

Treasuring Jesus

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[0:00] Morning, church. I'm a bit croaky. Oh, thanks, Sean. Have you ever really been into something, a hobby, a sport, an instrument, and you've learned a new trick or a new skill, and you wanted to show everybody? Growing up, there were popular fads, and one of them was yo-yos.

And on the inside of Milo tins was instructions on how to do certain tricks. Milo or Ivo team, one of those ones. And so everyone could sort of, I'll see if we can get this happening.

Everyone could walk the dog. I set this up so it would be spinning well. It's not spinning well at all, because you're supposed to get the string, so it should just stay there.

It's not staying. I'm not going to be able to do it. What a shame. Oh, there we go. Everyone can walk the dog, and everyone can rock the cradle, all that sort of stuff, right? And then, so I worked on it, and I found this one. It was the star. And so, it's just not doing what I want it to do. It's one of those things I've practiced beforehand, and it was working a treat. There we go. That's the star. Anyway, so some people might go, whoa, like I just heard.

And some people might go, meh. Okay, big deal. That's a little disappointing. Some people can be impressed, and some people, not so much. That's a little bit of what's happening here at the end of John 11. Jesus has not just performed a mere trick, but an incredible miracle, raising Lazarus from the dead. And if you look at verse 45, many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But then, on the other hand, some people are not so impressed. Verse 46, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. And the council is definitely not super impressed. And it's these different responses that have brought us to the middle of the Gospel of John and created this incredible tension. The rest of John's Gospel rolls out the last week of Jesus' life and a bit post his resurrection. Leading up to this moment, Jesus has performed seven amazing miracles, signs to get people's attention and to reveal his messianic identity.

[2:39] The signs get more and more amazing, and the opposition intensifies while belief increases. As we move through the end of chapter 11 into chapter 12, we see the mood changing from celebration to great danger. It's getting tense, and we're going to notice three things, and you can follow along in the app if you've got the app open. The problem of fake religion. There are a number of people who are fakes. They have the outward appearance of being religious, but it's just a facade. It's all show with no substance. One of the things I want us to think about as a church is how we avoid fake religion. And that will be our second point, by treasuring Jesus.

And finally, this will make sense if we don't lose sight of God's great plan. So let's start with fake religion or fake piety. And we see this sort of bookended at the start of the passage, John 11, 47 to 53, 57, and then John 12, verses 10 and 11. It's bookended.

But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. They're dobbling on Jesus. Look what Jesus did. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, what are we to do? For this man performs many signs. We get several glimpses here of the religious leaders, the Pharisees and the high priests, who together make the Jewish council of their day, the Sanhedrin. And not surprisingly, after raising Lazarus to life, belief in Jesus is increasing. He was dead four days. Now he's alive. If you want to crush people's belief in Jesus, how do you strategize when your enemy starts raising the dead? They're frustrated. He's a formidable opponent. And death doesn't even seem to be able to stop him. Verse 48, if we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation. They're sounding desperate. So they get together and brainstorm, how are we going to solve a problem like Jesus? Anyway, I shouldn't sing. They plot and the high priest of all people comes up with this brilliant idea. Let's kill Jesus. Now, if you read the gospels, we're used to these guys being the baddies. But let's think about this for a moment.

The high priest is supposedly the most religiously significant person in his day for the Jews. He's important because he oversees the temple. He intercedes with God on behalf of the people. [5 : 25] He makes sacrifices for his own purity and the nations. And he is to look out for God's people as a shepherd tends its flock. He is a figure of holiness, God's holiness. He is to obey God's word and all God's commands, which is summarized into, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbors as yourself. The fact we have a high priest here proposing premeditative murder is crazy. He is going against every plan God has set forward for the priesthood. I've read the Old Testament enough and I've not seen any word from God. The high priest can bump off anyone he doesn't like. There's nothing like that. And they don't just want to kill Jesus.

In John 12, 10 to 11, the chief priests make plans to kill Lazarus as well because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. And we never do find out if they did make a successful hit on Lazarus. But they're two-faced. Their religion is a facade. It's fake. If you're a Batman fan, that's two-faced. They're upfoot on a high priest. Anyway, it's fatal to be on the wrong side of these religious leaders. Because it's so tense and dangerous, Jesus avoids Jerusalem for the time being. It's not yet his time. The hour has not yet come. So why are the religious leaders behaving this way? What's at stake? Verse 48, they're afraid their place and their nation will be taken away by the Romans. They're afraid that somehow, intentionally or accidentally, Jesus is going to spark a Jewish rebellion that will aggravate the Romans, who will then destroy the city, the temple, and scatter the nation. Now, this is not an unrealistic fear, considering the revolutionary Jews at this time, who held that the Abrahamic covenant said that this is our land, this land belongs to us. And incidentally, their fears did come to fruition when Jerusalem was sacked about 40 years after Jesus by the Romans in 70 AD, where the Jews were dispersed and the temple was destroyed, and they didn't get their land back till 1948. And even today, they're fighting over the land. But the place mentioned here is the temple, the religious centre. So in their perceived concern for religious stability, they convey the appearance of good motives. But as Jesus has pointed out in other parts of the gospel, that was their problem. They're all about keeping up appearances. In fact, as we read down to the bottom of chapter 12, verses 43 and 44, 42 and 43, it says, some actually believed in Jesus, on what he'd been doing, the signs he'd done. But they wouldn't acknowledge this publicly, for fear of being kicked out of the synagogue, and also because they desired praise from humans, rather than praise from God. The Pharisees really just liked the respect they received in the marketplace. They liked showy prayers. They wanted people to think they were super religious.

They liked to be noticed, to feel important. As long as Jesus was around questioning their brand of religion, their standing in the community, undermining their control, position, and power, calling out their inconsistencies, exposing hypocrisy, the religious leaders would continue to feel threatened, jealous, self-conscious, indignant, and angered. As we move into chapter 12, we get another point of religious fakery that's also rather dangerous, and that's Judas. Mary has anointed Jesus' feet with expensive nard, an imported perfume, and a daily wage was one denarii, and given that there was no work on the Sabbath, this lavish gift of 300 denarii is the equivalent of about a whole year's salary, gross wage. So you'd be saving for a while to purchase this perfume. Judas' response, verse 5, chapter 12. Whoa, whoa, whoa, hang on, wait a minute. The ointment could be sold and given to the poor.

And we get this, don't we? When we lavish ourselves with material things, surely there's sometimes an inner voice, or often, you'd hope, saying, well, maybe I could have put this money to a better cause, or to someone more needy. But maybe I can just spoil myself a bit. I deserve it. But anyway, Judas certainly appears to be saying that. But John gives us a little more detail than the other Gospels. Judas said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the money bag, he used to help himself with what was put into it.

We don't know why Judas loves money, but we do know that he oversees the money bag, and he's stealing. So if he can persuade Mary to sell the ointment, he can then watch over it and help himself to it. Judas is a thief, and he's a liar who pretends to care about the poor, if only he can get his hands on a little more money. Judas uses religion and piety to hide what he really cares about, money. We're told here he will betray Jesus, and as we know, he sells Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver. Money severs Judas' relationship with Jesus. And you wonder when Judas in this moment says, oh, we can give it to the poor, do you think he knows his spiritual state, what's in his heart?

What makes this worse is that Judas has seen Jesus denounce the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Judas knows that religious fakeness is not a virtue. He knows this as an insider.

[11:23] He's had the best internship that anyone could have. He could ask for his work with Jesus as one of his disciples, but it's his fake piety that's going to kill Jesus. Fake piety.

I want us to think about this, and it's a little bit heavy, to think about being religiously fake, especially in the church. We need God to, we need to ask God to protect us, because it's seriously dangerous, and here's why. Fake piety and fake religion can mask what's in our hearts. We often know what the right thing to say is, especially if we've grown up in a religious family.

It's much easier to say the religious thing than to actually do it, or even desire to do it. So we can fool ourselves and others, and we can think we're going okay, and certainly everyone around us can think we've got it together. But fake piety kills churches, and living in a double life kills souls. It kills us. We've heard of churches that are all about money, pastors who use their position to gain influence, and misuse that power. We hear of churches where people are fake, where they talk one way with each other, but they bite each other behind their backs. No one wants that, and no one wants to be part of that kind of church. When you see it or experience it, it makes you wonder about the truthfulness of Christianity, because you see the followers do the complete opposite of everything they say they believe in. What are the things that we really want when we talk about caring for the poor, when we talk about how much we read our Bible, or the ministry we're involved with, whatever the religious thing that we're doing? How much has genuine motives? Jesus said this, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Are the motivations of our heart in the right place? Do we really love Jesus? Do we really desire praise from God, or praise from other people?

Do we really listen to God's Word and read it? Do we like praying? Do we care for the poor? What are the things that are actually in our hearts? We need as a church to come clean with each other. We know that we're not perfect. That's why we all need Jesus. But we need to help each other, not be religious fake, confess sins, and be free from our sins. So how do we fight fake religion?

[13:55] This is the second point, by treasuring Jesus. We can see that in Mary, anointing Jesus' feet. Paul says that a woman's hair is her glory in 1 Corinthians 11, and there were cultural taboos around how women did their hair. Mary lets her hair down and wipes Jesus' feet. It's a lowly servant, task. But Mary loves Jesus. So it's not a matter of dignity. She forgets herself. She washes his feet with her hair, lavishing him with her love and attention. She's not self-conscious about what others think. She has complete disregard for other people's opinions. She is singularly focused on treasuring Jesus. If you contrast Jesus with the religious leaders and Judas, you can see why Mary loves Jesus so much. Back in John 10, Jesus says, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I come that they may have life and have it to the full. Judas is a thief, and the Pharisees and priests are killers. They're destroyers. But Jesus has come when we have life and life to the full. And Mary knows this firsthand. They're feasting because Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead. He's come out of the grave, and they're celebrating life.

You can imagine if someone in your midst can raise the dead, and that person is just brought back to life, one of your closest family members, you'd be incredibly grateful. And Mary and Martha know Jesus is the good shepherd who has come that they may have life and life to the full.

This anointing is Mary's expression of her love for Jesus. And Jesus tells us in the prologue of the gospel that, sorry, John tells us at the start of John's gospel that Jesus is full of grace and truth. He's not fake. We can trust the things that come out of his mouth are real. Mary loves Jesus, and that's something we want for ourselves. We want that humility and self-forgetfulness that Mary has. We want the love of Jesus and his truthfulness reflected in our lives. We don't want to be like the liars and the fakers. We want to be open and honest like Jesus, full of truth and grace.

[16:25] Something striking here is taking place. Mary washing Jesus' feet with her hair is actually Mary looking like Jesus, because we know later that Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

Mary's response to treasuring Jesus is because she knows the love that Jesus gives. Treasuring Jesus is one way that we fight religious fakeness. As we know Jesus more, we know his truthfulness. We know his grace. We know his life-giving power. We can be captivated by Jesus and desire to be made more like him each day. There's another way to resist this trap that the religious leaders had fallen into. Let's not lose sight of God's grand plan. While the situation for Jesus is dangerous here, God is at work behind the scenes. Jesus rebukes Judas and tells Mary to keep the perfume for his burial, indicating what will take place shortly.

It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial, Jesus said. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me. And God even works through the prophecy of Caiaphas at the end of chapter 11.

Being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Truer words could not be spoken. The Passover is coming up, and this is a time when God's people make atonement for their sins through the high priest's sacrifice of the perfect lamb. It's ironic that Caiaphas will offer the blood of Christ as he suggests killing Jesus, the lamb of God, who will make atonement for the sins of not just God's people, but the sins of the world.

[18:18] Isn't it better that one man dies? Absolutely, yes. God has this grand plan all along, and Jesus alludes to that fulfillment earlier in John 10.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

I know my own, and my own know me. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

The shepherds in Jeremiah 23 destroy and scatter the sheep. Judas is a thief. The Pharisees and the priests are destroyers.

In Deuteronomy 30, God promised that all those who have been scattered will be gathered back together, gathered into one as children of God. So let's put an end to fake religion. We need to be authentic.

[19:20] Our private lives and our public lives need to match up. J.C. Ryle said this, A Christian is a walking sermon. They preach far more than a minister does, for they preach all week long.

How do we do this? Match our faith with our actions. We need the good shepherd to change our hearts. We need to treasure Jesus. Treasuring Jesus means we're keen to cultivate our faith, and not only see our own faith grow, but encourage and disciple others in their Christian walk.

Christianity is a relationship with God through Jesus. So let's treasure Jesus together for the joy of all people. This happens as we meet regularly. I remember hearing Philip Jensen at a conference some years ago, and he once spoke of someone who came up from his congregation and said, I've bought a boat.

And his response was, why? He went on to explain how the boat would take up his time on weekends.

And he said, he went on further. He said, people who are committed members of their church, and they would say, yeah, I'm committed to St. Paul's, or I'm committed to, it was Matthias at the time, I'm committed to our church.

[20:30] But it doesn't mean they're there every week. When they have an investment property getaway home, or a boat, or they work, or go on holidays, which is fair enough, or their kids have sporting commitments, they're probably at church 75% of the time.

This is what Philip was saying. He then said, if you're at church 75% of the time, and the other person's at church 75% of the time, you actually don't overlap, because you don't sink at all.

So you don't see, so at best you could see each other, I can't remember if he said 30% of the time or 60% of the time, but it's a lot lower. We don't actually see each other all the time. So his question was, how can we encourage one another when we don't see each other regularly?

If you know it's important to meet together, and you can't make Sunday services regularly, apparently Thursday night's the sweet spot. Most people have nothing on Thursday nights. We're starting up Thursday night church. Make that your regular church service.

7 p.m., May 2nd. We don't just treasure Jesus corporately together. We need to do this individually. Spending time daily in God's word, four or more times a week.

[21:35] And if you're in a relationship with someone, is that too much to ask? Like, I'm not trying to put guilt on here at all. Like, just how are we going in our walk? I had someone once, and what about prayer?

I had someone say, you know, I'm too busy to pray, and then someone said, I'm too busy to not pray. Life is so hectic. I need God in my life. Maybe your next step is to be disciplined with word one-to-one, or join a community group, get involved with the heartbeat of our church, a safe place where we can drop our guard, be genuine and authentic, and spur one another on as the day of the Lord approaches.

Again, this isn't to guilt anyone. Let's just examine our own hearts. Above all things, and I mean above all things, do we treasure Jesus? Do we love God with every part of our being and seek to love others like Jesus?

Don't lose sight of God's grand plan. Jesus is coming back soon. As he gathers his church worldwide and he gathers us, no more fake religion. Get on board God's plan of a living relationship with Jesus.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. If we want genuine Christianity and genuine unity, we must treasure Jesus. And see, that's part of God's work.

[22 : 54] Jesus, the good shepherd, will make us one. And our living hope is that one day soon, Jesus will gather all people together in the new creation. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we just give thanks for Mary's just total disregard for what others thought. She was singularly focused on Jesus. I pray that we can have that attitude too.

Focus on Jesus. Focus on what is to come. And focus on matching our outward expression of faith with an inner change and our public life and our private life matching up.

Lord, we pray we can live for you this day and always. Amen.