

The Word Became Flesh
Week 35
John 12:1-9 (CSB)
“Acts of Purest Devotion”

Introduction

“But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship The Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, The Father wants such people to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

John 4:23-24

After the resurrection of Lazarus, he and his family wanted to do something to show Jesus their gratitude. By reading the narratives given in the Gospels of *Matthew* and *Mark*, we learn that they invited Jesus to a “thanksgiving meal” at the home of a man named Simon, in the village of Bethany, where they lived. Perhaps Simon, who had once been a leper (***Matthew 26:6***) and was healed by Jesus, was more than willing to offer his home as the location for the dinner in order to show his own gratitude for what the Savior had done for him. The event had been well planned and orchestrated to honor the One Who had brought such joy to the small village of Bethany.

One can only imagine the painstaking lengths to which all of the hosts of the feast had gone in order to make the celebration an event to be remembered. Each of them were assigned specific duties to ensure that Jesus would be given the honor that He so richly deserved for the blessings that He had bestowed upon this small congregation of followers.

We are not told why this gala was held at Simon’s house, rather than at the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Perhaps Simon had more room for the accommodation of so many guest. Or perhaps he had insisted on hosting the event simply because he too had much to be thankful for. Whatever the reason, a week before Jesus’ death upon the cross, He was surrounded by the people who loved Him the most. And this must have come as a great encouragement to The Son of God, Who just days later would be surrounded by the godless multitude celebrating His death.

God has a way of encouraging those who are obedient to Him just when they need it the most. Every servant of Christ knows exactly what I’m talking about. And I believe that The beloved Son of God was no exception when it came to The Father’s encouragement. His Father gave Him all that He needed in order to bear the suffering that was His and His alone to endure. What a comfort it must have been for The Savior to know in those moments that the very ones for whom He was about to lay down His life, although they were far from perfect, would forever worship Him in spirit and in truth!

When I look at this beautiful passage of Scripture, I do not see just a dinner given to honor The Savior. I see one of the most powerful worship services in all of *The New Testament*. All the elements needed for genuine worship were present in the dining room of Simon’s home. We see, the ***Witness*** of one who was raised from the dead (Lazarus), not to mention Simon who had been healed of his disease. We see the ***Works*** of Martha, who so graciously served Her LORD at the table that evening. And we see the beautiful ***Worship*** of Mary. And we see the ***Word*** of The LORD, as He offers both a rebuke to the wicked in the room, as well as, encouragement to the righteous.

Let me tell you, when you have all those elements in one place, offered up by a people who have gathered in Jesus Name, it does not matter if there is a steeple on the roof or no. You are about to have some **church** in that place! Remember what He has promised us:

“For where two or three are gathered in My Name, I am there among them.”

Matthew 18:20

Bearing this in mind, let us look today at the story of this feast at the house of Simon, as we see what a true worship service is meant to be. And let it teach us what God expects of us when we gather in His Name. Let us invite Christ in to our “house” in order to honor Him for all He has done for us.

The Witness of Lazarus (vs. 1 & 9)

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, the one Jesus had raised from the dead. **John 12:1**

Then a large crowd of Jews learned He was there. They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, the one he had raised from the dead. **John 12:9**

Now, it was no small matter that Lazarus had been brought from death unto life. In fact, we see in **verse 9** that a large crowd had gathered there, not only to see Jesus, but Lazarus as well. We must never underestimate the power of a life that has been transformed. Did you know that we have not one single quote offered by Lazarus in all of Scripture? As far as we know, he may have never said anything! (I'm sure that he did, but we just have no idea what it was.) But here's the reality: When a person is brought from death to life, it speaks volumes and people *will* take notice!

The Bible tells us in **Ephesians Chapter 2** that we were all dead in our trespasses and sins, but God Who is rich in mercy has brought us from death unto life in Christ Jesus. What does this mean exactly? It means that those who have placed their faith in Jesus have been completely transformed. They are no longer what they were. They have been remade (**Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17**). And let me tell you, when you have been miraculously remade in Christ, you don't have to say a word. People can see the difference! Lazarus didn't have to take out an ad in the local paper telling people that he had been raised from the dead. It became the talk of the whole region! Never underestimate the power of a "resurrection testimony". When Christ does a work in you, people will notice the difference.

I love that **verse 2** tells us that Lazarus was "reclining at the table with Jesus" at the feast. That is such a beautiful picture of salvation. We, who were once alienated to God because of our sin, have been brought near to Him through Christ Jesus.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, Who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. **Ephesians 2:13-14**

Those who have placed their faith in Christ and repented of their sins are now reclining at the table with Him in genuine fellowship. I imagine that old Lazarus had the time of his life at that dinner table, just spending quality time with the One Who had raised him from the dead! When we gather at Jesus' table to celebrate with our fellow Believers, we too are filled with love, joy, and peace. For Christ has delivered us.

Have you been transformed today? Have you repented of your sins and been delivered from death unto life? If you have, then you have a powerful testimony. Let the crowds gather around you to see the change that Jesus has made in your life. As someone once said, "*Preach the gospel, use words if necessary!*" Never underestimate the powerful testimony of a changed life.

The Working of Martha (vs. 2)

So they gave a dinner for Him there; Martha was serving them, and Lazarus was one of those those reclining at the table with Him. **John 12:2**

It doesn't matter were you go to church, the reality will always be, whenever people are able to gather and have fellowship with The Savior, others will be there working. Sunday is a work day for me, just as it is for the many in the church who teach, help park the cars, usher new people to their seats, or serve coffee. You were able to come today and recline at the table with the Savior... because several people are working all around you!

Now, when we read of Martha in *The Bible*, she is always busy serving others. She is the perfect example of a Believer who has the spiritual gift of "Service". These are the folks in the Church who never want any attention brought upon themselves. They just quietly serve everyone who gathers in Jesus Name. I for one am so very thankful for the many "Marthas" we have in our fellowship. They give of themselves week after week so that others may hear The Word of God. And why do they do this so faithfully? Because of their devotion to Christ, that's why.

There can be little doubt that Martha loved her Savior. She hurried about the table that day making sure that Christ, along with all the other guests, had everything that they needed to ensure a wonderful time of food and fellowship. She gave of herself so that others could share in the joy. What a blessing she was to them. I'm not sure if all the guests that day even noticed her. But we know that God did. How do we know? Because He has her service written down in His Word! Make no mistake, when you offer yourself as a servant of Christ, He notices! If we remain faithful in our service of Him, we will all one day hear these words:

...Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your Master's joy! **Matthew 25:21b**

I cannot begin to imagine what an awesome feeling that will be to hear Him say that! But I know that I long to hear it. How about you? Are you a servant of Christ? Are you busying yourself with the works that bring others to the table in the kingdom of God. We are all called to serve. All of us have different gifts of service that we must use to honor the One Who raised us to life. And believe me, you cannot have "church" without loving acts of service. Just ask Martha.

The Worship of Mary (vs. 3)

Then Mary took a pound of perfume, pure and expensive nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped His feet with her hair. So the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Now we come to one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture (in my humble opinion). As Jesus was reclining at the table with Lazarus, just a few days before He was to be crucified for the sins of the world, Mary entered the room with an expensive jar of perfume. She broke it open and first anointed Jesus head with it. And then she poured the remainder on His feet and began to wash them with her hair. The sweet fragrance of the perfume filled the room, John tells us. No doubt this act had left a tremendous impression upon the young disciple, as he, much later describes it with such vivid recollection. He could still remember the way this wondrous act of worship filled the room with a sweet smelling aroma many years after the fact when he wrote this gospel.

True worship leaves an impression. In fact, it stays with some for a lifetime, while it offends others. The effect has everything to do with whether a person genuinely loves The Savior, or not. As we examine this beautiful act of devotion, it is important for us to see every little nuance in order to fully comprehend exactly what Mary had done.

Nard is a sweet-smelling, fragrant spice that had to be imported all the way from India. The fact that Mary had this ointment in her possession tells us that her family was one of considerable means. We can also assume this to be the case due to the many mourners who came from Jerusalem to the funeral of Lazarus. With all these things taken together for consideration, we may assume that Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were doing pretty well financially.

Judas, that despicable disciple who would go immediately from this banquet to work out his infamous bargain with the Pharisees (**Matthew 26:14-16**), had even estimated the perfume's value to be 300 denarii. Now we do not deal in denarii these days, so that evaluation means little to us. But in *those* days a common laborer would be paid approximately 1 denarius for a days wage. Therefore, Mary's gift

to Jesus that day would be valued as about a years worth of wages! This was indeed a precious offering given to the Savior.

The word “worship” in the Greek language is *proskuneo*, and it literally means to bow down and “kiss towards” or to describe the way that a dog would lick the hand of its master. It is an act of not only reverence and adoration, but one of humility as well. In first century Judea, it was considered highly improper for a Jewish woman to uncover and let down her hair in a public setting. When Mary took down her hair in the room that day, no doubt there would have been a few astonished gasps from those present. But Mary did not care what others thought of her. She was completely focused upon The One Who had shown her grace and mercy. And she held nothing back in her worship of Him. It did not matter to her in the least what the others would say about her. She just worshipped her LORD with all that she had. She gave her best gift to Him along with the very best of herself.

Now, I could preach a whole sermon just on Mary’s simple act of devotion. But I most certainly do not want you to miss this one particular truth. *The New Testament* tells us that a woman’s glory is her hair. It is her “crown”, if you will. Listen to the words of Paul:

Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to argue about this, we have no other custom, nor do the churches of God. **1 Corinthians 11:14-16**

Now, keep this in mind as we see what Mary did with her hair that day. She offered her glory, her very crown as it were, and not only did she lay it at Jesus’ feet, she used it as a rag to wash them! Don’t miss the significance of this. True worship will always be an act of **absolute** humility! The very best that Mary had to give of herself was used to perform the most demeaning of service. In those days, it was considered a slave’s duty and occupation to wash the feet of a guest. Mary not only humbled herself in the presence of The LORD, and everyone there, in order to perform a slave’s labor, but she offered up her own “glory” to perform the task by using her hair as a wash rag. For you see, the very best that we have to offer in worship is still nothing compared to the glory of Christ.

All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment; all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities carry us away like the wind. **Isaiah 64:6**

Everything that Mary had to offer, didn’t measure up to Christ’s holiness and perfection. And she knew it, but she offered Him the very best that she had anyway. It was an act of selfless and pure devotion. And it was accepted by the One Who died in order to clothe us in His very Own righteousness so that we, like Lazarus, could be raised from death to walk in newness of life.

When we gather to worship the One Who died for us, we must always follow the example of Mary, giving the very best of ourselves to bring Him glory and honor. He deserves no less from us. So let us lay our crowns at His feet and worship Him in Spirit and in truth. It is in fact the very least that we can do.

The Word of The LORD (vs. 4-8)

Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot (who was about to betray him), said, “Why wasn’t this perfume sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He didn’t say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He was in charge of the money-bag and would steal part of what was put in it. Jesus answered, “Leave her alone; she has kept it for the day of my burial. For you will always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

Now leave it to the “Judases” of this world to be offended by an act of worship! He pretended to be concerned, because this “extravagant waste”, as he put it, could have been sold and “given to the poor”. As if he cared at all about the poor! Judas was all about Judas. And he did not fool Jesus for a moment. This is someone who had believed when Jesus, The Messiah took His rightful place as King of The Jews, that he might receive a position of honor in this new kingdom. All this talk of suffering and dying was a complete turnoff for Judas.

Jesus’ Words did what they do in every true church service. They rebuke the wicked and encouraged the acts of the righteous. This is what God’s Word does for us every time we gather to hear it. The Word convicts us of sin and encourages to continue in what is right. This particular event was no different. Jesus commended Mary for her act of devotion that He described as an anointing for His coming burial. And He condemned Judas for his wicked and selfish ambition.

I find this narrative in the other gospels to be quite telling. For it is immediately following this rebuke of Judas, that the wicked treasurer left to make a deal with the Pharisees who wished to kill Jesus. It is as if, in this moment, Judas decided to abandon his Master and see what he could salvage for himself for what he considered to be three wasted years of his life. For you see, he, like many others, had hoped that Jesus would overthrow the Romans. And in his own selfish ambition had tried to position himself accordingly so that when the day finally came, he would secure a lucrative position for himself.

The more that Jesus talked of laying down his life, the less that Judas cared to hear it. So he wanted to cash out, as it were. This is also why he wanted to sell Mary’s expensive perfume and pocket the proceeds. As soon as Jesus confronted him about his spiritual condition, he left the team for good. I am reminded here of a CEO who bails out on a fortune 500 company that he has run aground. Just before he leaves, he cashes out his stock in what is known as a “golden parachute”, so that he can safely land on his feet, leaving many others to crash and burn. Judas had mistakenly thought that Jesus time was soon to come to an end. Little did he know that the crucifixion was merely the beginning!

So during this beautiful worship service, we see the **Witness** of the one raised from death into life. We see the **Working** (Service) of the one who longed to please her Savior. We see the one who offered her true **Worship** to the Son of God Who would lay down His life to save her. And Finally, we see the **Word** of God rebuking the wicked and encouraging the righteous. This is exactly what should happen every time God’s people gather in His Name to worship Jesus Christ. The question is: Will you be offended by The Word today, or encouraged by it? Does this message make you want to continue to **Work, Worship, and Witness** for the glory of Christ? I truly hope so. For He deserves our very best worship.

And Let the true worshippers say... TRUTH!!!