

# Palm Sunday

*“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”  
(Matthew 21:5 ESV)*

*Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” (Matthew 26:3–5 ESV)*

## **Anointing and Betrayal**

**April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Matthew 26:6-16**

**Assistant Pastor Levi denBok**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning!

I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 26.

The story that we are about to read is also told in the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John. This is a scene that clearly made quite an impression on the disciples. They all recognized something in this encounter that needed to be written down so as not to be forgotten.

Before us is the story both of worship and of rebellion – anointing and betrayal. This story compels us to take a side. Will we align with Mary’s assessment of Jesus? Is Jesus worthy of all praise and glory and adoration? Or will we align with Judas’ assessment? Did Jesus go too far in accepting her offering?

Look with me now at Matthew 26:6-16. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, living and active word to us today:

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup> a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. <sup>8</sup> And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? <sup>9</sup> For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” <sup>10</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>11</sup> For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. <sup>12</sup> In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. <sup>13</sup> Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

<sup>14</sup> Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup> and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. <sup>16</sup> And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.  
(Matthew 26:6-16 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Matthew indicates that this event – the anointing of Jesus at Bethany – was the proverbial straw that finally broke the camel’s back for Judas. But what was it about this event that pushed Judas over the ledge? Think about it! Judas has been sitting front and center as a witness to Jesus’ ministry. Jesus has said and done a number of controversial things!

Jesus claimed that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days! That would have been enough to unsettle any devout Jew.

Jesus claimed to have authority to forgive sins! That one really lit a fire under the religious leaders.

Judas was able to endure all of that.

But here, in this scene, Judas was confronted with a question: Is Jesus Christ worthy of your praise?

That is THE question. It moves us beyond mere intellectual assent. You might know some important truths about Jesus – you might know that he is the Son of God, and the promised Messiah. You might know that he died on the cross, that he was buried and that he rose on the third day. You might know all of those things, but merely KNOWING these truths about Jesus will not save you. Judas spent three years living with Jesus. He had amassed quite a bit of knowledge over the years, but that knowledge was not enough.

With that in mind, I don’t think it is inappropriate for me to suggest that we might just have some people sitting in the room this morning who share some similarities with Judas. You have been sitting and listening intently for quite some time now, and you have even tolerated some radical, culture shaking claims that Jesus has made! Yet, there is something holding you back from surrendering to Jesus, isn’t there?

Is he wise? Yes. You’re learning lots as you listen to his word preached. Is he exemplary? Of course! You would readily admit that the world would be a far better place if we all sought to live like Jesus.

But that’s not the question this text is asking, is it? That’s not the question that has kept you standing with one foot out the door. The fundamental question that we must ask is this: Is Jesus worthy? Is he worthy of your affection, your worship, your life? Is he worthy of your money, your time, your everything?

Mary saw something that Judas did not see. Now, to be sure, we don’t know just how much Mary knew, but she knew ENOUGH to respond to Jesus in such an extravagant way that he was prompted to say:

Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” (Matthew 26:13 ESV)

There is something in this story that is meant to shape us and to correct us. I can think of no

better text to prepare our hearts to worship Christ on this holy week.

Is Jesus worthy of extravagant, lavish, sacrificial praise?

This sister was convinced! She saw enough! And Jesus here holds her up as an example to be followed. So let's do just that.

### **Because Jesus Is Worthy:**

First of all, because Jesus is worthy:

#### **1. Worship will be the heartbeat of all that we do**

I think that it's fair to say that verse 11 presents one of the most controversial sayings of Jesus. Look there with me:

For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. (Matthew 26:11 ESV)

At this point, those who have only been following Jesus because of his social justice policies hop off of the bandwagon. It was easy to follow Jesus when he was humanizing those who had been dehumanized and when he was elevating those who had been marginalized by society. That Jesus was an easy sell. But now he is telling us that we ought to prioritize our worship of him even over service to the poor!

What do we do with that?

And if you're a Bible-reader, then you know that this is not the only time that Jesus has made radical claims about his rightful position on our priority list. Do you remember what he taught us about our love for our families? In Luke 14 Jesus says:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26 ESV)

Now, is Jesus here saying that anyone who loves their parents is disqualified from following him? Of course not! The fifth commandment says:

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12 ESV)

Obviously, Jesus is not telling us that anyone who obeys the fifth commandment cannot be his disciple. So, what is he saying? He is telling us that, as good as mothers, fathers, wives, children, brothers, sisters and even our lives are, they must take a back seat to Jesus Christ. Our love for Jesus must be on another level. Our love for him ought to make our love for anything and anyone else pale in comparison.

The other day I was snuggling with Luke and Noelle and Luke asked, "Do you love Noelle?" To which I replied, "I sure do, buddy." Then he followed that up by asking, "But you love God the

most, right dad?" To which I replied, "That's exactly right Luke." Little does he know that it is a very real challenge as a father to keep those loves in the proper order! Amen? The human heart is an idol factory. We take the good gifts of God and we make little gods out of them, and we live lives of worship for the gifts instead of the giver. It is so easy to make idols of our children – to allow them to dictate our schedules, our ministries, our lives. Jesus consistently shines light on our propensity to make good things "god" things.

That's exactly what he's doing here: Jesus is teaching us that worship must be the center – it must be the heartbeat – of everything that we do as believers. Is he teaching us to neglect the poor? Of course not! Just last week we read:

'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:40b ESV)

Jesus isn't condemning generosity to the poor. No! What he's doing here is he's warning us of the dangerous inclinations of our hearts. We will be tempted to prioritize serving the poor over and above worshiping Jesus. We simply cannot do that. Jesus will not take a back seat in our affections – not even to a worthy cause like service for the poor.

Let's flesh this out in our own context.

As a congregation, we are called to extend the same self-preserving care that we hold for ourselves to our neighbours. Jesus taught us that lesson in his parable of the good Samaritan. So, we are going to seek to resolve the physical needs of those who are struggling in our community. We are going to come alongside and pray for the Lighthouse. We are going to offer meals and support through our James 1:27 ministry. We're going to run basketball camps and carnivals to support families in our community. And in all of these things we are going to preach the gospel boldly and intentionally. We understand outreach to be a critical component of our mission as a church.

But, before we do ANY of that we are going to WORSHIP JESUS. Our primary mission – the central, immovable, never-to-be-moved-from-the-number-one-position heartbeat of this church is WORSHIP! We reach out to the poor SO THAT THEY MIGHT BECOME WORSHIPERS TOO!

This story is about worship. Could Mary have used that perfume to alleviate the needs of the poor? Sure. But she didn't. She used every last drop of that perfume to express her love for Jesus Christ. The disciples accused her of wastefulness, because the disciples had subtly allowed their priorities to become distorted.

Serving the poor is good. In fact, serving the poor is necessary! But serving the poor is not ultimate. Because Jesus is worthy, worship will be the heartbeat of all that we do.

So, let's look at the worship that Mary has modelled for us here. Because Jesus is worthy:

## **2. Our worship will be extravagantly generous**

A nice bottle of perfume in our culture would cost – what – \$200? For that reason, we need to do

a little bit of homework to understand Judas' indignant response. As I mentioned off the top, this story is found in two other Gospels. This is very helpful because, with the help of the Holy Spirit, Mark had the foresight to write down the price of this ointment. He tells us that the ointment had a market value of 300 denarii<sup>1</sup>. In those days, 300 denarii was roughly the amount of money that a working man would earn in a year. So, we're not talking about a \$200 bottle of perfume this morning. We're talking about \$55,000 poured over the head of Jesus as he sat at the dinner table with his disciples.

How would you react to that?

Apparently, Judas was not alone in his shock. Look again at verse 8:

And when **the disciples** saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? (Matthew 26:8 ESV)

Judas wasn't the only one taken aback! More than one of Jesus' disciples looked at this generous outpouring and asked: "Why this waste?"

At this point in the story, Jesus has an excellent opportunity to explain to Mary the value of shrewd, financial planning! He has a great opportunity to rebuke her for her reckless impulsiveness.

But he didn't do any of that. This isn't to say that there is no value in wise, financial stewardship. We'll see some of that in our series through Proverbs. But do you know what Jesus values more than financial prudence? Generous, extravagant, sacrificial WORSHIP! Jesus won't let us miss this. He grabs his disciples; he directs their attention to this generous outpouring, and he says:

Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." (Matthew 26:13 ESV)

There Jesus stood, soaked in a year's-wages-worth of perfume. Her generosity was literally filling the room with fragrance. He looked at his grumbling disciples and he said: "Look at the example that Mary has set for you! Not only do I approve of her generosity, but this act of worship will be remembered FOREVER!"

Can I ask you something this morning? Are you more like Mary, or Judas?

In John's Gospel, we're given a glimpse in Judas' hidden motives. There we read:

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. (John 12:6 ESV)

Follow a man's money and you will quickly discover his love. Here, Judas' primary love was exposed. He was a lover of money more than he was a lover of Jesus.

Here's a question to consider: Do you love Jesus more than you love money?

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 14:5

Is your worship extravagantly generous? I'm not just talking about the offering plate. I'm talking about your life. If I were to follow the money in your life, what would it tell me about your love? Would it tell me that you are a worshipper? Would it tell me that you are sold out for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this world?

Here's perhaps a more nuanced question: How would you have counselled Talia – a young woman in her twenties from our church who decided to leave it all behind so as to serve the Lord in South-East Asia? Would you have encouraged her to go? Or would you have given her ten reasons why she was sacrificing too much? What was your counsel for Craig and Rene as they sold their house and as they prepare to leave behind a thriving profession to train pastors in South Africa? When you see people taking extravagant, generous steps of faith, does your heart say: "Yes! Jesus is worth it!" Or does your heart say: "That seems a little extreme to me"?

If Jesus is who he says he is and if he has done what the Bible says he has done and if he is going to return again to restore what he said he would restore, then HE IS WORTHY. He is worthy of radical, extravagant, generous worship! We should be getting audited every year because our inexplicable giving to the cause of Christ should leave the Canadian government saying: "there is no way that they are really giving away THAT much money."

Finally, because Jesus is worthy:

### **3. Our worship will be passionate and lavish**

John's gospel provides us with some really helpful details in this story. He provides this vivid description of the event:

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. (John 12:3 ESV)

I would guess that every conversation in the room came to a halt as a jar of perfume was poured over Jesus head. I can only imagine how shocked John would have been while he watched as Mary used her own hair to rub Jesus' almost-certainly-dirty feet. How quiet would that room have been?

It was lavish.

It was awkward.

Perhaps it even seemed inappropriate.

And, all three gospel accounts tell us that Jesus approved of it!

How would you respond to such a lavish display? In fact, let's tame this down a bit with an easier example: What would you think if someone walked out into the aisle and danced as we sang praise to God? What thoughts would run through your mind? Can I take a guess?

"That's inappropriate and distracting. How are we supposed to focus on Jesus when this dancing is drawing in so much attention? And what are their motives, anyways? They probably WANT

everyone to watch them! Someone ought to do something about that.”

I bet the disciples were thinking much the same thing as their discussion was interrupted by a jar of perfume dumped on Jesus’ head. I bet the room was uncomfortably silent as Mary knelt down and wiped Jesus’ feet with her hair. They were bothered. They questioned the wisdom of such a reckless, lavish expression of praise. Look with me at verse 10:

But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. (Matthew 26:10 ESV)

Church, can I share something personal with you? One of the consistent prayers that I pray for myself and for us as a church is that we will slowly but surely grow as passionate, lavish worshipers of Jesus Christ. I don’t ever want it to be said of us that, in spite of our earnest commitment to the preaching of the Word, we are a cold people.

Next Sunday we will be celebrating the resurrection of our Savior! We will watch as eight brothers and sisters pass through the waters of baptism! In most parts of the world, a day like that would be marked with tears of joy, shouting, dancing, and rejoicing! But we are Canadians, and if left to our own natural inclinations I suspect that we will give a healthy round of applause before quietly taking our seats. To be clear, that’s not sinful. But I think it’s fair to say that this is a weakness in our culture.

I want to be careful here... I don’t want to be manipulative. This is not a rebuke. It’s an encouragement. Church, I want to give you permission to be expressive next weekend! I want to invite you to feel freedom in this place to shout, or cry, or dance, or clap, or smile from ear to ear as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and as we witness the testimonies of seven people who have been raised from death to life!

Don’t despise exuberance. Don’t be so quick to judge reckless abandon. Jesus points to such worship and he holds it up for us as an example. Our praise should be passionate and lavish because Jesus is worthy! Amen?

## Conclusion

Here’s one concluding thought: Judas fell because Judas did not see Christ as infinitely valuable. That reality is highlighted in verses 14-16:

<sup>14</sup> Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup> and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. <sup>16</sup> And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him. (Matthew 26:14-16 ESV)

Thirty pieces of silver was the price prescribed in Exodus 21:32 to compensate a man for the accidental death of his slave. How fitting that the King of Kings who humbled himself to serve his people was then sold by his people for the price of a lowly servant. Charles Spurgeon writes:

The amount agreed upon, *thirty pieces of silver*, was the price of a slave; and showed how little value the chief priests set upon Jesus, and also revealed the greed of Judas in selling his master for so small a sum. Yet many have sold Jesus for a less price than Judas

received; a smile or a sneer has been sufficient to induce them to betray their Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Are you Judas? What is Jesus worth to you? When you look at Christ, do you see him as infinitely valuable? Do you see him as worthy of praise, glory and adoration – worthy of your very life? Or is his glory hidden to you?

Holy week is upon us. You will be given every opportunity this week to see Jesus and delight in him.

On Friday, you will see him upon the cross. You will see him with a back shredded by Roman lashes and a crown of thorns pressed cruelly upon his head. You will see him with nail pierced hands crying out, “My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?” You will see the sinless Lamb of God offered up as a sacrifice to atone for your sins and for mine, and in that gruesome display you will see his love for sinners.

He who would know love, let him retire to Calvary and see the Man of sorrows die.<sup>3</sup>

On Sunday, you will see the risen Savior standing victorious over sin and death. You will see his nail scarred hands and you will hear Mary proclaim, “He is alive! He is alive!” You will discover once and for all that God is powerful to save and that the enemy’s scheme for us has been overthrown! The accuser has been silenced! The deceiver has fallen before Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life! The Lion of Judah has conquered the grave and He is worthy! He is worthy of all blessing and honor and glory! He is worthy of extravagantly generous, passionate, lavish praise! Amen?

By God’s grace, my prayer for you – my prayer for all of us – is that we will receive the blessing that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 13. He said to his disciples:

<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. (Matthew 13:16 ESV)

O God, in Your infinite kindness, would you open up our eyes to see and love Christ!

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Commentary On Matthew* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2013), 398.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening Devotions*. (Lynchburg, Virginia: The Old Time Gospel Hour), 202.