

# Vibrant & Active Faith

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[ 0 : 01 ] Let us turn again to Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 12, and we're going to look at a very well-known part at the beginning of the chapter where Mary announced Jesus at Bethany.

I'm sure you've heard many a sermon from this particular part of God's Word. But it's always good for us to be reminded because that's part of what teaching is all about, is reinforcing and reminding ourselves even of things that we already know.

And the wonderful thing about God's Word is that while it is an old book, it is ever new because God's Spirit applies the Word afresh to us.

And as we say, this is a part of God's Word that we're all very familiar with. Six days after the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

So they gave him a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table. 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.

[ 1 : 22 ] Now, Jesus is on his way to die. And Jesus has told his disciples what is going to happen. And his disciples hadn't grasped.

They weren't able to take it on board. They weren't able to understand exactly what Jesus was saying. Now, we've mentioned this before, but the most discerning follower, I think, that Jesus had certainly recorded for us.

The most discerning follower that Jesus had was not a man, but a woman. John, the great disciple, what we would term the disciple of love, didn't understand or grasp even what Mary understood. Because Mary, it is very obvious here in what she does, she does in light of Christ's death. The disciples hadn't grasped it.

Even Peter. Peter, when Jesus spoke about his death, that Peter said to Jesus, put these things away from you. Don't be thinking like that.

[ 2 : 33 ] But here is Mary, and Mary has understood in a way and in a manner that even these very close disciples, they hadn't grasped.

In fact, it would almost indicate to us that when John stooped into the tomb and he saw the empty tomb, it tells us he believed.

It's like at that particular moment, all Christ's teaching and all that he had said, it's like it all came together. And he grasped it. He understood.

Now, here is Mary, and as we said here, she was a great woman, one of the great people in the Bible.

A heart that oozed love, a heart that was filled, full of faith, a heart filled with devotion to the Lord. And it's very interesting that when we come across Mary in the Bible, so often she is at the feet of Jesus.

[ 3 : 33 ] It actually mentions that, that she was at the feet of Jesus. In the previous chapter, remember how, no, sorry, in chapter earlier on, not the previous chapter.

We'll look at that, just mention that just in a moment. But you remember when, back when Martha is busy, Jesus again is in that house, and Martha is so busy serving.

And of course, remember how she complains about Mary, because what was Mary doing? Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus. That is just an expression for us, that it is a place where she just sat to learn, to listen to Jesus.

That's the idea. We use it, in fact, the Bible speaks about it. Even Paul, who sat at the feet of Gamaliel. That is, in other words, that she sat in the place where she would be taught by Jesus.

That was Mary's great joy in the world. She said, I want to go to be with Jesus. I want to hear what Jesus has to say. This is what life is about. This was her main priority.

[ 4 : 39 ] As she goes and she sits at the feet of Jesus. And you remember how Martha was so annoyed that there was Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. And Martha was running about, and she was doing this, and she was doing that.

And she was busy preparing the meal, and trying to sort and tidy the house. And it was just this flurry of activity until she could take it no longer. And she cried out to the Lord, and she said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me alone to serve?

And remember what Jesus said, Martha, Martha, you are cumbered, or you are so busy about so many things. But Mary has chosen this good part, or this good portion, which shall not be taken from her.

There is a great lesson to us there. We can be too busy as well. And I think that one of the great priorities in life, or one of the things that we have to stop and think about in this world that we're living in that is herring.

And there's always such a ferry of activity, and we're running this way and running that way. Is we need to take time to stop. To stop and to think.

[ 5 : 56 ] To stop and read God's word, and think about God's word. You know, if you go into a room today, and you see someone just sitting, looking.

You'd say to yourself, what's up with that person? You see, we've lost the ability to stop, to reflect, to meditate, to stop, to think, to take time.

It's pressure, pressure. We've got to be doing. We've got to be at this. We've got to be at that.

We've got to be looking at this, or talking about that. We have to take time to stop. That's what Mary learned.

And that's why Mary grew, and grew, and grew as a disciple of Jesus. Because the more time you spend with Jesus, the more you will come to know of Jesus, and the more like him you will become. So we need to take time to stop. So we need to take time to stop. And to think. And to reflect. And to meditate. And to pray. Satan doesn't want us to do that.

[ 7 : 00 ] And we live in this day that's putting so many pressures on us. And we will begin to struggle spiritually. If you're struggling spiritually here today. If you want somebody in here, and you're saying to yourself, you know, I just am not growing as a Christian.

Let me ask yourself. Do you actually take time out every day to read God's word? Not just to skim through it. To read it.

To reflect on it. To prayerfully meditate upon it. Even for a wee while. Because if you don't, you're not going to develop and grow.

And if you're here saying, you know, I feel so dead, and so flat, and so empty, and so... And at the same time that you're not taking time to seek to feed and nourish yourself on God's word.

Then, it's inevitable, but that's who you'll be. And so it's important to make time. Make sure that every day that you set aside a little time.

[ 8 : 05 ] In order that you will feed upon God's word. And again in John chapter 11, we find Mary at the feet of Jesus. When Lazarus dies, and she comes and she throws herself at Jesus' feet.

And she's saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother had not died. She believed that if Christ had been present, that her brother Lazarus would have still been alive.

But the thing is that Mary knew where to take herself. She took herself to Jesus. Threw herself upon Jesus. My dear friend, if you're burdened, whatever it is, it might not necessarily be bereavement, but it might be.

Whatever it is that may be troubling you. Whatever anxieties, whatever pressures, whatever things may be in the past in your life. Things that have scarred your present.

Whatever it is, take yourself and your troubles to the Lord. And then burden yourself, casting yourself at his feet. That's the example that Mary has given us. And by doing that, she found strength and relief from the Lord.

[ 9 : 10 ] So here we are again, and we find that here is Mary. And again, she comes in a different way. And she comes to the feet of Jesus Christ.

Now, we find that Jesus has come to this home again in Bethany. The home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And it was a home that he loved. Because he loved these people.

He loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And this was a home where Jesus could relax. It was a home amongst friends. It is a home where he could go away from the pressures and the demands that were always being placed upon him.

And I'm sure we all appreciate just in this life. Homes where we feel at home. Where we have friends that we can go to and be with and relax.

These things are so precious in this life. And it was the same for Jesus. He knew what it was. To have a place or places where he could go and he could feel at home.

[10:13] And this was certainly one of these places. And as has been highlighted, it has been suggested by so many people.

And you'll find that commentator suggests this very thing. It's something we're all again familiar with. We're not hearing anything new today. But when Jesus ascended.

Remember, not his resurrection ascension. But when he ascended back to be with his father. In full view of his disciples. When he led them out, remember.

And then he lifted up his hands in benediction blessing. And he rose from them. That it wasn't. Some people would think, well, why not rise from beside the temple?

Why not go to Bethlehem, the place of his birth? Or what about going to Nazareth, the place he was brought up in? Or what about going to Capernaum, the center where he engaged in his ministry?

[11:12] That was kind of the center where he would go out here and there. Why not from Jerusalem? But it was from Bethany. That's where he ascended. This little village which lay close to Jerusalem.

That Jesus went to Bethany. And it was from Bethany that he ascended in full view back to heaven. And many people suggest that it was as a token of the esteem that the Lord had for Mary and for that home in Bethany.

That it was from Bethany that he rose from this world in full view to go back into heaven. But again, that doesn't tell us that that is why.

But many people believe or think that that is why. But anyway, we find that this meal has been prepared. And Martha's again. She's serving. But there's no word of complaint now.

And we find that Mary comes in with this very, very precious ointment. We're told when we read about it in Mark's account that it was in an alabaster box.

[12:21] This nard which came from a herb, an aromatic herb, we believe, from northern India. And this was extremely precious.

We're told that it was later on when there was a complaint made by Judas that that could have been sold for 300 denarii. Now, a denarius was equivalent to a penny.

A penny a day which was a laborer's wage. So you can see that this perfume cost a year's wages. So you see it's something of incredible worth.

You think of a laborer's wage and put that every single month of that year, that all that money is put together to buy this one ointment.

Now, I don't know how Mary got it. Maybe it was a home that they were maybe, I don't know, maybe they were reasonably well to do. Maybe she had inherited it.

[13:21] Maybe she had saved up or had been given money from somebody else. But however, she had this. Now, again, sometimes girls would try and save up a little or try and save up so that they would get even just a little of this ointment, maybe for the day of their wedding.

Some people would have some set aside just a little for their burial when their body would be embalmed with this. But whatever it was, obviously, a fairly large box of ointment, whether it was an actual oil or whether it was an ointment that Mary had.

This was the most precious possession, earthly possession, that Mary had. And she took it. And she broke it.

And she poured it out upon Jesus. Now, I wonder if we had been in that situation and were saying to ourselves, you know, I really got to do something for Jesus.

My heart is so full of love to and for Jesus. I must do something. And you go and you get this box of this ointment, which is so precious. And you see it yourself.

[14:32] Putting it into today's time. Here we have something. And this costs thousands and thousands and thousands of pounds. Am I going to take it? And am I going to break it and pour it over Jesus?

And you can imagine almost looking in and saying, oh, no, that's too costly. I can't really do that. And putting it aside and maybe getting something inferior or something of less worth or value. But Mary's heart was so full of love that, you see, love doesn't count the cost. Mary wasn't seeing in pounds. Mary wasn't seeing in sterling or in denarii.

She wasn't looking at it in earthly figures and costs. Mary only had this heart of love. What is the most precious thing? That I can do for Jesus and give to Jesus.

What is it that I can do? And it was this taking of this ointment. But you see, there was more than that. There was great faith in Mary's heart.

[ 15 : 32 ] Because Mary was seeing who Jesus is and what Jesus was about. And there was faith in what Mary was doing. Because Mary did then what other women wanted to do later on.

You remember that after Jesus died and his body was taken from the cross and put in the tomb, that we read that there were some women who came early in the morning to go with spices to the tomb.

To anoint the body of Jesus. They were too late. Jesus wasn't there. He had risen. So Mary's faith was seeing beyond.

Mary's faith was vibrant. It was active. She could understand the mission of Jesus, what it was all about. And so, while Jesus is alive, and Jesus is here with her, she does and pours herself out upon Jesus in light of his death.

And in light of what he is to do. And that's how love works. Love doesn't sit down and work out the cost. Love pours itself out.

[ 16 : 46 ] And you know, in a sense, what Mary was doing was mirroring in a tiny way what the Lord Jesus Christ himself was going to do.

Mary took what was most precious to her. But Jesus, remember what God the Father did. God the Father took the one who was most precious to him, his son.

And he sent him into this world. To be broken open. And to be poured out. And that's what Jesus did on the cross in Calvary.

That's where Jesus was just going. And his love was so great that he wasn't holding anything back. And I believe that as Jesus saw what Mary was doing, that Jesus' heart would be moved.

And he was saying, this woman really understands what I'm about. This woman really understands what I'm doing. And Jesus so appreciated. Because he knew that just in a few days, he was going to have himself broken open and poured out.

[ 17 : 57 ] And my dear friends, that's what, God willing, we will be remembering next Lord's Day. Is Jesus pouring himself out for us. That is his love.

You see, if there wasn't love in the heart of Jesus, he would have held back. But he didn't. He gave himself completely. He handed himself over.

And he submitted to the most awful assault upon a human being that could possibly be given. It was, as we know, crucifixion was the most barbaric way of death.

It was devised. We remember this. It was devised to make death as painful and as lingering as possible. So that a person suffered the intensity of agony for as long as possible before they died.

That's why crucifixion was devised. And that's why the Romans who didn't devise it, but who had embraced it, only kept it for criminals and for slaves and such like.

[ 19 : 05 ] Not for themselves. And so this is a death that Jesus was to die. But we know that it wasn't just simply the physical and the emotional and the mental agonies that he had to endure, but the awful spiritual agonies where God the Father poured his wrath upon his Son.

Because Jesus was there in the place of sinners. God was pouring. God was, as it were, pouring hell. What constitutes hell?

Upon his Son. The forsakenness. The abandonment. The wrath. The curse. The judgment. Where all that God is in his light and love and peace, all was removed.

And all that God is in his wrath and in his justice and in his judgment was poured upon Christ. My dear friends, that one sacrifice for sin is what the gospel is all about.

And that's why we need God's Spirit to teach us. Enable us to understand it passionately. That's what I want. That's what you must want as well.

[ 20 : 21 ] That I would see passionately Jesus there in my place. Lord, open my eyes that I might see how personal his sacrifice is.

That Jesus was there for me. That's what we want to see. And if you've never seen that, ask the Holy Spirit that he would open your heart and mind to see it with spiritual eyes. To embrace Christ. And even if you're a follower of Jesus for many years, and I've kind of lost the passion, lost the sight, the sight of faith, ask him today, Lord, rekindle that in my heart. Give me to see again what Jesus did for me. And I believe it's one of the great concerns with so many of God's people is how they've lost this. Or they just don't have. But let me say this to you. You know today, if you're here today as a believer, and it's what you want. Do you know that's a good sign? [ 21 : 30 ] That's called thirsting. Where you're thirsting after the Lord. Thirsting to see. Thirsting to know. Thirsting to have.

Thirsting to be more part of Jesus. Then that, my dear friends, is a good way to be. It's an encouragement if that's how you feel. And so, Jesus is the one who gave himself all for us. And it tells us about Mary's action. That Mary then took this 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. But Judas, one of the disciples, he was the one who complained about it. Two things there, very briefly. You know, Mary's action couldn't be hidden. Supposing everybody in that room was blind. Supposing everybody in that room was blind.

[ 22 : 35 ] Everybody in that room would have known that something had taken place. they would have known that there was some action taking place involving a powerful perfume.

Because the room was filled with the fragrance. And you know, there are some Christians and there's almost an atmosphere about them, a Christ-like atmosphere. Because they live so close to Jesus that something of Jesus is running going through their lives. You're with them and you say, you know, there's something special about that person. And it is because there's that closeness to Jesus that there's almost a Christ-like atmosphere about them. That's how it was with Mary. But then again, her actions, we see, were criticized. And sometimes people, people whose hearts are away from the Lord, will not understand sometimes the extravagance of love. [ 23 : 40 ] Because love is extravagant. As we said, love doesn't sit down and measure out the cost. If it did, it couldn't work. Love gives.

That's what love is. And often there will be criticism. There will be those who criticize. Sometimes you will find it supposing somebody in its most basic form. And I've heard that sort of thing. Somebody's working in a lucrative job, a job, a really well-paid job. And somebody is sort of climbing the ladder or somebody's doing really well. And they give it up to go into the ministry or as a missionary. And people will say, what a waste. What on earth are they giving up that? You see, that's exactly the spirit of Judas. Judas, who is looking at somebody who is giving to the Lord and serving the Lord and they're condemning it because the way they see it is as a waste. [ 24 : 45 ] An absolute waste. But it was no waste with Jesus and it's never a waste in giving of her shells to the Lord. And we see just how much Jesus appreciated what Mary did.

and Mary, as we say, grabbed the opportunity that was set before her because Mary never again had an opportunity like that.

My dear friends, in light of the Lord's Supper, God willing, next Lord's Day, we have another opportunity of sitting at the table that Jesus has prepared for us.

Have you openly confessed? You see, Mary openly confessed her love for Jesus that day in that house in a very public way.

Have you openly confessed and professed your faith and your love? And let us remember that faith works by love. It can't separate whether it is faith or it is love.

[ 25 : 51 ] Have you confessed and professed that faith and that love by taking your place at the table that Jesus has set? And if you have never even come yet to know this Jesus, who I believe today, if you're in here without Christ, I believe that there's an interest in your heart about Christ.

That there's something in your heart saying, you know, it might be at a different level, there might be some people in here today, and they're really interested. There might be some people and Jesus is saying to them as he said to somebody in the Bible, you're not far from the kingdom.

There might be others and they're not very interested at all, but there is still sufficient interest to bring them here. My dear friend, you look to this Jesus who is passing by and is offering himself, offering his work, and you ask, Lord, give me the faith, give me just to see sufficient to be able to take you, Lord, as my Lord and Savior, so that my life will become yours.

Take me over my fears, because, you know, an awful lot of people have fears. We're always a wee bit afraid of the unknown, and there's this idea that when you become a Christian, you're stepping into unknown territory, and you feel more comfortable where you're at, because you say, well, I know I'm in the wrong place, but at least I know where I am, and I'm comfortable with that, even although there are times I'm not comfortable, because I know where I should be, but I'm a wee bit scared of the unknown.

Ask the Lord to take you over that, to take you through that fear, and you will discover that not only does the fear go, but peace comes in, and you'll say to yourself then afterwards, what on earth was I afraid about?

[ 27 : 52 ] Because the Lord will deal with you in such a way that you will say, this is the way, this is what I needed. Come thou with us, as the person said in the Bible, and we will do thee good.

Let us pray. Oh, Lord, oh, God, we pray that we might be inspired by those who have gone before us, that we may take heart and see that although life can be filled with its difficulties and problems and criticisms, yet that ultimately it is who we are and what we are before the Lord that matters.

And we pray that we may put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ this day, that we may seek to follow him and to serve him, and that this will be our hearts delight and joy.

Bless us, we pray, and bless all our homes, our families and our loved ones. Take us home in safety and forgive us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.