

The King Worth Everything

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[0:00] Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you for your word through which you continue to speak to us by your spirit. We ask, Father, that you would give us minds to understand, but hearts also that would live in light of your word to us this morning.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it was about 20 years ago. Michelle and I had only just been married, I think, and we were at a church in New South Wales.

And we got to know quite a few people there, and one man in particular was a guy called Nigel, a very passionate Christian guy, and he and his wife were expecting their first baby.

When the time came, the baby was born, but sadly there was complications and the child died. As you can imagine, there was great heartache after the doctors checked him and declared him deceased.

An even greater heartache when the mother couldn't leave the hospital because she still had to recover from the C-section. It was about three hours later from memory when the nurse was going to dispose of the body and she heard a noise.

[1:10] She checked the baby, and he was alive. It's a true story. The doctors could not believe it. And do you know what Nigel named his son? Lazarus.

Back from the dead. Can you imagine their gratitude to God for this? They've not stopped serving him since. They even tried to evangelize the doctors.

Though as far as I know, the doctors refused to believe, even though the evidence of Lazarus was right there before them. And to this day, Lazarus from New South Wales is alive and well and studying at university, I think.

It's a great story, isn't it? God can and does do miracles in our day. But some Christians then expect him to always act in this way.

After all, these sorts of miracles seem to always happen in Jesus' day. So why not always in our day? And the answer is because in Jesus' day, they had a particular purpose.

[2:12] John calls them signs which were to point people to who Jesus is that they might believe in him. We know this from John's purpose statement, which I showed you last week.

It's at the end of his gospel or end of his book. Jesus performed many other signs. That's miracles in the presence of his disciples. But these are written that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the King, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

And so while God does do miracles today, he can do anything. They are not as common as they were in Jesus' day because people have been pointed to Jesus as the King and the early church has begun.

And so now the church grows by spreading the word about Jesus. Notice how John says in that purpose statement, these things are written so that you may believe.

But I also tell this story about Lazarus from New South Wales because the Lazarus from the Bible is still very much on view in our passage today. On the next slide, John seems to use Lazarus as a thread to link these three seemingly separate scenes together.

[3:33] I'll unpack them as we go as soon as Annette brings me up a Bible, which I... Can you believe that? A preacher forgetting to bring the Bible up to the pulpit. That's disgraceful. Thanks, Annette. I'll unpack this more as we go, but we're at scene one in your outlines and chapter 11, verse 55 in your Bibles.

So when it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for the ceremonial cleansing before the Passover.

Now, at this point, I know it's an odd spot in our Bibles, in our English versions, but I think there's a break here because John has just spent the last 11 chapters telling us about three years of Jesus's

life.

But now he'll spend the next eight chapters looking at just the last week of Jesus's life. He slows down the action. And this comment about the Passover starts a new section.

And the Passover, as you know, was a festival that the Jews celebrated every year around Easter time. It celebrates how God, our Easter time, it celebrates how God saved Israel from Egypt with the blood of a sacrificial lamb.

[4 : 42] Remember, there were nine plagues which were warning Pharaoh time and time again to let Israel go. And then God sent an angel to judge Egypt with a tenth plague to force Pharaoh's hand.

But the angel would judge everyone in the land, including Israel. So God told Israel and anyone else who would listen to sacrifice a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts. So here's a kind of artist's impression.

That's what they did. And so when the angel came and saw the blood of the sacrificial lamb, it would pass over the house. Hence Passover festival.

But it was this judgment that forced Pharaoh's hand and saved Israel from Egypt. So every year the Jews would sacrifice a lamb at the temple, have lamb roast for dinner and celebrate how God saved them from Egypt through this sacrificial lamb.

But because the men needed to carry the lamb into the area of the temple known as the court of priests where the altar was, then they had to purify themselves in baths south of the temple. You can see them today.

[5 : 52] This is an example of what the bath looked like, but it was obviously filled with water. And they would go in and do ceremonial washing to purify themselves. But it seems what is on the minds of the people in our passage was not the Passover, but Jesus.

Have a look at verse 56. They kept looking for Jesus, these people, and they stood in the temple courts. They asked one another, what do you think?

Isn't he coming to the festival at all? Actually, their question is a bit more positive. It's more like he's coming to the festival, isn't he? There's this great expectation around Jesus.

Given what we'll see of the crowds later, it seems they expect him, you know, perhaps he is the king, the promised Messiah. But their response stands in stark contrast to the Jewish leaders.

Verse 57. 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 : 58] And it was particularly the miraculous sign of raising Lazarus from the dead that made these Jewish leaders want to do that, want to arrest him and kill him.

That's why they were looking for Jesus. It reminds me of a church notice I saw one time. I may have shown you this before, actually. Morning sermon. Jesus walks on the water. Evening sermon. Looking for Jesus.

Now, of course, Jesus has not drowned. He just hasn't come to Jerusalem for the Passover yet. Instead, he stopped off at Bethany, about three kilometers away, where he is anointed.

So we're at point two now and chapter 12, verse 1 and 2. Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Here is the dinner given in Jesus' honor.

[7 : 59] And notice how John makes sure we know Lazarus is there. In fact, John even adds, whom Jesus raised from the dead. Why does he need to do that?

I mean, it's such an amazing thing. Wouldn't have everyone remembered? Wouldn't we know? I mean, how many different Lazaruses or Lazari, whatever the plural is, how many different Lazarus are in Bethany to start with?

That he needs to make this distinction. It seems John wants us as readers to know that it's because of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead that leads to what happens next.

So what happens next? Well, verse 3. Now, I don't know a lot about perfume.

It's not something I generally wear. Actually, it's not something I ever wear. But I do know there are different kinds. You know, there's Chanel No. 5 and Chanel No. 4, I assume.

[9 : 07] Is there 4? I don't know. I also know there are different kinds in terms of cost. There's the expensive and the really expensive. And in verse 5, we're told that this is the really expensive type.

It's worth a year's wages. Now, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics in Victoria last year, the average wage, yearly wage, was \$84,000.

I don't know if you thought you got ripped off when you were working or not, but that's what it was. Can you imagine owning perfume worth that much? It's likely this was a family heirloom, perhaps to be used sparingly for special occasions.

And certainly as a pure up nard, it was probably meant to be watered down to go further. But Mary pours it all on Jesus.

It's a radical response, isn't it? But that's not all. Mary then lets down her hair in public, in the company of men, which in those days was against the culture and invited social embarrassment.

[10:13] But that's not all. She then uses her hair to clean Jesus' dirty feet. That's the job of a servant. This is really a radical response, isn't it?

Or is it? I mean, what would you do for the one who raised your loved one from the dead? Or the one who could raise you from the dead?

What would that one be worth to you? Would he be worth going against your culture for? Worth inviting some social embarrassment? Worth your family's most prized possession?

Worth being his servant? You see, because Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, that's what John wants us to know, Mary now knows that he is the Messiah, the King.

Just like her sister confessed last week. And she knows that he is worth her everything. You know, the one who can bring life in the face of death, like her brother.

[11:19] This response, it wasn't radical for Mary, but it was for Judas. Have a look at verse 4. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected.

Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages. He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put in it.

Now, in verse 5, Judas does seem to ask a seemingly sensible question. After all, it was a lot of money, and it could have helped a lot of poor, couldn't it?

But either side of verse 5, John tells us and makes sure we know that Judas is dodgy, that his seemingly sensible question is really just a cover-up for his greed and self-interest.

He is the one who's about to betray Jesus. He is the one who wanted to help himself to some of this \$84,000 worth. And this greed and self-interest of Judas seems to have blinded him to who Jesus is.

[12:34] The evidence is right there in front of Judas. I mean, Judas saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. He's clearly no ordinary person, is Jesus. And here is Lazarus, the evidence, sitting at the table with Judas right in front of him.

And he's kind of blinded to who Jesus is, such that he's willing to betray Jesus and skimp the money and have a go at Mary for what she did to Jesus. He cannot see who Jesus is.

And sadly, this is how it is for many people today, is it not? You know, despite the evidence we have for Jesus, including his miracles and even his resurrection, despite the sense that Christianity makes of our world, better sense than any other religion, despite the hope and help Jesus really offers, people are blinded by their self-interest, whether it be money or study or secular peer pressure, such that they don't see Jesus for who he really is, even when the evidence is sitting right there in front of them.

And even when this Jesus would die for them. Do you see verse 7 and 8? Leave her alone, Jesus replied. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.

You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me. In other words, Jesus is saying, look, leave her alone. What she did, I'm worth it.

[13:57] That you'll always have the poor to care for, but you won't always have me physically with you. For he's about to die. And that's why in verse 7, Jesus gives extra meaning to Mary's act of adoration or worship, saying that he has been anointed for his burial.

He's about to die. And given the repetition of the Passover in our passage, in chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12, John keeps making sure we know the Passover's in the background.

I suspect John wants us to see that Jesus is going to die as the sacrificial lamb, the Passover lamb, to save us, not from Egypt, but from sin and death.

After all, that's what John highlighted right at the beginning of his gospel in chapter 1, verse 29.

Annette read this at the start of the service, where John the Baptist says, look, the lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world, Jesus.

Jesus is the one who will die to give us life. You see, as sinners, we are spiritually dead to God and we will face eternal death for our sins.

[15:11] When my son was little, one of his favourite songs was a song by Colin Buchanan, who used to be a presenter on PlaySchool and he's written a lot of Christian kids music and he's put a lot of memory verses to song.

And my son's favourite one was Romans 6.23 and it came with actions and he loved it because of the action. It says, for the wages of sin is death. That's the part he loved.

Typical boy. But the point of the verse is, sin leads to death. That's its wage. That's the consequence of sin. But Jesus died the death we deserve.

He took the punishment in our place for our sins so that we don't have to. So that we who believe can instead be given new spiritual life with God now that never ends like we saw last week.

Now it keeps going even through death. And so he could also give us new physical resurrection life later. And someone who is willing to do that for us, you know, willing to die in order to raise our loved ones who believe from the dead, willing to die for us in order to raise us from the dead, is he not worth a year's wages?

[16:32] Is he not worth believing in? Seems many thought so. Verse 9. Meanwhile, a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there at Bethany at this house and came not only because of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well. For an account of him, you know, the evidence, the sign, many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

Here the crowd of Jews left Jerusalem and walked roughly three kilometers to see Jesus and Lazarus. And again, John adds, whom Jesus raised from the dead, in case we're forgotten.

But more than that, not because he thinks we may have forgotten, but because he wants us to know that it was this sign in particular that helped many Jews believe. Verse 11.

But again, the Jews who believed stand in stark contrast to the chief priests who now want to kill Lazarus as well. So that, you know, people would stop believing in Jesus.

[17:42] They want to get rid of the evidence for who Jesus is, like crooked cops trying to bury the evidence to convict an innocent person. Of course, they'd better kill Jesus first.

You know, if they killed Lazarus first, oh, fine, get back out, Lazarus. Cycle repeats. But since many of the Jews did believe, then it's no wonder the next day they go out to meet Jesus and declare him the king.

So it's scene number three and verse number 12. The next day, the great crowd that come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel. Here, this great crowd, no doubt included those who went to Bethany the night before, as well as many others, it seems, who came for the Passover festival.

And in verse 13, they all shout Hosanna, which originally meant save now. It's part of Psalm 118, which the Jews sung at Passover time, you know, to remember how God saved them from Egypt.

[18:54] And those coming in the name of the Lord were originally pilgrims who were coming up to the temple to celebrate. Let me show you Psalm 118 on the slide.

So there it is. Lord, save us, or the Hebrew is Hosanna. Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

That's the pilgrims coming up to the temple. And the next verse, from the house, that is the temple of the Lord, we bless you. So it's a response of the people who are already there. But by Jesus's day, Hosanna had become an expression of praise.

And the Jews saw the one who comes in the name of the Lord as ultimately the Messiah, the King. That's why they say in verse 13, blessed is the King of Israel. That's not in Psalm 118. The crowd adds it because they think the Psalm ultimately points to the King who they are now declaring is Jesus.

[20:02] But Jesus is not a political King who rides on a war horse. He is a humble King who rides on a donkey. That's what John highlights in verse 14 and 15.

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it as it is written. Do not be afraid, daughter Zion. See your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt. I hear John quotes from our first reading in Zechariah.

And he emphasizes that Jesus is a humble King, the one who's lowly riding on a donkey. Why? Well, because the people wanted a political King who would wage war against the Romans, kick them out of Israel, save them from Roman rule. But Jesus has not come to the Passover festival to be a political King.

He has come to the Passover festival to be a humble King who would give his life as a sacrificial lamb to bring peace to the nations. And that by his blood, he would save people from death, from the waterless pit, as Zechariah put it.

[21 : 08] Of course, that's a lot to get from just riding on a donkey, isn't it? And so no wonder verse 16 says, at first his disciples did not understand all this.

Only after Jesus was glorified, did they realize these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him. And next week we will see that Jesus's glorification refers to his death.

And so it was only after his death that the disciples understood what all these actions and Old Testament prophecies were about. That Jesus was the humble King who would die as the Passover lamb.

But by raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus has already done enough for people to follow him as their King. You see verse 17? Now the crowd that was with Jesus when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word.

And so many people, because they heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, see, this is getting us nowhere.

[22 : 20] Look how the whole world has gone after him. Like each of the other scenes, this one also ends with the Jewish leaders. At this time it's the Pharisees who complain their plan to arrest and kill Jesus is not working.

But again, in contrast to them are the many people of verse 18. They go out to meet Jesus, presumably as their King. The phrase went out to meet him was already used exactly word for word in verse 13.

When the people do declare him, blessed is the King of Israel. And so these people go out to meet Jesus as their King. And not only just meet him, but follow after him, as the Pharisees imply.

Notice verse 19, the whole world has gone after him, to follow him. Why? Well again, because of Lazarus. This is the thread that runs through these three scenes.

But do you notice, it's not because these people in verse 18 saw the sign themselves. They didn't see Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. They only heard the word of those who did.

[23 : 34] You see verse 17 again? Those who saw Jesus perform the miraculous sign, then spread the word, or literally bore witness. Therefore, verse 18, because this other group heard this eyewitness testimony, then they went out to meet Jesus as King.

And this is encouraging for us, I think. Because none of us have seen Jesus in the flesh, performing signs like Lazarus, have we? And we don't always see miracles like the family of New South Wales, Lazarus saw.

But we don't have to, to believe. Like these people here, reliable eyewitness testimony is enough to believe. Just like it's enough in a court of law.

In fact, the Pharisees who did see other signs, still don't believe. So seeing is no guarantee to believing, is it? Reliable eyewitness testimony, which the Bible has been shown to be, is enough to believe.

It's enough to realize Jesus is no ordinary person. It's enough to see that he is the King, who by his death saves us from sin and gives us life.

[24 : 49] It's enough to believe in him and have life in his name. After all, that's why John has written his eyewitness testimony. I remember a time at school when we all had to get vaccinations.

I don't know if they do that in primary schools these days. They still do. And it reminded me how we'd all react differently, although generally it was a negative reaction. But it also reminded me of a picture I once saw, like on this next slide here.

And there's all these different reactions, aren't there? I love the second in line. He's got this concerned look on his face, you know, I'm next. And the reason I raise this is because in our passage today, we've seen all sorts of reactions to Jesus, all different responses, haven't we? And not to a needle, but to him raising Lazarus from the dead. And the implicit question is, how then will we respond to this? Will you respond like the Jewish leaders who stubbornly refuse to believe

despite eyewitness evidence?

Or like Judas who lets self-interest and greed, or perhaps in our case, the opinions of our family or our world, blind us to who Jesus is? Or will you be like the crowds who at this point at least, I mean, they cry out crucify later, but at this point at least, believe in him as king?

[26 : 18] And for us who already believe in him as king, then we are to continue to do so, such that we listen to him and follow him in our lives, obeying him.

I remember being at a Christian conference when I was 18. I can't remember if I've told this story, but anyway, and we were learning about Jesus being our king. And at lunchtime, I went out to get some lunch, but I was on my pea plates and like a rebellious pea plater, I hooned down the roads. This was Katoomba where there was big hills, so you could get up a whole lot of speed. And I hooned down and came back. And then after the conference, it started with some notices. And one of the notices was, if Jesus is our king, then let's act like it on the roads.

Now, to this day, I have no idea if that notice was just for me. But the point is, if we believe in him as our king, then we have to act like it, aren't we? Even if, to our world, we seem a bit radical.

It's a bit much. I like a guy from church who mentioned to a colleague at work what he did on the weekend, including going to church. And the colleague went, oh, really? How often do you do that?

[27 : 27] He replied, every week I can. God, you're joking, aren't we? You serious? And he kind of laughed and other colleagues kind of heard and looked and, you know, this guy from church invited social embarrassment, but he did not care.

He knew Jesus as his king who died to give him life. He knew Jesus was worth it. Or, another guy I know of who got his taxes done by an accountant for the first time last year, and apparently the accountant noticed how much he was giving each week to church and balked.

Do you have to keep doing this? I mean, you know, world vision, bushfire relief, one-offs, yeah, that's fine. That makes you a good person. But are you going to keep doing this regularly, was the question.

Yeah, I want to support gospel ministry. Oh, okay. For this guy, he knew Jesus was his king who died to give him life. Jesus was worth it.

It's interesting, the only time John records Jesus speaking in our passage is when he defends Mary. It's as though her response is the one to be commended above all.

[28 : 37] For when we recognize who Jesus really is, the one who died to pay for our sins, the one who can raise our loved ones who believe to new life again, the one who can give us new life, when we realize who he is and all he's done for us, then is he not worth serving as our king?

Is he not worth our money? Is he not worth going against our culture even if we invite social embarrassment? Is this king not worth our everything?

Let's pray. Our gracious father, we do thank you this morning for this reminder of who Jesus is, what he has done for us and what he will do for us in the future by raising us to new physical life too.

Father, in light of all he has done for us, we pray that you would help us to follow him as our king. Even if our behavior and allegiance appears radical to our world, help us to remember that this king is worth our everything.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.