

A Picture of True Worship
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John 12:1-8
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 12th chapter of John's Gospel. We touched on John 12:1 very briefly last week, and today we're going to really look at the first eight verses. As I mentioned earlier, we're going to be examining a portrait of true worship. John 12:1-8, we have the story of the anointing of Jesus by Mary, the sister of Lazarus. In this, I think we have a portrait of what real worship is supposed to be like. In a sense also, it is another test of discipleship that John seems to want to bring before us throughout his Gospel. That is that there is a contrast in a passage between Mary and Judas. We're going to see that this passage identifies Judas as the ringleader of the objectioners, those who object to the expense of the perfume.

So we ponder why the Lord inspired John to recount the events exactly as he did. I think it is clear that he is making a contrast between true worship, genuine worship, and false worship. Judas is a false worshiper, one who outwardly follows Christ, but who inwardly does not. Mary is a portrait of true, inward worship from the heart. Let's read these verses together, John 12:1-8:

*John 12:1-8 ~ Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. 3 Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, *said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" 6 Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. 7 Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. 8 For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."*

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come this morning mindful of our need and completely dependent upon Your grace. We pray that Your Spirit, who inspired these words to be written might now illuminate them in our minds and our hearts, and You might grant faith and repentance. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

A Picture of True Worship

One of the things, as we read the text of Scripture, we ought always be asking ourselves: “What was God’s purpose in putting this passage in the pages of Holy Scripture? What is the claim that this text makes on my life?” When we understand the intent of the author, the Spirit-inspired intent of the author, we understand the claim that God wants to make on our lives. This is a passage, as we look at this, and we really try to analyze what is being said here, it is helpful, in the Gospels this is often the case, to compare this account with parallel passages, because this particular story is told by two other of the Gospel writers. Matthew recounts this, and Mark does as well. Matthew 26:6-13, this same account is told. Mark 14:3-9, the same account is told. Luke 7 is not a parallel. Some people get mixed up on that and think it is because there are some similarities with the story in Luke 7, and the story that I just mentioned in John 12, Matthew 26, and Mark 14.

In Luke 7, there is a sinful woman who comes in a different place to Jesus, and she weeps at Jesus’ feet, and in a sense, anoints His feet with her tears, and wipes them with her hair, but that is not the same person. It is a different place, and a different time in Jesus’ ministry. You can tell by the other references, Mark 14, near the end of Mark’s Gospel. He has 16 chapters. Matthew 26, near the end of Matthew’s Gospel. He has 28 chapters. And John 12, though John has 21, he is going to spend 13-21 on the last week of Jesus’ life. So all three of these accounts are near the end of Jesus’ ministry, where Luke 7 is very early in Jesus ministry, and a very different place. So don’t be confused by that, but we can look at the parallel accounts of this anointing of Jesus. I want you to turn over, hold your place in John 12, we’re going to come back here of course, but turn over to Mark’s account, and Matthew’s and Mark’s are almost identical, but let’s look at Mark’s account in Chapter 14:3-9.

Mark 14:3 ~ While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.

Now right off the bat, we see Bethany is the same location, but here Matthew records for us the fact that the home they are in is owned by a guy named Simon, who was formerly a leper. Apparently what we have going on here is kind of a banquet in Jesus' honor. It is held in the home of a guy named Simon who used to have leprosy. He is called '*Simon, the Leper*' so everybody can remember what he used to be like. We know there is somebody else, though Matthew and Mark don't tell us, they tell us about Simon, they tell us about this act of worship, but they don't give a name to the person. But John is careful to tell us not about Simon, the Leper, he omits that part. It is not so important whose house they were at. Apparently several families got together and threw the party, and Simon had the best place to do it. They did it at his house, and Martha was of course on the food committee, as we would have expected. Mary, not so much, but the Lord had other purposes for Mary.

Mark 14:4 ~ But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? 5 For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her.

But John tells us it was Judas. Maybe some of the apostles kind of, "Hey, that probably isn't right. You're right, this is wrong," but where did it start? It started with Judas. John tells us that, and Jesus tells them the same thing.

Mark 14:6 ~ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. 7 For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. 9 Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

Now, what you have, you have a couple of differences in the passage. One is, in Mark and Matthew, they record that she anointed the head of Jesus. John didn't say anything about the head, he talked about the feet. John didn't tell us which house it was. He just said in Bethany and Martha was serving. They sat down for a dinner, Martha was serving. Now I love this. This is where people that want to disbelieve the Bible like to go off on the contradictions, they act like there are contradictions here. These are not contradictions. These are complimentary details told by witnesses, exactly the way you would have it told by witnesses who were not in cahoots, telling you about something that happened. It illustrates the total

truthfulness of Scripture. If you ask two people what happened, “Well, we were at Simon’s house.” And they ask another guy, “We were in Bethany,” and “We were in Bethany not long after Lazarus was raised,” this is John now talking. “And Mary and Martha were there.” But Matthew says, “When the woman came in, I don’t remember what her name was. I don’t think it is important. But when the woman came in, what she did was what was important.” He says, “She poured out the perfume.” Mark said, “She broke the vial.” Well, is there contradiction there? No of course not, she broke the vial and poured out the perfume. Where did she start? On His head, but she ended up anointing His feet and wiping His feet with her hair. John was struck by that part of the story. Matthew and Mark, because the Spirit of God, particularly in Matthew, is inspiring him to focus on the Kingship of Jesus, he focuses on the fact that Jesus, the King, is anointed even as He goes to His death, is being anointed as King on His head.

But John has a very different purpose, and the Spirit inspires him to remember the details that he remembers, and he gives us a complimentary portrait which is a beautiful portrait of worship. These details, the very fact that Simon the Leper is left out by John. Why is that? “Well, John has a bad memory.” No, the Spirit of God doesn’t have a bad memory. Remember what Jesus told the disciples in the upper room? Actually, we are going to be covering it in the future sometime in John’s Gospel, Lord-willing, when He tells them, “The Spirit will bring to remembrance everything that you need to know.” Basically He is telling them, “This is how you are going to record the Scriptures. The Spirit is going to bring to your remembrance everything that you need.” This is true here, the Spirit has given everything that they need, and John doesn’t want to focus on Simon the Leper, he doesn’t want us to be thinking about the fact that this is probably a banquet thrown by a number of different people who have been healed of something. He wants us to focus on one family and one event which he just told us about in Chapter 11, and which he has now given us this event without any intervening data.

It had probably been about six weeks, we don’t know exactly. We know that in December, Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication, after the Good Shepherd Discourse, some time He then comes back to Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication. He talks about the Shepherd a little more. Then Chapter 11 happens sometime between that and Passover, probably early January, and now here we are in late March, early April at Passover. It has been maybe 6-8 weeks since Lazarus was raised. Jesus, when He heard they were going to kill Him again, left. We talked about this last week, the conspiracy to kill Him. He leaves and goes up into the hill country of Judea, and is there for a period of time, but we are not told any of the miracles He does up there, or any of the teaching that He does up there by

John because John wants us to see the raising of Lazarus, and this act of worship, side-by-side. John doesn't tell us the detail about Simon because he is not interested in that particular thing. He wants us to be thinking about Mary and her response to the saving work of her Savior.

Then in this, when you look at John, back to John 12 now, look at how he unfolds the story for us. Verse 1:

John 12:1 ~ Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover,...

He answers the *When?* for us. The Passover is right there. Jesus' death is imminent. *Where?* Bethany. *Who?* Who does he talk about? Where Lazarus was. Bethany is the place where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

John 12:1-2 ~ came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.

Then Mary, you see? Martha, Lazarus, Mary—that's who we want to see. He wants us to think about what was going through Mary's mind, not what was going through Simon's mind. What was going through Mary's mind? And when we understand this, this act of worship, what we see is we are really getting a picture of true worship. Let me tell you, my outline today is the setting. This is going to be the outline for probably a two-part message. The setting is the first point. The act is the second point, and the response is the third point. Verse 1-2, we have the setting. Verse 3, we have the act. Verses 4-8, we have the response. The response of Judas and the response of Jesus. That is the basic flow of the passage and as we go through the narrative, what we see then, the setting really, the first point, the setting also is the ground of true worship. The setting provides for us the ground, or the source, or the fountain of true worship. The fuel, you could use any of these words, but I'm calling it the ground of true worship. Then we are going to see that the act, as we look at what she does in Verse 3, we have the expression of true worship. So that's what we're going to look at today, Lord-willing, we'll cover the first two points, or most of the second point. The setting, the ground of true worship. The act, the expression of true worship.

1) The Setting:

The setting gives us the ground of true worship. John wants us to see this is in Bethany, where Lazarus was raised from the dead, and the people we need to see

are Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Because the ground of true worship, and this is what we're going to see as we look at this, what is the root or source of true worship? We said that we're looking, we're distinguishing true worship from false worship. Judas a false worshiper, Mary a true worshiper. What does true worship come from? It comes from the heart and it comes from a deep understanding of this. There are two parts to it. True worship is rooted in a right apprehension of the Savior of myself, my circumstances, and my hopeless condition. True worship is always grounded in that first, a right apprehension of myself, my circumstances, and my hopeless condition. The second thing that true worship is grounded in is a right apprehension of the Savior, His amazing work of salvation.

So you have to understand who you are, how hopeless you are, how helpless you are, and then you have to understand how wonderful and amazing Jesus is. That is true worship. That is the fountain of true worship. That is the root of true worship. If you are not starting there, anything you have is like Judas. It is like wanting an apple tree, you plant an apple tree. And if the apple tree is a good tree, it bears apples. But if you just want an apple tree and you've got a tree out in the yard that looks pretty good, it is green, but it doesn't grow apples, you could go out I guess and buy a bushel of apples and staple them on the tree. "Look at my apple tree." It looked impressive for maybe a week or two depending on the weather, right? But then what would happen? The fruit is going to rot because that is not an apple tree, that is not real fruit. An apple tree is an apple tree all the way down to the root. Every part of the apple tree is an apple tree, and from the root up you've got to have true worship. It starts at the root. The root is a right apprehension of myself, my hopeless condition, my circumstances, and a right apprehension and His amazing work of salvation.

Now think about this from Mary's perspective now. Here is the banquet, a lot of people, the house is full, Martha busy making food, along with the other food committee people, doing what she needs to do which is beautiful and wonderful. She is making a wonderful meal for Jesus. But here Mary is struck, and the Spirit of God is working in her, and she is struck by what has happened in her life. "Six weeks ago my brother died." Six weeks ago, these two single women, living with their single brother, she was left destitute. She was bereft, she was bereaved of that dear brother that she loved, and who provided stability, and security, and provision for her, and suddenly he was gone. Remember the hopes that she had, they sent word to Jesus, surely He's going to come, but the reality was that she experienced, though she sent someone to Jesus, she experienced the thing she dreaded the most, losing the one she loved, and suddenly he was gone. At first maybe the hope that Jesus would come. "Surely He'll come back. He can raise somebody from the

dead. We've heard that He's done that a couple of different times in a couple of different places." But no, four days pass. Lazarus is in the tomb. He has been in the tomb for four days. When Jesus comes back, and Jesus takes that hole in her heart, that sense of tremendous loss, that sense of brokenness.

Isn't it amazing how hard death is to deal with? The older I get, the more real it becomes to me. Many of you were praying for me last week, I had a dear friend, and actually Todd and Shannon. My brother Todd and his wife Shannon, their brother-in-law, Paul Jones, passed away. Shannon's sister's husband, suddenly died on a Sunday afternoon two weeks ago. You are left wondering, there are so many different things you wonder. He had been to the cardiologist on Friday. He was going to have a stress test on Monday. He died on Sunday of a heart attack. If he had done differently, you wonder all these things, but the reality is that that family is now bereft. That family has a sense of loss that is profound, and it was a sudden sense of loss. I know, for Patti and me, he was a good friend of ours from way back in school, 8th grade for me. I found myself over the last couple of weeks, from time to time it just hits me again. He really is dead. I'm not seeing the family on a daily basis at all. I just saw them during the service, and afterwards, and before, but I'm hearing, you know checking in with Shannon and stuff, but it hits me that way. How must it feel for them? How must it feel for his college son when he went back to the University of Mississippi, when he was being driven home by Todd, and by his grandfather, "My dad is dead." Nothing is going to change that. The power of death. I mean, death is our greatest enemy, and death is one thing that we will never be able to defeat apart from Christ, and the reality is if He doesn't come back we are all going to be its victim. Every one of us! It is a horrible and cruel enemy. It takes the strength, the beauty, the dignity of man and it robs us of it. It leaves a lifeless corpse.

Mary had lived through that, and she in that day had been a part of treating her brother's body for burial. She had been there when they rolled the stone over the tomb. She had surrendered herself as a faithful follower of God that, "This is God's will and I've got to learn to live with it." But then Jesus had come, they thought too late. Remember? They both said, Martha and Mary both said, "If only You had been here my brother would not have died." They meet Him separately and they say exactly the same thing—"If only You had been here." Jesus sees her weeping. Remember, she's the one that fell at His feet. Martha just talks to Him, "If only You had been here my brother would not have died." Then Jesus has a dialogue with her. "Your brother will rise again." But Mary comes and falls at His feet, "If only You had been here my brother would not have died," and Jesus, seeing her weeping, and seeing the Jews with weeping, He was deeply moved in

His Spirit, troubled within. “Where have you laid him?” “Come and see,” and He follows.

Then the text says that as He gets close to the tomb, He was deeply moved within. But then He said those wonderful words, “Lazarus, come forth.” That corpse that had begun decaying, and stinking, and rotting in the grave was suddenly, completely restored by the word of His power. And the man comes out, only limited by the fact that he is wrapped up in grave clothes. He is bound with all of these bandages, but he is raring to go. I mean, can you imagine what Lazarus is feeling at that moment? “I’m alive!” Of course, then he is thinking, “I can’t see, I can’t move.” He probably hopped out of the tomb because his legs were bound. Can you imagine what Martha and Mary were feeling? What elation, indescribable. None of us has experienced that. That joy has seized her heart. Can you imagine?

Every day she comes down and she is making coffee, or maybe Martha already had the coffee made. Lazarus is sitting there and Mary comes down late, but she sits there, and there is Lazarus at the table. He said, “Isn’t it a beautiful day today?” She hears his voice. It is one of the hardest things when you lose someone suddenly is you don’t hear their voice again, but she hears his voice. She sees his face, she sees his smile, she hears his laugh. All because of Jesus the Messiah, because He has the power. So six weeks of that joy welling up in her heart. She hasn’t seen Jesus since He left Bethany the day He healed Lazarus. Now He has come back into Bethany. They throw a party for Him the next day. She has got to express her joy and her worship, and so she comes, and she brings this vial of very costly perfume, and she pours it out on His head, and on His feet. She cast caution to the wind and she just blesses her Savior. Now that is where worship comes from. Seeing where you were, seeing who we are apart from Christ, and seeing what He has done.

When we live in the realization of that, the heart can only spend itself in worship. The reason Judas is not worshipping, the reason Judas is thinking the nonsense he is thinking is because he never has been there. He has never seen himself truly, He has never seen his circumstances truly, he has never seen his own condition truly. He thinks he just needs a helper. He doesn’t realize that he is dead in his trespasses and sins, that he is the most miserable wretch that ever walked the face of the earth, and that is the reality that everyone who truly comes to Christ must come to grips with. “I am the most miserable wretch that has ever walked the face of the earth.” You are! We are unworthy of God. We were hopeless and helpless, and if you haven’t yet come to Christ, you are now hopeless and helpless. If you could see your condition, and you need to ask God to show it to you right now, your

spiritual condition is rotten, decaying, putrid—that’s what God sees of our efforts to please Him, our efforts to be right with Him, our efforts to make ourselves acceptable to Him. When we come to understand that, then we understand that that is what Jesus has healed, that though we were absolutely filthy, that our righteousness was filthy rags in His sight, that is what Isaiah says. It’s a very graphic picture he uses in Isaiah when he says that. Even our righteousness, even the things that we do are filthy rags. The idea is of garments that have been used and soiled in the care of bodily ailments, somebody else’s bodily ailments cloth. That is what our righteousness is. That’s our best.

How could God save that? How could God love that? How could God love you or me? The wonder is that Jesus Christ has done what was necessary to make it so, that not only has He cleansed you and cleaned up the nastiness, He has given you incredible beauty in the sight of God, so that when God looks at you, He sees nothing of the former, but only completely of the latter, the beauty and the glory of His Son shining out in your face. When we come to Christ, we have been brought to life, and therefore, every moment ought to be lived in the realization of that. That’s where true worship comes from.

This means we never need to forget where we came from, and the reality is that if we’re living as we ought, if we’re living with a heart that’s seeking God, every day we have ample opportunity to remember where we came from. This is one of the reasons God doesn’t make you able to overcome your sin like that. Sometimes that happens. I know there are some people who are delivered of some particular sin. When they came to Christ, they were delivered and they never looked back. Praise God for that. That’s not the norm. That’s the exception. Usually what God does is He gives you a new heart, and then He lets you fight the rest of your life against sin, put it to death, and the reason He does is so that we can be reminded each day of what a wretch we are apart from Him.

When I find myself losing my temper in my home, saying something that’s caustic or sarcastic, thinking in my own mind, “I can’t believe that you’re doing this to me,” whatever it is, I’m talking about, you know, “We’re running late,” or, “You forgot something you weren’t supposed to forget. How could you do this to me?” Now, to say that is to illustrate what a ridiculous and sinful statement I’m making, but don’t judge me too harshly, because when you’re doing it, it seems perfectly logical until you look a little deeper, doesn’t it? I’m not concerned about the Name of God. Or if I am, it’s a tiny little bit. Whatever we’re doing is dishonoring God.

What's happened is I am about me, and you are not honoring me. It's like I want you to worship my idol, and want you to cooperate with my agenda, and that is despicable. That is nauseating, and when I see that, and I ought to see that on a daily basis, because it's happening—I mean, we don't want to see it more and more, we want to see it less and less, but the reality is we're going to see it at some level all the days of our lives, and as you grow in Christ, what happens is you see it at a deeper level, and this is the irony. When you grow in Christ, when you learn how to talk with God, you become more and more holy, more and more righteous, and yet you're aware of your sin at a deeper level. The sin that you see now is at a deeper level, and the farther down you go to the root, the uglier it becomes.

This is why the most godly people are the most humble people. They keep getting more and more righteous, and yet they keep continually being humbled with who they are apart from Christ. But this is the beauty of it. God is willed His sanctification process to be this way so that we continually are confronted with how much we need a Savior.

Look at me, Lord. I'm a pastor. I just preached a sermon on whatever this is, and I felt like when I was studying it, You blessed me so much and it was so clear, and here I am doing exactly the opposite of what I preached. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ. Here I am in need of a Savior again, Lord, and here I am as I realize how awful I am again.

I affirm again that Jesus Christ has paid it all, that no matter how ugly what I just did, or what I just thought, or what I just said is, Jesus Christ paid for that in full. Not only that, but He is available for me again. He's already clothed me in the righteousness that is needed there. Whatever I did, if I was having a sinful, angry attitude, or a fearful attitude, the Lord then gives me in place of anger, meekness, in place of fear, faith, because Jesus is that. He went through all the temptations that we've ever gone through in deeper form, and He always did what was right. So not only has He saved us for heaven, but He's given His righteousness, and now He gives me the power. Lord, I'm asking You now to help me not do that the next time. I'm asking You to give me the power through Your word, through Your Spirit, to now be righteous, and then here I have gone from a moment of utter sin and ugliness, now to glorying again in the glory of my Savior. Not only has He saved me from the penalty of sin, He is willing to save me from the power of sin, and He's given me all that I need.

So, suddenly I find myself having just sinned by worshiping myself, now restored and worshiping a glorious Savior. This is how all of life is to be lived, in worship, getting up in the morning and glorying in who God is and what He's done, and when we fall, running to Christ and glorying in who He is and what He's done. So the setting of worship is that awareness, that we are, at our core, needy, helpless, weak, utterly hopeless people. And the Christian is the person who knows that about himself. The unbeliever goes on acting like he's fine, but he's worse by far than any of us. The Christian is the one who sees that, and the Christian then is the one who clings to Christ and who changes. That's the setting of true worship, the ground of true worship, a right apprehension of ourselves and a right apprehension of Christ. Now look at the act. Let's begin to look at the act of true worship here in John 12:3.

2) The Act of True Worship:

John 12:3 ~ Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard,...

I think there are four things in this verse that we want to see about true worship, the expression of true worship, four things that characterize true worship. We're going to look at things in the text, and then we're going to draw like we did in the first point, application from those.

The first thing is we see in looking at the text is the cost of the perfume. That's the first thing we're drawn to, a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, he tells us. The reality is nard, and the fact that it was pure, nard was often diluted because it was such an expensive commodity. Spikenard comes from a plant that grows in the Himalayas, so in this day it was imported from India, the Indian side of the Himalayas—China, Nepal—spikenard grows up on top of the mountains there. It is a very rare substance and is very costly. That's why sometimes they dilute it. But here she has a pound of very costly perfume that is pure spikenard. They were told by Judas, "Hey, that's worth at least 300 denarii.

Now, to get an idea of 300 denarii, we need to understand that that's a lot of money. A denarius basically, one denarius was one day's wages for a day laborer, that is, an hourly worker. To put that in context, basically we think of for our purposes in America, an hourly worker, a person who works say for \$10 an hour, 40 hours a week, that's \$400 a week, 50 weeks a year, and that is \$20,000. That's how much the perfume was worth.

It's 11 or 12 ounces. It's probably about 11.5. We're trying to convert a Roman measurement to English pounds and ounces, and stuff, but it's about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pound, so it rounds off to a pound. For our sake, let's say 12 ounces. I happened to look online a little bit to see about perfume. It's not something that I've—I have bought my wife some cologne before, but I've never bought her anything like this. It's been a long time since I've bought that, too. I probably need to... It's convicting when you bring up things like this, isn't it? But online I found a website that sells the most expensive perfumes in the world. Now, there was one that was just unbelievable, and I'm not going to even mention it, but there were a number that were about \$1,500 an ounce.

Well, that's exactly what this perfume cost. Twelve ounces at \$1,500 an ounce is \$18,000. That's a year's salary for someone who's a day worker, and she breaks that and pours it out. The text we're rendering in the English is kind of hard. When it says, "Leave her alone," in Verse 7, "Let her alone so that she may keep it for the day of My burial," I don't think it really means that there's any that's going to be left and kept. I think what He says, the word is hard to translate, but basically I think it means this: *She has kept it for My burial*. You see, the keeping's already happened. Now she's spent it. *She saved it back, she guarded it, for the day of My burial*.

In fact, that verb is a strong verb. *She's kept it* really means she guarded it, watched over it. The picture is Mary has kept this somehow either knowingly or somewhat unknowingly. We're not exactly sure in the text. It seems that she certainly has some measure of understanding of it, but how much, we don't know. Did she really understand that Jesus was going to the cross? Maybe she didn't understand, but in the providence of God, she wanted to give this offering to Jesus, and she kept it for Him.

It's interesting that when she lost her brother, she didn't use it on him. This is the place that things like that were used. We're told that when Jesus was buried in John's Gospel, that Nicodemus bought 75 pounds of various ointments. Now, those obviously aren't the \$1,500 an ounce ointments, but it was 75 pounds. A lot went into it, and the most fragrant aromas were used so that you would protect the smell of the decay. But Mary, even though she loved her brother Lazarus, even though Jesus was gone for 4 days before He showed up, she would not let this go. This is for Jesus.

Even before she knew that, she had a relationship with Him, and this was for Him, and now how joyfully she must have broken that bottle, as we add Mark to John, their picture, she broke the top of the alabaster bottle and she poured it on His head, and she rubbed it on His head and on His feet, and then she wiped His feet with her hair. Her heart is just being poured out in the same way that that \$20,000 precious valuable perfume is being poured out.

The expression of true worship is seen first of all in the cost of the perfume, and this really means that worship, the first aspect of true worship, the first characteristic of true worship that we see from the cost is that true worship is the surrender of one's self. True worship is full surrender. It is to lay down that which is most valuable, for the glory of God. It is to be spent. It is to be poured out, and this is really how we're supposed to live. It's how we're called to live.

You remember in Romans when we were working through Romans and we turned the corner in the epistle of Paul. In Romans, the first 11 chapters show for us the glory of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. It's a wonderful chapter about justification and sanctification, election, the first 11 chapters. And Chapter 12:1 is the hinge of the book of Romans. The last 5 chapters, 12 to 16, are practical. The first 11 chapters are theological, doctrinal, and the last 5 chapters are about living. How do you take your doctrine into your life? Chapter 12:1 is the hinge. How do you take your doctrine into your life? Romans 12:1 says this: "I urge you then brothers, in view of the mercies of God, that you offer yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is only your reasonable service of worship."

The only reasonable thing that you can do in light of all that He's done is to offer yourself as a perpetual sacrifice to Him. You see, that's worship. That is living a life of worship, and that is what Mary was doing. She was offering herself, that which was most precious to her. How she came about having that bottle of perfume, we don't know, but we know it had to be precious to her, and she lavishes it on Jesus. That is what true worship is, to lavish all that we have on Him, because He is worthy. To become a follower of Jesus Christ, you have to surrender yourself. That's why we have Jesus saying things like this: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. He who keeps His life loses it, but he who loses his life for My sake, finds it." We need to be like Paul and have our lives poured out as a drink offering. That is true worship.

That's what Jesus was calling for from the rich, young ruler in the story in Luke's Gospel where the young man comes and asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and Jesus says, "Why do you call Me good? Only God is good." He's

searching his heart. He's saying, "Do you believe that I'm God? No, of course you don't. You haven't gotten that far." He says, "Well, how does it read to you? How do you read the law? Have you kept the commandments?" He says, "I have. I've kept all the commandments from my youth." He's got serious problems. This young man thinks he's worthy of God. He thinks he's got it all down. Jesus says, "One thing you lack—I'm going to go for the very *heart* of the heart of the commandments that you're not thinking about. The first commandment is, 'You shall have no other gods before Me.'" And He says, "Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor, and then come and you'll find life with Me." The young man went away sad and despondent, because he had many things, and he loved riches more than he loved God. Jesus went for the jugular. He said, "I'm going to go right for the idol in your heart. What you love more than anything else is your riches and your wealth, and you cannot have eternal life unless you're willing to give up everything," and the reality is that's true.

It doesn't mean that to be a Christian you have to go sell all that you have. No, but to be a Christian means that you have to be willing to give God everything. He doesn't normally make that demand of us, but the question is would you give it if He did ask? And if there's something you're holding onto, you will hold onto that until you enter into hell, but God invites this kind of worship. He says, "I've done everything necessary for you, and what you're holding onto, like Jesus said, 'He who holds his life, who keeps his life, loses it.'" You can't keep it anyway. But if you lose it, if you give it to Him, if you pour it out in honor of Him, then you receive it back.

I mean, how much joy—I think she was so happy that whole day leading up to the banquet, and then thinking about what she was going to do. She was going to breach custom. I don't know if she planned on all that she ends up doing when she ends up letting her hair down and all of that, but she knew she was going to anoint Jesus. She knew she was going to make a scene, in a sense, a lot like David, because Jesus is worthy of worship. What He has done is worthy of this kind of worship, and it's so important that He be worshiped. I'm not concerned about myself, I'm not concerned about what you think, I'm only concerned that He be worshiped. So the joy in her heart overwhelms her and she comes, and I believe that joy grew as she's pouring out the ointment. She was pouring out \$20,000 but she was feeling richer as every ounce poured out. She was feeling more and more full, because that's what God does for those who honor Him. "He who honors Me, I will honor."

Isn't it astounding that she's the only person in the gospels that ever received the acclamation Jesus gives in Matthew and Mark? He gave it this time, but Matthew and Mark had already recorded it. "I tell you that wherever the gospel is preached, what this woman has done will be remembered in memory of her." Jesus says, "This meant so much to Me that I want it to be talked about, that every time My gospel is preached people are going to come across this woman and what she did." This means that Jesus says what matters to Him more than anything else is that kind of surrender. It doesn't matter that you give some things to Him. This is how we do it. We want to bargain with God. "I'll give you this and that, but I'm holding this." To be saved, you have to surrender to Him as Lord. It means there has to be a transaction in your heart with God that says, "I'm giving You everything. I'm nothing and You're everything." If that hasn't happened, you're not saved.

Once that happens, the Christian life, then, is a daily battle to live in that. We keep finding we want to pick things up. We keep thinking we'll bargain with God. "Lord, You can have this and that, but not this." And when we do that, we make ourselves miserable and our lives ineffective. But when we lay it down and we say there's no conditions, it's unconditional surrender, whenever something comes that we're afraid of, we just automatically say, "Lord, I don't want that to happen, but if You let it happen, that's for Your glory, and so be it." We want to live life with an open hand. When you try to hold something and you close your hand on something, saying, "I must have this. You can have everything else, Lord, all the stuff around me, but I've got to have this," what happens is there's something about sin that the more you squeeze, if I have something in my hand and squeeze too hard, eventually I'm forcing it out the side, and that is the nature of sin. Anything that you want to hold onto, you will not keep for long.

Maybe it's a relationship. If you're saying, "I must have this relationship with my son or my daughter. I must have this relationship," and you cling to it like that, then you will have no relationship. Mark it down. But if you say, "Lord, if it's not Your will for me to have that, then take it," and you offer it to God like that, the wonder of it is that what He's interested in is this. What's in your hand isn't such a big deal to Him. The issue is that surrender, and when you have an open hand, if I was holding something, I don't have anything to hold, but imagine I've got something in my hand and I'm saying, "Lord, I've got to have that," no, it's, "I want to have that, Lord, but it's Yours. I give it to You, because You are worthy. You can take this from me because of what Jesus has done for me. I'm willing to lay it at your feet, Lord. I'm laying it at Your feet."

I'm holding it like this, and the Lord says, "You keep holding it for Me, and while you've got your hands open, let Me just keep piling some blessings in your hands," because God can't give anything to you when you're like that anyway. But when you open up your hands like that, blessed are the meek. The meek is the person who's got his hands like that. What does He say? "Blessed are the meek," for what? "...for they shall inherit the earth." You let go and He just fills and blesses, and this is the only reasonable service of worship. This is what we ought to do. No Christian should be living with closed hands. We should be laying it down before Him every day, saying, "Whatever You want, Lord. Today is a new day. I want things to go my way—that's my nature—let me get my mind right. What I want is for You to be glorified. Whatever You want from me, I want You to have, because You are worthy."

When we see our selfishness, when we see our sin, "Wait a minute, look how it's all about me again. I'm doing this. Lord, forgive me. Thank You that You died for that. You died for this evil, wicked tendency in me. You've covered it in Your blood. Make me like Jesus who didn't regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but He emptied Himself, and took upon Himself the form of a servant and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross." He didn't regard His reputation and His honor a thing to be grasped, but what did God do? Jesus did this, and then God says at the end of that passage, "Therefore, God has exalted Him and given Him a Name above every name." Do you see that? That's the way of God. When we let go and we worship, He fills us. He makes us fruitful. When you don't worship, when you despise true worship, you are like Michal, David's wife, barren. You have nothing.

Let's pray together...

Father, we come to You grateful for Your word that shows us Your requirements of us, and shows us not only Your requirements for us, but Your provision for us. You require us to be people who love You with all our heart, soul, and mind, and strength. You require us, Lord, to be people who put You above everything else at every moment of our lives, and we have failed. The reality is we have always by nature put ourselves at the center of everything. There are some in this room who still are putting themselves at the center of everything and have not yet been saved. We're thankful that You see our hearts and there is no hiding from You. You see us exactly as we are.

We pray, Father, that You would bring to the light what needs to be brought to light, and that You would grant repentance and faith, that You would enable hearts to reach out to You right now and to let go of everything else and just reach for Christ, trusting that He is all that matters, that nothing else will satisfy, could ever satisfy, but Jesus is everything. Thank You that You have promised that the one who reaches out to You, the one who acknowledges himself to be unworthy, You will honor and bless forever. You will never turn away the one who looks to Christ. Thank You for His glorious salvation. Father, be glorified and magnified in our hearts. Keep us in an attitude of worship more, and more, and more, so that You would receive continual, perpetual praise, for You are worthy. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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