John 11:45-57

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[0:00] Let us pray. Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

! Oh Lord, our maker and our redeemer. Amen. Well, a special welcome to those of you who are visiting with us today, especially if you have come to support one of those who have just been baptized.
Welcome to the family, little ones. Great to have you with us. Wasn't that wonderful? Amen. You have joined us for a very special day, not only because people have been baptized, but we are coming to the last of week of about an 11 or 12 week series of stories about people who have encountered Jesus and the impact that Jesus had on their lives and how it is that they tried to make sense of this person that they encounter.
And this week, we're looking at a story that takes all that has happened in all the other stories and boils it down to a single question. Is he worthy? Is he worthy of all our praise and honor and glory? Is he worthy of this?
And so would you please join me in John chapter 12 if you closed your Bible, but I hope it's still open. John chapter 13, page 898. This is a story about a woman who knew the true value of Jesus.
[1:36] Little confession. I love shows where people bring their random stuff to an expert to get evaluated. You know what I'm talking about? So there's an American version of this. It's very unsophisticated.

It's called Pawn Stars. And they have people bring guitars and they bring baseballs and they bring, you know, just like random playing cards and stuff to them.
And people evaluate, is this worth two cents or is this worth $200 or $2,000, you name it. A more sophisticated version is BBC's Antique Roadshow UK. You know what I'm talking about?
So I saw one of these the other day where a woman brought a bunch of jewelry and she's like, you know, my great grandmother gave me this jewelry. It's just been sitting in the closet. And how much is it worth? And the person was kind of looking at it.
I was like, oh, it's worth this. And then he looked at her hand and said, can you give me that ring that you're wearing? And she's like, oh, sure. Gives her the ring. And he's like, where'd you buy this? Oh, I bought it at some random place for 10 pounds.
[2:36] Starts looking at it and goes, oh, this is a really special ring. And this comes from like Queen Mary's cousin actually had a ring just like this. Let me verify what's going on.

He takes it away and he comes back and he says, do you know how much this ring is worth? She's like, I don't know. I got it for 10 pounds. Like $100,000. You know, something crazy. And the shock on people's face when they discover that they have or they've been given something that's more worth than they ever could have imagined.
And sometimes we don't know the true value of something until someone who really knows tells us. Do you know the true worth of Jesus is the question this morning. Mary on that day really knew what Jesus was worth.
It was six days before his death. Six days before the Passover. That great celebration of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. That great celebration that the blood of a sacrificial lamb could protect his people from the angel and curse of death.
Jesus had come to Bethany to reconnect with his friend Lazarus. Lazarus was the one, remember, just prior in the chapter that Jesus had raised from the dead.
[3:47] So if Jesus comes back to Bethany, you can imagine he's a pretty popular person in Bethany at this point. And so they put on a dinner. They put on a feast to welcome their wonderful

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guest.

To honor him for what he did for their town in restoring Lazarus to them. And Martha, as always, was the host of this feast. She was setting the table. She was serving the food.
She was making sure everybody was comfortable. And Lazarus was very comfortable. He was reclining at the table. He was enjoying the feast with his friend Jesus. So thankful to be in his presence again.
Sharing a joke. Laughing a bit. Seeing the face of his Savior. And then there's Mary. Well, Mary always does the unexpected and unconventional thing, you know.
She's a little bit of a live wire at social gatherings. And she has a knack for embarrassing her sister with blatant disregard for social convention. It's a bit like Elizabeth Bennett in Jane Austen's novel Pride and Prejudice.
[4:47] And this time it was the smell. The smell that Mary unleashed in the room that evening. As Martha and Lazarus and everybody there could remember unmistakably what that night was like.

In current trauma research has shown that smell is actually one of the strongest sensations that we have as human beings. And it leaves one of the longest lasting impressions on our memory.
Smell can connect us to the past. A past experience or event. In a way that even taste or touch a sight cannot. So it's no mistake that John describes the smell of the perfume as filling the air.
It was otherworldly. It overpowered the smell of bread and lamb and lentils that night. It was overpowering with its beauty. It was like walking through a garden of roses or a field of lilies.
Or sitting under a wisteria vine. Or next to a jasmine plant as it's in full bloom on a hot summer day.
The otherworldly smell caught everyone's attention.
[5:51] It was as if the whole house and the whole dinner came to a sudden halt. A pregnant silence and all eyes were fixed on Mary. There she was. Kneeling at the feet of Jesus.

A woman daring to touch the feet of her teacher. Pouring pure nard onto his feet. Each drop would have been worth a full day's wages.
And yet she holds back no single drop. And as if that wasn't enough. She's unraveling her hair. Taking her hair out from underneath her head covering.
Something that you would have never done except in the presence of your husband if you're a married woman. And she is using her own hair rather than a towel to wipe the feet of Jesus that she has anointed.
I mean the smell and the sight would have sent shock waves through everybody's nervous system that evening. Mary's love for Jesus was over the top.
[6:48] And I mean like a really good kind of over the top. It was over the top extravagant. Like the amount and the cost and the quality of the perfume. It was over the top intimate to be using her hair rather than a towel.

It was over the top beautiful. The aroma filled the whole house. Mary knew what Jesus was worth that night. And she was going to spare no expense to let him know.
Mary knew that you cannot follow Jesus too closely. Mary knew that you cannot praise him too loudly. Mary knew that you cannot love Jesus too much.
And so the question I want to ask you this morning is do you agree with Mary? Is he worthy? Is he worthy of your devotion? Your delight and your praise and your tears and your paycheck and your love regardless of what it costs and regardless of what others might think of you.
Is he worthy? Or was Mary not thinking straight that day? Was she well intentioned but a tad bit extreme. We don't need to go that far.
[8:01] Did she have a good heart but she wasn't very pragmatic? She could do with a little more reason in her life. It's one of the reasons why I empathize with the other characters in the story because in some ways I on most days I feel a lot more like them.

While Mary was on her knees Judas was thinking about money. Caiaphas was thinking about politics. And the priests and Pharisees were thinking about work. Money, politics, work.
All the stuff that we who live in the real world. Tend to value most. Let's take a look at Judas first. Judas. For Judas money is more important it seems.
At first glance it seems Judas cares about the poor. That's his main concern we thought. Surely he's picked this up from Jesus. Verse 5. Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?

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A denarius was a day's wages for your local field worker. So 300 would have been a full day, a full year's worth of work. Now Judas often gets a bad reputation doesn't he?
[9:10] But let's be honest. When I'm reading this I'm thinking what's the deal with Jesus' comments about the poor? Like is he minimizing their plight?

Is he putting himself before their needs? Because I kind of wonder didn't Judas get something right here even though he had so selfish motives? Wouldn't it have been better if he had sold the money and given it to the poor?
I mean wasn't it Jesus himself who said the spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim good news to the poor? And wasn't it Jesus himself who said whatever you do unto the least of these my brothers and sisters you do it unto me?
So setting aside the question of Judas' motives for the moment and John tells us that Judas does not have pure motives. He's more interested in personal gain than social justice.
Yet what are we to make of Judas' question about the poor? And what are we to make of Jesus' response about it? Verse 8. For the poor you always have with you but you do not always have me.
[10:13] And so there's something significant about the presence of Jesus in this moment that Jesus wants to draw their attention to. Not to minimize the significance of the poor for all time but to highlight the significance of Jesus right here and now.

Now on the one hand it seems that Judas' question assumes a false dichotomy between personal devotion and social duty. Between piety and justice.
Like we've got to choose one to be more important than the other. And this is something that you simply can't not find in the teachings of Jesus. Throughout the teachings of Jesus real Christian discipleship is full devotion to Jesus that leads to genuine care for your neighbor.
So throughout the gospels we cannot live this false dichotomy. And yet on the other hand I believe in these words we are to hear a subtle warning. If it is true that the self-righteous piety can sometimes snuff out care for the poor.
Like in other words I read my Bible today but I walk by the homeless man who asked me for help. It is also true and it must be admitted that social activism. Even when it meets the real needs of real people sometimes can mask a heart that knows nothing of the true value of Jesus.
[11:38] In other words I fed the homeless man today but I did not open my lips to pray or praise Jesus. So Judas' question, he questions Mary's extravagant devotion to Jesus.

And yet only days later he would sell Jesus for just 30 pieces of silver. He did not know the true worth of the man he betrayed. Let's take a look at Caiaphas next.
Caiaphas isn't so interested in money. He's much more interested in the nation that he serves. Politics are more important to him than Jesus. Now he was high priest this year.
And high priest served for a full year. Unless they were kicked out. Which often happened. And high priest wasn't just a religious position.
High priest was also a position of political power in that day. He had a key role in helping kind of oversee and organize the Sanhedrin. Which was the council of elders that ran Jerusalem.
[12:46] Rome gave the council of elders kind of delegated authority. So that they could have delegated autonomy and rule themselves. And so when this council of members is gathered together.

They're in a fearful frenzy. Because the popularity of Jesus they fear will get the attention of the Romans. And the Romans will come in and say you're not very good at ruling yourselves.
We're going to come in and take your power away from you. And we're going to rule instead. And so Caiaphas in this situation becomes the calm voice of political pragmatism. He says I know how to solve this situation.
Verse 49. You know nothing at all. You don't know what you're talking about. He says nor do you understand that here's the solution. It is better for you that one man should die for the nation.
Not that the whole nation should perish. Translation Jesus is expendable. The death of one man is a small price to pay for the survival of a whole nation.
[13:44] It's a simple math equation. It's ethical pragmatism at its best. And it makes Judas look like Mother Teresa. For too many people when Jesus seems to stand in the way of the nation that they love.

Or the nation they are seeking to build and protect. Then Jesus must go so the nation can thrive. And so religion serves politics.

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Rather than politics, religion. Such is the way of Caiaphas. And then there are the chief priests and the Pharisees. Oh, the chief priests and the Pharisees.
Aren't they lovely? For them power and privilege and prestige is more important than Jesus. And it's easy for us just to think, oh yeah, I'm not in that camp.
But oh my goodness, every one of us is in that camp. They don't want to lose their jobs and all the perks that come with their positions. And the way they explain it shows that they're motivated less by even political pragmatism and the concerns of the nation than they are just by personal fear of what they could possibly lose.
[14:54] Look at verses 47 and 48. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone's going to believe in him.

And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. There's a sense of personal investment and personal loss that they fear.
For Judas, money was more important than Jesus. For Caiaphas, it was the hopes of the nation that were more important than Jesus. And for the priests and the Pharisees, it was their jobs and what they would lose that was more important than following Jesus.
It was only Mary on that day that sees the true value of the one who stands in front of her. As I said earlier, this is a story about a woman who knew the true worth of Jesus.
And yet the story is also realistic. Jesus lives in a world where others do not see what she sees. And we live in a world where others do not see what we see.
[16:04] And so I want to end by asking the question, What does this story reveal about Jesus' worth to us? What is it that John really wants us to know about the value of Jesus that will help us remain fully devoted to Jesus?

Regardless of the cost and regardless of what others might think about him. And regardless of how others might value other things over him. What is it about Jesus that we need to know?
Two things I think our passage reveals. Number one is Jesus' worth is hard for people to see. And number two, Jesus' worth is seen most clearly in his death.
First, it's hard for people to see. I think this passage shows us there is a stubbornness and there's a blindness in the human heart to the real worth of Jesus. And every person is born blind to the worth of Jesus until the miracle of the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and opens our eyes to see the beauty of Jesus.
It takes a miracle of grace for the truth and the beauty of Jesus to be perceived and to be received. Because the true worth of Jesus is not something that we can calculate by our best reasoning efforts.
[17:17] It's not something we can intuit just from our experiences in life. It's not something we can gain by practices of self-reflection and daily meditation. The true worth of Jesus is something you can only see if God reveals it to you.

If God reveals it to you and he opens your eyes to see it. And the wonderful good news of our passage is that God has revealed it to you. But it's in the most unlikely and most of places and the most unlikely of ways.
It's that Jesus' true worth is revealed to us in his costly death. This is the great paradox that's at the heart of this passage is that Jesus' worth is seen most clearly in his death.
Do you remember how our passage begins in verses 45 to 47? Some people see what Jesus did and they believe in him. And other people hear about what Jesus did and they want to kill him.
And what is the thing that Jesus did in this instance? Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave. In other words, the plot to put Jesus to death is sparked by the fact that Jesus raised somebody out of death.
[18:29] And the person that they want to put to death is the one who has just proven that he has power over death. And so right at the beginning of our passage is a little detail that brings us straight to the beauty of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Is that Jesus intentionally exchanges places with Lazarus. He takes Lazarus out of the grave and then he goes on his way to the grave. It's the substitution of grace.
It's the gift of one life for another. It's the gift that a friend lays down his life for a friend. And if we go on a little further, we realize it's not just one friend laying down his life for another friend.

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It's one person laying down his life for the whole nation and the whole world. It's just so magnificent. As he comes to Caiaphas and Caiaphas, this calm, cool, collected voice of political pragmatism preaches the gospel.
He says, it is better that one man die than that the whole nation should perish. It's about Jesus coming to give his life away for the sins of the whole entire world.
[19:40] And the last time that we heard that language of perish was Jesus himself in John chapter 3, that famous verse that I learned when I was four years old. And every one of you should know it, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

In other words, Jesus will perish so that we do not have to. He will be the sacrificial lamb so that we can live forever with him.
And not only will he be the sacrificial lamb for the nation of Israel, but it says he will gather together the children of God who are spread across the whole entire world.
In other words, Jesus is not just a sacrificial lamb. He is a good shepherd who goes out into all the world sharing the good news of his finished work on the cross and drawing them into his family so that they too can know the worth, the surpassing worth of knowing him.
And as if that wasn't enough, John gives us more. It's all in the details, friends. You know those little verses between what Caiaphas says and then what happens in the room that we just glide over?
[21:02] Well, there's two little details there that are significant. Jesus retreats. The second that the council decides they're going to kill him, Jesus retreats.

Jesus, meaning that no human court could possibly force Jesus to the cross. He retreats and he will reemerge when it's his time to go there. Meaning he goes to the cross in his own way, on his own timing, by his own will.
He is a willing sacrificial lamb. And the other little detail is that Jesus doesn't go to Jerusalem to purify himself before Passover. Did you notice that?
So it's talking about all the Jews go up before Passover to Jerusalem to purify themselves so they're ready to celebrate the festival. Because they realize they're impure to approach the presence of God and celebrate his goodness and his grace without being purified.
And they're looking around wondering where in the world is Jesus? It seems that Jesus doesn't think he needs to be purified. Jesus is already pure. He does not come into Jerusalem for this Passover to lay down his life for himself.
[22:11] He's pure. He is spotless. He is holy. He is sinless. No guilt. No shame. Nothing done wrong. And so we see this beautiful thing that Jesus comes into the world to exchange his life for his friends.

Jesus comes into the world to perish so that the whole world, if they believe in him, doesn't have to perish. And Jesus comes in not as somebody who's been forced by any authorities. He comes in who comes in on his own power and will to do this.
And he comes in not because he needs some sort of grace and forgiveness and purification, but because he is the pure and spotless lamb who will take away the sins of the world. And this is the true value of Jesus that we see shining through his death, which is on the horizon.
And my question to you is, can you see it? Mary was the only one that saw it. Can you see it? Do you see his worth in your life?
Do you know and believe that he is worthy of your deepest devotion and your greatest delight? No matter how deep the suffering. No matter how confusing the sorrow.
[23:26] No matter how big the questions. No matter how searching the doubt. No matter whether you have two days to go or 20 years to go.

Is he worthy of this? Will you join Mary on your knees? Would you break open that jar of your adoration? Would you anoint him with your praises?
Brothers and sisters, this is the privilege of our lives. It's to know Jesus. And to say he is worthy. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

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