will go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Mary anointed Jesus to celebrate Lazarus' life, but Jesus received the anointing to prepare for His death.

Jesus says in Matthew and Mark that Mary's worship is so excellent that, "wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of in memory of her." (Matt. 26:13) We are here this morning fulfilling Jesus' words and remembering Mary's love for Jesus. What testimony will we leave behind? Will it be one of adoration for Jesus, or will we be remembered for our calculated selfishness?

---

<sup>2</sup> William Hendrikson. *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids 2004) pg. 175.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper. *Leave Her Alone, Judas, This is for My Burial* (Desiring God Ministries, sermon by John Piper) <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/leave-her-alone-judas-this-is-for-my-burial>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Jesus tells them that they will not always have Him, but, thinking of Moses, He tells them that they will always have the poor. Moses told the people, “For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, you shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land. (Deut. 15:11). It is God’s command to care for the poor. It is a privilege for the people of God to serve Him in this way. However, the commandment cannot take greater priority than the One who gave it. They are to be focused on Jesus their Passover Lamb.

Judas completely misses who Jesus is and why He has come. Though Jesus was rich, He became poor that through His poverty — remember that Judas holds Jesus’ money — we might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9). While Mary adores the resurrection and the life, Judas is blind and miserable and poor and will not believe. J.C. Ryle wrote, “It is vain to expect a man to do much for Christ, when he has no sense of debt to Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

Mary’s is an act of costly, humble devotion, but like Caiaphas’ actions her actions signal so much more than she understands.<sup>6</sup> Caiaphas saw Jesus’ death as the way to save Israel from Roman interference. God saw Jesus’ death as the way to save His people out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Mary sees her anointing as a loving gratitude for life. Jesus sees it as a loving preparation for death.

John has come to understand that Jesus’ burial is what makes Mary’s worship possible. Mary may be memorialized in the New Testament, but she lived her life in the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant. What Mary did may have been extravagant, but it was also dangerously courageous.

Mary lives less than two miles from the temple. Some days she may have been able to see the smoke rising from the altar. If the wind was right she could probably smell the burning flesh of the sacrifices. Mary knows the principles of the Law. She knows that on all the earth there was only one way to approach God, and God had prescribed that way in His *Manual of Worship*, the *Book of Leviticus*. The way to God was at the temple with a blood sacrifice offered through a priest.

The requirement of a blood sacrifice is primitive to our sophisticated sensibilities today. “It is primitive for a blood sacrifice to be made to satisfy the justice of a transcendent and holy God, but sin is a primitive thing that is basic to our human existence, so God chose to communicate His love, mercy, and redemption to us through this primitive work.”<sup>7</sup> Lev. 17:11 explains:

---

<sup>5</sup> J.C. Ryle. *Expository Thoughts on John, Vol. 2*. (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh 1999) pg. 349.

<sup>6</sup> D.A. Carson. *The Gospel According to John* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1991) pg. 430.

<sup>7</sup> R.C. Sproul. *The Truth of the Cross* (Reformation Trust Publishing 2007) pg. 11.

'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.'

Life is sacred because it belongs to God. When Adam sinned and died, he died because he was no longer worthy of the life God breathed into him. All his descendents are cut out of the same twisted and depraved cloth. In light of God's righteousness, excellence, and holiness none of us deserve to live before the face of God.

However, to magnify His mercy throughout all creation for His glory, God preserves a remnant of that fabric Adam ruined. God accepts the lifeblood of one creature so that the life of another creature may continue. That's what the sacrificial system in *Leviticus* taught. An eye for an eye, a life for a life, and it hasn't changed.

Worshippers at the temple were never bored in the presence of God. God was not to be trifled with. You could not come to Him any way you pleased. There was always a sacrifice. And you could not bring any sacrifice. It had to be the first born, the unblemished, the best from your flock or herd. A wild animal was unacceptable. It had to cost you to sacrifice. Worship of God at the temple was traumatic, costly, emotional, and unforgettable.

You may remember the story of Nadab and Abihu. They were the sons of Aaron, the high priest and brother to Moses. These brothers decided to experiment with worship one day. They entered the tabernacle and offered strange fire to the LORD, fire that was not commanded. As a result fire came out from the LORD and consumed them. Can you imagine being their father? Aaron trained them to do all that God had said, but they still thought some other fire would do.

Moses comforted Aaron with these words, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, by those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored." Aaron kept silent. Throughout the *Book of Leviticus* God repeats, "you shall be holy for I am holy." Nadab and Abihu's death was a *death by holiness*. Adam and Eve's death was a *death by holiness*. We all experience *death by holiness*.

Jesus teaches His disciples in chapter 14 (14:6) that He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to His Father except through Him. Coming to God in any other way than Jesus is strange fire to the Lord. Coming before God in any other way than through Christ will consume you. Is Jesus changing the Law? Is He abolishing the *Manual of Worship*? No, in His Sermon on the Mount He taught that He had not come to abolish the Law. He had come to fulfill the law (Matt. 5:17).

Jesus told the Pharisees that if they destroyed this temple, He would raise it up in three days. They thought He was crazy. But He spoke of His body as the temple.

And He is the temple of God for all the fullness of the deity dwells in Him (Col. 2:9). He is the great High Priest of which Aaron was only a shadow. He is the Lamb of God of the real Passover of God. His is the blood of the atonement that God promised in Leviticus.

For the life of the flesh is in Jesus' blood, and I have given it to you on the altar of the cross to make atonement for your souls.

None of us came this morning with sacrifices in our hands. *Nothing in our hands we bring, simply to the cross we cling.* We come to the Father through Jesus alone because He is the fulfillment of all the Law required; He is the heavenly temple; He is our Great High Priest; He has offered up the Lamb of God; He has offered up Himself. Paul told the Galatians that the Law had become God's tutor to lead His people to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Mary adored Jesus because she witnessed the death of death. Are you drawn to Jesus because you see the death of your death? Mary saw the end of God's curse and the source of hope. She saw Lazarus alive. What better news could she ever hear?

As Mary caressed Jesus' feet with her hair and as the air filled with the fragrance of her affection, she recognized just how beautiful are the feet of Him who brings good news. Who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isa. 52:7)

When my 17 year old brother died in a bicycle accident with a car, my closest friend came to comfort me. We had been friends for twenty years, since the time we were both five. He knew my brother since his birth. He was grieving; I was grieving. He told me if there was anything he could, to let him know. Out of the depth of grief and despair — one day my brother is here; the next day he is gone — I looked into the eyes of my dear friend and told him bluntly and bitterly that there was nothing he could do — unless he could raise the dead.

That is it, isn't it? We want to live. Supremely more important, God wants us to live and has provided the only way we can live. Death is a cruel enemy. It consumes us in grief. We are burdened with the certainty of death. We run from death and hide from it and deny it. Yet death is our common destiny. But if you trust Jesus, believe Jesus, if you believe He is the resurrection and the life, you will live even if you die. You will rise as certainly as Lazarus, as perfectly as Jesus.

Caiaphas, who thought it would be expedient to kill Jesus for the sake of the people, now wants to kill Lazarus. Why? Lazarus is evidence of the truth of Jesus. Verse 9 tells us that a great multitude comes to Bethany, not for Jesus' sake alone, but also to see Lazarus, and they are believing in Jesus.

First it was Jesus, but Jesus' death wasn't enough. Now Lazarus must die. Soon it will be Stephen, Peter, then Paul. The world will never stop burying the evidence of Jesus. The taller we stand for Jesus, the louder we speak for Jesus, the greater the evidence is that His life is in us, the greater will be the world's pursuit to bury us.

In light of the certainty of our resurrection from the dead, a year's worth of perfume, a year's worth of anything, is a small gift to offer to Jesus. Mary was blessed to have such a rich gift to pour out on to Jesus. Maybe she was wealthy. Maybe she inherited it. Not all of us are so blessed, *but all believers are blessed with the fruit of the Spirit* with which we can anoint the Body of Christ, the church.

What gift has God given you? Long-suffering? Wipe His feet with it. Offer your very best back to Him. Has He given you joy? Anoint Him with your oil of joy. Peace? Kindness? Gentleness? Offer it back to Him. Pour it out on the Body of Christ. Take your honor and your glory and your beauty and wipe the feet, the earthy and dirtiest part of His Body. Let us set Him apart with our worship so that the fragrance of our worship, the cost, the beauty, the depth of our worship, will turn the eyes of the world to our King and our Lord.

Mary's adoration of Jesus reminds us what a privilege it is to come and worship at the feet of Jesus as a congregation. When we come together Jesus is to be supreme in our hearts and our teaching. John Piper writes, "If the fountain of living water does not flow from the mountain of God's sovereign grace on Sunday morning, will not the people hew for themselves cisterns on Monday, broken cisterns that hold no water (Jer. 2:13)?"<sup>8</sup> Let God we gather together we should be able to say with the psalmist, "So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory." (Psa. 63:2) We want to be like Mary and remember, by those who come near the Lord He will be treated as holy, and before all the people Jesus must be honored.

## **PRAYER**

*Permissions: You are permitted to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and that you cite references appropriately. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Blacksburg Christian Fellowship, Blacksburg, VA.*

---

<sup>8</sup> John Piper. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids 1995) pg. 109.