

He Is Worthy

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this morning as we take time to listen to the Word of God, we're returning to our series in the Gospel of John. As we do, I want to take a couple minutes to remind us of where we've been so far in this series.

Now, we've been at this for quite a while, so I'm not going to do a full overview here. Those messages are all online. We're not going to trace all the things we learned about Jesus or God. But just a few things, enough to get our bearings to know where we are in the story of Jesus as we continue on here.

So after John's wonderful introduction about who Jesus really is in the first chapter of his Gospel, he picks up the story with Jesus at John the Baptizer in the days when he was doing his ministry, the days when Jesus first went public.

And John tells us about how some of Jesus' first disciples came to follow him and believe in him. He tells us about the miracle at Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine.

From there, John followed Jesus down to Jerusalem for Passover. And we saw Jesus do some interesting stuff in the temple courts. And we heard about the meet-up with Nicodemus.

[1 : 1 3] Then John followed Jesus from there back to Galilee in the north, and on the way making a stop in Samaria, where he met the woman at the well. And we heard about the healing of the royal official's son back in Galilee.

And then back to Jerusalem for another of the Jewish festivals, where Jesus healed a man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. A man who hadn't walked in 38 years.

We listened as this brought Jesus into a clash with the religious leaders. Then we followed Jesus once again back up to Galilee. And we heard about how he fed the 5,000 out in the wilderness.

And then we heard about the conversation with the multitudes that he had just after that feeding on the other side of the lake. We followed Jesus then again back down to Jerusalem for another festival.

And we heard a lot of Jesus' conversation with the Jews there. And more runnins, more tension rising with the religious leaders. Things were starting to heat up.

[2 : 1 7] And on one occasion there, Jesus' opponents attempted to stone him. It was around then that we heard about Jesus healing the man who had been born blind. And it was out of that occasion that we heard the teaching of how Jesus is the good shepherd.

And the one who protects his flock from the thieves and the wolves. Then comes yet another festival in Jerusalem. John chapter 10. And it's there that things really come to a boiling point.

Jesus makes some of his greatest declarations ever. I give eternal life to my sheep. I and the Father are one, he said.

I am in my Father and my Father is in me. And again, Jesus was almost stoned and captured by his opponents. But then slipped away.

And he went from there across the Jordan and did some ministry out of reach of the religious leaders for a while. But then just before Christmas this past year, we heard about how Lazarus got sick.

[3 : 26] And died. This is what brought Jesus back into the vicinity of Jerusalem. Bethany is a village that's just about three kilometers outside of Jerusalem.

And it was there that Lazarus and his two sisters lived. And it was there that Jesus did one of the greatest miracles, the greatest signs that he ever performed and raised Lazarus from the dead.

And this resurrection of Lazarus was really the thing that triggered the whole final series of events that we're about to look at, the events that will lead to Jesus' death.

We're going to pick it up this morning in John chapter 11. And I'm going to read starting in verse 45. John chapter 11, verse 45.

Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did, that's the raising of Lazarus from the dead, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

[4 : 34] Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. What are we accomplishing? They asked. Here is this man performing many signs.

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation. One of them named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up.

You know nothing at all. You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation.

And not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on, they plotted to take his life.

Therefore, Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead, he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

[5 : 40] So this was the last straw in the minds of the religious leaders, this resurrection of Lazarus. It's there at the meeting of the Sanhedrin that they officially decided to take Jesus out.

From that day on, it says, they plotted to take his life. And John tells us that he no longer moved about publicly as he did before.

He withdrew yet again to a more remote region, this little village of Ephraim, kind of on the edge of the wilderness. But of course, if we've been reading John, we know that Jesus will be back to Jerusalem.

And it's probably going to be for another festival. And that's exactly what happened. Let's read it in verse 55. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover.

They kept looking for Jesus. And as they stood in the temple courts, they asked one another, what do you think? Isn't he coming to the festival at all? But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

[6 : 56] So the people are arriving from all over the nation for Passover. As we'll see soon from even farther away, some of the surrounding nations, it was a huge swelling of people in Jerusalem.

And as this happens, John tells us that Jesus is the talk of the times. Everybody's looking for him. Everybody's hoping to see him. They're wondering if and when he's going to arrive.

And at the same time, the religious leaders have given these orders that anyone who finds out where Jesus is must report it. I don't know if they had wanted posters like you see in some of those old westerns, but whatever they had, it was probably like that.

Written notices on bulletin boards or whatever all throughout the city. Jesus was a wanted man. And finally, with the Passover festival just days from starting, the religious leaders receive a tip.

Somebody has spotted Jesus and knows where he is. chapter 12, verse 1. Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

[8 : 22] Here, a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. We're going to look at this visit more in a second, but for now, let's keep our eye on the larger story of Jesus and what's going on here.

Jesus is now, first he raised Lazarus from the dead, then he went out to this remote village. Now he's back in Bethany, just three kilometers outside of Jerusalem.

And as was his custom, he stopped over to see Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And one of the reasons I think John tells us this is because it's this little visit when Jesus suddenly pops back up on the radar of the religious leaders.

Ah! We know where he is. Let's start the planning again. Look down to verse 9 of chapter 12. As this visit with Martha and Mary and Lazarus is happening, meanwhile, a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there in Bethany, and they came, not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

It's as if they were thinking, let's kill two birds with one stone. We'll make the trip out to Bethany. We'll see Jesus, the talk of the town, and then we'll see Lazarus as well.

[9 : 46] Some of us had been to the funeral. Others knew someone who went to the funeral. Yeah, he was dead. Let's go out there and see this walking miracle, this man who Jesus raised for ourselves.

And notice the number of people, a large crowd. We don't know exactly how many, probably more than 10 or 15. I was thinking about when we see a large crowd go anywhere in our day today.

The only thing that came to mind was a rider game. Everybody jumps in their cars from all over, and this large crowd is there suddenly at the game. Well, whether it was that many people or just a few thousands or just several hundred, we don't know.

But even as they're making their way into Jerusalem from all over the world and all around, there's this large group of people that's making their way out on the road to Bethany to see Jesus and to see Lazarus.

Verse 10, So the chief priests catching word of this made plans to kill Lazarus as well. Why?

[11 : 03] Verse 11, For on account of Lazarus, many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

So this is quite the atmosphere here. On the one hand, the city's probably full of notices on bulletin boards or however they did it, saying, Jesus, wanted by the chief priests, if anybody gets word of where he is, notify your local religious authorities immediately.

And yet in the very midst of this, from this very same city, there are all these people traveling out on the road to see Jesus, the wanted man. And many of them are coming to believe in Jesus because of Lazarus and his testimony.

So what are the Pharisees and the religious leaders thinking? Not only are we going to kill Jesus, but we're going to kill Lazarus too.

We can't have people believing that Jesus really did raise Lazarus from the dead. So we'll kill him. All of these claims of resurrection and him raised from the dead will just go away.

[12 : 20] Isn't that something? I mean, these are the religious, the religious leaders of Israel. Chief priests, experts in the law of God.

And what are they doing together? They're plotting the murder of Lazarus, an innocent man. Has it got this bad in Israel?

That her shepherds, the men who hold the highest positions, the men who are supposed to be the spiritual guides, the priests are plotting the murder of an innocent man simply to discredit their opponent in a power struggle.

It has got this bad. And this is why we need the good shepherd. Jesus was right when he spoke about them earlier in chapter 10, the thieves.

What do they come to do? To kill, to steal, to destroy. That's exactly what they're doing. This is why we need the good shepherd, Jesus, and not these hypocritical religious imposters.

[13 : 37] So things are coming to their climax, very quickly, between Jesus and the religious leaders. And in less than two weeks' time, from this point in the story, Jesus will be hanging on a cross, dying.

And yet, as quickly as things are moving, John seems to be calling us, and inviting us, to slow down, and learn about some of the most precious moments that happened, that he witnessed, between here, and the cross.

And one of those things is this dinner, in chapter 12, with Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus. And so, even though we all want to go forward, and hear the rest of the story, we want to listen.

We want to slow down with John, and notice, why does he put this dinner in here? What's going on here? Let's read it in John chapter 12.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

[14 : 52] Then Mary, took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped his feet, with her hair.

And the house was filled, with the fragrance, of the perfume. Now some of you might be wondering, about how this relates, to those similar mentions, of a woman doing something like this, in the other gospels.

It's been discussed, and debated by many. There are many similarities, and there are also, some significant differences. And I don't really want to, get into all that this morning. That's kind of what, Bible commentaries are for.

But I will suggest to you, one possible way of understanding, the various accounts. This is probably a different event, than what Luke describes, in his gospel. In Luke's gospel, he seems to describe a dinner, that Jesus had at the house, of one of the Pharisees.

And this probably, in his account, took place, earlier in his ministry, where an immoral woman, comes in, cries over Jesus' feet, wipes them with her hair, and then, puts some perfume on them.

[16 : 07] Matthew and Mark's accounts, on the other hand, they seem to match up, quite closely, to what John tells us here. In both of them, Matthew and Mark's, an unnamed woman, at a dinner, in Bethany, anoints some part of Jesus, with very expensive perfume.

And the conversation, that follows after, Matthew and Mark says, is pretty much the same, as what we read here, in John. In fact, Mark's account says, that the perfume, was also a pure nard, had the same value, as Judas is about to tell us, in this gospel.

So, either this happened twice, with two different women, or I think more likely, all three accounts, Matthew, Mark, and John, refer to the same event.

And maybe Matthew and Mark, simply put their tellings, in a different spot, in their accounts. We do this, when we tell stories, sometimes we have to backtrack, and then, you know, fill in the details.

And we certainly, want to give them, the freedom to do that, as well. That, and it's easy to see, how there could be, different things, that each of these men, noticed, as they wrote their, accounts of Jesus.

[17 : 20] Different things, they wanted to emphasize. Matthew and Mark, they're all about, proclaiming, how, Jesus is the king, the Messiah, the one that we've, been waiting for.

And so, they notice, they emphasize, Mary pouring, on his head, as if, anointing a king. But, but if we look closely, at what Jesus says, in Mark, there was, perfume on his body.

You've had done this, to my body. Even the feet. Perhaps, John only mentions, the feet, because that was the part, that he saw, that just blew him away.

Like, what a humbling thing, to wipe Jesus' feet, with her hair. To take one of the most, beautiful parts of herself, her hair, and stoop down, and use it like a cloth, on Jesus' feet.

Let's notice, the perfume, for a moment. John makes it clear, that this was no, cheap stuff. It was, expensive stuff.

[18 : 32] Judas actually helps us, see the value of it, in verse five. He says, why wasn't this perfume sold, and the money given, to the poor? It was worth, a year's wages, 300 denarii.

Denarii is a year's, a day's wage, 300, you take the Sabbaths, out of that, and you get 300 working days, in a year. A year's, salary, was the, worth of this perfume, made of pure nard, which comes from the root, and spike, of the nard plant, in India.

So, this is exotic stuff. I don't know, if we can directly compare it, but for the sake, of understanding, let's just take, an average, annual salary, in Canada, let's just say, 45,000 bucks.

I don't know, what it is. Can you imagine that? A bottle of perfume, worth 45,000 bucks? This was no, cheap stuff. However, that translates, into their day, their culture, their place in the world.

We don't know, how Mary came to own it, but probably, it was her most, valuable possession. It could have been, that it was a family heirloom, that had been passed down, likely the most valuable thing, that she owned.

[19 : 49] And perhaps, that's also why, John's attention, was so drawn, to Jesus' feet. Perfume does not normally, go down there.

Especially, not this kind of perfume. And yet for Mary, yes, even Jesus' dusty, and calloused feet, are worthy, of the very best stuff, that I've got to give.

This is the kind of perfume, that ordinarily, you would just use, a drop or two, at a time. How valuable it was. And yet, by the other accounts, Mary empties the whole bottle, on Jesus.

And even some, on his feet. John notices. This is extravagant love. Extravagant worship.

This is Mary, declaring to Jesus, and to everybody else, who's there in the room, to witness it, or would hear of it. Jesus, you are worthy, of everything I've got.

[20 : 59] Of the very best, that I have. Even the lowest, part of you, your feet, are worthy of it. Worthy of, being wiped, by the very, best I've got.

My hair. And even as, she is doing this, Judas, is there, poo-pooing, what she's doing.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later, to betray him, objected. Right there, while she's doing this. Why wasn't this perfume, sold, and the money given, to the poor?

It was worth, a year's wages. Of course, John tells us, he didn't say this, because he actually, cared about the poor, but because he was, the treasurer of the group, and he used to help himself, to the money, that was in the bag.

The other gospels, tell us, the disciples say, similar things, not just Judas, but some of the others as well, amongst themselves, and even to her. Like, what a waste, they said.

[22 : 11] Jesus comes to Mary's defense. Leave her alone, Jesus replied.

It was intended, that she should save this perfume, for the day of my burial. In Matthew and Mark, it's, leave her alone, she has done a beautiful thing to me.

Different translations, render this verse seven differently. There's some grammatical, ambiguity here, more than one possible way, to translate this.

Some see Jesus here, telling Mary, to save what's left, of the perfume, for the burial. And yet to me, it seems that Mary's already, used up the perfume, on Jesus. I'm inclined to follow, the New King James version, on this one, which says, let her alone, she has kept this, for the day of my burial.

In other words, she's been saving this, for some time now. She's been intending, to give this special gift to me, for a while, to do this for me.

[23 : 21] It leads us to the question, does Mary know, that Jesus' death, is right around the corner? that this will be, his last visit, to Jerusalem, before he's killed?

Well, it's certainly possible, that she knew, Jesus had already told, his disciples, several times, at least three, that we know of, if not more, that he was going, to suffer, and die.

It's possible, that Mary learned, from her last visit, with Jesus, and her brother, being raised from the dead, to take, every word, that Jesus says, is true. It's possible, that even though, the disciples seem deaf, to Jesus, when he was telling him, that he would die, he would suffer, that Mary was there, all along, hearing, and believing, and knowing, that this was coming, and seeing it come to a head.

We don't know. Either that, or she just wants, to do something special, for her Lord, to show her love, and maybe unbeknownst to her, this fits in the plan of God.

It's like the preparation, for his burial, that's coming. Jesus says, in verse 8, you will always, have the poor among you, but you will not, always have me.

[24 : 42] Jesus is in no way, diminishing the plight, of the poor, or saying that we should, ignore them. Rather, he's pointing out, that the poor, will still be here, among you, to receive, whatever help, you give them, after I'm gone, but you will not, always have me, here with you, like I am, right now.

It's as if he's saying, our days together, like this, are coming to an end. The window of opportunity, to be with me, like this, is closing, and Mary, has not missed out, on her chance, to give her love, and worship, and worship to me.

There is a time, to celebrate. There is a time, to feast, and yes, there is even a time, to give extravagant gifts, and Mary, has understood, that this, is that time.

This is her moment, to do it. This is her chance, and this is the second time, Jesus has commended her, for understanding, what's best, in the moment, isn't it?

Let's put this, in perspective. After Jesus leaves, the next time, he will be seen, as is when he returns, in his father's glory, to rule, and reign, forevermore.

[26 : 07] I kept thinking, about the words, in Mark chapter 8, verse 38. Jesus said, if anyone is ashamed, of me, and my words, in this adulterous, and sinful generation, the son of man, will be ashamed, of them, or of him, when he comes, in his father's glory, with the holy angels.

This was partly, a rebuke, that was given to Peter, for being ashamed, of Jesus talking, about how he was going, to suffer, and be rejected, and die, which was coming. But what we see here, from Mary, in this moment, at this dinner, is the exact opposite.

She is not ashamed, of Jesus. In fact, she is the only one, in the room, it seems, who is treating Jesus, as he really deserves, as the king, who will one day, bust through the clouds, in glory.

glory. She treats him, as he is worthy, of being treated. She understands, here and now, before he comes, in glory, that he is that one, who someday, will come, in glory.

And that now, and forever, he is deserving, of not just a little love, not just a little, of what we could possibly give, little worship, not just a little token, of our faith, but the highest, and the greatest, and the best, of all that we have.

[27 : 41] Borrowing the words, of my dear friend, and brother in the Lord, Ross Adnacon, there are many Christians, out there today, who are all too content, to give Jesus, bare minimum love, bare minimum worship, bare minimum, church attendance, bare minimum service, bare minimum obedience, bare minimum time, spent in prayer, and in the word.

Are you one of them? When Jesus comes, in his father's glory, Mary will not be ashamed, of this moment.

No, we, will be ashamed, and regret, that we did not, give him the very best, when we had, the chance. So let me ask you, how are you going, to live for Jesus, in this new year?

How are you going, to live for the son of man, who will someday come, in his father's glory, with his holy angels? How are you going, to live for him, this new year?

I pray, that all of us, will take a lesson, from Mary. Jesus, is worthy, beyond measure. Let's pray.

[29 : 16] Father in heaven, let this moment, soak into our hearts, and change us. give us eyes, to see your son, as he truly is, the king of glory.

Reorient, our priorities, our decisions, to reflect, that day, that's coming, when he returns. Show us, how to live, and give, what we have, for his honor, and his glory.

we ask this, in his name. Amen.