



The Anointing at Bethany

Message Notes, July 31, 2016

John 12:1-8

This past Sunday we jumped from John 10 to John 12. We covered John 11, the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead at Easter.

There is a connection between John 11 and John 12. The dinner that was “given” for Jesus was an expression of gratitude from the family of Lazarus for the miracle Jesus had recently performed. It was a celebration but at the same time it must have been a bittersweet. There was also a dark cloud hanging over all of them. The scribes and Pharisees had let it be known that they were looking for Jesus and warned that anyone who had knowledge of His whereabouts should report it immediately. If anyone found out, this little dinner party could get them in trouble.

When we look at other Gospel accounts (Matt 26: 6-13 and Mark 14: 3-9) of this story, we find that the dinner party was held in the home of Simon the Leper. We also find that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were at the dinner. The disciples, the scribes and Pharisees were there as well. What they all had in common was that their lives had been transformed by the presence of Jesus. Or at least there was an opportunity for transformation to take place.

- During the dinner Mary broke a jar containing more than a pint of pure nard, a fragrant or perfumed oil, and began to anoint Jesus with it right in front of the entire crowd.
- If we know this story it may be hard to understand, but imagine what it would have been like in the moment having just finished the meal and now reclining and talking around the table.
- To say it was disruptive would be an understatement.
- John reports that she anointed His feet. Matthew and Mark say she anointed His head. It is likely she anointed both his hand and feet. Mary’s action was one of pure worship of Jesus.

Mary’s worship was ...

1. Fueled by love

- John Piper quote: "It is a beautiful thing when the worth of Jesus and love of his followers match - when the value of his perfections and the intensity of our affections correspond."

2. Clothed in humility

- To attend to the feet was the job of a servant or slave
- Mary freely and joyously took on that identity in a way that magnified the worth of Jesus and minimized her own worth.

3. Given extravagantly

- A year’s worth of wages!
- It was her most precious treasure.
- Yet she gave it willingly and without regret.
- Treasure, when hoarded and kept selfishly can become putrid, but when gratitude moves one to give it freely, it becomes a sweet-smelling sacrifice, not only to God, but to all who benefit from it.

4. Expressed with abandonment.

- Taking her hair down would have been scandalous. A woman was never to let her hair down in public.
- But there was too much oil and she had no towel. Without a towel, Mary took her own hair—a woman’s crown— and used it to wipe the excess oil from Jesus, dirty, dusty feet.
- Everyone in the room squirmed over the inappropriateness, the unreasonableness, and the wildness of Mary’s actions.
- Pure worship is like that - so completely consumed with Jesus that there is no thought of self or anyone else in the room.

This expression of worship by Mary and the response of some who were in attendance remind us of the story of David in 2 Sam 6. David leaped and danced before the Lord in response to what He had done. His wife Michal, Saul’s daughter, said: “How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!” David’s reply was: “... I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes.”

As soon as Mary broke the jar, John says that Judas objected. Matthew and Mark say that all the disciples were indignant. More than likely, they were all thinking the same thing but it was Judas who spoke: “Why the waste? Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?”

Jesus simply says, “Leave her alone. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor, but you will not always have me.” What did Jesus mean by “You will always have the poor?”

See the contrast:

- Mary is moved by love; Judas by pragmatism.
- Mary was unreasonable in extravagance; Judas was restrained by logic
- Mary lavishes attention on Jesus; Judas deflected attention from Jesus.
- Mary worships Him for who He is; Judas failed to see Who He was.

According to Matthew, Judas immediately went and agreed to sell Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Mary “wasted” almost three times that much (pint of nard) in expression of her love for Jesus.

Reflection Questions

- Does my worship reflect my appreciation for the difference He has made in my life?
- To what extent will I go to show my gratitude for the transformation that has taken place in my life?
- Am I self-conscious when I worship or am I able to minimize my own worth and magnify His?
- What am I willing to sacrifice to show my love for Him? What have I not been able to let go of? Why?
- When in worship who do we resemble? Simon the Leper? Lazarus? Martha? Mary? The disciples? Judas? The scribes and Pharisees?
- Do we ever feel like worshipping like David, leaping and dancing before the Lord? What keeps us from doing so?
- How can we “Give Ourselves Away”?