
Before we move on in our text, I want us to take another quick look at last week's text but instead of focusing on Mary and Martha we are going to talk about Lazarus. Lazarus in this story provides us a powerful metaphor of resurrection—life from the dead—and the spiritual journey of each believer.

1) Lazarus was dead. We were dead in our sins (*Ephesians 2:1*).

2) After 4-days in the grave, Lazarus stunk. The stench from our sin and selfishness infected every part of our lives; even our righteousness was no better than filthy rags (*Isaiah 64:6*).

3) Jesus asked others to roll away the stone that covered the tomb. The hardness over our heart was rolled away through the assistance of others that God used in our lives to bring to us the Word of truth.

4) By Jesus' words—"come forth"—Lazarus was brought to life. In the same way, Jesus gives us life from the dead (*Ephesians 2:5-6*). When we choose to accept Christ into our lives, He births in us a new nature that is created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true (*Ephesians 4:24*); a nature that is eternal and will never perish.

5) Lazarus was bound head to toe in burial cloth and had to be released in order to walk free. *Colossians 3:1-17* tells us how we can put off the grave clothes and clothe ourselves with the Spirit. We are not to walk around carrying any of those old dirty, stinky garments, but we have been made new and we are to live as new creations free in Christ (*2 Corinthians 5:17*).

6) Lazarus new life was a witness to the glory of Jesus for many of the people who were with Mary and Martha believed in Jesus when they saw this miracle. Similarly, if you walk in the Spirit of God, others will come to believe that the

Father sent the Son because as you walk in the Spirit of God your life will be a miracle of resurrection.

7) He fellowshiped with Jesus. Jumping ahead to the next chapter we will see that they were all having dinner together at Lazarus' house (*John 12:1-2*). We are to constantly dine with Jesus, feasting on His Word, always enjoying His presence in our lives knowing that without Him we can do nothing (*John 15:5*).

And 8) He was persecuted. When we get to *Chapter 12* we will find that the religious leaders wanted to kill Lazarus for it was because of him that many deserted the religious leaders and believed in Jesus (*John 12:10*). Similarly, we are told in *2 Timothy 3:12* that all who desire to live godly lives will suffer persecution. It is part and parcel with the whole resurrection gig.

I love the layers that are in the Bible. I know that sometimes they are hard to see, but if you keep seeking the Lord with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul, and if you let His word be *authoritative* over your life, you will begin to see. Let's continue with our story.

John 11:45-54

Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. "What are we going to do?" they asked each other. "This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation."

Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, "You don't know what you're talking about! You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed." He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation. And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world.

So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus' death. As a result, Jesus stopped his public ministry among the people and left Jerusalem. He went to a place near the wilderness, to the village of Ephraim, and stayed there with his disciples.

With Bethany being just a couple miles outside of Jerusalem, some good upstanding citizens went to Jerusalem to inform on Jesus even though they were well aware that the religious leaders were looking for reasons to have Him arrested and killed. It is amazing to me how their hearts could be so hard. How often do people say they will believe if they could just see a miracle, if they could just see God prove Himself for real. Well, this just emphasizes what the Bible has told us over and over again. Absent a work of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are so hard and so dark that even if we were to see someone rise from the dead, we would still demand something else—another sign.

So the leading religious leaders called together the high council or the Sanhedrin. This group consisted of 71-members and the high priest sat at its head. The Sanhedrin was comprised of the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. They were essentially the combined congress and supreme court of the land and they had the last word on all matters civil and religious.

Can you imagine that they called together this whole group just to discuss this one man who is doing nothing more than performing miraculous signs and wonders? Why the drama? Isn't it a good thing that people are getting healed and cared for? Why would that cause the Romans any concern? Consider for a moment the merits of their arguments. Jesus has not gathered together any group of political activists; there have been no protests and riots against the Roman government. He has not even said anything that could be considered remotely political or anti-Roman. The only thing He has been speaking about is the need for the Jewish people to believe that the Father sent Him explaining that their wrong belief and unbelief has prevented them from truly knowing and experiencing God—which of course came across as a personal challenge to the religious leaders who have, knowingly or not, promulgated this wrong belief and unbelief.

In reality their concerns for the “nation” were just a ruse, it was a covering for raw self-interest. I cannot imagine for a moment that they were legitimately concerned about the Romans; they were concerned with losing control of the people that they ruled with an iron hand of fear and religious despotism. The truth is that they did not want their position, their power, their wealth, and overall lifestyle in any way jeopardized—that is what Caiaphas meant by the “nation.” After all, Augustus Caesar had decreed in 1BC that the Jews could carry on their religion as they see fit as long as they paid their tributes to the Roman government and maintained peace in their land. Jesus was not causing any trouble, He paid His taxes and the only ones who kept prompting riots were the priests. Their “concern” for the “nation” was just disingenuous rhetoric.

This is such a typical human reaction. Instead of being honest about what's really going on, they cover it up in some “I'm really concerned about others” type of drama. This is not uncommon and we do it all the time in relationships;

especially when we are afraid that we might not get our way, but we don't want others to know that we are really just obsessing on the "ME."

It's interesting that the High Priest, Caiaphas, prophesied by the Spirit of God even when it is clear that he was not one who sought the Father but one who was absolutely beholden to their religious/political system. What does that tell you about prophecy? First of all, God can, and at times does, speak through anyone. It is not required that the vessel He chooses be some righteous person. Remember the story of Balaam in the book of Numbers. He spoke for God but was a greedy and evil man who gave the Moabites a plan to get God to judge the Israelites. Now, God speaking through the ungodly is the exception and not the rule, but it is important to never put God in a box and require Him to only operate in ways that fit your paradigm of how God should act. With this in mind, Paul gives us very specific instruction regarding prophecy:

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;

So we are not to judge based on appearances, background, or even character of the messenger; rather, we are to carefully examine the content, what is said, to see if it aligns with scripture and aligns with what God is doing. If it proves to be good, then we are to hold on to it.

Caiaphas tells us that Jesus must die for the people and John then give us the interpretation of this statement and says that Jesus must die not just for the Jewish

nation but His death will bring together and unite all those who have been chosen to be children of God scattered all throughout the world. Paul puts it this way:

1 Timothy 4:10

For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

Jesus sacrifice would bring a final resolution to the problem of sin that had separated God and man allowing man to once again have a real time relationship with the living God. However, although Jesus' death removed sin as the problem it put Him, Jesus, right in the middle between man and God. In other words, the only way that Jesus' death can provide atonement for your sin, and the only way you can approach the Father, is if you go through the Son. He is the door way through which you must walk. When you walk through that door His blood will cover you, cleanse you, and redeem you allowing you full access to the throne room of God thereby giving you all the rights and privileges of being a child of God. This is so powerful. If you have not walked through that door, you need to. It is the only way to experience eternal life—a life which begins here and now. Jesus put it this way: “unless you believe that I am who I say I am, you will die in your sins” (***John 8:24***). He died for you and He wants you to come to the Father, but you must believe by placing your entire life and future in the fact that He is the Father's ***only*** provision for your life. He is the ***only*** one and the ***only*** way!

After this prophecy about the impact of Jesus' death on all of humanity, the religious leaders dug in, hardened their heart, and decided that they would seriously have to plot Jesus' death. So Jesus left Jerusalem and He does not return

until the Passover celebration which ushers in the final days in Jesus life and ministry.

John 11:55-57

It was now almost time for the Jewish Passover celebration, and many people from all over the country arrived in Jerusalem several days early so they could go through the purification ceremony before Passover began. They kept looking for Jesus, but as they stood around in the Temple, they said to each other, "What do you think? He won't come for Passover, will he?" Meanwhile, the leading priests and Pharisees had publicly ordered that anyone seeing Jesus must report it immediately so they could arrest him.

This is it! The countdown is on. The tension is building and everyone is looking for Him, everyone.

John 12:1-2

Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him.

On His way to Jerusalem for the Passover, Jesus returns to the home of His loved ones and they threw a dinner party to honor Him. Can you imagine the buzz? I can just picture the disciples crowded around Lazarus asking him all sorts of questions. Did you see a light at the end of a tunnel? Was it hot? Did you see

anyone you knew? Were you bummed that you were brought back to this life? I could picture Jesus laughing at the whole scene and then just settling down with his good friends to enjoy a meal. Of course, Martha was busy serving but then suddenly, out of the blue, Mary does something remarkable.

John 12:3-8

Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance. But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, "That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself. Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

This is quite a fascinating exchange that we see happen between Mary, Jesus and Judas and there are all these underlying tensions that are going on. What is happening at the conversational level is just the surface part of the story. Can you imagine coming over to someone's home for dinner and then having the chutzpah to challenge them about how they decide to use their money? Why do you think Judas did this? John told us he was a thief and wanted to take some of the money, but still why would he have been so bold in confronting Mary?

First of all, being the treasurer he was used to handling the money from those that supported the work of the ministry. *Luke 8* tells us that Jesus and the disciples

were supported by many women and others who contributed from their private means. It is no different than the way things are to be done today. We have a box for your offerings which are used to support the ministry but Judas would carry the bag and personally receive the money. It is my guess that he probably had received quite a bit of support from this family and had developed a sense of entitlement on behalf of the group—as often happens in the world of giving. In his mind their giving had turned from an offering and the fulfillment of a spiritual principle to a personal duty. Thus, he felt the right to communicate to Mary that way.

Besides, I think he was also getting very unsettled with the way things were turning out and that is why we see him behaving in this unsightly manner. Everyone knew that the time was getting short and something was about to go down. The pressure was on and as with most people, those situations bring out what is really at the core of a person, and for Judas it was bringing out his desperation and greed.

He knew that if things continued to go south that he was going to need an exit. It is clear to him by now that Jesus was not going to lead the people in a big uprising to restore the nation to self-rule, so I am sure he saw no good end in sight. He was probably thinking that if they go back to Jerusalem for Passover that this would be it and that he would likely be hunted down, arrested, and killed along with Jesus; and he had not signed up for that gig. So if the ship was going to go down, he wanted to grab whatever he could—without being caught—and make an exit. So it just ticked him off to see her waste her money anointing, of all things, Jesus' feet when, in his mind, some of that could have been his. Especially since that amount of nard (which was from a plant found only in the Himalayas) was worth approximately one year of wages. Judas' could have easily pilfered enough from that gift and left before anyone really found out.

I am sure his head was turning with what to do now, what to do now. He probably already started thinking about saving his own skin and what he could get if he turned over Jesus to the authorities; and now the temptation to follow that line of thinking was growing. Something had to be done, he had no other way out, he had to; and if he didn't then someone was going to do something to him and it was not going to be pleasant.

We all know how self interest and paranoia go hand in hand. We have all been there. The more we let the self interest drive our paranoia the more our paranoia drives our self interest. Things quickly become "me" vs. "them" and it is a self charged tempest that always results in us saying things and doing things to other people that are not rational, not kind, not loving, and just downright rude.

Jesus' response to Judas just exacerbates his paranoia. "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial." Your burial; I knew it! I knew this was for naught. See, that is why something has to be done. He is not going to save us; he is not going to do anything but put our lives in jeopardy. We have followed him for these 3-years and he is just going to Jerusalem to die. I don't understand and I am so upset right now. He has not even left us even means by which to care for ourselves. We have given up everything for Him; He is doing nothing for us.

Then Jesus said: "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." This is an interesting statement because Jesus uses a Greek word, "*Ptochos*," that is very broad and which is used in many contexts including referring to spiritual poverty (*Matthew 11:5*) as well as actual poverty (*Luke 21:3*). Jesus could have used the word "*penichros*" which specifically refers to those who are needy and financially destitute. Therefore, I believe this statement was layered and less for Judas than it was for the other disciples. Jesus knew the condition of Judas' heart and I doubt He thought a little spiritual lesson would have any impact

on Judas' willingness to believe the truth. Judas' heart was impoverished and there was nothing of worth in him at all; no light, just darkness. This statement was not for him.

I believe Jesus is warning the disciples, foreshadowing so to speak, so they will not freak out when Judas does what Jesus knew he would ultimately do. He wanted the disciples to focus on Him and only on Him and not place their eyes on what is going on around them. There are *always* those who are spiritually impoverished. They may be part of the group, have responsibilities in the group, and from the outside look like they truly belong, but their hearts are darkened with unbelief. So do not be dismayed, that is the way it is always going to be. His message: focus on me while you have me. Keep your eyes on me and you will make it.

This is such an important lesson for us; especially since keeping our eyes on Jesus means that we have to be willing to trust the intangible truth over and above what we can see, feel, and think. Unfortunately, there is such a tendency for us to not just keep our eyes on Jesus and look only to Him to be our strength and provision in life, but we often let what happens to others, or what others choose to do, have such a huge impact on us. But I have to warn you. There will be those who come and go, those who continue to grow and those who decide they are happy where they are at. There will even be those who decide that it is not worth it, the cost is too high, and they decide to just leave and try to find someplace where they can just practice their Christianity in the way they want. Some of these people might be your friends or even those you look to as leaders; but that does not matter, you must keep your eyes on Jesus and focus only on Him. If you do you will be ok; you will make it.

This is exactly what Mary did; she kept her eyes on the Lord. I am sure that she was so excited for Jesus to come to their home and her heart was probably still

over flowing with thankfulness for the fact that He gave her back her brother. But what is so beautiful is how she expressed her love for Jesus.

Mary's *response* to Jesus' presence was to burst into a spontaneous act of lavish worship. Martha had been serving, Lazarus and Jesus had been dining and then Mary just could not hold it in any longer, she stooped down, as she has done before, and falls at Jesus' feet. What a contrast there is between Mary and Judas. He was only focused on the "ME" whereas Mary just poured herself out before the One she loved, and she did it publically. There was no restraint, there was no insecurity, and she was not all conscientious about what others might think or say; this was just unabashed worship.

This act of worship was also very, very personal. Not only was she doing the job of a slave, or the lowest person in the household, not only did she pour out on Jesus' feet an extremely valuable possession, which so few others could even afford, but she used her own hair to wipe his feet. It's almost as if she knows that He is going to offer himself up as a living sacrifice and she wants Jesus to know that she is willing to sacrifice it all for Him. Judas is thinking about how he can preserve his life and she is thinking about how she can sacrifice hers. She came to know that her Messiah loved her and that was enough; now she wanted to give everything to Him.

The offering of perfume was symbolic of all that she possessed. It not only symbolized that she was willing to give up, materially, all that she had and pour it out for Jesus, but also her social identity and worth. You have to remember that in that culture personal cleanliness was not like it is in Western cultures of our day. Pretty much people smelled. There was no deodorant or anti-perspirant and bathing was not part of the daily routine. Women who had perfume to cover the smell were either wealthy and as such carried some personal status in the community, or else

they were a professional and needed it to attract customers. So this was symbolically a potent offering and Mary was giving it all up and telling Jesus that He has it all.

By wiping His feet with her hair she was symbolically telling Jesus that she is willing to lay down her glory for His glory. Think about it; you don't mess with a woman's hair. It is such a defining and important aspect of being a woman. Even *1 Corinthians 11:15* tells us that a woman's long hair is her glory; yet, that is what Mary uses to cleanse Jesus' feet. Mary beautifully, lavishly, publically, and unashamedly pours out as an offering to Jesus of all that she is and all that she ever hopes to be. It is all His; she is all His.

We are told that the smell of this beautiful offering filled the house which means that all those who were there were blessed by this sacrifice. It had an overflow affect from her life to others. This is the blessing of the purity of worship.

I want you to ask yourself who do you more closely resemble: Judas, who was self seeking or Mary, who was self sacrificing? This is a tough question but I encourage you to get real for your sake. Jesus already knows the answer; He already knows your heart, but it is important that you come clean and deal with the truth.

Is your relationship primarily based on what you hope Jesus might do for you? Do you have expectations that you expect Him to fulfill and when that does not seem to be happening do you get unnerved? Do you start trying to figure out how you are going to take care of things in order to protect yourself or care for yourself? Are you trying to fit Jesus into what you think your future (your life, your career, your family, etc.) should be? Is your ability to freely and lavishly worship based on whether or not you are happy with what is happening in your life

at the moment? Do you hold things back from the Lord: your hopes, your dreams, your identity, your self-image, your possessions, your time, your money, and so on because you are not sure if He is truly trustworthy? If so, then as difficult as it might be to consider, you might be a bit more like Judas than Mary.

Consider Mary. She was just so pleased to be in the presence of her Lord that she just wanted to once again be at His feet. Mary had learned to *respond* to the “who” and not base her worship on “what” was happening in her life. Yes, her Messiah was going to Jerusalem and would die, and she did not know what that entailed for her, but she did not *react* for she was with Him. She trusted herself to Jesus regardless of whether or not she could understand her tomorrow. As a result, she could publically, spontaneously, and lavishly give herself to the Lord.

I think that each of us has a mix of both Judas and a Mary, but as for me, I want to learn to always worship like Mary. I want to be so aware of His presence in my life that I can do nothing but throw myself at Him to do with as He wills. I want Him to have all that I am and all that I hope to be so that I can be only what He desires me to be. Then maybe my life will emit such a fragrance that others will be drawn to Jesus because of the raw beauty of my worship.

It’s time we ask the Lord to help us worship like Mary. And take note, true worship is less about singing songs or raising our hands’ it’s about pouring ourselves out before His presence trusting ourselves completely to His love and His care of our lives. This is true worship and when this is your life I am positive that you will be surprised how often you burst out in spontaneous, lavish, personal, and even public expressions of praise to the Lord! You won’t be able to hold it in.

Let’s Pray