

Gospel of John Study

Session 24

In our last session we witnessed Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead. If you recall, Jesus waited a full four days before raising Lazarus to prove that He was both the resurrection and the life. He had the power to give life to whomever He chose. Despite the wondrous outcome, it was a challenging time for Jesus as many, even those closest to Him, were not displaying faith in His words and teachings. They were having trouble seeing past the circumstances to understand the power and love Jesus had for those who would dare to put their faith in Him.

In this session, we are going to see the crisis in the ministry of Jesus that preceded its conclusion. The hostility of the Jewish leaders had been intensifying because they had been unable to entangle Jesus in any compromising dilemma or defeat Him in a public debate. Despite this, there was a general decline in Jesus' popularity among the masses. He seemed reluctant to stage the political coup that many expected the Messiah to accomplish and also His teachings were obscure to many of His listeners. Regardless of these conditions, the multitudes still held Jesus in awe. However, there was a loyal band of disciples who remained with Jesus - some thinking He might use His miraculous powers to establish a new world order where Israel dominated the world but others followed out of loyalty and devotion for Jesus.

For Jesus this time was critical because the forces for and against Him were crystalizing. He had been living strictly by a program established by His Father and outlined by Scripture. Now as the moment for the fulfilment of divine purpose approached, the tension increased. As we read through chapter 12 (the first part in this session and the rest in the next session) we are going to see that John is using this chapter as a transition and will chronicle a series of three events, all of which serve to foreshadow the coming of the conclusion of the Father's plan for Jesus' coming into the world.

As for our time line, as we will note, chapter 12 marks the beginning of the passion week and the final week of Jesus' earthly life. In this session we will look at the first of the three events of this chapter which deals with extravagant love for Jesus and what it looks like.

[John 11:55-57]

Q: What was the celebration which was nearing in this passage? (*v.55 - the Passover*)

The note that people were coming from the country to Jerusalem to purify themselves serves as a time marker as it generally would take a week to undergo the rituals to become ceremonially clean, and thus able to participate in the Passover celebration and other religious events at the Temple. This is the third Passover mentioned in John and how we know the approximate length of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Q: What was the discussion about Jesus among the populace? (*v.56 - They wanted to know if Jesus would show up at the Passover? Their expectations that Jesus could be the Messiah were high and this would be the perfect time for Him to reveal Himself as their conquering king.*)

Q: What was the standing order of the chief priests and Pharisees? (*v.57 - to report to them the*

whereabouts of Jesus, should He appear in Jerusalem. They sought to arrest Him.)

[John 12:1-2]

The dinner mentioned here takes place on the Saturday night (the end of the Sabbath) before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus would have arrived in Bethany on the Friday, just before the Sabbath began (Friday night) to stay in Bethany with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. This allows for the next day after the dinner to be Sunday, the day of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It had been a month or two since Lazarus had been raised from the dead. Word had spread that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and so he would have been quite the spectacle as he was a living testimony of Jesus' power over death.

Remember, Jesus had been staying some 12 miles or so away from Jerusalem for His own safety and the safety of His disciples. Now as He realizes that it is the Father's time for Him to enter Jerusalem and give Himself up during this Passover - as the Passover Lamb for the world - He moves in closer, as Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem. It also gave Mary and Martha the opportunity to throw a "thank you" dinner for Jesus - "thank you for raising our brother from the dead".

For our western minds, it is important to realize how the people ate their important meals. There would be a large table in the center of the room. There were low couches surrounding the table with large pillow for each person. It was common to lounge so that one's head was near the table while leaning on the pillow with one arm while eating with the other arm. One's feet were pointed away from the table.

One thing to keep in mind for us is Lazarus. He is the picture a person, once that person has the life of Christ within them. At the time we come to know Christ personally, we are brought to life and are now feasting in heaven with Him. Our bodies may still be on earth but our spirits are safely reclining at the table of heaven with Jesus.

[Ephesians 2:1-7]

[John 12:3-8]

Before we get to the lessons of this passage, it is good to note that this same event is detailed in three of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and John). (In Luke 7 there is an account that describes a woman anointing Jesus with perfume but it is not the same event as these three mention. It happened earlier in Jesus' ministry and at a different place.) What I want to do is to harmonize these versions.

[Matthew 26:6-13]

[Mark 14:3-9]

Q: What do you see as the same in this account as the one in John? *(Both happened in Bethany, both have a costly vial of perfume that was poured on Jesus while He reclined at the dinner table, the disciples were indignant with the woman, Jesus rebukes the disciple(s) for them missing the point of the gesture and commending the woman publicly, all three account show*

that Jesus points to this event as being to prepare His body for burial, implying a death.)

Q: What do you see as different in this account than the one in John? *(Judas is not mentioned by name in Matthew and Mark, Matthew doesn't name the perfume but John and Mark do, both Matthew and Mark list the home being that of Simon the leper, both Matthew and Mark speak of the vial being broken and poured over Jesus' head, not His feet, both Matthew and Mark give the side note that where the gospel is preached, this story will be told with it.)*

When we put all these accounts together it makes perfect sense. First, think of this. Lazarus had probably become something of an attraction due to his resurrection from the dead and many curious people were coming through town to see him and talk to him. To escape the curious crowds, he probably moved in with Simon the leper, at least temporarily, to avoid the notoriety. This is why it is mentioned in v.2 that Mary and Martha were serving while Lazarus was reclining at the dinner with Jesus. Had they been at their own house, Lazarus would have been expected to be serving as a host - not being treated as a guest.

Second, the amount of perfume in this vial was probably close to 3/4 of a pound or about 11-12 ounces. This is way too much to just anoint a person's head or feet but is more than enough to anoint an entire person. Mary probably started with Jesus' head and then continued to pour the costly perfume over His entire body, ending in His feet where she then wiped it with her hair. (This also foreshadows Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet in chapter 13.)

The mention by Matthew and Mark of this story being linked to the proclamation of the gospel message is important. In John, the meaning of the story is brought out by Mary's actions and her relationship with Jesus that we know from the proceeding chapter.

The deal is that this scene imparts several important truths to us. All of these point to this section foreshadowing the Jesus was going to die and rise from the dead.

Q: Why do you think that it was important that Jesus was to be crucified at the time of the Passover? *(He is the Passover Lamb for the entire world. He is the fulfillment of the Passover itself and will show that in His upcoming sacrifice of Himself.)*

At the Passover celebration, each and every family would bring a lamb to the feast as an offering. It was a reminder of what God had done for the Jewish people to initiate the Exodus from Egyptian slavery. The lamb's blood smeared on the doorposts of a person's house, in the original Passover in Egypt, showed that family trusted God to protect them from the destroying angel God was unleashing on the Egyptians that night. Now Jesus becomes our Passover lamb who takes away our sins and causes God's wrath to pass over us eternally. The One who raised Lazarus from the dead is about to deliver Himself up to the cross as the last Passover Lamb.

[I Corinthians 5:7-8]

The leaven mentioned in this passage in I Corinthians is the continuing to live in the ways of the world after one's salvation. It is living by what we'd call "license" or the abuse of grace. These behaviors are normal to the world yet for the Christian represent the previous life, which is now dead to sin. The danger is that like leaven, they infect and affect the entire body of the

church thus must be removed before the entire body is spoiled. To get this point across, Paul mentions that Christ is our Passover, Who has been sacrificed already. (This is the same use of the phrase the John the Baptist used when he witnessed about Jesus in John 1:29.) The issue was that the Passover lamb had already been sacrificed on our part but the leaven has not been put away from the body but is still being used as if the sacrifice had not happened. The truth was that we are made unleavened by the blood of Jesus' sacrifice. It is who we are so to continue to live in the ways of the world - by its leaven and its thinking is to miss who we are. The sacrifice of Jesus removed sin from us and now believers are to live as those who have been cleansed and the leaven of the world has been removed from our lives. As Jesus rose to a new life, we too rise with Him to a new life after our conversion.

[Romans 6:8-14]

Another feature of the account that shows foreshadowing is that Lazarus is present. He becomes a symbol of death and resurrection. Lazarus died and was put into a grave only to have Jesus raise him from the dead and bring him out of the tomb. Jesus would do this within the next week.

One more element of the story that lets us know that John is leading us to the climax of the narrative is that Mary anoints Jesus with costly perfume. This perfume was used as a burial spice and it shows that Mary, on some level, understood that Jesus was going to die. She is preparing His body for death.

Q: What were Jesus' words of rebuke to Judas Iscariot? (v.8 - *"You will always have the poor with you but you do not always have Me."*)

This is yet another foreshadowing feature of the account pointing to the reader to grasp that Jesus is going to be put to death in the very near future. It is important to understand Jesus' statement here. Jesus' statement should NOT be used as a justification for tolerating unnecessary poverty or refusing the help the needy due to their constant presence. Instead, it was a note to Judas (and anyone thinking like him) that if he were really concerned about the poor, he would never lack opportunity to assist them in the future. Jesus, the Son of God, was with them at that moment. This was one of their last opportunities to be with Him in person.

Q: What do we learn about Judas Iscariot from this passage? (v.5-6 - *He was not concerned about the poor, he was the group's treasurer and a thief and routinely stole money from the common purse.*)

Judas represents a side of humanity that we as believers need to guard against. Judas was utilitarian in his outlook. He viewed Mary's gift, on face value, as something useful to sell and give the funds to the poor (assuming he wasn't just planning on stealing what he thought he could from the sale of the perfume). This character trait permeated into his relationship with Jesus. He followed Jesus thinking that there was a utilitarian purpose for him in doing so. By following Jesus, he could be there to encourage Jesus to lead the expected Messianic uprising against Rome. He would be part of the leadership of the new order. In other words, Judas was using Jesus for his own purposes. Judas had been with Jesus for nearly three years at this point.

He had heard the lessons He had taught. He saw the great love Jesus had for the people He encountered. He knew He had a special relationship with the Father and did nothing from His own initiative. He witnessed many miracles and yet he failed to truly come to know Jesus at this time. His knowledge of Jesus revolved around how useful Jesus was to him and his own agenda.

We must guard our hearts from developing this attitude that Judas possessed. We are not to see Jesus purely as someone useful to know that helps us reach our agendas. In fact, we must stay vigilant against the modern utilitarian thinking that pits pragmatic compassion and concern for the poor against extravagant, unqualified devotion to Jesus. The key is that any compassion we show for the needy should be out of an overflow of love for Jesus, knowing that He loves these people, too. Social activism that attempts to meet only the physical needs of a person will create a spirit which knows nothing of worship or adoration of Jesus. When we cut our love for Jesus out of the equation for the motivation to help other people, we become secular, self-centered and like Judas - open to using Jesus for our own uses - even if they sound noble.

The good news is that this passage gives us an account of someone who loved Jesus and had the sort of relationship we should learn to maintain.

Q: What type of nard was used in this perfume? (*v.3 - It was pure nard, no additives, fillers or other pollutants - just the pure item as Jesus Himself is pure*)

Q: In v.3 what did Mary anoint Jesus' feet with? (*Her hair - this shows her great humility, devotion and love towards Jesus*)

Q: Was there a command given to Mary to do this act and if so, what was it? (*no command was given*)

Mary was not responding robotically to a command by Jesus or anyone else. She loved Him deeply and this was a response motivated by that love. Her gift shows humility and generosity as this gift was valued at one year of an average person's wages. (In today's money, this would have sold for anywhere between \$34,000-\$50,000.)

In the previous chapters John has been contrasting light and darkness. Now we see it plainly in the contrast between Mary and Judas. Mary represents the authentic love relationship God seeks for all mankind to possess with Him - thus the light. While Judas represents the self-centered religion, the hypocritical faith - thus the darkness.

[John 3:20-21]

Q: Who was Judas ultimately love the most? (*himself*)

Q: Who did Mary love the most? (*Jesus*)

Jesus condemns the self-centered religion of Judas as his heart is faithless and steeped in pride and self-righteousness. On the other hand Jesus commends the love and faith of Mary.

Q: Why does Jesus say in Matthew and Mark that this story will be preached alongside the gospel? *(Because it shows the true love of Jesus that the gospel brings about in a person's heart. It condemns the self-centered religion of the world and commends the extravagant love that pours out of the heart that has come to know Jesus and His grace. This short story pictures the results of the gospel in that it shows the depths of love we have for Jesus after our hearts are changed by the gospel. The person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah will come to love Jesus as Mary does. Jesus was saying in effect, "You want to know how your life will change after receiving the gospel message? This is it. Your love for me will grow to be like Mary's was.)*

Q: After Mary anointed Jesus' body, what do you suppose the house smelled like? *(v.3 - like pure nard, a very pleasant smell - the whole house would have been filled with that aroma of the perfume and it would have been the predominant smell for some time afterwards)*

God is always more concerned about the condition of our hearts than our actions. When our hearts prioritize our love for Jesus, as Mary did, everything we do will be covered the aroma of that extravagant love.

[II Corinthians 2:14-17]

For the people who are putting their faith in Christ, the spiritual aroma we give off will be one of life while for those who are resisting Christ it will be the aroma of death. However it is received, we are those who live out the Word of God in a genuine way that demonstrates our deep love for Christ and what He's done for us. Like Mary, what could she do that could show Jesus how she loved Him and how she was grateful for all He'd done for them, including bringing her brother back to life? In Mary's mind, her love needed to be extravagant to be a gift that honored such a love that Jesus showed her.

Now we get to the real meaning of the account - extravagant love for Jesus.

Based upon Mary's action of anointing Jesus and Him commending this action as something that would be preached alongside the gospel message as displaying its power, let's come up with a definition of extravagant love.

Q: How would y'all define this love? *(This is a love which is costly, consuming, sacrificial, timely and many others)*

[I John 4:7-11]

[Ephesians 3:14-19]

[John 15:12-17]

[Luke 14:26-27, 33] - This is a dangerous passage in that we can do these things from a cold, self-centered, and/or prideful heart. The key is that Jesus is saying that a true disciple loves Jesus

more than anything else or anybody else in this world. These are attitudes that a disciple holds because he or she loves Jesus above everything else. There is nothing worth Jesus in this world. In our story, Mary said loud and clear when she anointed Jesus with the expensive perfume that "Jesus is worth it!"

In practical terms, Mary loved Jesus enough to do the hard work of thinking of something that He'd love and appreciate. If this were just a command that needed to be fulfilled, this could have been done with or without love for Jesus. It could have been just checking a box. However, it was an extravagant love that took the time to realize that Jesus' time with them was short and this was something she could do to show her love for Him.

This should be the bedrock of all we do for Jesus - extravagant love. We can be motivated by a lot of different things to do good works. However, when we chose to do things from a heart bent on extravagant love towards Jesus, it's going to fill where are with the aroma of Jesus' love. It's going to draw others to Him in a way that nothing else can.

Mary's gift also gives us a whiff of the day we will all be engulfed by the fragrance of Jesus forever.

[Story of Rogerio's gift]

While in Brazil on one of the mission trips I took there, one hot afternoon, my team came upon a group of children playing soccer in a dirt field. These kids were in the 10-12 year age range. We were in a fairly poor area and the field the kids were playing soccer in was nothing but dirt and the goals were marked with pieces of trash stuck in the ground with sticks. Just so you know, in our country we have lots of sports we play as children. In Brazil, soccer is the only sport anyone cares about and plays. It's what they do from the time they are born - it's built into their culture. We watched them until they noticed us and then they all came over to ask us what we were doing there. My translator told them that we were from the United States and we were telling people of Brazil about Jesus and how much He loved them.

As was our custom with kids, we answered any questions on their minds first - especially those about life in the U.S. Then we proceeded to share the gospel with them. Since they were in no hurry, we had time to really give a thorough presentation of the gospel on their level. Our main focus was on how much God loved them and how Jesus showed them God's love. After this we gave them time to ask more questions. When we asked if any of them wanted to receive Christ, they all responded with their hands in the air, like they were in school. After this we gave them all New Testaments and showed them how to read it and then explained that we were going to be in a nearby church that week and they could come and see us and their parents could come too. These kids were enthusiastic about Jesus. Our translator, who was a believer, told us that he could tell the Spirit had been at work in the hearts of these kids as they were very receptive and eager to receive the gospel - even more so than we usually saw in Brazil.

Then as we were packing up to go down the street, one kid name Rogerio all of the sudden jumped up and started talking frantically to the translator, then he ran off. The translator told us that he had to go home but he'd be right back and he was begging us to stay there until he got back. In just a few moments, he came running back, breathless, with something in his hands. Rogerio then approached me and handed me something and told me that he wanted to give me something special for bringing something special to him - Jesus.

It was his soccer shirt. Soccer shirts were very special in all of Brazil but also they were expensive. This kid was from a poor neighborhood and I was shocked to discover that he even owned one at all. It was surely his prized possession. It was irreplaceable. I had enough money in my pocket to go and buy a soccer shirt for every kid on the field yet for him and his family, this shirt was something very special and valuable beyond what money it took to buy. Of course, I didn't want to take it from him but as I was about to try to give it back, my translator grabbed my arm and held it down before I could get it up to give it back. He explained to me that I couldn't give this shirt back to him and all it represented to this child. The translator had tears in his eyes while he was explaining this to me. It would be a huge insult to not accept it, even though my translator knew what I was thinking. How could I take this kid's prized possession? But in the end I did accept the gift. Rogerio was truly overjoyed when I took his soccer shirt because he had Jesus in his heart and knew he was loved. Here I was just the messenger and I was the recipient of extravagant love and gratitude this child had for Jesus. By the end of the week, his entire family was in church and got saved - mainly due to Rogerio's testimony of a joyful life and how some Americans told him about Jesus.

Q: How can we show extravagant love to Jesus? In our decision making, do we ever think about what would bring joy to Jesus' heart?

[Matthew 10:40-42] - Acting in the name of Jesus is the key to blessing Jesus' heart.

[Matthew 25:34-40]

Jesus is no longer with us physically but we show extravagant love for Him by loving others in His name. We meet the needs of others, both physical and spiritual needs, in the resources of Jesus and by that we show love to Him. To the extent that you served the needs of another, you did it to Jesus. That's the love Jesus desires for us to demonstrate.

There is one more part of this story to cover.

[John 12:9-11]

Q: Why were there large crowds at Bethany? (*v.9 - people wanted to see Jesus and Lazarus*)

Q: Why were the chief priests wanting to put Lazarus to death? (*v.11 - Lazarus' life provided grounds for believing in Jesus. Because of this, Lazarus had to die as well.*)

The story of Mary's extravagant gift of love to Jesus is yet one more way John was foreshadowing the coming of Jesus' death. Her story is surrounded by two stories that show the Jewish leaders conspiring to put Jesus to death. It was their intent as this would be what we best for the nation in their eyes. It's interesting that this story of Mary is situated in between such cruelty and hostility towards the Son of God and the Messiah they have so long awaited.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?