

Dying with Jesus: Prepare to Die

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[0 : 00] Well, in your bulletin, you'll notice that the title of this sermon is Dying with Jesus, Prepare to Die. It does say John 12, verses 1 to 9. I am spanning what we read, which is verses 1 to 19.

So please do turn to your Bible, page 898. If I would give a sub to the subtitle of this, I would actually call it... Well, I would call it a different rule.

And in preparing to die, I figure that what we're doing is actually learning to live. And the standard of this rule in our life is the resurrection and life of Jesus Christ.

So in preparing to die, we really do learn to live. And that's what these 19 verses are about. They're about Jesus' resurrection and life. You'll notice from actually, as we read, from beginning to end, actually, or at the beginning and the end, verse 1 and verse 17, it's noted about Jesus' resurrection. And so there are two scenes here, both I know that are well known to you. The first one, the anointing at Bethany. There's a great conviction and a contrast that happens in that.

[1 : 17] Jesus is treated as a friend, but also something of an enemy. And then the second scene is the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And there's a great commotion and a kind of a coronation as well.

Jesus is represented as king, though I think he's somewhat misunderstood. And in the midst of this, it's easy to miss that Jesus is the resurrection of life, that John is still on that subject.

Hard to believe as that may be, given the resurrection of Lazarus, but some won't believe, and in fact, it is impossible to believe that, apart from grace, which gives us faith.

And so Jesus' resurrection of life that he offers, that he's proclaimed that he is, is unique. And John impresses this upon the reader in today's reading. And he does that by staying on the subject, by positive responses of friends who celebrate him, but by negative responses of religious leaders who want to kill him and now Lazarus.

Resurrection and life of Jesus transforms and transcends everything. It determines what we understand, how we live, who we serve, and what we give.

[2 : 32] And so I just want to point to two different kinds of rule of life for us. Rule number one is a new standard of life. And rule number two is a unique kind of king.

So let's look at the first one. Rule number one, a new kind of standard. Jesus' resurrection is the standard for life. If you don't have Jesus' life, you don't have life.

The occasion for the first scene is a dinner party. It is in honor of Jesus before the Passover. And Jesus withdrew from the crowds after the resurrection of Lazarus, and then he gathered with his friends and disciples back in Bethany.

And Jesus is the reason, the center. He is the subject for this celebration. Jesus shows us the greatness, the value, the rule, or the standard of life here.

His life stands actually between contrasts in this scene. His honor emerges from a conflict. The contrast and conflict is between a family in Bethany and Jesus' disciples, and more specifically, Judas.

[3 : 43] First then, this family in Bethany. As you know, it's Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. In the text, we read that 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. Well, the friend's behavior in these first three verses expose what they think of Jesus. Martha serves Jesus because she believes that Jesus is her Lord and Master.

That's a good thing. Lazarus reclines and enjoys Jesus because, of course, Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Mary lavishes her love on Jesus in the form of this anointment because she knows that Jesus is her Lord and Savior.

That's the first, the family in Bethany. Secondly, though, the disciples, and specifically including Jesus here, but not excluding the other 11, I think. Judas says, Why was this anointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?

Interesting, he knows the detail of its cost and what to do with it. The disciples' behavior expose what they think of Jesus. We already know that disciples believe that Jesus is an influential teacher, that he's the Christ, that he's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[5 : 09] Judas treats Jesus as a teacher and maybe a friend to use and we know to steal from. He's labeled as a thief here.

And so I wonder this, who are you most like? I must confess, I'm a little bit more like Judas. I think Mary's act, I think if I'm honest, is a little bit of a waste of money.

Now I'm not stealing from the treasury, hear me, okay? But we can all hide behind good causes, can't we? Well, Jesus' definition or value of a life emerges through this contrast.

It emerges through this conflict. And Jesus says, Leave her alone. He was probably maybe even more stern than that. And so he defends Mary.

He rebukes Judas. And he says this, So that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.

[6 : 09] He defends the poor as well. It's good. And he demonstrates his interest and his concern, his service for the poor too. But it's the phrase before that really captures my attention.

So that she may keep it for the day of my burial. Did you hear that? I think that's a little bit odd. Not, it's hers so she can do with it whatever she wants.

Or not, right question, but wrong motivation. But, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. What does that mean? Mary isn't keeping the perfume for the day of his burial.

Mary's spreading it and using it on the day to honor Jesus before he's even died. Let's just look at some facts for a minute. This is not the day of Jesus' burial.

Jews didn't anoint live bodies. Jews anointed corpses. Mary doesn't provide perfume at Jesus' burial after he's died.

[7 : 14] Nicodemus, in fact, is the one who provides the perfume, the anointment for the burial with Joseph of Arimathea after Jesus has died. And so question, was this a waste of perfume, money, and time?

It seems legitimate. What is actually going on here? And I think that Jesus, through Mary, is pointing to his death by naming the burial.

Jesus is also, though, pointing to his resurrection and his life. Because it seems to me that actually this perfume that's being used is somewhat superfluous.

The perfume is as useless for Jesus' burial as it is expensive because he's going to be raised from the dead. He's going to be alive again.

And it is expensive, but it is nowhere near. That is, the perfume is nowhere near as valuable as Jesus' life. But as valuable it is to Mary, she's showing, to some degree, just how valuable Jesus' life is to her and to everyone else.

[8 : 25] And so through Jesus' death and his resurrection, which is being previewed here again, we learn just the value, the rule, and the standard for all of life.

Jesus is more infinite, more eternal than anything or anyone else. Jesus is more precious than diamonds and gold and silver and perfume.

And so Mary, spend it or using this perfume on Jesus is saying that he is worth it. He is actually more than worth this perfume.

Jesus' life is the standard. So another question, what is the most valuable possession of yours? It is of no comparison to the life of Jesus, to the resurrection of our Lord.

Jesus is showing that his resurrection life is the standard for living. It's the standard for our life.

That's the first rule. Second rule, rule number two.

[9 : 29] There is a unique kind of king that's presented. We move on then to the next day after this gathering. And Jesus leaves one crowd and another one finds him. The crowd does two things.

They proclaim him Lord, Hosanna. And that crowd then acclaims him king. Blessed is the king of Israel. And it is a Jewish royal procession with palm branches.

The palms were to the Jews what maple leaves are to Canadians. It's a symbol of national identity. And Jesus affirms their actions with one of his own.

And knowingly, he fulfills scripture, prophecy in Zechariah 9, verse 9. Jesus, not the crowd then, found this young donkey which he then sits upon.

And Jesus had something of a different kind of a symbol of kingship. Not like Joseph Maccabeus or Solomon who ride on a horse.

[10:27] Jesus chooses a donkey. And he makes his own claim and establishes then his own order here. I can't help but think, in addition to saying that his reign would be a gentle one, he also has something else in mind like that he's full of mercy and compassionate.

Slow as a donkey to anger and steadfast in love. It's kind of curious though, don't you think? The crowd knows enough to shout Hosanna and blessed.

But his disciples, as John reports, didn't get Jesus' choice of a donkey. And maybe we don't either. John makes an important comment about Jesus' rule or order.

He says this, His disciples did not understand these things at first. But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered. Two things.

First about understanding. And then, secondly, about this order, this pattern of Jesus' rule. We can't understand Jesus' order and rule apart from his glory.

[11:36] I think that's what John is saying. Jesus' glory is related to, directly defined by, his death and resurrection. As he's lifted up on the cross and he's raised from the tomb.

We can't understand his kingdom. In fact, it's actually quite impossible. We can't have any peace or prosperity, goodness, fulfillment, justice, apart from Jesus' death and his resurrection.

That's his glory. And we can't build, bring, or buy our way into what it is that God wants for us. Think about it. Would the beauty to build what we want, would the brawn even to bring it, or would even the cost to buy it come at all close to or compare to the glory of Jesus Christ?

Not even close. The disciples didn't understand his ways. The world doesn't understand his ways. And they and we are as strange and surprising to us as riding on a donkey.

But Jesus' ways are revealed to us in his word. And when we accept the glory of his death and his resurrection, we can understand his rule.

[12:50] Literally, we stand under his rule. And that's what he has for us. It's the first thing about this new kind of kingship, this unique kind of kingship. The second thing, though, is that we are given a pattern of Jesus' rule.

And it comes to us in two parts. First, it's written. That's what John says. And then it's enacted. He says, But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

Written, that is, about him, an action that was done to him. This kingship and rule was the plan all along of God. It was a written plan.

And the Lord didn't make up this plan as he kind of went along. They weren't just ideas, but they were also deeds that were prepared in advance.

The Lord's sovereign rule is the order of the great I Am's ways that are given to us. And what the Lord promises by his word, he then delivers.

[13:56] He practices, as it were, what he proclaimed in advance. And so proclamations, decrees, warnings, truth, and his grace to us, that's what the subjects expect from their rulers.

And the rulers that we have don't deliver 100% on that. But our Lord never forgets. And he expects that we won't forget either, and that we will remember.

This is the pattern of Jesus' rule. His disciples didn't understand it at first, but then he was glorified. He died. He rose again. Then they remembered what he had said.

Not just a kind of a jogging of their memory, but remembering in a Hebrew way. And remembering to the Hebrews meant actually present. God present to them.

The reality of God with them. This is the unique kind of rule of this king. When Jesus was glorified, then they remembered. Jesus has been glorified, and we remember too.

[15:01] And our work is to believe on what it is that he's brought to bear in our lives. Well, this order and rule in our lives means that we, as Zechariah then prophesied, that we could now fear not or fear less.

And that means, I figure, the absence of fear or the opposite of fear, or the contrast of fear, is to have faith in Jesus. Fearing less actually means to have courage then.

So the great thing about this text today, that God is giving this, I think these two great new rules to us. The first rule is, is that of this incredible, this remarkable, this awesome person who comes into

our life, that we can expend our life to him, because he's established for us a new standard of life. That standard of life, doesn't only transform our devotion to him, like it did to Mary that day, and those that were there as well, but it also, it spills over, as it were, into this world in which we live, as Jesus establishes this new order, by his rule, which is the standard that's established, by his life, and his resurrection from the dead.

As he comes, presented himself as the king on a donkey, but his new order is full of gentleness, and goodness, and grace, and kindness, and transforms the way that we live our life in this world, and calls us to how the disciples then responded to him, as we can too now, to witness to him, and who he is, and the truth that he has to bring to bear in our life, not only privately, but publicly.

[16 : 40] I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.