

Because He's Worth it

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[0 : 00] Please turn back to our reading in John chapter 12. We'll look at the story of the anointing in verses 1 to 8. I'll read again just verse 3.

John 12 at 3. Mary, therefore, took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nigh, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped the feet of her hair.

So the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. So today, on the Lord's Day, we gather in worship.

And we're often reminded that that word, worship, comes a long time ago from worship. Worship is worship.

It's acknowledging the work of God, the worthiness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And saying, this God deserves our praise.

[1 : 13] He deserves that we acknowledge his work in worship. It's often said today that that's a very counter-cultural thing to do, especially in an age that is often characterized as a selfie culture, where it's all about me and who I am and my identity.

Now, you can see that I'm not the greatest advert in the world for L'Oreal, but I checked recently, and you should remember them saying, because you're worthy.

And I looked up the byline a little while ago, and it was, create your own legend because we're worthy.

So it's a culture that says, I am worthy, and I want things to revolve around me. But the Bible is saying, if he is worthy, I am unworthy, and I should revolve around him.

We need a kind of Copernican revolution, so that instead of things revolving around us, we recognize that we revolve around the sun, and the sun, S-O-N, that we revolve, we should revolve around him.

[2 : 49] So the gospel call is to reorient my life around Jesus by his grace, because he is worthy.

Now, that's what this story is saying to me and to you today, that many recognize that Jesus was worthy, that he was worth anything, and that he deserves everything.

And especially I want you to see today, and you'll come back to this at the very end, that this happens six days before the Passover, according to the beginning of the story.

This is the Lamb of God, the true Passover Lamb, on his way to be slain at Passover time, in Jerusalem.

Remember that John has told us at the very beginning of his gospel, in the words of John the Baptist, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sinful God.

[3 : 57] And John already has told us about a couple of Passover times, and now here's yet another one. But this is the one where the Lamb of God will die to take away sin.

So Mary's story, Mary's action here, in the bigger story of John's gospel at Passover time, is saying, worthy is the Lamb.

Jesus is the Lamb. He's going to die as the Lamb. And he is worthy of the Lamb he's done. So let's look at the story under three headings.

Mary anoints, Judas objects, and Jesus confesses. Simple as that. Mary, Judas, and Jesus. First of all, Mary anoints.

Now the place we're told at the beginning of the story is Bethany, a couple of miles or less from Jerusalem. And I think it's important for us to note that this is the same incident as you have early on in Matthew 26 and in Mark 14.

[5 : 15] You'll know these stories about the anointing and the people by an unnamed woman. Matthew 26 and Mark 14. So this takes place in the house of Simon the leper as we've told you.

I think they're the same incident told in slightly different ways. Important also to say that this is not the same incident as the one you have in Luke chapter 7 towards the end of that chapter.

Remember the story of a woman who's led an immoral life and she comes and she's weeping and her tears wet the feet of Jesus and she dries his feet with her hair and then she anoints him with her feet.

I think that is a different story from this and these other stories. Now the occasion here is a special dinner in honour of Jesus.

You can see that in verse 2. they gave a dinner for him for him for Jesus. The meal is a banquet in honour of Jesus.

[6 : 24] Now Jesus has special friends in Bethany. Jesus had special friendships from his wife and her. He was a human being who needed friends and he has friends here in Bethany.

And they're present here to want to be more best. Lazarus who he'd raised from the dead and we saw that repeated in the story. And then Martha verse 2 as usual Martha is busy with catering and service and as also mail.

Now some say that these three are healed as symbolic of different kinds of Christians. And there's an element of truth in that.

But I prefer to see them here as symbolic of three different aspects of the Christian life that should be true to some extent in every Christian life.

So Martha serves. Martha's busy doing practical things for other people. And Lazarus there is sitting with Jesus quietly calmly sitting and listening to Jesus.

[7 : 49] And there he goes to get something to do something special. Actually unique in her life probably for Jesus and so.

So Martha serves Lazarus six and Mary four. Now I don't think that these are three different Christians for us to talk into one of them.

I think they are three challenges to all of us. sometimes we are called to serve. Sometimes we are just called to sit. And maybe sometimes on special occasions we are called to serve.

I'm not denying that these are different people with their different personalities and their different gifts. And some of us will see more of ourselves in one of them than in the other.

Some of us may feel we are very like Martha and very like Lazarus and very like Mary. But still I prefer to apply each of these in some way to ourselves and say that we should all be people who want to serve others in the name of people.

[9 : 05] We should all be people who want sometimes just to spend time sitting in the presence of people. And we should all be people who are sometimes open to the challenge to pull ourselves or something else up and do something special.

Well imagine the situation that's all of this happened. Imagine that you've all been at events like dinners or wedding receptions whatever it is where there's a lot of conversation and then maybe you've been at the kind of thing where suddenly there's an incident.

Imagine things like that where there's a buzz of conversation over a meal and then someone does something or says something and says something or someone says something that they just should not have said and have had to have to have to die down as people say what do you do in verse three it's a flask of pure nard you can see in the footnote the kind of quantity there was and this is something that was outrageously expensive ridiculously expensive it had to be imported from india and we don't know how she had it perhaps there was money in the family perhaps there had been money in the past in the family perhaps this was a kind of air that was waiting for a special occasion we don't know how she had it but we know that she had it and she poured out this very very she only needed a tiny quantity but she pours out this very strong sweet smelling perfume on

Jesus feet as he would find at the table Matthew and Mark have suggested it's the same story they focus on Jesus head being mounted here the focus is on feet being mounted but even in Matthew and Mark Jesus says she has anointed my body for burial she anointed him on his head and she anointed his body whatever part of it they focus on it was his body and then she lets her hair down and that would have been culturally soft she would have had her hair up in polite company and she takes off whatever is tying her hair she tosses her hair and she lets her down and then she wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair and there would have been a shocked embarrassed silence so unusual to see that she wiped off her hair down maybe maybe because she wanted this connection to

Jesus to think of it John also says that the house was filled with the fragrance it was a memorable evocative incident the fragrance would have lasted on Jesus body the fragrance would have lasted on his body over the coming day and it also lasts in John's memory I think John as he wrote this many years later could go smell the perfume filling the house smells are very evocative when you come home here on holiday you come off the ferry and be aware of the smell of peach milk and whenever on very very rare occasions I smelt peach smoking and I would think of holidays for years as a child and it was really early back so here is

[13 : 38] John a hint of this person many years later and have brought the whole thing all flooding back and of course as Matthew and Mark tell us Jesus himself says that this becomes part of the collective memory of the church because whatever the gospel is preached to the people the people will be spoken of and they will be very significant and be worth to think of it and what's the meaning of what he does I think simply the extravagance of love he loves Jesus that's all there is to it she loves Jesus so she thinks he's worth all of this this is the best I can do for him he's worth all of this and much much more she loves him because of what he has done for her in her life she loves him because of what he's done for

Lazarus the brother raised him from the dead she loves him because of what she knows he's willing to do for the whole world as he goes to the cross true love is prepared to be a love we know that in human relationships when somebody loves someone else they're prepared to do something over the top for that person not to hold back somebody falls in love and somebody says to the guy you're crazy that you're willing to do and he says she's worth it she's worth anything I'll do anything for her I'll die for her love wants to give the best you possibly can love is not embarrassed I remember a year ago I was in a restaurant stuck in a couple of friends and a couple of five were at a table for your restaurant and then over at the other side I saw a young couple having a year and I saw the fellows get up and they went down and they thought they thought they'd be something for they'd be something for they'd be one in and that's happened and got the girl been waiting later and later you can expect that moment there he got a box he got a box he got a ring he made a speech to her eventually he took a ring finger and he sat there and everybody was secretly very relieved that he said yes but he wasn't embarrassed

I don't think about anybody else but he got a back there he got down in one knee in a busy restaurant and proposed to people love and he wants to afford marriage and he didn't care that anybody sees or says that he is extravagant and not caring what anybody says he's extravagant because of who Jesus is and what Jesus is going to do and notice also that Jesus accepts it without question Jesus is very humble but Jesus also knows who he is the son of God and the savior of the world so he has this self consciousness about who he is and he accepts what is worship from this room he's divine and he accepts her worship and her extravagant love and her extravagance is a hope isn't it because of

God's extravagant love for the world John 3 16 in this very book for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son willing to give the best for anyone and everyone who believes in him and willing to give them eternal life forever and for heaven so the key question is do I love Jesus have you experienced the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ have you experienced God extravagant grace which says whoever you are whatever you've done I will forgive every one of your sins now and always and I will give you eternal life beginning year and lasting forever I will give it all to you because of Jesus and when you experience the extravagance of God's grace then maybe you're willing to do something extravagant to show your love to the

Jesus who has done so much for you so Mary announced it's all about the extravagance of her love secondly more quickly Judas objects the silence is broken verse 4 by Judas you notice everybody has gone quiet and then you hear a voice and it's the voice of Judas now it's clear in the surrounding context that Jesus has many enemies and things are coming to a head but the extraordinary thing is that there's an enemy among the inner group the twelve the disciples and this event is setting the stage for Judas' betrayal of Jesus everything's moving to the cross and here Judas focuses you notice on the issue of extravagance verses four and following verse five why wasn't the sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor he knows what this perfume is worth and he says you could have done something better with it you see he has no understanding of the love that motivated this gift it's the clearest indication of where

[20 : 00] Judas' heart really is he can't understand Mary's lavish love for Jesus he knows what the perfume is worth it was worth about a year's wages for a poor day labourer who would get a denarius a penny a day and he says he could have been sold to help the poor now John tells us in verse six here that Judas said this not because he wanted to help the poor not because he had a heart for the poor but because he was an embezzler very popular today to portray Judas as sort of fundamentally well intentioned every year I notice at the Edinburgh festival somewhere on the fringe there'll be a play maybe more than one where Judas is the hero and he's portrayed as a kind of freedom fighter who does this kind of thing to force the issue and there's all kinds of complex psychological and political motives they say for what

Judas did and they try to turn him into a good guy but here it's made clear that he's a thief and worse than a thief he's a traitor and here Judas shows that he knows the cost of things what they're worth in this world but notice he only knows what they're worth in this world alone he has no sense of true value true worth eternal value he just knows what things are worth here he knows what the perfume is worth but he doesn't appreciate what Jesus is worth it's very important to contrast Judas and Mary in this story Judas clearly is somebody who's asking what can I get for myself what can I get out of this and when he doesn't get it for himself he says oh let's give it to the poor but

Mary is saying what can I give to Jesus what can I give to him they're opposites aren't they Judas what can I get or what can I say that will make me look good I'll say something about the poor but Mary is saying what can I give to Jesus one is self centered one is Jesus centered the world finds it very hard to understand spending for Christ and being spent for Christ as anything but a waste when people give their money or their time or their talents to Jesus it's often seen as a waste I used to see this often in St Andrews young very able people from very well off backgrounds whose parents had invested a great deal in their education and hoped they do amazing things these young people would sometimes get converted and their parents were often very disappointed especially if they thought that these young people were going to waste their talents on seeking to help others and the worst of all would be if they wanted to give their time and talents to spreading the gospel and students would say to me

I'm a great disappointment to my parents because I've become a Christian and they think it's such a waste of my brain to believe all this stuff and I want to find out what Jesus wants me to do with my life and they're getting annoyed when I tell them this because they want me to do something with my life that will be worth all their investment in me and will make them really proud of me when they tell their friends what I'm doing with my life these students were often very upset having come back from home on a holiday that they were such a disappointment to their parents and their parents thought they were throwing away their minds and their talents and maybe one day their money on this Jesus what's even more amazing though is that sometimes the criticism comes not from the world but from the followers of Jesus himself if you look at the story later on in

Matthew 26 in verse 8 it's the disciples who are indignant at what Mary has done and they join in with isn't that an amazing thing they join in with Judas Judas starts the criticism but it looks as if the other disciples join in with Judas and they think this is a ridiculous thing that Mary has done and they join in the criticism I think it's a warning for myself and for you too maybe that we should not criticize Christians who are we might think over enthusiastic Christians who are passionate Christians who are zealous Christians who are sacrificial and generous Christians who witness very openly we shouldn't criticize that kind of enthusiasm and extravagance when it's motivated by love for the

[25 : 48] Lord we should celebrate the extravagance of a fellow Christian and perhaps be challenged by it as these people should have been challenged by what Mary was doing so Mary anoints Judas objects and thirdly Jesus defends Jesus defends verse 7 great words leave her alone that's what Jesus says Judas is criticizing the disciples are criticizing all around people are criticizing Mary the only person who's not criticizing is Jesus he says leave her alone he defends Mary and her actions it's not a wonderful thing she has Jesus on her side but a great thing to have Jesus on my side and he explains in verse 7 that she's intended this for the day of his burial now if it confuses you verse 7 has something that's very difficult to translate people aren't sure exactly what some of the words the way to translate them and

I'm not sure that ESV here in verse 7 has chosen the best way to express it I think in their footnote they've chosen the better way to express it which is leave her alone she intended to keep this for the day of my burial but she's done it now because maybe this is the only opportunity she'll have I think that's what Jesus is saying here she thought she was keeping this for the day of my burial but here it is she's anointing me now because she knows that my death and my burial is imminent here's the one notice in the story the irony here's the one who raises the dead we keep being told that he's raised Lazarus from the dead but the very one who raises the dead is soon going to be buried in a tomb and he knows it and then he adds in verse 8 that they always have the poor but won't always have him he's speaking there of the uniqueness of this moment now the reference to the poor here is often misunderstood

Jesus is not saying anything against helping the poor in fact he quotes a verse from scripture that commands us to help the poor Deuteronomy 15 and 11 here's the full verse for there will never cease to be poor in the land therefore I command you you shall open wide your hand to the needy so he quotes from a verse that says help the poor but he's saying in this particular moment he's saying I am worthy of this in the light of my burial I must take priority over anything else for Mary in these moments nothing else is more important than what I'm going to do in my death and burial Mary recognizes that and so she's done an appropriate thing for me here now

I think here that Jesus is defending a woman who's clearly more perceptive than the men I think Mary is a theologian and she's also portrayed as a model disciple note for one thing her insight we'll see in a minute that she she used to sit at Jesus feet and she's clearly learned a lot as a disciple she appears here to be the one with the clearest view of what's going to happen now earlier we've been told that Caiaphas says that one will die for the people but he didn't really know what he was saying so sometimes people say more than they realize but here Mary clearly according to Jesus knows what she's doing and why she's doing it she knows that

Jesus is on his way to die and she knows why he's going to die he's taught her about it and she suspects that she might never get an opportunity to anoint his body properly so she takes this opportunity this is an opportunity now and she takes it it's a sort of once in a lifetime moment and her focus is on his death because she knows that that is his focus he's taught her that and she's learned the lesson so she's far more perceptive than the men she's a better theologian than these men in this story Mary has tremendous insight but notice also her humility in contrast with the men you're meant to contrast Mary in this chapter with the disciples at the beginning of the next chapter because the next chapter begins with a story of

[31 : 32] Jesus washing the disciples feet they don't wash his feet but Mary here takes a servant's role and goes way beyond it and anoints Jesus feet I don't know if you ever contrasted these two stories before Mary anoints the feet of Jesus and then the disciples don't wash the feet of Jesus Mary is a much better disciple and a much more insightful disciple at the moment than these men are being and in relation to that repeated mention of feet don't know if you've ever noticed that we regularly hear of Mary being at the feet of Jesus in Luke 10 and 39 we're told that she sat at his feet listening to his teaching remember when

Martha is telling her you should be with me in the kitchen and Jesus says leave her where she is she's in the posture of a disciple with a rabbi listening to his teaching and then across the page here in John 11 and 32 she falls at Jesus feet after Lazarus has died and Jesus has come back and she falls in humble faith and she could have stopped this happening if you had been here and then when we meet Mary here she's at the feet of Jesus so these three occasions at least she's sitting at his feet listening to his teaching she falls at his feet saying you could have stopped my brother dying and then she anoints the feet of Jesus when we meet Mary she's at the feet of Jesus again and again and again it's a model to us where we all need to be our proper place at the feet of

Jesus listening to him worshipping him serving him like Mary at the feet of the Lord so there are two I better move to conclusion two voices here Judas and Jesus competing for our attention Mary doesn't say anything she does something but Judas speaks and Jesus speaks so two voices in the story as it's told by John who will we listen to a Christian wants to do something for Jesus perhaps something extravagant perhaps something that expresses a loving heart and a thankful heart something like Mary of Bethany something that has the fragrance of sacrifice and of worship the Judas voice says to the Christian don't be mad the voice of Jesus says go for it I love it or the same thing if you're not a

Christian a non Christian wants to give herself or himself to Jesus I mean to hand over something extravagant doesn't it to say here's my life here's all I have here's my immortal soul I want to give everything to you I want to hand over my life my whole self to you eternally I mean you can't give anything more than that and the Judas voice says no don't give your life to Jesus but the Jesus voice says don't listen to them the Judas voice will be joined by other voices with their spurious reasons saying don't give your life to Jesus but the Jesus voice says go for it and it says to these other people leave her alone leave him alone let him or her come to me and trust in me and follow me and there again is the challenge of the gospel today

Judas voices say don't give your life to Jesus the voice of Jesus says come to me which voice are you listening to I don't think I can put the question more biblically from this story today or more starkly which voice are you listening to Jesus that Judas voices in the world around you are saying don't trust in Jesus but Jesus is saying trust in me come to me which voice are you going to listen to today Jesus says listen to my voice and come to me and give yourself to me and spend for me and pour yourself out for me it will all be worth it because I am worth it that's what Jesus says and to finish on this note here is

[36 : 57] Mary saying that the lamb who's going to die at Passover is worth it and what does heaven say now and what will heaven say eternally revelation chapter five worthy is the lamb that's the great song of heaven for those who sang it on earth and who said and who lived Jesus is worthy heaven will sing it forever worthy is the lamb who was slain Mary saw it Mary had the heart of it and Mary responded to it openly and publicly and extravagantly and we are all called to the same song now and always to say worthy is the lamb to say in my heart and with my life Jesus you are worth it amen