

Worth and Worship

John 12:1-11

We are right now in the middle of our Gospel of John series. And as we've heard again and again, John's purpose for this gospel is to demonstrate the divinity of Jesus – show that He is the Son of God.

That's best illustrated through our series verse:

John 20:31

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Two weeks ago, Alyse preached an amazing sermon about the story of Lazarus. He was a man who died and who Jesus supernaturally raised from the dead.

Today we are going to re-visit Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha. And we are going to read about a gift of great worth and value.

And I want to explore this concept of worth and what makes something worth it.

And let's talk about that phrase, because we use it pretty much all the time.

I mean anytime you're thinking over a financial decision or some sort of experience you want to have, you ask yourself is it worth it? Because I'm about to put my time, money and effort into something, so I want to know if it's worth it.

We all attribute different value to different things.

We make so many decisions throughout the day weighing the value of this or that, and trying to figure out what something is worth to us.

What am I willing to put my time, my energy, my focus and my finances into?

What is worthy of that?

And the deeper and farther we go into worth, the closer we get

to the realm of worship.

Worship is assigning supreme and ultimate worth to something. The English word “worship” literally translates to “worth – ship”.

You always worship what you value the most.

Today’s passage is going to center around worship.

Everyone at this upcoming dinner we’re going to read about knows who Jesus is. They know He claims to be the Son of God. They know He can perform supernatural miracles. They know His teachings.

But though they all follow him, they do not all attribute the same amount of worth to Him.

As we read, I want you to consider who is the recipient of each person’s worship in this text. And I hope that we can also examine for ourselves who or what is the recipient of my worship.

Where do I place ultimate worth?

John 12:1-11

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then Mary took about a pint^[a] of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages. ^[b]” ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you,^[c] but you will not always have me.”

“Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. “So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, “for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.”

When I look over the entirety of this, what really stands out to me is that John is highlighting two individuals in contrast to each other: Mary and Judas.

They are what looks like polar opposites.

Mary doesn’t speak in this passage, Judas objects.

Mary humbles herself, bowing down and wiping Jesus’s feet with her hair.

Judas has an illusion of humility.

Mary is extravagant in her giving. Judas is a thief.

But what I want to propose about these two contrasting individuals is that they have one similarity in common: they are both worshipping something.

Everyone worships something, and even if you don’t say what it is, your choices will say it for you.

Most of us here probably already know about Judas Iscariot.

He is one of the most infamous figures in the Bible. He’s the person who ultimately betrays Jesus and hands him over to the priests who have him killed.

The Bible doesn’t tell us a lot about Judas and why he did that. In fact, Judas talks very little throughout the entire Bible, but passages like this give us a clue on why he did what he did.

Firstly, Judas is a thief. And he’s a liar to boot, he doesn’t actually care about the poor.

What’s worse is that Judas is the treasurer for the whole group.

Jesus and his disciples travel together to different towns, preaching and healing people, and visiting people, and people would donate money to them because they wanted to support this ministry.

Maybe they were someone who had heard the words of Jesus or who had been healed by him and their life was changed, and

they gave up of what they could so the disciples could eat, travel and continue their ministry.

And Judas would personally help himself to that money.

And it's pretty clear that in the beginning the disciples had no idea about this, they learned it later, but Jesus knows all things.

John 2 says that he knows what's in each person.

But even though he knew he would betray him, Jesus still accepted Judas as a disciple.

Judas traveled with Jesus, he learned from him, he saw Jesus perform miracles, he heard Jesus's claims.

He got what so many of us have wanted – to see firsthand God in the flesh.

You would think that would be the ultimate goal of his life as a disciple, and as a Jewish person who has been waiting for the savior.

But this passage tells us that there was something he saw as far more worthy in his life: and that was money.

His response to Mary's worship was to say why are you wasting that money? It could have gone to me.

1. False worship uses Jesus.

If Mary valued Jesus enough to give him something costly, then Judas valued Jesus's ministry for the costly things it could give him.

Judas was walking with Jesus so he could line his pockets.

Consider this a subpoint: **Jesus is not a means to an end.**

If following Jesus is a means to get something else, then what we really worship is that something else.

If following Jesus is a means to success, then success is being worshipped.

If following Jesus is a means to power, then power is what's being worshipped.

We all need to examine our hearts and motives at some point to see who or what you're really worshipping. What are you pursuing? What will you go above and beyond for?

There are many good things to pursue, but only one of them is

the greatest and takes precedence over the rest.

When you follow Jesus for the sake of getting another thing, not only do you deceive yourselves, but you're operating under a false guarantee.

The only definite thing Christianity is a means to is Christ. Christ is the reward.

We're not promised all the earthly things we want, but God has given us the eternal salvation that we need.

For Judas, Jesus was a means to money. Judas was willing to compromise for the sake of money.

Whatever you worship, you will sacrifice for.

Right after this passage, the other gospels say that Judas will leave the house and find the chief priests and ask them how much they'll give him in exchange for Jesus.

Judas sacrificed integrity, friendship, morals and faith on the altar of money. That's what he worshipped.

And ultimately, he would sacrifice Jesus for the sake of that money.

You know that quote show me your friends, and I'll show you your future?

I feel like it can be said show me your sacrifices, and I'll show you your god.

Judas's sacrifice showed what he worshipped.

And Mary's sacrifice demonstrated who she worshipped.

We just said a false worship uses Jesus – it uses him as a means to get to another thing.

Here is the inverse:

2. True worship treasures Jesus.

Verse 3:

“Then Mary took about a pint^[a] of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

Let's talk about this perfume.

By Judas's calculations, a pint of pure nard, also known as

spikenard, is worth a year's wages.

So let's say you make 50K, 60K, 70K, 100K in a year, that would be the value of this perfume. Whatever you make a year, that was the equivalent of this gift given all at once in one moment.

This is an extravagant gift.

Spikenard grows on the Himalayan Mountains, so it had to be imported to Bethany, where Mary lived, which only contributed to the price.

We are not sure how she has it, but it's very likely that this was a family heirloom or her inheritance, or even part of her dowry.

This perfume literally represented Mary's future.

No one asked her to bring it. No one asked her to pour it on Jesus. She chose to do so out of gratitude and love for him. It was her highest form of worship to give him her everything.

Mary clearly believed that Jesus was more valuable than the most expensive thing she owned.

She willingly sacrificed it, pouring it over his feet, wiping his feet with her hair.

Can you actually imagine that today? Someone bowing down before you and wiping your feet with their hair.

How much humility that would take?

An act like that would be so shocking and counter-cultural now, but it also was so back then. In these times, women didn't wear their hair out and loose, unless they wanted to be mistaken as immoral.

They wore their hair bound.

But Mary desired to worship Jesus so much so that she was willing to give up her money, her pride, and her culture's expectations just to be at His feet.

True worship treasures Jesus.

I want to also point out one more thing, before we move on to the rest of the passage.

Mary was not the only family member who worshipped Jesus.

I want us to look briefly at Martha and Lazarus.

John says that Martha served, while Lazarus reclined at the table with Jesus.

I want us to see that serving, and spending time with Jesus are forms of worship just as much as sacrificially giving to Him is.

Martha is known as a server in other gospels. In fact, she kind of gets a bad rap for it. Last time she served, she was distracted, worried, and upset, and her serving was a burden to others rather than a benefit.

We need people with servant hearts, we need doers, everything you see here could not be done without people willing to serve.

But Martha shows us that serving needs to be executed in a way that does not harm or impede others, and here in John 12, we see Martha serve without complaint or worry.

That was her worship.

Serving others is a form of worship unto God. And maybe some of you here God is calling you to serve someone.

And now, Lazarus. Lazarus sat with Jesus.

That's easy to overlook. You don't really hear any great stories about people who just sat around.

But sitting with and spending time with Jesus is an important form of worship.

You're not coming in with an agenda, not coming in hoping to get something out of it for someone else, not coming in to get a check list, but with a heart that says here I am, Lord. Let me be in your presence.

James 4:8 says "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

Time and time again, Jesus calls us to be in His presence. He draws us in.

And maybe some of you here need to spend time sitting in the presence of Jesus. Not just during worship here at church, but at home. In your day to day, sit at the table with Jesus.

The same God who raised Lazarus from the dead sat at the dining table with him.

God is not an impersonal God; He desires relationship with you.

And Mary, we saw, sacrificed.

She sacrificed her most precious item. That was her worship.

And maybe that is the story for some of you today. There is something that you might need to give unto God today, something that is of value to you.

Maybe you need to fast. Maybe seem of you need to tithe. Some of you might need to give up a habit.

Maybe God has put it on your heart to give something. I don't know what that may be, but you do.

And I assure you, God is worth all these things.

And who knows what one act of faithfulness can do?

So in our worship, we can serve, sit and sacrifice.

Verse 6:

“He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

”“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied.

Don't you love how Jesus defends his people?

”“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied.

“It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you,^[a] but you will not always have me.”

I want to stop here for a second and clarify something.

Jesus isn't saying that we should not care about the poor. In fact, he was quoting Deuteronomy here, Deuteronomy 15:11:

“There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.”

So we have a call to care for the poor, to care for others, but what Jesus is saying here is that there will always be opportunities to take care of the poor and the hurting, but you need to make the opportunity to spend time with Jesus.

You have to make time to prioritize him.

And I think that this applies to us now, but Jesus specifically brings it up in the text because he is telling them my time is coming.

All throughout the series of John, Pastor Mike has brought up Jesus talking about the time and the hour. His time has not come yet. His hour has not yet come.

And when Jesus says that, he's referring to his death. He's warning them – you won't always have me.

Very soon, he will die, and later, resurrect.

But look at what Jesus says in this passage. He says that the perfume was intended for the day of his burial.

Now when I first read that, I was like but he's not dying today, why is he saying this is the day of his burial.

Well in ancient Jewish customs, a person would anoint the body with oils and perfumes to prepare them for burial.

Unbeknownst to Mary, this is exactly what she was doing for Jesus days before he died.

Like Skip Heitzig says, she gave him the flowers before the funeral.

And this means before Jesus would be betrayed, before he would be beaten and die for the sins of the world, someone who loved him anointed him with a precious perfume. And maybe that perfume stayed with him on his skin up until he hung on the cross.

And scripture says it was intended for Mary to do just that.

She had no idea that God had a plan that involved her worship.

What then can he do with our worship?

Let's finish up in the text:

"Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. "So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, (poor guy – he just came back to life)" for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

Notice how Lazarus doesn't say a single thing in this text. In fact, you never hear Lazarus talking in any one of the gospels.

And we don't even need to, because someone only had to see Lazarus to know that God had marked his life.

He was a dead man, and now he's alive. He's a walking testimony. I'm sure everyone wanted to come to that dinner and see him once they heard he was there.

Because of him, many came to believe in Jesus.

This is my last point:

1. Worship leads to witness

Our lives are the evidence of what we worship.

Guess what, you don't need to literally come back to life to have a testimony.

Your testimony is a transformed life.

A life where you love God and you love your neighbor as yourself. A life where you denounce slander and gossip, and speak life and truth.

A life where you don't hold onto bitterness or resentment, but you forgive.

That too is evidence of a life marked by the hand of God. And the more time we spend with Jesus, the more we become like Him.

Worship of Jesus changes us, and it moves beyond us. That is how we are able to witness to others.

And witnessing is not just something you say or do, it is about who you are.

In verse 3, it says that the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

What stands out to me is that John remembered the fragrance of the perfume all these years later as he is writing this story.

It would have been 60-70 years, and he can still recall the scent of the perfume that filled the whole house.

This was an act that lingered long after it happened.

What I didn't mention earlier is that this story of Jesus being anointed is also found in two other gospels – Mark and Matthew. And there is something else that Jesus says in those gospels that I want to include here.

Matthew 26: 12-13 says ²When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

This is so beautiful to me because Mary didn't pour her perfume on Jesus expecting any of this.

She wasn't looking to be remembered, she wasn't looking for this story to spread, she was simply worshipping Jesus in the best way she could.

But today, two thousand years later, her worship is a testimony to us of the goodness of Jesus.

And just like Lazarus, she never spoke a word in this passage. Even if we never say it, our lives themselves will speak on what we worship.

We need to talk to people about Jesus. We need to share the gospel.

But this Scripture also shows up that we can talk to people about Jesus without ever saying a word, simply because our lives and worship point to Him.

In Matthew 5, it says “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Our deeds will actively demonstrate who or what we worship.

If I worship money, my life will point others to it. If I worship success, my life will point others to it.

But if I worship the King of Kings and the Great I Am, my life will point others to Him.

And who knows what Jesus can do with your worship?

We all worship something.

And it is worth it to ask ourselves: what do I worship? What do I place my value in?

Because whether you know it or not, your life will lead you down the path of whatever you put your worth in.

Today, we can pour our worship onto Jesus.

He is worth our true and proper worship.

Jesus is not a means to an end; He is the beginning and the end. He is the reward.

Maybe He is showing you that you’ve had your eyes on something else that you’ve placed above Him for far too long, and it’s time to focus on Him again.

Maybe He’s showing you that there is an area in your life where He is calling you to serve, to sit, or to sacrifice. To treasure Him first.

Or maybe He’s reminding you when you’re discouraged, that your life and your worship are still part of His story.

