

John 11:45-57

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Preacher: Rev. Ryan Spear

[0:00] Let's pray briefly before we sit. Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto you.!

It's incredibly beautiful because our passage today in John, which you just heard read, the idea of Christ as King looms large as the religious and the political elite reject Christ as their King and actively seek His death.

And as Mary anoints Jesus, evoking all sorts of imagery of kingly anointing. So on this Christ our King Sunday, we're going to look at the two gatherings in our passage, the end of chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12.

And in both of these gatherings, Jesus is at the center. In the first, He's the target of a hostile council. And in the second, He's the honorary guest at His dinner party.

And the key question for both of these gatherings is, what is Jesus worth? And what we'll see in each scene is the extravagant mission of Christ, and then the extravagant worth of Christ.

[1:40] So let's look at our first scene, the end of chapter 11, beginning in verse 45. This is our hostile council. And here we're going to encounter the cold calculations of Caiaphas and the extravagant mission of Christ.

So verse 45 tells us, Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what He did, believed in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

So what had Jesus done? Well, in the verses that happened just before this, He had raised Lazarus from the dead. A man who had been completely dead for four days.

Not just mostly dead, but totally and utterly dead. And He was raised by just three words. Lazarus, come out.

So of course, news travels fast. The council gathers and the first question they ask is, What are we to do? This is a rather bizarre question.

[2:49] Even after a man has been raised from the dead, it's not a question of who is this or how should we respond, but we've got to do something to stop this guy. They seem to have what's called confirmation bias.

Their minds are already made up. And not even raising someone from the dead seems to be able to change that. So rather than saying, Maybe I need to rethink my premises here.

They continue to persist in their disbelief. And at this point, it's no longer I'm standing in a neutral spot waiting to be convinced. It's an ongoing, active, willful disbelief.

So why? Why are their hearts this way? Well, our chapter gets to the heart of it in verse 48. It tells us four things here. First, they say, If He goes on like this, Everyone will believe in Him.

The Romans will come. They're going to take away our place. And they're going to take away our nation. Now, whether we understand this as pure jealousy of His popularity and influence, or reasonable fear at the loss of their temple and homeland, Either way, whatever this man Jesus is, and whatever He's doing, it's not worth the risk to them to lose everything.

[4 : 08] And now we get to Caiaphas' calculation. And the question, What is Jesus' worth? Comes sharply into focus. Now, when Caiaphas calculates that it's better for you that one man should die for the people, he means more than he says.

John tells us in verses 51 to 52 that in an ironic twist, Caiaphas prophesied the deeper meaning of Jesus' extravagant mission.

Indeed, Jesus' death would be for the nation, but also to gather into one the children of God scattered abroad. But it wasn't Rome they needed rescuing from.

It was rescue from sin and the power of death. But in the face of the supposed threat of losing it all, they miss all that they have to gain.

So what do we learn from this? What's our takeaway from the hostile counsel and the worth of Jesus in our first scene? I think we see that Jesus' rescue plan is far more extravagant than any rescue we might imagine we need.

[5 : 23] Only Jesus' life is worth it all. For us, for all people, He is the way, the truth, and the life. And His death would be His crowning glory.

One precious, extravagantly worthy life given for all people. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

And this invites us to ask for ourselves and for others that God would soften hearts that see Jesus as a threat. To rethink any premise that would dismiss Jesus and His ways.

And instead to grasp His worth and His extravagant mission to bring all people to Himself. So that's our first scene, the first question of the worth of Jesus.

We turn to a different kind of gathering now at the beginning of chapter 12. This time, a dinner party where Jesus is held in high honor. And here we're going to encounter the extravagant gift of Christ and the cynical calculation of Judas.

[6 : 35] And chapter 12 begins. Six days before the Passover, Jesus accepts this dinner party invitation. And this party is clearly in response to what Jesus had done in chapter 11.

We know this because Lazarus, Martha, and Mary are there. A life restored. Lazarus sitting among them, eating, laughing.

A relationship restored. Beyond all hope. Beyond all expectation. But remember, Jesus had given them something even greater than Lazarus.

Something even greater than being raised from the dead in that moment. Before He raised Lazarus from the dead, He said to all those listening, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. And now Jesus is here, sharing a meal with all of them.

[7 : 37] And Mary goes all in with an act of scandalizing extravagance. The details point to this being scandalous. Look at the quantity. It was nearly half a liter.

That's a lot. That's like Costco quantity, a lot of perfume. Second, the quality. It was pure. It was expensive. And finally, she used her hair to wipe it off.

Now commentators describe this as an act of devotion, or an act of intense gratitude, an act of humility. And yes, it was all of these things. But it spoke volumes more.

The extravagant act of love by Mary shows the extravagant worth of Jesus. This anointing is the act of worship. Worshiping Christ for who He is, and for His purpose for all people.

And the wiping with her hair, an act of intimate identification, was Jesus. The verse tells us, and the house was filled with the fragrance.

[8 : 46] And we all know the power of smell, and its ability to bring us back to places or memories. It's actually hardwired into the brain.

All other scents go through some sort of process of interpretation in our brain, but not smell. Smell goes directly to memory, directly to emotion.

This is why years or decades after an event, we might catch a whiff of something and be instantly transported there. Sometimes it's a smell of joy and wonder.

Sometimes it's a smell of sadness and regret. And now this house was filled with this smell. But where Mary saw worth, Judas saw waste.

John tells us Judas' concern wasn't really for the poor. He was concerned he wasn't going to get his cut. Leave her alone, Jesus says, as He puts her act of devotion, of worship, and its deeper purpose.

[9 : 53] His anointing for burial. And the poor, he tells Judas, you don't have to wait for grand gestures to serve the poor. And he closed with a sober warning to respond to Jesus' presence while they still could.

You do not always have me, he said. We don't have a lot of time to get into Judas. I just want to say something briefly I believe two things are equally true about Judas, so they are in tension.

Jesus knew Judas would betray Him. And yet, in His extravagant grace, He still gave Judas every chance He could.

I don't know how to resolve that, but I know that Jesus is good. I know that His plans and His purposes will always be carried out.

So what do we learn about Jesus' worth as we close from this scene? We learn that when Mary anointed Jesus, it evoked all manner of associations with kingship, with priesthood, with festivity, and with burial, and with mourning.

[11 : 06] We learn that only Jesus was worth this level of extravagance, because Jesus Himself is the extravagant gift. And to be identified with Jesus, to carry any kind of scent associated with Him, would be the most extravagant thing any of us could hope for.

And how do we respond to this? I think perhaps one way to respond is in grateful prayer. Lord, thank You.

Thank You for being my extravagant gift. By Your life, giving me an abundant life. As King, You went to the cross in triumphant glory. Help us to see You as Mary did that day.

And with the fragrance of the aroma of Your worth come upon me, and fill the spaces and places You put me. And as we close on this Christ the King Sunday, I'll leave you with this poem by Malcolm Geit that helps to place us in the room that day.

It's titled The Anointing at Bethany. Come close with Mary, Martha, Lazarus. So close the candles stir with their soft breath and kindle heart and soul to flame within us, lit by these mysteries of life and death.

[12 : 37] For beauty now begins the final movement in quietness and intimate encounter. The alabaster jar of precious ointment is broken open for the world's true lover.

The whole room richly fills to feast the senses with all the yearning such a fragrance brings. The heart is mourning, but the spirit dances.

Here at the very center of all things, here at the meeting place of love and loss, we all foresee and see beyond the cross.

I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.