

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

JOHN 12.1-11



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,

He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Gospel of John: John 12.1-11

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Introduction to *John 12.1-11*

The action returns to Bethany, and a dinner at the home of one Simon the leper. John uses this situation to draw us into the emotions and contrasts swirling around Jesus. He wants us to *feel* the events, and not just to *think* about them.

Mary's beautiful act symbolizes Jesus' death, but Lazarus' presence at the table with Him reminds us He is the Lord of life. What must His disciples have been thinking and feeling?

We know what Judas was thinking: "What's in this for me?" And many others were coming to Jesus as well, with a variety of motives and aspirations.

There is so much to contemplate in these eleven verses. Slow down. Read deeply. Think deeply. Feel deeply. This is what John wants for us.

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1 A Meal with His Friends

Read and meditate on John 12.1, 2.

Jesus returned to Bethany as He traveled to Jerusalem, stopping at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus for dinner. John will use this situation to prepare us further for the work whereby Jesus would be glorified.

¹Then, six days before the Passover began, the Lord arrived at Bethany, where he who had been dead, whom Jesus made to be alive again, was living. ²They prepared a supper for Him there, and Martha cared for Him and other guests, and Lazarus sat with Him at table.

- John 12.1, 2

Reflect

1. Jesus made a point of stopping to be with His friends, whom we have previously met. Was this simply a farewell visit, or was John using it to remind and prepare us? Explain. Complete this prayer: *Thank You, Lord, that You not only visit me, but dwell in me! I rejoice and...*

2. Given that John names again all the parties who were involved central to the raising of Lazarus – Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (v. 3) – he seems to be using this event to reconnect us with the drama and purposes of the previous chapter. What were those purposes (Jn. 11.4, 15, 25, 40)? Jesus had been in the north country for a while, and now John felt the need to get us back on track by returning us to the place Jesus had been before He left. It's good to revisit significant events in our lives with the Lord, don't you think? Why? How can revisiting these events, especially in prayers, help us reconnect with the Lord's purposes for our lives? Can you think of an example from your own life? *Many times, Lord, many times You have reminded me that...*

3. We are "six days" before Passover, which means we are in Bethany with Jesus on Saturday, the Sabbath. The next day – the first day of the week – He would be declared the King of Israel (vv. 12, 13). Paul says that the resurrection, which was on the first day of the week, was the declaration in power that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 1.4). Did Jesus *plan* to be heralded as the King of Israel on the first day of the week? Why? To what did this point forward?? Comment on Jesus' timing here. *Lord, You leave nothing to chance; You work everything according to the counsel of Your will (Eph. 1.11), and this includes...*

4. What do you make of John's mention that Martha served while Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus? Why should we care about such details? What would have been the effect of this on "those who sat at table" with Jesus and Lazarus? *Lord, let me bear from others the good work you have done for them, and let me learn from their example...*

5. Even this meal has significance. It is the *last* meal with these friends Jesus will enjoy, just as the supper in John 13 is the *Last Supper* He would have with His disciples. Here, oil would be poured on Jesus' feet; in John 13 He will wash the disciples' feet. Here the ambience is one of life and beauty and wonder; in that upper room, a different ambience will prevail. What do you think about the way John uses this meal in Bethany to create anticipation for events to come? Does such literary craftsmanship lend beauty and depth to his gospel? Explain. Bring together into one the prayers you composed for questions 1-4.

Summary

“Being sure of the glory of his resurrection, Jesus first came to Bethany, a town near Jerusalem, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. Then he went to Jerusalem, where he himself was to suffer and rise from the dead. He went to Jerusalem so that he might die there, but to Bethany so that the raising up of Lazarus might be imprinted more deeply on the memory of all.” *The Venerable Bede (672-735 AD)*

Friend, don't rush through reading the gospels, or any of Scripture, for that matter. Take your time. Ask lots of questions about all the details. Look for connections. Appreciate the gifts and style of each writer. Marvel at the master craftsmanship of the Holy Spirit. Feed on the Word, and let it bring joy and rejoicing to your heart (Jer. 15.16). What especially do you appreciate about these two verses?

Closing Prayer

Many, O LORD my God, *are* Your wonderful works
Which You have done;
And Your thoughts toward us
Cannot be recounted to You in order;
If I would declare and speak of *them*,
They are more than can be numbered.
Sacrifice and offering You did not desire;
My ears You have opened.
Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.
Then I said, “Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book *it is* written of me.
I delight to do Your will, O my God,
And Your law *is* within my heart.”
I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness
In the great assembly;
Indeed, I do not restrain my lips,
O LORD, You Yourself know.

Psalm 40.5-9

Psalm 40.4-10 (*Dix: For the Beauty of the Earth*)

Blessed are all who trust in You, turning both from lies and pride.
Countless wonders, Lord, You do, and Your thoughts with us abide.
Lord, Your worth who can declare? None with You can e'er compare.

Offrings You do not require – open now my ears, O Lord –
What from me do You desire? Firm delight to do Your Word.
Take my life in ev'ry part; write Your Law upon my heart

Lord, Your truth will I proclaim to Your people gathered 'round,
Nor will I my lips restrain – let Your precious ways resound!
Of Your saving grace and Word I would speak, most loving Lord.

2 A Beautiful Work

Read and meditate on John 12.3.

We find Mary again, at the feet of Jesus, but with an entirely different purpose this time. What a beautiful work of love.

³Mary brought a vat of costly oil of spikenard, and began anointing Jesus' feet with it. And then she wiped His feet with her own hair. And so the fragrance of the oil began to go throughout the house.

- John 12.3

Reflect

1. In Luke 10.38-42, we find Mary *sitting* at Jesus' feet. Doing what? Here she is again at His feet. How is this situation different from the previous one? What significance should we attach to each of these situations taking place at Jesus' feet? What does each suggest about Mary? Since Jesus commended her each time, what instruction is there for us? Complete this prayer: *Lord, let me be found always at Your feet, for...*

2. Harmonies of the gospels (NKJV, Robertson, Aland, Augustine, Calvin) equate Mary's act with that of the unnamed woman who anointed Jesus' head in Matthew 26 and Mark 14. Both were done in Bethany, but in the home of Simon, not Lazarus and his sisters. Apparently, Mary poured her precious oil on Jesus' head and feet, though John only mentions His feet. In both Matthew's and Mark's account of this incident, Jesus described what Mary did as a *good* or even a *beautiful* work (cf. Matt. 26.10, Mk. 14.6). What was *beautiful* about this act? Is there beauty in the *effects* of this? Can we learn anything about *beauty* from Mary's act? About living in a *beautiful* way? *Lord, help me to contemplate Your beauty (Ps. 27.4), so that I might...*

3. This was a very expensive act on Mary's part. A denarius (v. 5) was the equivalent of a day's wage for laborers. What would a comparable sacrifice look like, if you were to make it? Meditate on Romans 12.1. *Lord, make me a living sacrifice every day, so that all I am and have...*

4. John makes a point of telling us that Mary wiped Jesus' feet with her hair? What would have been the effect of this on Jesus' feet? On Mary's hair? Why do you suppose it was important to John to mention this? *Jesus, You are the Anointed One of God! Rub off on me, Lord, and transform me, so that...*

5. "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil." Meditate on Ephesians 4.8-10 and 2 Corinthians 2.14-16. In what ways can Mary's act symbolize what God intends for you with respect to your Personal Mission Field? Bring together into one prayer the prayers you wrote from questions 1-4.

Summary

"Harmony is maintained here between the three Evangelists: Matthew, Mark and John. There is no doubt that they record the same occurrence at Bethany. This is the occasion when the disciples also, as all three mention, murmured against the woman, ostensibly on the ground of her having wasted this very precious ointment. There is the further fact that Matthew and Mark tell us that it was the Lord's head on which the ointment was poured, while John says it was his feet. This can be shown to involve no contradiction if we apply the principle ... that even where the several Evangelists introduce only the one fact each, we should take the case to have been really that both things were elements in the actual occurrence. In the same way, our conclusion with regard to the passage now before us should be that the woman poured the ointment not only on the Lord's head but also on his feet." *Augustine (354-430 AD)*

Mary lavished her most expensive possession on Jesus, with the result that all those in the house turned their attention to Jesus, and the beautiful fragrance coming off His head and feet. This is beautiful and good work, indeed. What's the lesson for you?

Closing Prayer

How lovely *is* Your tabernacle,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, even faints
For the courts of the LORD;
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
Even the sparrow has found a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young—
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,
My King and my God.
Blessed *are* those who dwell in Your house;
They will still be praising You.

Psalm 84.1-4

Psalm 84.1-4 (*Holy Manna: Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Lord of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling;
How my soul longs for Your courts!
Let my soul with joy keep telling
Of Your grace forever more.
Like a bird upon the altar
Let my life to You belong.
Blessed are they who never falter
As they praise Your grace with song!

3 Drifter

Read and meditate on John 12.4, 5.

Jesus saw a work of goodness and beauty; Judas saw a missed opportunity – for himself.

⁴But Judas, one of His disciples – Simon’s son, and it was this one who would ultimately betray Him – he said, ⁵“Why was this sweet oil not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?” ⁶He said this, not that he might do some good for others, for he cared not for the poor, but he their money kept in store, and he would often steal it.

- John 12.4, 5

Reflect

1. We rightly condemn Judas’ false piety and sinful motives. He wasn’t alone. According to Matthew, other disciples joined in his complaint (Matt. 26.8), and Mark suggests that other guests gave their “Amen” to Judas’ complaint (Mk. 8.4). Perhaps these all chimed in on Judas’ false piety regarding the poor, but their protest may have been sincere. What do you think? Explain. Complete this prayer: *We are prone to parade our faith, Lord, when what we should do is...*

2. Judas is a classic example of failing to heed the warning of Hebrews 2.1 about drifting from the Lord and our salvation. We recall that Judas had been among the disciples from the beginning. What kinds of activities would he have been involved in as one of the twelve? What does this suggest about looking to ministry activities as proof of discipleship? *I understand, Lord, that mere activity in Your Name is no guarantee that we know You. Instead...*

3. Jesus and His disciples maintained a fund, which they used for various purposes as they went about their work. Judas kept the “money box,” and the temptation of those funds was apparently the cause of his drifting from the Lord. What other temptations can cause us to drift like Judas? *Where am I vulnerable, Lord, to using my relationship with You for personal gain? Help me to...*

4. Judas’ work with Jesus had become entirely self-serving, and this proved that he was in fact no true disciple at all, but a “son of perdition” (Jn. 17.12). Outwardly, he looked pretty much like the other disciples, and he appeared concerned for the poor; inwardly, he was all about Judas. What is the warning for us from the sad case of Judas? *Lord, I know that I belong to You because...*

5. If mere activity is not the measure of true discipleship, what is? What might be some signs that you were beginning to drift from the Lord and His salvation? Bring together into one prayer the prayers you wrote for questions 1-4.

Summary

“In the other Gospels it is the disciples who murmured at the waste of the ointment... I think myself that Judas is put for the whole body of disciples; the plural used for the singular. ... But at any rate we may supply for ourselves that the other disciples said it, or thought it or were persuaded by this very speech of Judas. The only difference is that Matthew and Mark expressly mention the concurrence of the others, whereas John only mentions Judas, whose habit of thieving he takes occasion to notice.” *Augustine (354-430 AD)*

We can all become drifters, if we're not careful to attend to the daily disciplines and duties that come with following Jesus. What are those disciplines and duties?

Closing Prayer

But You, O GOD the Lord,
Deal with me for Your name's sake;
Because Your mercy *is* good, deliver me.
For I *am* poor and needy,
And my heart is wounded within me.
I am gone like a shadow when it lengthens;
I am shaken off like a locust.
My knees are weak through fasting,
And my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness.
I also have become a reproach to them;
When they look at me, they shake their heads.
Help me, O LORD my God!
Oh, save me according to Your mercy,
That they may know that this is Your hand—
That You, LORD, have done it!

Psalm 109.21-27

Psalm 109.28-31 (*Veni Emmanuel: O Come, O Come, Immanuel*)

Let all who stand against Your holy Word
Be brought to woe by Your great pow'r, O Lord.
May all who curse and all who accuse
To Your great mercy access be refused.
O God, I praise and thank You with my song,
And worship You amid Your holy throng.

Let my accusers come to shame
While I still praise and thank Your holy Name.
At our right hand the Lord shall take His stand
To save our souls from those who would condemn.
O God, I praise and thank You with my song,
And worship You amid Your holy throng.

4 Mary's Offering Commended

Read and meditate on John 12.7, 8.

Without exposing Judas' self-indulgent motives, Jesus commended Mary's offering, and explained its significance.

⁷Jesus said,
"Let her alone, for she has this instead
kept for the day when I am buried. ⁸You
the poor have with you always, and can do
for them at any time you choose. But Me
you do not always have."

- John 12.7, 8

Reflect

1. Jesus' command to "Let her alone" suggests that people had begun to try and restrain Mary. Jesus thus received Mary's lavish gift, and commended her actions of pouring it on His head and feet, and wiping His feet with her hair. What do you suppose the effect of this was on Mary? Complete the following prayer: *Lord Jesus, I offer You myself for this day – all my time, strength, attention, and effort. Help me to...*

2. Jesus said that Mary had "kept" that ointment "for the day of My burial." The sense of *kept* is that Mary *had been saving* the oil to signify that Jesus would die. Do you suppose Mary understood that prior to this moment? But she had kept the oil nonetheless, and when she was moved to make some dramatic gesture of honor and reverence for Jesus, that oil was available, and she did not hesitate. What precious treasures are you *keeping* that Jesus might want you to offer for His honor and glory? *All that I am and have is Yours, Lord. As You lead me, help me to...*

3. Jesus saw Mary's offering as signifying His death. From the time of the Trojan War, spikenard (v. 3) was used to apply a sweet fragrance to the bodies of the dead. Why do you suppose people did this? Why was it important to anoint the departed with a sweet fragrance, prior to their entombment? What were people saying by doing this? Why didn't Mary use this with Lazarus when he died? Why did Jesus bother to connect Mary's offering with His own death? What was He saying to His disciples about events to come?

4. Jesus commends in part Judas' suggestion about sharing with the poor (v. 6). In Mark 14.7 He says, "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always." He did not want His rebuke ("Let her alone") to become an excuse for not sharing with the poor. Why? Meditate on Galatians 2.10. How does your church practice this? *Thank You, Lord, that You shared the riches of glory with me, a poor sinner. Help me always to...*

5. There is something ominous about that "Me you do not have always." We can imagine the disciples' hearts sinking upon hearing that. To what was Jesus alluding? Meditate on John 14.1-3 and John 15.5-7. Why was Jesus' departing good news? Since this remark portended such good things, why didn't Jesus allay their sadness and say more? Bring together your prayers from questions 1-4 into one prayer.

Summary

"It is as though Judas were asking an innocent question, and so our Lord simply and gently explained the mystery of what Mary's action meant, namely, that he himself was about to die and that he was to be anointed for his burial with the spices. It was being granted to Mary (to whom it would not be permitted to anoint his dead body, although she greatly desired this) to render a service [to him while he was] still alive, since she would be unable [to perform it] after his death, for she would be prevented by his swift resurrection." *The*

Venerable Bede (672-735 AD)

John begins to slow his narrative significantly, and to pack it with symbolism. He is enhancing his narrative by embellishing it with symbolic acts, such as this anointing, the question of the Greeks, the washing of the disciples' feet, and the inauguration of the Supper. Why would he do this? How do such symbols affect us as followers of Jesus? Are they important? Explain.

Closing Prayer

What shall I render to the LORD
For all His benefits toward me?
I will take up the cup of salvation,
And call upon the name of the LORD.
I will pay my vows to the LORD
Now in the presence of all His people.
Precious in the sight of the LORD
Is the death of His saints.
O LORD, truly I *am* Your servant;
I *am* Your servant, the son of Your maidservant;
You have loosed my bonds.
I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving,
And will call upon the name of the LORD.
I will pay my vows to the LORD
Now in the presence of all His people,
In the courts of the LORD house,
In the midst of you, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 116.12-19

Psalm 116.7-19 (*Mit Freuden Zart: All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

Full well the Lord has dealt with me; my soul from death He delivered.
My weeping eyes, my stumbling feet, He has redeemed forever.
Forever I before His face shall walk with those who know His grace,
And dwell with them forever.

Afflicted, I believe His Word, though lying men would undo me.
What shall I render to the Lord for all His blessings to me?
Salvation's cup I lift above and call upon the God of love
And pay my vows most truly.

How sweet to Him when saints depart – save me, Your servant, Savior!
From sin You loosed my wand'ring heart; I praise Your Name forever!
On You I call, my vows to pay; here in Your presence I would stay
Your praise to offer ever.

5 Coming to Jesus

Read and meditate on John 12.9.

The motives of those who sought to see Jesus were not always what they should have been. But that was OK. At least they came.

‘The Jews knew He was there, and many came because of Him, but also that they might see Lazarus, him whom Jesus raised.

- John 12.9

Reflect

1. Many people gathered around Jesus for a variety of reasons throughout the course of His earthly sojourn. Quickly review Jesus’ ministry from John 1 to our passage for today. What kind of motives can you discern among those who came to Jesus? Complete this prayer: *Lord, let my motives in seeking You be always what they ought to be. Guard me against...*

2. Word got out that Jesus was in Bethany, and many came to see Him. The only way they would have known that Jesus was in the vicinity was by word of mouth, since mass media didn’t exist in Jesus’ day. What can you imagine was being said about Jesus, that would cause “a great many of the Jews” to come to Him? How do people today think about Jesus? If you aren’t sure, ask a few of the people you see today. *I’m sure people have many different opinions about You, Lord, but my calling is to...*

3. John makes a point of telling us that many of those who came to Jesus wanted also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. What was the fascination in this? Meditate on Ephesians 2.4-10. Should people be curious to see Jesus because of what they see in us? Explain. *Thank You, Lord, for giving me life; help me to...*

4. John has been deliberately mixing the themes of death and life in this and the last chapter. Review John 11.1-12.9. Cite the verses in which John mentions one or the other of these themes. Why is John doing this? Is he trying to focus us more pointedly on this theme? Explain. *Lord, You are the Life we need. You raise us from the dead and give us eternal life with You and the Father. All around us, Lord, people are dead in their trespasses and sins, as I once was. But You have appointed me to...*

5. John does not condemn the people who were coming to see Jesus out of mere curiosity. He merely tells us this was the case. Are people today as curious to see Jesus as these people seem to have been? Why or why not? Should they be curious to see Him? What is our responsibility, as individuals and churches, in provoking people to greater curiosity about Jesus? Bring together into one your prayers from questions 1-4.

Summary

“The Jews discovered that Jesus was again in Bethany, staying with Lazarus and his sisters, and was in fact with them at that moment. Many came ... perhaps expecting to hear something extraordinary from him, like somebody who comes back to civilization from a strange and remote land. For this reason the chief priests, when they saw that the crowd was also greatly attracted by the desire to see Lazarus, thought to kill Lazarus together with Christ. They obviously had the idea that the crowds would have not confined themselves to see Lazarus but by seeing him would have been led to faith in Christ—as if he who had raised [Lazarus] from the dead once could not bring him back to life again.” *Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 AD)*

Not everyone who came to Jesus came because they were seeking relief from the burden of their sins. They

came out of selfish interest – bread or healing – or simple curiosity – would He raise another dead person? Or just because some friend was excited about seeing Jesus for one reason or another. Jesus created a stir wherever He went, and people came out to see Him. Is this the case still today? Jesus lives in those who believe in Him. Local churches are the very Body of Christ. Why do people today seem less curious than in Jesus' day to get a look at Him?

Closing Prayer

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.
God is in her palaces;
He is known as her refuge.
For behold, the kings assembled,
They passed by together.
They saw it, *and* so they marveled;
They were troubled, they hastened away.
Fear took hold of them there,
And pain, as of a woman in birth pangs,
As when You break the ships of Tarshish
With an east wind.
As we have heard,
So we have seen
In the city of the LORD of hosts,
In the city of our God:
God will establish it forever. Selah
We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness,
In the midst of Your temple.
According to Your name, O God,
So *is* Your praise to the ends of the earth;
Your right hand is full of righteousness.

Psalm 48.1-10

Psalm 48.1-11 (*Cwm Rhondda: Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehova*)

Great is God, now greatly praise Him in the city of the Lord.
Holy she, His lovely mountain, great and glorious by His Word!
God her King is great within her, He, her Stronghold ever sure!
He, her Stronghold ever sure!

Earthly kings, amazed and wond'ring, look upon the Church with fear.
See them flee in dread and anguish, knowing that the Lord is near.
For the city of the Savior God will keep forevermore!
God will keep forevermore!

For Your grace and lovingkindness we proclaim Your matchless worth!
As Your Name is, great and boundless, let Your praise fill all the earth.
Let Your people sing rejoicing for the judgment of Your truth;
For the judgment of Your truth.

6 Sin's Rage

Read and meditate on John 12.10, 11.

Unchecked sin spreads like a cancer, but it harms more than just those who are afflicted by it.

¹⁰The priests determined to kill Lazarus, too, ¹¹because so many Jews on his account had turned to Jesus, and believed in Him.

- John 12.10, 11

Reflect

1. In Psalm 73, Asaph is confronted by a powerful temptation – to prefer the ways of the prosperous ungodly to the servants of God. But though he complained about the disciplined life of following God, he would not so much as speak what was in his heart. Instead, he sought the way of escape from this temptation, which he found initially by remembering that his sin, unchecked, would constitute a betrayal of God's people (vv. 13-15). How so? And how can you see this in the priests and religious leaders in our text? Complete this prayer: *Show me, Lord, day by day, where I have fallen short of Your glory, and lead me to...*

2. The rage of the priests and other religious leaders against Jesus was channeled toward Lazarus as well. What was his crime, as they saw it? Asaph likened temptation and unchecked sin to a slippery slope (Ps. 73.18, 19), and remembering this, was bolstered in his determination to stay true to the Lord. Is Asaph's metaphor an apt description of the priests' situation? Explain. What should we learn from this? *Keep my feet on the solid ground of Your truth, O Lord, and show me whenever I...*

3. In their blind rage against Jesus and Lazarus, the greatest power the priests could wield was the power to kill, and they determined to employ that power against the two of them. What were they overlooking? Put another way, to what was sin blinding them? How did Asaph appeal to this as a way of escape through temptation (Ps. 73.23-26)? *Your power, O Lord, is greater even than death. So I can...*

4. Sin works destruction on the soul. Like a cancer, it overruns healthy cells with deadly ones, and destroys all that is wholesome and good. Having decided to kill Jesus, killing Lazarus only made sense, since he was the cause of many others coming to believe Jesus. What was sin doing to the minds of these priests? To their hearts (affections)? Their priorities and values? Can sin do the same in us? Explain. *Lord, guard my soul – heart, mind, and conscience – from the destructive powers of sin, and keep me...*

5. Where would rage and sin lead these priests and religious leaders, not just in Jesus' lifetime, but ultimately? Meditate on Psalm 73.15-28. By how many different means did Asaph resist temptation and thwart the power of sin? Bring together into one your prayers from questions 1-4.

Summary

“See now how frantic the rulers seem to become, wildly rushing here and there under the influence of their envy and saying nothing coherently. They seriously meditate murder on murder, thinking they can remove the force of the miraculous deed at the same time as their victim in order to stop the people from running to believe Christ.” *Cyril of Alexandria (375-444 AD)*

Sin will kill you. And unchecked sin in you will inflict harm on others. What's the lesson here?

Closing Prayer

You will guide me with Your counsel,

And afterward receive me *to* glory.
Whom have I in heaven *but* You?
And *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire besides You.
My flesh and my heart fail;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish;
You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.
But *it is* good for me to draw near to God;
I have put my trust in the Lord GOD,
That I may declare all Your works.

Psalm 73.24-28

Psalm 73.21-28 (*Ellacombe: Hosanna, Loud Hosanna*)
When my poor sad, embittered heart was pierced within by grace,
I saw how beastly was the part I chose before Your face.
But I am ever with You, Lord, You hold me by the hand,
And guide me daily by Your Word; in glory I e'er shall stand.

Then what have I in heav'n above but You, my God and Lord?
And on this earth what shall I love besides You and Your Word?
My flesh and heart shall surely fail, and death my soul release;
Your strength for me shall e'er avail and grant eternal peace.

Then let them perish who depart from You and from Your Word.
All those unfaithful in their heart You shall destroy, O Lord!
But as for me, Your nearness, Lord, is where I e'er will dwell!
I hide myself within Your Word, Your wondrous works to tell.

7 Jesus in Bethany

Read and meditate on John 12.1-11.

Bethany is Jesus' last stop before arriving in Jerusalem for the final time. John packs the occasion with drama and symbolism, preparing us for the momentous events which are about to occur.

¹Then, six days before the Passover began, the Lord arrived at Bethany, where he who had been dead, whom Jesus made to be alive again, was living. ²They prepared a supper for Him there, and Martha cared for Him and other guests, and Lazarus sat with Him at table. ³Mary brought a vat of costly oil of spikenard, and began anointing Jesus' feet with it. And then she wiped His feet with her own hair. And so the fragrance of the oil began to go throughout the house. ⁴But Judas, one of His disciples – Simon's son, and it was this one who would ultimately betray Him – he said, ⁵"Why was this sweet oil not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?" ⁶He said this, not that he might do some good for others, for he cared not for the poor, but he their money kept in store, and he would often steal it. ⁷Jesus said, "Let her alone, for she has this instead kept for the day when I am buried. ⁸You the poor have with you always, and can do for them at any time you choose. But Me you do not always have."

⁹The Jews knew He was there, and many came because of Him, but also that they might see Lazarus, him whom Jesus raised. ¹⁰The priests determined to kill Lazarus, too, ¹¹because so many Jews on his account had turned to Jesus, and believed in Him.

- John 12.1-11

Reflect

1. John omits one important detail about this visit to Bethany, and it has a bearing on what will ensue. The supper prepared for Jesus was at the home of Simon the leper (Matt. 26.6; Mk. 14.3). The man was a known leper, yet Jesus went to eat with him; and the disciples, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus accompanied Him as well. What does this tell us about Jesus? About those who follow Jesus? What does entering this man's home suggest about Jerusalem, which Jesus is shortly to enter? Complete this prayer: *Thank You, Lord, that You have come to fellowship with such a one as I, who...*

2. The details of this story, as all the details of Scripture, are important – details of time, place, people, items, conversations, and actions. These details lend credibility to John’s account as a record of true events. Why does this matter? *Let me never forget, Lord, that You walked among us in history, and that You fulfilled all Your work in history, so that we can have confidence that...*

3. John uses this story to prepare us for events in Jerusalem. We need to know a little more about Judas, the kind of person he was. Jesus talked about His burial. The religious leaders are in such a rage that not only are they planning to kill Jesus, but Lazarus, too. A comparable situation to this is the song “[Tonight Quintet and Chorus](#)” from the film, *West Side Story*, in which the tragic events of the evening are anticipated by all the members of the cast, according to their different perspectives. John wants us to feel the tension and uncertainty he and the other disciples must have felt during that last week of Jesus’ earthly sojourn. It is good for us to let these tensions and other emotions sink in, since learning is a matter not only of the mind, but of the heart. Explain. What affections is John appealing to in our heart as we read this account? *You have commanded us to love You with all our heart, Lord, and I want to, truly I do. Help me to...*

4. This story also presents a study in contrasts: the beauty of Mary’s act, the ugliness of burial; the faith of the many who were coming to Jesus, the sinful rage of their leaders; the selfishness of Judas, the faith of the disciples; the threat of death, the presence of the one raised from the dead; Jesus’ plan, the plot of the Jews. These contrasts summarize the ministry of Jesus and prepare us for what will follow. Explain. *You are the Lord of all contrasts, Jesus! When I find myself in the midst of conflicting circumstances...*

5. Try your hand at a summary: Jesus has left the country of Ephraim and was on His way to Jerusalem for Passover. We know what awaits Him there. But rather than go right to those events, John records this stopover in Bethany. Why? Bring together into one prayer the prayers you composed for questions 1-4.

Summary

“Blind cunning of the blind, to wish to kill one who had been restored to life! As if [Jesus] could not restore to life one who had been killed when he had been able to restore to life one who had died! And, indeed, he taught that he was about do both, since he restored to life both Lazarus, who had died, and himself, who had been killed.” *The Venerable Bede (672-735 AD)*

How does the story of Mary’s anointing Jesus’ feet cause you to love Him more with your *heart*?

Closing Prayer

I have set the LORD always before me;
Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will rest in hope.
For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence *is* fullness of joy;
At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:8-11

Psalm 16:8-11 (*All to Christ: Jesus Paid It All*)

You are ever with me, Lord; in You I shall not fall.
But rejoicing in Your Word, I abide within Your call.
Make me know life’s way! Pleasures fill Your hand;
Fill my life with joy each day! Before Your face I stand.

The Gospel of John: John 12:1-11

Soon Your glory I shall see, for as Jesus rose again,
You will go gather me to my home with You in heav'n.
Make me know life's way! Pleasures fill Your hand;
Fill my life with joy each day! Before Your face I stand.

The Gospel of John: John 12.1-11

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. John cared a great deal about the details of his stories. Why are all these details important?
2. John used symbolism and emotion to prepare us for the events in Jerusalem. Explain.
3. Is it possible to get everything John intends for us from this story without slowing down, as he did, and contemplating each verse, each detail, and all these teach and represent? What are you learning from this study about how to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col. 3.16)?
4. This story introduces a warning to those who come to Jesus, and even those who profess to be His disciples. Explain.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from John 12.1-11? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Items for prayer:

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