

# John 12:1-8

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[0:00] Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Right? Spiritually dead.

I read all of that to you to make that point. You were dead in trespasses and sins. That's what this looked like within verse 4, Paul says. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. So you see this little picture of that in the resurrection and the following feasting of Lazarus with Jesus.

Every Christian is, spiritually speaking, Lazarus sitting at the table. Next, we can notice that Martha served.

It's a different meal than the one where Martha complains to Jesus about her sister not helping.

There is no criticism of Martha's service here. She, I suggest to you, is being faithful.

[1:19] Not more and less than her brother. He's reclining. Or her sister, who's about to do an extravagant thing. I think that she is using her skill of hospitality to serve her Savior.

Right? I imagine that Martha was a bit of a type A. Organized. Knew how to put a party together.

And she is faithfully serving her Lord. Martha's gratitude expresses itself through service.

The siblings of Mary have undoubtedly received Jesus as the Christ. At great risk to himself, Lazarus welcomes him into his home.

With great energy, Martha makes the meal possible. And this brings us to Mary. Mary, remember, in chapter 11, grieving without hope.

Jesus is concerned about the way in which she comes to him and asks that question. Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And here we see this beautiful, beautiful picture of her receiving Jesus as the Christ.

[2:33] And John means for us to pause and really consider this act of worship. She is the primary character being juxtaposed against treacherous Judas.

These are the two primaries in this story. Mary and Judas. Again, this account being framed in terms of worth.

What is Jesus worth to you? Notice how valuable he is to Mary. First part of verse 3.

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.

First, to Mary, Jesus was worth her resources. John tells us Mary took this expensive ointment, right?

[3:35] And a significant amount of expensive ointment. Nard is an oil that's derived from a plant grown in India. This is all I learned about it.

But the fact that it's called pure meant that it would have been very expensive. It would have been imported. It was costly. Very costly. And of course we know how costly because Judas tells us how much in verse 5.

At least some approximation. Maybe pure nard sold at a discounted rate second hand. I don't know. But he estimates that it could have been sold for 300 denarii.

A denarii you may well know already. But if you don't, log this little bit of information away. It was the average day's wage.

A typical worker was paid a denarii per day. So this is almost a year's pay. So in today's terms, you could do the math maybe for your own home.

[4:39] This ointment was worth tens of thousands of dollars. A perfume worth, I hope none of you own perfume worth tens of thousands of dollars. We need another conversation if you do.

Mary does. Mary has this ointment. It was an ointment that was likely used in the preparation of dead bodies. This may have been something that had been carefully saved for and stored up. And it was meant for a future use of this kind. And expensive, expensive thing. And Mary is glad to spend it in worship of the Christ.

Last week, in the cartoon in your bulletin, if you're an adult and you don't ever flip to the back, you are missing out. Today, just as a quote, as a simple text quote in your bulletin, Augustine once said, Christ is not valued at all unless he is valued above all.

Christ is not valued at all unless he is valued above all. And Mary so wonderfully expresses that to us here.

[5:53] Tens of thousands of dollars worth of this, right, given in worship of Christ. But not only that, secondly, so Jesus is worth her resources, but secondly, to Mary, Jesus was also worth her dignity.

To wash someone's feet was an act of great service. Feet, generally speaking, are gross. And to that, a sandal-wearing culture in a dusty environment, and you have the cleaning of feet as a task for the lowliest of servants in a house.

It was a customary thing when someone would come over that you would have the lowest servant, the last in the pecking order, would wash feet so that people could recline at table and enjoy their time without dusty, smelly feet.

John is not unaware of the humility of this act, as he will have Jesus himself wash his feet a few chapters later, right? Remember, he's writing that with all of this in mind as a model of humble service.

Additionally, Mary lets down her hair to wipe his feet clean. And this would not have been normative. This is not the normal way that foot washing concluded.

[7:19] What I imagine, and this is not explicit in the text, is that she, being so generous in the anointing of Jesus' feet, makes a bit of a mess.

She puts a little more on than she meant to. We're going to spend some time on the extravagance of the offering with the sentence, the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

This was not a little bit that she used. It was enough to fill the space with the smell. It's probably a picture from one perspective, certainly that of Judas, of her overdoing it.

I think, knowing that she was going to anoint Jesus' feet, that she brought along a towel. But that towel was insufficient for the extravagance of her offering.

So she, with no thought to herself, already washing feet, uses her hair to serve her king. I think the towel didn't suffice, and she immediately, to help finish this process, to serve Jesus in this way, thought, I have something that can help.

[8:31] And she lets down her hair, and uses her hair to clean up this ointment. To Mary, I would argue, Jesus is worth everything.

Everything. And so I ask the question again, what is Jesus worth to you? Mary does not calculate the minimum amount necessary to honor Christ.

She gives extravagantly. Now there is an important distinction that should be made at this point. Extravagant worship is not wasteful worship.

Waste occurs when something valuable is spent upon something unworthy of it. Certainly this happens. But if Jesus possesses infinite worth, then nothing genuinely offered to him in faith can finally be described as wasted.

He is worthy of all of our praise. Judah sees 300 denarii going up in vapor.

[9:46] Mary sees Jesus. And that difference between the two changes everything. Second point.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. Now last week I made a lengthy argument. We took that odd break because I really wanted to show you that this phrase is the chiasmic center of John's gospel.

If you disagree with me about this, you are welcome to be wrong. And we can still be friends. I believe though, this is the chiasmic center of John's gospel.

And that is to say, John means to do, is he wants to fill our minds with imagery of the high priest entering into the Holy of Holies on that one day in the year when he made atonement for the sins of Israel.

I believe that's what's happening in this text. This phrase, the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. One man, one time a year, amongst the varied instructions for cleansing and sacrifice was a command to take incense into that place and fill it with the aroma of the smoke.

[11:03] I think that's what's being pictured here. Right? The whole book of John is turning on this phrase. Why? Why?

Why? John means for us to see Mary worshiping in the very presence of God himself. This extravagant act of worship, she's putting herself at the feet of God.

Not cut off in some outer part of the temple. Limited access to God. Access through one man, one time of year. Everybody stood back and walked and hoped that he carried out the instructions precisely as he should.

That atonement would in fact happen. But this is shadowing this thing is about to happen. Jesus is going to die once for all. He's going to make that final payment.

The Lamb of God will lay his life down for his people. He would atone for their sins forever. This is forward looking to that moment.

[12:06] And Jesus is meeting with Mary in this moment. God himself with a worshiper. Intimate affection.

Now, I said this in brief last week. I want to say it again. And I think it's important for us to do this as a church. Mostly because I think I've erred so often in my thinking and in my teaching.

We rightly defend the doctrine of justification. Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It is a hill that we should die on. We are Protestants.

We are still protesting. We want to uphold this doctrine. It's so incredibly important for our sin to be expunged and for us to have a law-keeping record so that we can stand before God and not be condemned.

We must be justified. But if we stop there, we miss the fullness of the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're welcomed back in. We're back part of the family.

[13:07] The doctrine of justification must lead our minds to think about the doctrine of adoption. What do we think about God when we think of him as our father?

That we are welcomed. That he is ours and we are his. That all of his promises are yes and amen for us. We're not trying to be performative to earn his acceptance.

We have his acceptance. Because we're justified, we are adopted. And I want to make this case briefly to you from John.

I did this again. I did it last week. I want to do it again quickly. Remembering that John gives us the reason for his writing. John chapter 20, verse 30 and 31. Repeated this many, many times.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written. He took the time. He wrote it down under inspiration. So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.

[14:09] The Son of God. Receive him as the Christ. And that by believing you may have life in his name. Life now. Life forever more.

Spiritual life. And when we read this in John 20, we should know exactly what he's talking about. Because in John 17, he has defined what that life is.

Carry the idea with us to John 20. In John 17, he says, And this is eternal life. That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Knowing God. Being in relationship with God. This is eternal life. We were made for intimate fellowship with God.

It's what we were designed for. Sin separates us relationally from him. And your life will never be fulfilled until you, created one.

[15:13] You, created one. Are restored to your creator. There will always be a deficiency. You could try all types of things. Success.

Money. Relationships. Sex. Drugs. I feel like I was supposed to say rock and roll there. Hobbies. Hobbies. Nothing will satisfy the hunger of your soul, but the restoration of your relationship with God.

Try it all you want. It will not happen. Spell yourself the pain, if you've yet to be restored to God in Christ, of trying everything out that you could possibly try out.

You will not be satisfied until you're restored to God. Again, a quote from Augustine. From the first paragraph of his work, Confessions.

He said, You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. That's exactly the sentiment that he is expressing there.

[16 : 20] So the beauty of this whole scene, leading up to in this last little part of verse 3 of John 12, the beauty of the whole scene, it's emphasized by this phrase, I want to live in the aroma of life with God.

God himself. And I think that if we do, we are going to spread that smell around. That if the idea that we have access to God in this way, through his word and in prayer, meeting with the church, we've got restored access to God himself.

We live life in that aroma. We're going to spread that around. It's going to be inevitable that it will happen. Perhaps Paul had this very scene in mind when he wrote 2 Corinthians 2, and verse 14, where he says, But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

Now, I am sad to say that our text does not end on a high note. There it was. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But following that, because it's chiastic, we see that Judas rejects Jesus. In contradiction to, in juxtaposition of Mary, Judas rejects Jesus.

[18 : 10] The fragrance fills the room, and then Judas speaks, why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? Now, without John's commentary, Judas sounds reasonable.

Perhaps he even sounds spiritual. 300 denarii? Think how many hungry people could have been fed that day, abundantly fed.

Judas' objection possesses the appearance of compassion. But John immediately pulls back the curtain and gives us this commentary.

He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. And having charge of the money bag, he was serving as the treasurer for this group. He used to help himself to what was put into it.

He was skimming off the top, as they say. Here's one of the most sobering realities in the passage.

[19 : 16] Religious language can conceal an unbelieving heart. Judas knows how to sound righteous.

Perhaps you know people like this. I have. They know all the right answers. They can say all the right things. Judas has been around Jesus.

He has spent all this time with him. He's heard the sermons, the instruction to care for the poor. He has witnessed the miracles. He knows the vocabulary.

He knows what Christ followers are supposed to care about. And so, his greed speaks the language of compassion.

It is possible to know Christian vocabulary, participate in Christian ministry, associate closely with Christian people, and even appear concerned about Christian causes while loving something more than Christ.

[20 : 24] Sometimes it's even those Christian things that are loved more than the Savior. Judas measures everything by what it can give him.

He is not concerned about serving others, but about serving himself. As opposed to Mary and the siblings. It's all about service too. His is about serving himself.

Mary and Judas stand as deliberate, stark contrasts. Mary asks, What can I give to Jesus?

Judas asks, What could this have given to me? What do I get from Jesus? Mary empties something valuable for Christ.

Judas steals what belongs to Christ. And eventually the difference between them will become even clearer. Mary values Jesus more than 300 denarii.

[21 : 29] Judas will betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, which would be about four months of labor. The price he sells Jesus for is not even as much as the sacrifice here by Mary.

So Jesus says in response, Leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

There's a fair amount of debate about what this sentence means exactly.

We can be clear that he's saying letter B. But what exactly is meant by her keeping it for the day of burial is strangely hotly contested.

I don't really know why. I don't think it matters all that much. But what I think is happening is that Jesus is alluding to his death by suggesting that Mary should be allowed to keep the rest of the perfume to anoint his body after the crucifixion.

That's my very best guess at what he means by this phrase. Some say that it's just leave the sacrifice alone. Let it be remembered for that day.

[22:36] I never felt anything was very convincing, but that's my best guess at what he means by that. But regardless, letter B. What she has done is a beautiful and good thing.

And then he elaborates, for the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me. Now, Jesus is here not being dismissive to the poor.

He's not disregarding the poor at all, right? In many places he has taught that we ought to care for the poor, sell our possessions and give to the poor and store up heavenly reward.

He's not being anti-poor in this case. But what he's likely doing is referencing Deuteronomy chapter 15 and verse 11. Which says this, For there will never cease to be poor in the land.

That's what we think he's citing right there. Therefore, the text goes on, I command you in your land. So the familiarity with this text, when he says that, they would have known, oh, he's not speaking against, he's saying there will be future opportunity because the poor will be in the land.

[23:44] They will never cease to be in the land. And therefore, our generosity towards the poor should never cease. The difference here is that you won't always have me. Bodily form, here on earth with you.

So to be generous toward me was an appropriate thing for Mary to do in this moment. So, some final applications in closing, just to sum some of this up for us.

Number one, remember the grace you have received. Lazarus at the table reminds us that Christian devotion begins with resurrection grace.

We recline and we serve and we worship because Christ has made dead sinners alive. All of it's possible because of what God has done on our behalf and the personal work of Jesus.

Remember the grace you have received. Number two, examine what your sacrifices reveal about Christ's worth to you.

[24:52] Just ask that question again. What is Jesus worth to you? Our use of money, time, comfort, reputation, and energy reveals what we believe is valuable.

How do you spend and how are you spent? How do you spend and how are you spent? What do you think about most?

What do you talk about most? Start to notice what this may communicate about your heart and what about you truly value. Third, beware of respectable arguments that conceal sinful loves.

Judas teaches us that the human heart is capable of clothing, greed, and false worship of all sorts in theological language.

Beware of respectable arguments that conceal sinful loves. things. And fourth, and lastly, do not confuse extravagant devotion with waste.

[26:02] The world, and sometimes even professing Christians, will regard wholehearted devotion to Christ as excessive. but nothing is wasted when it is genuinely given to the one of infinite worth.

Let's pray.