

## John 12:1-11 Extravagant Worship

We are halfway through this Gospel and the final half is devoted to the last week of Jesus' ministry on earth. Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead was a final sign that He was not only the Messiah but the life giver as well. The Pharisees had decided they would kill Him to avoid a revolution and Roman retaliation.

*<sup>1</sup> Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.*

1 This is the day before the day we call Palm Sunday. If the disciples worried about going back to Jerusalem before (John 11:16), now they had even more reason to be concerned. The raising of Lazarus was a kind of throwing down the gauntlet. It was a sign that surpassed all others and declared that Jesus was more than their understanding of a messiah. It proved Him to be the life giver!

*<sup>2</sup> So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.*

2 They were in the home of Simon the Leper. That means he must have been healed. I believe we can assume that he was throwing a feast for Jesus and his friends in gratitude for being healed. It was one last chance to celebrate together with Jesus before He heads into Jerusalem and the confrontations begin again.

Let me read for you how Pastor Kent Hughes saw the conversation. *I can imagine Simon saying, "You cannot imagine what it was like! I saw the scabs fall off my hand! My fingers grew back in place! I reached up, and my eyebrows were there. I was healed!" Then perhaps Lazarus interrupted, saying, "Simon, that was nothing! I mean, that must have been great, but let me tell you what it was like for me. Hey, I died! I was gone four earth days. I went to Paradise. Boy, I saw all the biggies — Abraham, Moses, David. But I will tell you, the most amazing thing I saw was when I came back and walked out of that tomb. Peter's eyes were that big around."* That had to be some amazing table conversation!

The most unforgettable moment in a person's life is when they touch the Divine. In those rare moments when our heart is willing to set aside selfish inclinations and being caught up in the demands of the day, it dawns on us that God is the great giver. That realization will draw our hearts to desire to return a portion of God's goodness as a token of our gratitude. Mary of Bethany was a woman in Scripture who had one of those moments. She reached for the most expensive thing at hand. It happened to have a double significance.

*<sup>3</sup> 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.*

3 She was probably thinking, "What can I do? How can I show Him what I feel? Her mind turned toward this expensive container of pure nard and Jesus' predictions of

His impending execution. The family had probably purchased the nard for Lazarus' body, but Lazarus did not need it now. And then it hit her, "I will anoint Jesus with it. He is worthy of so much more, but this is the best I can bring. I will soothe His head and feet with it. Maybe I am doing this because we won't have time to anoint His body for burial." Here was this costly item that was probably going to be sold to recover the money, but Mary wanted to use it for a much higher purpose, to show her heart of gratitude and love to Jesus.

*<sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said,  
<sup>5</sup> "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"*

4,5 Both Mark and John tell us that the value was equivalent to a year's wages (Mark 14:5). Do you think that is extravagant? What if someone spent fifty or sixty-thousand dollars on a onetime event because they loved Jesus? Someone once handed the church a check for one-hundred thousand dollars and we gave it all away to missions that were effectively reaching lost souls. Would you join Judas in murmuring about it?

Watch out for a critical spirit. Do not be drawn in when someone begins criticizing others. Lift up Jesus. Speak praise. Sometimes there needs to be warnings to those who are young in the faith such as we are reading about in Galatians. But in general, praise is more fitting than complaint for complaint is often murmuring against God.

*<sup>6</sup> 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.*

6 Criticism often tells you more about the one who is criticizing than about who or what they criticize. Self-interest, self-concern, greed masked with a cloak of righteousness (Luke 12:15)! I want! I deserve! That is often the case. People create divisions and strife because they want something the way they want it, but they would never say it that plainly. Instead, they cloak it in some self-sacrificial language that sounds like they are only thinking of others (Matthew 7:15). Contrast that with the fact that Mary had just performed one of the most memorable acts of worship ever recorded. What a moment to have witnessed.

In Pakistan, Qabil Matar moved his wife, son and daughter to the Northwest Frontier province to reach out to the Taliban and Al Qaeda with the message of Jesus Christ. He was captured, hung upside down in the hole of an outhouse for hours, interrogated, beaten, and locked in that bathroom for the night. In the middle of the night, God answered the saints who were praying for him and one of his captors secretly released him and told him to flee.

He was able to escape the region with his family, but when he learned about all the people praying for him, he said, "I was encouraged... That moment I decided to go back and preach in the same area. My fear is gone." His extravagant worship is his utter denial of this world for that world that is to come (Hebrews 11:14)!

We feel we must complain because the actions of extravagant worshipers expose our hypocrisy. That was what was bothering Judas. Mary's worship was such a contrast to his greed.

*<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial."*

I love the way Jesus stands up for the innocent, don't you? In essence Jesus was saying, "Back off! You are blind to what is really going on here." When you do what the Spirit of God leads you to do, people will criticize you. Remember, Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). You have Someone who will stand up for you! When Jesus is standing up for you, who else do you need? He is more than able to put anyone in their place. Do not expect anyone but Him to really understand your worship, especially when it is extravagant worship. In Matthew's Gospel (26:6), Jesus said, "*She has done a beautiful thing to me.*" (ESV) What an expression. I want to do beautiful things for Jesus. How about you?

Wherever Jesus went on those last days, from the Gethsemane to the mock trials, to Pilate and Herod, to the cross, everyone who was near Him could smell the fragrance of nard (Song of Songs 1:12). It was a beautiful thing that she did. The fragrance stood in contrast to the humiliation Jesus was enduring. There was one thing she could do to lessen the ugliness of it all, and she did it, no matter the cost.

*<sup>8</sup> For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."*

You can do things for Jesus by helping the poor anytime. "There will always be the poor in the earth" was a quote from the Torah (Deuteronomy 15:11). Jesus was only to be with them for a few more days. This was Mary's last chance to show her love and appreciation to Him while He was physically present.

*<sup>9</sup> When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*

9-11 The people were "going over." I think that means they were abandoning the leadership of the Sanhedrin and following Jesus. The leadership of the Jews was so hardened in heart that they decided to kill not only Jesus, but Lazarus as well. How desperate to think you can stop God by covering up His miracles (Job 40:8,9). It really shows how pathetic we can be in insisting on our own way.

In Matthew's account of the story (26:13), he recorded that Jesus said, <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.*" And right here this evening in Arizona, halfway around the world, the words of Jesus are being fulfilled. An extravagant act of worship and love from 2000 years ago is challenging us today to be more dedicated and committed. It is rebuffing our mediocrity (Revelation 3:15). It is calling us to go deeper and to let the love of Christ so grip our hearts that no sacrifice could be too great.

Questions

Who is the host and why is that important?

What do you think moved Mary to worship?

How were Judas' words deceptive?

How did Jesus stick up for extravagant worship?

How was Jesus' prophecy fulfilled this evening?

How do we get to the place where all that matters is Jesus?

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, Kent, *Preaching the Word, The Gospel of John*