Also See Lazarus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 March 2007

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0:01] Our Father, now as we turn to your word, we pray that you would take away the distractions in our hearts, that you would reveal to us again the glory and beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that you would draw from us faith in him, for we ask in his name. Amen.

Please sit down. If you would take your Bible and turn to John 12 on page 101. John chapter 12, which is just read for us, Sophie.
And as you do that, I'll just tell you one of the things that happened in the children's time up the front here, which you miss if you sit back of the third row.
Dan was in midstream and a little boy put up his hand and said, Excuse me, what are you talking about? I think that's a fantastic question, don't you?
I'm expecting in the middle of the sermon. Actually, I have had someone say that to me once in a sermon, except the sentence was also filled with expletives.
[1:11] Not at St. John's. St. John's is far too polite. Okay. What am I talking about? I'm talking about John 12. And you probably know that John's Gospel breaks into two halves.

The first half is all action. Jesus' miracles, his signs. Water into wine. Healing a man's son from a distance. Healing a man lame for 38 years.
Feeding 5,000. Healing a blind man. Raising the dead. Chapter 11. And then the second half from chapter 13, he goes away from the public and he gathers his disciples to himself in the upper room and he talks about his death.
And from 13 onward, it's all about his passion and his death. And chapter 12 is like the hinge between those two sections of the Gospel. And in chapter 12, Jesus says his last public words and does his last public actions and he explains why he's going to die.
We're going to look at chapter 12 over the next six weeks through Easter. And I want to give it to you, I want to commend it to you for your own meditations. You think about the death and resurrection of Jesus at this time.
[2:35] The heart of the chapter is this verse, verse 23. Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.
Now, just one thing about that that I want us to grasp. Glory, Jesus says, Now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. Glory is one of these words Christians use.
We use it for big things, things we can't really describe. What Jesus is saying here is that the glory of God cannot be separated from the death, his death, his violent, brutal execution on the cross.
And that is strange. Glory is not just majesty and bigness and power. Glory has to do with suffering, with sacrifice, with pain, and with giving.
[3:38] That is why Jesus says, Now has the hour come for the Son of Man to be glorified. See, the glory of God, at the heart of God, the glory of God has an eternal connection between suffering and love.

sacrifice and honour, expensive giving and love. So in chapter 12, verse 1, Jesus comes back to Bethany, to this very happy home of Mary and Lazarus and Martha.
Why are they so happy? Well, verse 1, there's Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead in the last chapter. Verse 9, there's Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead.
It's just a little throwaway line in the story. Twice we're told Lazarus is standing there, a very popular boy, Exhibit A, and everyone wants to get a piece of Lazarus.
You can see down in verse 10 and 11. I'm guessing there were movie offers if he was living today, interviews with Diane Sawyer. And I think the question, what would you want to ask Lazarus?

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[4:49] The question I'd want to ask him would be, what was it like going through death and coming back? I think he might have been a little disappointed, actually, coming back into this life. That's just my theory.

We're not told. And I think we're not told because that's not really the point of the passage. Here is the point. At the centre of this first episode in John 12, Mary anoints Jesus for his burial.
It's about Jesus' death. You see, so the story is framed with references to the fact that Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead.
You remember? He's the one who marched to the tomb and he said, come out Lazarus, even though he'd been dead four days. He turned to Mary and Martha and said, I am the resurrection and the life, which is not something you do unless you're able to raise the dead.
And I think the shocking thing that we hear in this first story is that Jesus, the resurrection and the life, the eternal word of God, he's going to die.
[5:54] It's absolutely impossible. Absolutely impossible. The eternal word who was made flesh at the beginning of the gospel, the source of life, the water of life, the bread of life, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth and the life, how can he die?

What would possess him to do such a thing? And the answer is in verse 1, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany. The Passover is the trigger for Jesus to go up to Jerusalem.
Look back in chapter 11, verse 47. The chief priests and Pharisees gathered the council and said, what are we to do with Jesus?
He performed way too many signs. If we let him go on this way, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and destroy our holy place and our nation. But one of them, Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year, and listen, this is how high priests are supposed to speak, you know nothing at all.
You do not understand it's expedient for you that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish. Verse 53. So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death.
[7:15] 54. So Jesus goes into hiding. Verse 55. The Passover of the Jews at hand and many went up from the country to Jerusalem to purify themselves.

And then chapter 12 opens with the Passover. Now the Passover is the messiest festival in the Jewish calendar. Thousands, literally thousands of sheep and oxen get slaughtered.
Historical records tell us that the streets run with blood because this is the great event. It's the great redemption from the Old Testament when God rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt and he sent the angel of death into Egypt and the angel of death passed over every house that was marked by the blood of a lamb which had been sacrificed.
Passover comes, Jesus says, now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. You see, if we'd read John's Gospel from the beginning in the first chapter John the Baptist says as Jesus comes to be baptized behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
Behold, here it is. here is the one to whom the whole of the Old Testament has been pointing. It's an irony, isn't it? The Jews are going up to Jerusalem to have their sins purified by ceremonies and in their midst is the one, the eternal one, the Lamb of God who's going to take away the sin of the world.
[8:48] The great rescue is about to happen. The other interesting thing and this is all introductory, the other interesting thing about this section is that in this first story Jesus is not the main actor.

You know, in verse 3 we meet Martha and she's serving or literally she's serving, serving, serving, serving, she's going on serving and then Mary takes this extravagant action and Jesus is passive.
It's one of the first times in the Gospel that Jesus is not the main actor and what Mary does is she takes a pound of extraordinarily expensive ointment, pure nard and pours it over Jesus, particularly his feet and then as a Jewish woman she undoes her hair which has been bound up and she wipes his feet with her hair to the shock of everyone present.
It's quite a shocking thing to do. I mean, it would be the same sort of thing if one of you did that today. And John is at pains to tell us how much this cost, pure nard, pound weight and he tells us that Judas very helpfully fills in the detail that this thing is worth a year's wages.
It is a deeply personal creative extravagance of Mary. She takes a life savings and pours it over Jesus. it's great humility and love.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[10:21] And John tells us this lovely little line at the end of verse 3, the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. You don't know that unless you're an eyewitness or a nose witness I should say.

While it shocks the disciples, Judas is offended. Verse 4, why on earth was this not sold and given to the poor? And I think it's clear from the way he says this so aggressively, he expected everyone in the room to agree with him.
It's a terrible waste. And I think Judas asks the most obvious question. Verse 7, Jesus said, let her alone. Now Jesus speaks.
Let her alone. Let her keep it or she has kept it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you but you do not always have me.
Here is something, it's quite socially awkward. I mean it's quite inappropriate what she's done in a way. Jesus takes it and brings it to point towards his death, his burial.
[11:30] I'm not sure Mary understood all of what was going on but by her extravagance she moves close to the heart of God and Jesus takes it and is honoured by it and said this is an incredibly precious thing that she is doing.

And incidentally, I don't know if you've ever had a debate on this but in verse 8 when Jesus says the poor you always have with you but me you don't Jesus is not saying don't worry about the poor better things to do with your money.
I've heard some people use the verse that way. I discovered this week he's actually quoting Deuteronomy 15 and in Deuteronomy 15 God is speaking to the people of Israel taking away their excuses for being greedy and saying you need to care for those among you who are poor.
Let me just quote to you one or two verses. He says give generously to the needy and do so without a grudging heart. Now that is an interesting thing to say.
Because of this the Lord your God will bless you all your work and everything you put your hand to.
Then he says there will always be poor in the land therefore I command you be open handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in the land.
[12:48] You see? Jesus is taking this quote and he's reminding them absolutely you've got an obligation to the poor but he's saying there's something more important here.

His death is more important than all the world's poor and that is shocking. It's particularly shocking because he quotes the text where God stands with the poor. It would have been a very good thing had Mary taken this ointment and sold it and given the proceeds away but Jesus says she's actually doing something better and the fragrance of what she does fills the house and continues to fill the house.
Now, question, what are we to do with this contrast between Mary and Judas? What do we do with it? What's behind it?
And I think we're meant to see here that this is a contrast of faith, of believing and unbelief. See in verse 11 if you look to the end of the story John tells us that everyone is going away and believing in Jesus.
That's the thing the authorities are most afraid of. And if you go to the end of the gospel we know that this is where the gospel has been going that John writes all these words so that we would believe in Jesus Christ and have life in his name.
[14:09] And the contrast between Mary and Judas is a contrast between belief and unbelief between faith and unfaith. And we Christians talk a lot about faith. We've used it in the service this morning.

You all stood and said I believe. But here is a concrete human example of what true faith looks like. And John beautifully brings this out by showing true faith and unfaith can be seen in three contrasts. So let me just this is what I'd like to spend our time on. The first contrast is the contrast of values. Real faith demonstrates itself in a contrast of values.
See, what Mary does, I've already said this, is socially inappropriate. But it's a perfect demonstration of real faith.
And John drives this home. In the original the word pure nard in verse 3 is literally faith nard. It's the same word as belief down in verse 11.
[15:12] In other words what Mary is doing comes out of her faith. faith. She values Jesus above everything else, above even her own financial security.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Whereas Judas is a man of unbelief. And what motivates Judas is money and greed. He is a man of the city. He values what the culture values.
And I don't know about you but I think money usually works its way to the top. I was on an excruciating long flight recently, 11 and a half hours and there were two young blokes behind me in the seats and they talked for the whole 11 and a half hours yes thank you about one thing about money.
It was just amazing to me. They talked about how they were going to make it what they were going to do with it how much they like it. It was remarkable. I took notes.
I should have taken notes. You see the absolute unquestioned assumption of their discussion is that money is the primary good.
[16:23] It's the way unbelief works. It looks at this world as the place of permanence and meaning and I think if you take Jesus out of the equation Judas' arguments make sense.

It's very straightforward what he says. You can hear what he says surely he says if we'd sold this it would benefit more people.
It's a waste really particularly if Jesus is about to die. How can you justify taking something that's worth a whole year's wages and wasting it on Jesus?
You could have set up some micro enterprise or a mini bank or a food bank or an orphanage. Judas would say devotion is all very well. I'm the first for devotion but this is an unqualified extravagance. It's socially awkward. It's even inappropriate. And Judas looks at Mary and what she does is utterly bewildering to him which is always the way unbelief looks at belief.
[17:29] If you are a believer you will always be bewildering to those who are unbelievers. And then in verse 6 John reaches out and flicks Judas mask off. You see verse 6 and we find out that his grubby grasping dried up deceptive little heart is because he's a thief.

He keeps the money bags for himself so he can help himself. He doesn't care about the poor. In the original when Judas says we could have sold this and given the money to the poor there's no the. we've given this to poor people. He's not thinking of anyone in particular. He's thinking of poor the sort of abstract concept of the poor folks out there.
It's a devastating picture of Judas. You see he has learned to disguise his greed as compassion. See he's learned to describe his graspy grubbing little materialistic heart in terms of social justice. it is because his eyes are closed to the glory of Jesus and he clings to his own self-indulgence and his own emptiness because of unbelief.
[18:36] That's the contrast here unbelief and belief different value system. The second contrast is a contrast of audience. Audience.

I think we get some idea of how appalling what Mary does is from the very next chapter in chapter 13 where Jesus washes the disciples feet and they are completely stupefied that anyone should do something so menial.
There's a tremendous self-forgetfulness in what Mary does. She doesn't stop and calculate what the public is going to do with what she does.
She's not doing this for the benefit of an audience except one alone, Jesus Christ and that's what faith does. she wipes his dirty feet with her hair.
It doesn't matter that it's socially awkward, what matters to her is she is personally involved with the Lord Jesus and her humility is genuine because it arises out of a devotion to Christ.
[19:40] She doesn't think about the financial cost and she doesn't think about how other people are going to look at her. And I think we'd have to say, wouldn't we, if we take away from this whole narrative the fact that Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life, if we take away from this that he is the word made flesh, we've got to agree that what Mary does is a complete waste, that Judas is right.

But if he has come from God and if he has come to bring us to God, brothers and sisters, there is no gift too great, there's no action that's too extravagant for him.
And what Mary does is beautiful and right. And this is the way of true faith. Believing in Jesus and loving Jesus above all things will make us do things that look rash and extravagant and wasteful to our culture.
Why on earth would you give 10% of your income to the church when you haven't even paid off your credit cards, let alone your mortgage? Why would you volunteer a week of your precious holiday?

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

to help in a mission or help with a children's camp? Why would you take 15 hours a week and prepare for a small group Bible study unless you saw Jesus Christ as the one who's ultimately important?
[21:02] You see, real faith will show itself in a way that's dangerously out of step with our culture, with what normal people think. Because it looks at Jesus and it sees in Jesus someone who's more important than the world's poor, more important than the world's rich, more important than anything, the one in whom is all we desire, all we desire.

So that's the second contrast. It's a contrast in valuers and it's a contrast in audience. And thirdly, real faith is also a contrast in deaths, death plural, deaths.
Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it.
She who loves her life loses it. She who hates her life, he who hates his life in this world, will keep it for eternal life. I don't know if you noticed this, there's a contrast of deaths.
There are little deaths and big deaths in this passage. I think that's why Lazarus is so heavily relied on in this first section. Lazarus' death was a little death.
[22:15] It was little because Jesus brought him back. But Jesus' death is the big death. Because he is the resurrection and the life you see, it is a big thing for him to go to death.

In surrendering to death, he will destroy death. And real believing, real faith in Jesus is a little death. death. It is dying to this world.
It is dying to my life. It is dying to everything that I hold precious. That is why in verse 11, when the Jews describe those who believe in Jesus, it says they're going away and believing in Jesus. They're going over. They're betraying us and believing in Jesus. It's fundamentally, believing in Jesus is fundamentally an act of betrayal. So that is, here is the great choice of life.
The choice is to betray Christ as Judas did or to betray my own life as Mary did. That's it. And believing in Jesus means putting an end to loving this life and it's a little death.
[23:27] And Mary's faith shows a reckless disregard for everything that was expected. And that's the little death. When I was first, when I was a young Christian, I used to think that God would require me someday to offer my body as a martyr and I would go nobly to the stake or whatever.

And I think, many of us think that, many of us think about the Christian life as though we're going to be called upon for a great sacrifice one day. The older I get, the more I think, actually, the Christian life is made up of a thousand little deaths daily.
And what this passage does in a lovely way is it connects our little death with his big death. It makes sense of our little deaths. It says that through his big death and our little deaths, we live and have eternal life.
In 1672, just before he was released from prison, John Bunyan, who wrote Pilgrim's Progress, and he'd been in prison for 12 years for preaching without a license, which is, let that be a warning to you, Dan.
Just before he was released, he was very conscious that as the pastor of a congregation, how he suffered was important. He wrote this. He quoted from 2 Corinthians 1, which says, We felt that we had received the sentence of death, but that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead.
[25:12] And then he wrote this. In this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass the sentence of death upon everything that can be properly called a thing of life.

Even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyment and all as dead to me and myself as dead to them. Second, he said, is to live upon God that is invisible.
That's it. That's real faith. It sees in Jesus or in God more than we deserve and all that we desire. And in his death, the great death, our salvation and his glory.
And true faith looks at that and says, what Christ has given us is everything. And what Christ deserves from us is everything. So let's kneel and pray. flowchrise.
He. Thank you.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host