Journey with Jesus to the Cross in Lent Part 5:

John 12:1-8

Today we are continuing our studies through the season of Lent as we journey to the cross with Jesus. What we have been learning on this journey is that Lent is a time of confession and repentance that brings with it the hope of an eternal presence with our Lord. Over the next three weeks we will be concluding this journey as we travel with Jesus to Jerusalem. Next week we will join Him as He enters Jerusalem on a donkey, showing that He is the humble servant Messiah that has been promised in the pages of Scripture. In two weeks, as we celebrate resurrection Sunday, we will experience both the horror of His death as well as His glorious resurrection. This morning our focus is on an event that took place less than a week before the Passover meal in the town of Bethany. This event holds major significance because it will lay the foundation and prepare us for the weeks ahead. Please open your bulletins or your Scriptures to the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John.

**Context and Setting**

The event of the 12th chapter takes place six days before the Passover in the town of Bethany, which is near the city of Jerusalem. This was the home of His friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary. In chapter 11 Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, so the people who were following Him were even more convinced at this time that He was the long-awaited Messiah promised in the Scriptures. Not only did this miracle cause the popularity of Jesus to rise with the common people, it also caught the attention of the Jewish authorities who wanted to kill Him now more than ever. We are told in **John 11:53 “So from that day on they [the Jewish authorities] planned together to kill Him.”** This mighty miracle set the stage for all of the events that would eventually take place over the last two weeks of Jesus’ life.

Another important aspect of this event is that it took place in the home of Simon the Leper. In the Gospel of Mark, we have the event recorded in Chapter 14:3-5. The reason why this Simon had the title of Leper was most likely because he had been healed by Jesus of the deadly disease of Leprosy. We are also told that Jesus was reclining at the table when the events of John unfold.

**The Loving Act of Mary (vv. 1-3)**

At the dinner that was being held for Jesus we have many people in attendance. We have the 12 disciples, Lazarus, his sisters Mary and Martha as well as other guests we are not told about. If we look closely, we see that Martha was doing the serving, which was her way to serve the Lord. This is the way that she chose to serve the Lord and we know this because there was another time when Jesus was visiting with them that Martha became angry at Mary because she was not helping her to serve the guests. **In Luke 10:38-42 the account is presented this way “38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who was also seated at the Lord’s feet, and was listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do the serving by myself? Then tell her to help me.’ 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary; for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.’”** Martha was a very high-strung woman who was always concerned that when someone came to her home that she was hospitable. Jesus does not condemn her for choosing to serve in that manner, but He also does say that Mary choosing to listen does not make her any less important. So, what we have is Martha serving the meal while Jesus, the disciples and Lazarus are reclining at the table enjoying the meal. Mary is not mentioned yet, but she will be in the next verse.

In verse 3 Mary appears with her gift and begins to anoint Jesus with the perfume. The perfume is described as being pure nard, which was precious because it was not something that was native to that part of the world. Today we know this as spikenard, which *“According to Eastman’s Bible Dictionary, spikenard “is the root of an Indian plant, the Nardostachys jatamansi, of the family of Valeriance, growing on the Himalaya mountains. It is distinguished by its having many hairy spikes shooting out from one root” (*[*https://www.gotquestions.org/spikenard-in-the-Bible.html*](https://www.gotquestions.org/spikenard-in-the-Bible.html)*).* With the fact that this oil traveled so far and was rare, we will find out what this was worth. In verse 5 after Judas Iscariot complains about this being used in this manner, he mentions the worth of this to be approximately 300 denarii. The reason this is so important is because we see that Mary gave something of extremely significant value when she did this for Jesus. In Bible times a denarii equaled a full day’s wages for a common laborer, so if you take that one days wage and multiplied it times 300, then subtracted 52 days of work for each year due to the Sabbath each week, this bottle of pure nard was worth about a full year of wages.

Not only was the oil a lovely gift due to its monetary value, but the oil itself holds special meaning in the way that it was used. By using this oil on Jesus, she is showing the love and respect that she had for Him. She was anointing Him because of her devotion to Him and also as an act of appreciation for what He had done for them in raising Lazarus from the dead. Not only did Mary do this for Jesus in His life, but when the wise men came to visit Him as a child one of the gifts, they gave Him was Myrrh, which is also a precious oil. These items being so valuable and precious were presented to Christ because they symbolized the high value of who Jesus is and the importance of His sacrifice for humanity.

The second reason why this anointing of Jesus is so important is because it is an example of love and worship done to honor Jesus. What had been happening after the raising of Lazarus was that Judas had gone to the Jewish authorities to work out plans to betray Jesus and then the authorities were looking for a way to kill Jesus as well as Lazarus so that the proof of this miracle might be eliminated. Mary was anointing Jesus at a time when the world was becoming much more dangerous and His enemies were conspiring to destroy Him. Her devotion at this time was a moment where Jesus was being honored for the sacrifice He was about to make.

The application we can take from this act of devotion to Jesus is that when we approach the throne of God, He asks us to bring the best we have to present to Him. When we think carefully about all that God has done for us and how He has freed us from the bondage to sin we should be willing to give back to Him our very best. This is reminiscent of the scene in Genesis when Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to God **(Genesis 4:4-5)**. Abel brought the first fruits and the finest of his cattle whereas Cain brought the left over and surplus of his grain. The problem was not that Cain brought grain instead of a lamb, but that he was not willing to share with God the best of what he had. We have so much to be thankful for, so it is only reasonable that we bring to God the very best that we have. As we look forward to our outreach activities this summer let us ask God to make known to us the ways we can use the gifts He has entrusted to us so that we can work to grow His kingdom here on earth. Just like Mary, let us give Him the best we have!

**The Hypocrisy of Judas (vv. 4-6)**

After Mary anoints the Lord Judas speaks up because he has a problem with what had been done. He makes the point that this ointment should not have been used in such manner, but should have been sold for about a year’s worth of wages. Such a comment is only made by Judas because, as John informs us, Judas was not concerned with the poor, but was very greedy and would keep back some of the proceeds of the ministry money for himself.

In what way does Judas show his hypocrisy in this situation? Well, he makes a public spectacle making it very clear that he does not approve of what Mary had done for the Lord. He puts on a show so that the others present at the meal would think that he had a real desire to do something nice for the poor. The extra information that John provides for us in verse 6 is most-likely information that he had available to him after all of this had taken place. We know that Judas was a greedy man because when he betrayed Jesus, he did the act for thirty pieces of silver. He was motivated by money and used the ministry as a way to enrich himself at the expense of the other disciples as well as those who supported the ministry of Jesus. If the ointment had been sold for the money, then Judas would have had access to that money which he liked to help himself to.

I think that it is appropriate at this time to mention that Judas served in the role as the treasurer for the ministry. He had the task of keeping watch over the purse and making certain there were enough funds so they all could eat and have places to stay at night. Having constant access to the money purse turned out to be a temptation that he could not withstand. The life of Judas and his difficulty with money is a real-life illustration of what the apostle Paul would later warn his readers in his letter to the young man Timothy. **“But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:9-10).** The words of Paul describe the trap that Judas found himself in, which led to him making some very bad decisions, most importantly, betraying the Son of God.

Now, what lesson can we learn from the life and example of Judas. What we need to guard ourselves from are those who offer righteous-sounding objections to acts of devotion by others in an attempt to cover up their own selfish desires. This happens when someone discredits a person of faith for living according to the standards of Scripture because they want to cover up a sin that is present in their own lives. The Jewish authorities were very prone to doing this. They were very concerned with the Laws of Moses being followed. They were so obsessed with this that they used the law to accuse Jesus of blasphemy even though He had done nothing to violate the law in any way. Their desire was not to stand up for the Law of Moses, rather their real desire was to protect their own power and influence in the nation. Judas was very adamant in his objection, but it was for the wrong reason. May we always stand firm in the Word of God and speak up when it is being wrongly proclaimed, but may we never do so to cover up our own sin.

**The Response of Jesus (vv.7-8)**

After the objection of Judas, Jesus responds to him in not a favorable tone. In verse 7 Jesus says **“Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.”** As we said earlier in the message, Mary was doing this for Jesus as a way to show devotion to Him. This act was done for Jesus only six days before the Passover meaning that His death would be taking place very soon. Mary was, in essence, anointing the body of Jesus in preparation for His burial. This is appropriate because as we will see as we study the account of the resurrection that the women go to visit the tomb on Sunday in order to anoint the body, which they will never have the chance to do because of the resurrection.

The last verse of our passage today is Jesus explain why this act of devotion was so important in comparison to the poor. **“For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have Me.”** This is the same as Jesus saying they need to treasure every moment they have with Him because it is quickly going to come to an end. Jesus is not saying that the poor are not important or that we should not be concerned about the well-being of others. What He wants us to remember is that we need to keep our priorities straight. According to the Scripture we must take our relationship with God as being the most important part of our lives. Jesus commanded His disciples to put Him first in their lives because it is their relationship with Him that is of ultimate importance. **“The one who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And the one who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. The one who has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life on My account will find it” (Matthew 10:37-39).** Jesus is reminding the disciples and everyone else at the dinner that the importance of being with Him needs to be the priority in their lives, not having money to give to the poor. Everything that we do in our lives must reflect the connection we have with the Lord. If others know that we hold our relationship with Christ as our number one priority then they will not be surprised when they see us do things that honor Him. Unfortunately, Judas showed everyone there that evening that he was not concerned about Jesus or the ministry, he was obsessed with material wealth and fulfilling his own desires. This is the lesson that we can take from the teaching of Jesus as well. Following Jesus will demand us to bring the very best of ourselves, so we must be ready, willing and able to give this for Him. Mary gave of her very best showing that she loved the Lord and worshiped Him for His majesty.

**What Have We Learned?**

This morning we have discussed one of the most important events to take place near the end of Jesus’ life. Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, has anointed the head and feet of Jesus as an act of love, devotion and worship. Even though she may not have been aware of it at the time, her act of love was preparing Jesus for His death which would be taking place soon. There are 4 key lessons that we can takeaway from this passage: 1. Being a devoted follower of Jesus Christ is going to cost us something. When we accept Christ as our Savior, we begin to realize that following Him will require us to take up our cross and follow Him. Being a servant to others means being willing to give up what we want for ourselves and putting the needs of others first. Just like Mary we need to be willing to do this so that Jesus may be glorified. 2. Mary’s act of devotion came from the heart. This was a personal act that showed she wanted to honor Him in the best way she knew how. Each of us can honor the Lord in a personal way. We do so when we use the talents, He has given us to share the good news with others. 3. Even though others might not always understand, we need to worship God. Judas did not understand what Mary was doing, but Jesus sure did. He made known to the group that what Mary did would be remembered for generations. That is right because we are still talking about her today. 4. Finally, Mary’s act of devotion reminds us of what Christ has done for us. He left His glory in heaven to take on an earthly body and wrap Himself in time. He gave up all that He had because He loved us and wanted to follow the Father’s will. Because of His faithful obedience each of us can approach God the Father with confidence knowing that we are made righteous in His sight through the blood of Christ. We cannot repay what He has done for us, but if we live in a way to honor Him and humbly share the good news with others, we can show Him that His sacrifice is appreciated. Mary wanted Jesus to know her gratitude and as we have seen she was not afraid to show that gratitude in front of others. We must never be embarrassed of the gospel, but we must share it with all who will listen. We have hope because of Christ, so let us remember to tell everyone. This news is too good not to share.

Let us pray: Praise be to you Father God for showing us in Your Word everything we need to know in order to please you. Give us the courage and strength to live out our faith in a way to be seen by others. Just like Mary may we give the best of ourselves so that all may come to a saving faith in Your Son Jesus Christ. To You be the honor and glory forevermore. Amen.