

John 12: LIVE FOR JESUS

Read John 12: 1-8

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Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. ³ Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

INTRO - UNIQUE AND SUPERNATURAL

Believe in Jesus and live. That's John's hope for his readers as he writes the Gospel of John (John 20:31).

For the Christian, witnessing is simply inviting people to meet Jesus for themselves. To meet Jesus in the pages of the Bible. To meet Jesus in the Gospel of John. To read about his miracles, his teaching, his life. We invite people to read the Bible with us. In the pages of scripture and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will ask each reader, "Do you believe this?"

That's a question for us today too: Do you believe what's written about Jesus?

In the Gospel of John we discover that Jesus is the most unique and supernatural person who ever lived.

- His Birth was unique and supernatural
- His life was unique and supernatural
- The end of his life was unique and supernatural.

No other person who has ever lived has had all three.

- Jesus was born of a virgin (Matt 1:23)
- Angels and wise men celebrated his birth (Luke 2: 8-15)
- He **performed miracles** that healed people, exorcized demons, multiplied objects (fish & bread), controlled the weather, and brought people back to life. (Acts 2:22)
- He lived a sinless, **perfect life**. (1 Peter 2:22; Heb 4:15)
- His life **fulfilled prophecies** made hundreds of years before his birth.
- He was crucified and came back to life! (Acts 2:23,24)

No one in history has a legacy like this. Jesus is utterly unique.

In John, Jesus is described as the light of the world, the bread of life, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the creator of the world.

In other words, He is Lord of all & Savior of the world.

Do you believe this?

If that is what you believe, then the second question is how do we live for Jesus?

In our passage today, Mary gives a beautiful example of how to live for Jesus.

She teaches us to live with passionate, costly devotion.

What it means to live for Jesus could be answered with words, but Mary gives a memorable picture of costly devotion with her actions.

MARY - COSTLY DEVOTION

Can you imagine the scene with me? It's the evening meal and they are reclining on the ground around the food. Mary enters with a jar of expensive ointment. In those days, there were no tops or lids on these jars. The only way to get the ointment out was to break the neck of the jar. So Mary breaks the jar and pours the precious ointment on Jesus and on his feet. You can see her bending down and loosening her hair and wiping his feet with her hair, and suddenly the whole house is full of this beautiful perfume.

Her actions are abrupt and stunning. Shocking really! Not something easily forgotten. In fact, when Mary is introduced in chapter 11, Mary is introduced as the person who anointed Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair (Jn 11:2). In a parallel account in Mark and Matthew's gospel, Jesus says that wherever the gospel is preached, her actions will be remembered.

What is so significant about Mary's actions?

In verse 5 Judas says that this ointment could have been sold for three hundred denarii. Most likely this pure nard had been imported from the mountains of India. It was used to anoint kings. A denarii was a day's wage. This jar worth 300 denarii represents an entire year's wage. I don't own anything that small that is worth that much. This is a vast sum of money in one jar of ointment. It is costly.

But it's not just costly in that it was expensive; most likely this jar of ointment was a family inheritance or perhaps saved as a dowry present for Mary's wedding day. It may have been something kept in reserve if the family fell on hard times.

To get the impact of this, not in terms of money, but in terms of actual cost, it would be like selling all of your family land to buy a jar of anointment to pour on the feet of Jesus. Or taking the savings from a lifetime of work to pour ointment on Jesus.

In other words, Mary gave away her financial security to honor Jesus.

Not only was Mary's act of devoted worship costly financially, it was costly socially. She not only poured this expensive ointment on Jesus, but she washed his feet with her hair. It does not take much imagining to see that it was socially awkward for Mary to do this. She is an unmarried woman washing the feet of an unmarried man. In order to wash his feet, she let down her hair, which was socially scandalous to do in the presence of men, and yet she does it. Why?

Why would Mary spend her financial security and risk her social image to honor Jesus?

The answer is simple. Jesus meant more to her than financial security or social image. She weighed the value of honoring Jesus against the value of her finances and her social image and decided that the cost of being devoted to Jesus was worth it.

And she backed up that belief with action.

Mary is an unparalleled example of love, worship and sacrifice.

When we look into our heart, do we see someone who is devoted to Jesus at the expense of our financial security? Do we see someone who is devoted to Jesus at the expense of our social image?

Mary was willing to embrace the cost. Will we?

A few years ago, I gave this talk at Forman Christian College in Pakistan. The chaplain had worked in the Lahore office of a well-known, international, American company. One of his Muslim colleagues died in a car accident.

At the funeral, all of the Pakistani employees of this international company prayed in a Muslim way, except this one Christian man. They hadn't talked about religion before and they didn't know he as a Christian since he was saved out of a Muslim background and had a Muslim name. But at the funeral, they found out he was a Christian.

The next week, his Pakistani boss (who was a good friend) called him into his office.

"Abdul," he asked, "are you a Christian?"

"Yes," this man replied.

"Why didn't you just sholat - pray in the Muslim way - with us?"

"Because I am a Christian now and I pray to God through Jesus."

That simple commitment, cost this brother his job. His boss (who had been a friend) made up a story about him not doing something right, the other Muslim employees agreed to those charges, and they fired him.

I said, "Wait, this is a major US company. They discriminated against you based on your religion. Why didn't you complain to the corporate headquarters?"

"Because my Pakistani colleagues would have just made up another charge against me. They wanted me out because of my faith."

Abdul was willing to embrace the cost of following Jesus. Will we?

JUDAS – COST REJECTED

Not everyone is willing to embrace the cost of being devoted to Jesus.

In the shocked silence of Mary's action, Judas speaks up, "Why wasn't this sold and given to the poor?" The voice of "wisdom" speaks against the voice of devoted worship. It would make more sense to do something else, says Judas. And that same type of "wisdom" is often spoken today.

- Don't give generously to the church, how will you provide for your family? Wait until you have extra funds to give money away.
- Don't let your friends and neighbors know you are passionate about following Jesus, you might lose their friendship or ruin your career.
- Don't be a pastor. It's too dangerous. You may sense God's call, but do something safer.

Why do we call "wisdom" whatever is safe and comfortable?

Judas thought the ointment was a gift too expensive to waste on Jesus. He was so accustomed to gauge things in terms of money that spiritual values were unreal to him. He had no place left for love's expressions of devotion and sacrifice.

Is anything too expensive to waste on Jesus? (pause)

The first words of Judas recorded in the Gospels reveal his true character – a heart filled with criticism and a spirit dominated by money. In verse 6, we learn that Judas did not actually care about the poor. He cared about the money, because he was a thief.

Jesus warns us again and again about the love of money. No one can serve money and God, Jesus said. Judas loved money more than Jesus.

What is frightening in this passage is how Judas' sinful heart was disguised in religious language. He hid his greed behind a seemingly good desire to care for the poor. Judas is one of the disciples, and yet beneath that exterior lies a heart that does not treasure

Jesus. This sinful heart causes Judas to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Money. He traded Jesus for money.

What a contrast to Mary to who traded her treasure and her social image to honor Jesus.

FRAGRANT WITNESS

Mary and Judas knew the same Jesus, but they made different choices about how to live for Christ.

Later in chapter 12 Jesus says:

“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

Jesus speaks in absolute terms to emphasize a point. “Loves his life” means ‘*delights in his life in this world more than in God*’ That was the response of Judas. Judas loved his life more than Jesus. Trying to hold onto earthly treasure he lost everything.

“Hates his life in this world” means, by contrast, ‘*thinks so little of his life and so much of God that he is willing to sacrifice it all for God.*’

That describes Mary. She thought so much of God that she was willing to sacrifice it all for him. Mary chose costly devotion and has been remembered and honored to this day.

In the gospels, the life of Mary is painted in three memorable scenes. In each she is found at the feet of Jesus. In Luke 10 she is seated at his feet, listening to his word (Luke 10:39). In John 11 she falls at his feet seeking his sympathy (John 11:32). Here in John 12 she anoints Jesus’ feet to express her love and devotion.

What a beautiful model of humble, sacrificial belief. At the feet of Jesus Mary gave her most treasured possession.

We all have something precious that we can unreservedly give to Jesus. What is your most valued possession or ability? Will you make it available to Jesus?

Mary didn’t give a small portion of what she valued. She gave it all to Jesus. The Lord Jesus loved us and gave himself for us. Will you give yourself fully to Him?

How will the world see that Jesus is Lord and Savior unless we live a life of humble, costly devotion to him?

- The world is full of people like Judas who disguise their desire for money and power with religious language. They don't want Jesus, they want religious power and prestige.
- There are some like the chief priests who refuse to believe despite the compelling evidence of Christ's unique and supernatural life and resurrection power. They openly oppose Jesus and the church.
- There are some who believe but are afraid. Like the Jewish leaders described at the end of chapter 12 they won't publically confess their belief for fear of public opinion. "For they love human praise more than the praise of God." (John 12:42,43)

And then there is Mary who lived with passionate, costly public devotion to Jesus.

When she broke that jar and anointed Jesus' feet, the house was filled with the fragrance.

- May this community be filled with the fragrance of our humble, costly devotion to Christ.
- May your home country be filled with the fragrance of your humble, costly devotion to Christ.
- May the world be filled with the fragrance of Christ's church living in humble, costly devotion to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May the life of Christ and our costly devotion to him cause many to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that by believing in him they might have life by the power of His name. (John 20:31). Amen