

We have come to the Passion Week and yet we are only half way through John. John the Beloved believed that final week's teachings to be so important that he devoted half his gospel to them. The other Gospel writers also emphasize this week with a large portion of their writing. The specific number of days before Passover is mentioned in verse 1. ¹ *Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.* That means 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 Messiah. It proved Him to be the life giver!

² *Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.* Jesus probably arrived at the end of the day on Friday. That is when the Sabbath began. Once the Sabbath began, one was not allowed to travel. When the Sabbath ended Simon the Leper threw a celebratory dinner in honor of Jesus. Martha served. Luke told us in another story about how Martha had asked Jesus to tell her sister, Mary, to get up and help her serve them, but Jesus refused. He said Mary had chosen a good thing, sitting there and listening to Him, and He wouldn't take that from her. (Luke 10:39-40)

It was March 27th of 33 A.D. Their faith had been expanded to accept that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25) It is difficult for us to imagine the sense of awe and wonder they must have felt as they dined with Jesus.

The Jews had adopted the Roman style of dining around a *reclinium*. It was a U shaped table only about a foot off the ground. The guests reclined on mats or lounges propping their head up with their left hand and eating with the right. That is why the text says *reclining at the table with him*. This was the calm before the storm. One last celebration of their love and respect for Jesus before He heads toward Jerusalem, one more meal together before the confrontations begin again. It would have been bitter sweet with reverential awe savoring every word from Jesus' lips, but also with a sense of foreboding of what was to follow.

Matthew tells us this was taking place in Simon the Leper's home. ⁶ *While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper...* We don't know anything about Simon the Leper. This story is often confused with Simon the Pharisee, (Luke 7:39-40) but the accounts are very different. Jesus' friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were also from Bethany. (John 11:1) Being close friends, they were also invited. No doubt Simon had seen or heard of the resurrection of Lazarus. If Jesus and the disciples were his guests in his home, he would have had to already been healed of the leprosy. It was against the religious law to go into a house with a leper. (Leviticus

Commented [notes1]: 16 Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."
John 11:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"
Luke 10:39-40 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;
John 11:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. 40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.
Luke 7:39-40 (KJV)

Commented [notes5]: Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.
John 11:1 (NIV)

13:45-46) In that culture, leprosy could take a man from the top of society and put him at the bottom in a minute. His healing was cause to celebrate.

It is sheer speculation, but I would venture to guess that Simon was feeding Jesus and the disciples in gratitude for being healed by Him. Someday we can hear the whole story of Simon the Leper. 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."*— Preaching the Word/John 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, a token of our gratitude. Mary of Bethany was a woman in Scripture that had one of those moments. She reached for the most expensive thing at hand. It happened to have a double significance.

³ *Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.* 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 death. The family had probably purchased the nard for Lazarus' body, but Lazarus didn't need it now. And then it hit her, "I'll anoint Jesus with it. He is worthy of so much more, but this is the best I can bring. I'll soothe His head and feet with it. Maybe I'm doing this because we won't have time to anoint His body for burial."

I have a little bottle of pure nard (Indian spike) that I purchased in front of the tomb where Lazarus was raised. It doesn't cost so much now. No caravans are needed to deliver it from the mountains of northern India. You are welcome to take a whiff as you leave today. It wasn't the nard itself that was so important. It did have a special meaning related to burial, but the important thing was the heart of the worshiper. This nard was probably the most costly thing in the house. I told you in the last chapter that families almost went broke burying their loved ones, trying to show others how much the dead meant to them.

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. ⁴ *But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected,* ⁵ *"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."* Both Mark and John tell us that the value was equivalent

Commented [notes6]: 45 "The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!'
46 As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.
Lev 13:45-46 (NIV)

to a year's wages. (Mark 14:5) Don't you think that is pretty extravagant? What if someone spent 50 or 60 thousand dollars on a onetime event because they loved Jesus? Someone once handed the church a check for \$100,000 and we gave it all away to missions. Would you join Judas in murmuring about it?

Commented [notes7]: 5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. Mark 14:5 (NIV)

When someone speaks negatively, there are always others that are ready to be drawn in. The old nature of man likes to complain and murmur. Human nature likes to criticize because it makes us feel superior. Be on guard against that tendency! (Titus 3:2) It is an evil one and can be extremely destructive. (James 3:5-6) Don't be afraid to stand out as different for the cause of righteousness. When someone starts to put someone down, either walk away, or gently remind the person that saying something nice about a person is more becoming than putting another down. (Philippians 2:3) Criticism usually says more about us than it does about the one we criticize. That was definitely the case with Judas. ⁶ *He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.*

Commented [notes8]: 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. Titus 3:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. James 3:5-6 (NIV)

Self-interest, self-concern, greed masked with a cloak of righteousness! (Luke 12:15) I want! I deserve! Isn't that often the case? People create divisions and strife because they want something the way they want it, but they would never say it plainly. Instead, they cloak it in some self-sacrificial language that sounds like they are only thinking of others. (Matthew 7:15)

Commented [notes10]: 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Phil 2:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15 (NIV)

Mary had just performed one of the most memorable acts of worship ever recorded. What a moment of to have witnessed. Have you ever seen someone give way beyond what was comfortable and been in awe of what God was doing in their heart? I've only personally witnessed it a few times in my life. Every time I read Voice of the Martyrs, I'm always challenged by people who choose to live in places of persecution to proclaim the Gospel. They are extravagant givers! (We'll have a speaker from Voice of the Martyrs here next Sunday.)

Commented [notes12]: 15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. Matt 7:15 (NIV)

Mike and Heather, who were here last week, are extravagant givers! They are raising their family in Botswana so that they can give their lives in service to the One they love. Heather doesn't see Mike for weeks on end as he travels to the different churches in the bush. That isn't just sacrifice; it's worship too. (2Kings 17:35)

Commented [notes13]: 35 When the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites, he commanded them: "Do not worship any other gods or bow down to them, serve them or sacrifice to them. 2 Kings 17:35 (NIV)

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 that 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 the world to come! (Hebrews 11:14)

Commented [notes14]: 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. Heb 11:14 (NIV)

Pastor Manuel moved his family to the borders of the FARC guerillas in Columbia. No other pastor would care for the church in that town. The FARC burst into his home and held him and his wife at gunpoint threatening for some time to shoot them. Finally, one of them pulled the trigger. The trigger jammed. He tried again and again. In frustration, he beat Pastor Manuel. His Assistant Pastor was murdered, but Pastor Manuel will not leave. These are extravagant worshipers! Let's stop and pray for them right now!

I imagine what happened in their hearts was something like what happened in Mary's heart. The loving forgiveness of God became so real to them that he had to do something about it. When the Holy Spirit said, "Go!" they responded, "Wherever You lead me!" (Isaiah 6:8) Extravagant worshipers never consider instruction from the Holy Spirit a sacrifice. They see every instruction as a privilege. The world looks on in abhorrence, because they can't imagine loving anything more than self. They fear that kind of "fanaticism". The true church looks on in admiration, wondering if our hearts will ever be touched so deeply that we can let go of our comfort and security and become such extravagant worshipers. The tares will always whine about wasting our lives, putting our family at risk, or being careless with our finances. We feel we have to 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.

⁷ "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "[It was intended] that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. I love the way Jesus stands up for the innocent. Don't you? "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. Don't expect anyone but Him to really understand your worship, especially when it is extravagant worship.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus said, "She has done a beautiful thing to me." What an expression. I want to do beautiful things for Jesus. Don't you? Remember the message about Jesus reminding the figurative sheep and goats that what they did to the least of the brothers, they did to the Lord? (Matthew 25:40) Do you feel led to do something extravagant for Jesus, then do it for the least of the brethren, to someone who can never pay you back. (Luke 14:13-14)

Somehow Mary knew she needed to anoint Jesus' body. There wasn't enough time on the day of the crucifixion. Remember the women will try to come take care of that on Sunday morning. (Mark 16:1) In the mean time, wherever Jesus went on those last days, from the Garden to the mock trials, to Pilate and Herod, to the cross, everyone that 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.

⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." You can do things for Jesus by helping the poor anytime. "There will always be the poor in

Commented [notes15]: 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. Rev 12:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Matt 25:40 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Luke 14:13-14 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Mark 16:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 12 While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. Song 1:12 (KJV)

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.

Commented [notes21]: Deuteronomy 15:11 (NIV) 11 There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

No matter how advanced societies become, there will always be the poor among us. Jesus was addressing Judas’ hypocritical excuse for being hard on Mary. He wasn’t denying the need to help the poor; He was just stating the fact that His time was up. If they wanted to do or say something to Him personally, that was the time to do it.

⁹ Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹ for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him. 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.

Commented [notes22]: "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? 9 Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? Job 40:8-9 (NIV)

In Matthew’s account of the story, he recorded that Jesus said, ¹³ *I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.*” And right here this morning in Arizona, half way 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. We are talking about Mary of Bethany and wondering what her example means to our lives and how we will respond to lives like that of the Walkers, or Qabil, or Pastor Manuel. How does your heart call you to worship Jesus today?

Commented [notes23]: 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! Rev 3:15 (NIV)

Please don’t think worship can only be something dramatic. By serving, Martha was worshiping with her gifts. Lazarus was worshiping by just being a testimony that Jesus can bring the dead to life. Consistent worship is as important as these moments of giving what is most valuable to us. Both must always involve the whole heart.

How do we get to that place that they arrived at where all that really matters is Jesus? It is not a secret. Most of you have heard it before. Repent and be baptized with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38) Die to self, and make Jesus the Lord of your life. (Matthew 16:24) It sounds so trite because we’ve gotten used to saying it without visualizing what it really means. These testimonies remind us of how far the decision can take us. These people don’t give like that everyday, but they are ready to every day. Like the Apostle Paul, they die daily so that when the call comes, they are ready to answer. (1Corinthians 15:31)

Commented [notes24]: 38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Matt 16:24 (NIV)

Is that where your heart is this morning? Has God been laying on your heart some extravagant act of worship? Let it be just between you and your Savior. Show how much you love Him. He already showed how much He loves us with His extravagant act of sacrifice, the cross. How will you respond?

Commented [notes26]: 31 I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Cor 15:31 (NIV)