
LIFE IN HIS NAME

FRAGRANT WORSHIP

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at 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. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

We come today to Chapter 12, which begins a transition in the gospel of John. The gospel of John is really in two parts. Part One is Chapters 1 through 12 and Part Two is Chapters 13 through 21. In many ways, Chapter 12 is right there on the hinge of that transition and it is a transition chapter of scripture for us.

In Part One we have seen amazing things about Jesus. Jesus is the one who gives sight to the blind. He is the one who feeds thousands and thousands supernaturally. He is the one who walks on water. He is the one who raises the dead. Jesus is the one who gives life. He is the living water. He is the bread of life. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the good shepherd.

We have been observing these miraculous signs. John has told us about seven of them, the last of those signs culminating with the seventh, the greatest, where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, having been in the grave for four days. Jesus is revealing himself as the one who gives life.

Now, in the second part of the gospel of John, Jesus will tell us exactly how he is going to accomplish what he has promised, how he is going to give life to us. I want you to anticipate as we begin this second part, three themes. I am going to list them for you. I will summarize them in this way.

- I. Jesus is the Lamb of God.
- II. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

III. What does a follower of Jesus look like, live like?

In the very beginning we saw these themes. They were mentioned in the first chapter or two of the gospel of John. We may have forgotten them by now, as John has been telling us about the greatness of Jesus and all the great things that he is doing and the wonderful promises that he has made. But you remember that John told us that everyone who believes on the name of God will have the right to become children of God. Jesus came to make us children of God. There was this amazing declaration. John the Baptist, presenting Jesus to the world said, “Look! (behold), the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

We saw this reference, but we may have forgotten about it now as we have been hearing of these miracles and reading about all the claims that Jesus has made. Now, in the second part we will see that Jesus will offer himself as a sacrifice, as the Lamb of God. He will go to the cross to pay the penalty of our sin. Our sin, our faults, our weaknesses, our rejection of God has created serious problems for us in this life and in this world. All that’s wrong with the world can be explained as a relational break with God, our Maker. And there is judgment that is demanded for that offense, for that sin. Jesus comes as the Lamb of God to offer himself, without sin, as the sacrifice for your sin and my sin. Jesus is the Lamb of God. We will read in Part Two how Jesus provides this perfect sacrifice so that you and I may be forgiven of our sin and become children of God.

But John the Baptist made another claim. He said, “There are a number of things that differentiate me from Jesus. I am presenting to you Jesus, but I am unworthy to do the most menial act of service. I am unworthy to even undo his sandals, to even wash his feet. Yeah, I am a popular preacher in the day, and thousands are coming to hear me, but the truth is I’m completely unworthy to even serve Jesus. I may have been born a few weeks before he was born, but the truth is that he has always been, and he is greater than I am.” But here was the main differentiation, the distinguishing mark, between John the Baptist and Jesus. John said this: “I baptize you with water. I immerse you with water. But the Lamb of God will cover you with the Spirit of God. He will baptize you in the Spirit of God. You will be drenched in the Spirit of God.”

So now, in Part Two, Jesus teaches this. Part two, Chapters 13 through 21 – it’s the last week of Jesus’ life. We will read about the Last Supper, about Jesus’ trial, about him going to the cross, about his resurrection, his ascension. We will read of these events, all taking place in a period of seven or eight days. And in the midst of it, Jesus will tell his disciples this: “I must be crucified. I must ascend. It is better that I go. Why? Because then I will be able to give you my Spirit.” And through these chapters, Jesus teaches us about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of one who follows Jesus.

Please hear this. You are here today. Perhaps you don’t really know that you are a Christian according to these definitions. I want to be clear. There is forgiveness of sin in the name of Jesus Christ. All who call on Jesus will be saved,

forgiven of sin, and will one day stand before God, forgiven, cleansed, declared righteous as a child of God. It comes as a gift. We receive it by faith. And all who receive that gift are given the Holy Spirit.

Now, please understand, sometimes we draw all of the impact out of that understanding. It's described as a baptism in the Spirit of God by John the Baptist. When we read about it occurring in the book of Acts, it's dynamic, it's personal, it's powerful. God's intention for you, according to the gospel of John, is for you to experience something of the fullness of God that comes by the Spirit of God. John said, "We beheld his glory, full of grace and truth. We have beheld his fullness, and all who believe on him are given the right to be called the children of God."

So now, I'm just describing for you these two parts in the gospel of John. In the second part, we really read about how Jesus fulfills this as the Lamb of God. He teaches us about the Holy Spirit and then finally he begins to teach us specifically what it looks like when we follow Jesus. What does a person live like? What does he look like when he is forgiven, when she is forgiven of his or her sin, cleansed by the sacrifice of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is poured out on that life? What does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Jesus will teach us about that.

If you have your bible open, just look at a couple of references. Let me give you a little bit of a foretaste of that. John 12:25-26: "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him." The first thing as a follower of Jesus is we lose our lives that we might live in Christ. We die to ourselves and we live a life of serving and following Jesus.

Go to Chapter 13:14-17. Jesus has just washed his disciples' feet.

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Please understand, in the first part, as we read about these seven signs in Chapters 1 through 11, and we saw the miracles that Jesus was doing, we heard this theme over and over and over and over again. Jesus is life. He is resurrection. He gives life. He imparts eternal life. You are born a new. You are born again in Jesus. Promise after promise, focusing on this one central truth: There is life in the name of Jesus Christ. If you don't know your purpose, if you don't know your reason for existing, if you are worried about your future, if you long for eternity, Jesus makes an amazing claim: There is life in the name of Jesus. Come to Jesus. Believe in him. There is life in his name.

Now, the teaching takes a different tone in the second half. Jesus very deliberately models and instructs in exactly what it looks like to follow him. But please understand the tone of it is not: Do these things, serve one another, and I will accept you and you will become a child of God. No, no, no, no, no. There is life in the name of Jesus. Trust in Jesus. You will receive forgiveness of sin. The Holy Spirit will be poured out upon you. Trust in him. Walk in the fullness of His Spirit, and follow Jesus. Then you will start to look like Jesus, which is a good thing. We are told here this great emphasis on serving one another.

Same chapter, Chapter 13:34-35: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Again, Jesus is teaching here: “What does it look like to follow me? What does it look like to be full of my Spirit, to be a child of God, to be forgiven of your sin?” Well, it looks like this radical kind of love that I’m modeling for you on the cross, where we lay down our lives for one another.

Chapter 15 is a great chapter on Jesus as the vine. We abide in him. In this chapter he teaches us about prayer and about bearing fruit to the glory of God. We abide in Jesus, we commune with him, we ask what we will and receive so that we might bear fruit to the glory of God. I’m just trying to illustrate for you and to maybe build a little bit of anticipation that now, as we continue in our study through John, we are going to see exactly how Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice. He teaches us about the Holy Spirit, and he begins to instruct us in what it looks like to live a life as a follower of Jesus Christ, changed because of the forgiveness that we receive in his name, and the fullness of his Spirit.

So are you ready? Are you ready to get started? This section begins in a remarkable way. It begins with a woman that we’ve already been introduced to. Her name is Mary. She is the sister of Lazarus, one of the two sisters, and she comes to Jesus and worships him. What we see is that Mary understands something that no one else is really understanding just yet. She gets it. She has just witnessed the resurrection of her brother. She has been in one of those moments where she has lost everything. Death has stolen from her what is precious, and then Jesus gave it back. She has caught it. She has understood that Jesus is the life and the resurrection. She understands in a deeper way what no one else is yet quite understanding. She is grasping this deep truth that Jesus must die and be buried, and she comes anointing Jesus with this expensive perfume, preparing him for his burial.

How much she understood I guess in some ways is up for debate. I think Jesus is saying she understood more than the rest. Regardless, her act is interpreted by Jesus as preparation for his burial. You see, John is telling you that this is now how Jesus is going to provide for the forgiveness of your sin. He is going to give his life. And she worships the Lord in the most beautiful, extravagant way. She models for us this simple truth: The death of Jesus restores us to a place of

worship. We offer to the Lord fragrant worship. There is really, here, a contrast of true worship and false worship. True worship is personified in the person of Mary, who worships the Lord. Then who typifies false worship for us? Judas.

So let's look at this explanation of true worship. It's summarized for us in one verse. There are three characteristics. True worship is expensive, humble, and personal, all found in verse 3. "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. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."

1. True worship is expensive.

This was a large amount of perfume, about 11 ounces, and she poured it all out, anointing Jesus. It was rare. It was expensive. We are told it was pure nard. It was taken from the root of a plant, and this particular perfume was undiluted. It was worth one year's salary.

I want you to think about this for a moment. How many times have you gone to the offering basket and put one year's salary in as an act of worship? How many times have we ever done anything as an act of blessing, giving, worshipping God, blessing others, that is in that amount? This was extravagant worship. But it models for us something that is at the heart of all worship. All worship is portrayed in scripture as a sacrifice.

I think it's a little unfortunate at times that we think of giving only in the sense of the tithe. The tithe is, I believe, a biblical concept, where we give the first tenth of all that God blesses us with unto the Lord. But at the heart of giving is this idea of sacrifice. Not giving extra, not giving leftovers, not giving the castoffs, but sacrificing. We experience this in all of the family relationships that mean the most. We don't interpret, receive gifts from others in light just of their financial, their monetary value. We look at what's gone into the gift. We look at the sacrifice that the person has made to bring it to us. We see that as an expression of their love for us.

Hebrews 13:15-16: "Through him (through Jesus) then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." The author of Hebrews is telling us that we are to offer sacrifices of worship to the Lord, sacrifices of praise; that is, offering to God the fruit of our lips. In their culture, in their day, in the book of Hebrews we know that they were being arrested. Their goods were being confiscated because they were worshipping Jesus. It was truly a sacrifice for them to offer praise to the Lord.

There is a place where when we gather to worship -- and certainly the principles of true worship that we are looking at today apply to more than this gathering -- but this gathering would be a highlight for us if we love to worship God. It would be the culmination of a week of worship lived to the Lord. And so we express our worship to the Lord. We lift

hands to the Lord as an act of adoration. No one is under obligation to do that. No one is hopefully noticing who does and who doesn't. We all have different comfort levels. We are all expressive in different ways. Some of it is our cultural background. Some of it is just our personality. Some of it is our temperament. Some of it is our upbringing. Some of us...we do this and we think are doing this. You know, it just feels like such a reach for us.

Church, I want to tell you it's important to express your worship to the Lord. We want to give ourselves to the expression of our love and adoration of God. So, it happens – the fruit of our lips and how we conduct ourselves in these gatherings, but he tells us here it's also sharing with others, "not neglecting to do good and sharing with others, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." Very simply, worship first of all is expensive. It's a sacrifice.

2. True worship is humble.

True worship is rooted and grounded in humility. She anointed Jesus' feet, which was rare. In fact, we know when we compare how John tells the story with other gospel writers, that she anointed Jesus' head and feet. She had a large quantity of perfume, and the fragrance filled the place. But John emphasizes that she anointed Jesus' feet. We have already looked at this. When John the Baptist said that he was unworthy to serve Jesus, even in the capacity of loosening his sandals and washing his feet, that was interpreted as an act of very demeaning service. But she anoints the feet of Jesus in an act of incredible humility.

Luke Chapter 7 tells us of another anointing. It's not the same account. There was a woman who came to Jesus. She was an immoral woman, and she anointed Jesus. There was a Pharisee who was hosting -- the whole event was taking place in this Pharisee's house. The man's name was Simon. Simon was observing this and made a judgment call, which is always a mistake in front of Jesus because Jesus knows what you're thinking, even if you don't say it. He was thinking, "Wow, if Jesus had any discernment at all he would know what a horrible woman this is. He wouldn't put up with this."

So Jesus told a story and taught a lesson and it was basically this. This woman has been forgiven much, and therefore she loves much. Again, it is this parallel, modeling for us that at the heart of worship is humility. It's the brokenness that comes from knowing the Lamb of God, the Son of God. God offered himself for me, paying the penalty of my sin, forgiving me.

I met with a new friend recently. I've known him only the past two or three years. He is a pastor. He's not a pastor here. You probably don't know this man. He was telling me about his experience of discovering that he was an alcoholic, and coming to grips with that, and walking into an AA meeting. It's a fascinating story, where he had an AA leader coming to this church. The AA leader led him (he was pastoring) to confront his alcoholism and get help, then he led his AA leader to

the Lord. It's a very cool story, isn't it? Yeah, it's humbling when you're the pastor and then a guy who doesn't even know Jesus is helping you get free of alcoholism.

But he told me something. He told me that there was something beautiful. Many of you have experienced this. Many of you have been into 12 step groups, or various groups where you have received help for an addiction. You know, the moment you walk into one of those groups and you declare yourself to be an addict, all of a sudden it's very difficult to be puffed up, isn't it? It's just a leveling. It's humbling.

That, in some ways, is a picture of the Church. If you're here and you're a Christian, Jesus died for your sin, right? So we come in utter humility, saying, "The only way I can make a sacrifice, the only reason I can present a sacrifice to God that's acceptable is that Jesus died for me." And that frees us to be transparent, to talk openly -- appropriately, but openly -- about our need and our sin. It sets us up for reconciliation in relationship, because we no longer have to be right. I've told you before that my wife has told me -- not recently, thank God -- but she used to tell me a lot that I had an amazing gift to always have the last word. Just one more, "By the way..." And there's more where that came from, right?

What is that that drives us to be right, to be justified? "Yeah, I did this, but you did this. I said this, but you said that." See, I haven't yet found the liberty in that moment to say, "You know what? Here's what I really deserved: I deserved to hang on a cross. I deserved the judgment of God, and Jesus took it for me." The psalmist says, "God saved me. He took me off the dung hill." That's my life without Jesus. So imagine me sitting next to the guy, "Wow, I was a little higher up on the dung hill than you were." It's just inappropriate. Humility characterizes our lives in Christ. It characterizes our worship.

There are so many applications to that truth, and I need to move on, but let me just say this. That means that worship is expressive, it's expensive, it's a sacrifice. Jesus warns us when you go to the Sermon on the Mount that we then hook that. We bend it around so it's a hook, so that we can bring attention back to ourselves. We don't give to be recognized by others. We don't pray out loud so others will be impressed. We don't worship in a way to draw attention to ourselves. It's expressive. Others may notice it. But we want to do it in a way that encourages them to worship and to think about Jesus and not about us. So, it's humble.

3. True worship is personal.

Mary did something unheard of in her culture. She unbound her hair, let her hair down. A woman didn't do this publicly. She used her hair to wipe the feet of Jesus -- just such a picture of vulnerability, of transparency, of true worship. Expensive, sacrificial, humble, very personal. It takes place from the heart. It's a personal expression of adoration. It is me, it is us, together exalting Jesus and worshipping him.

Think about this as we leave this. Think about your treasure, your talent, your time -- using who you are to express worship -- your finances, the abilities that you have, and the time that God has given you, and ask yourself: "Is my use of treasure, talent, and time characterized as expensive, humble, personal worship and adoration to God?" Now, having said that, please, please, please understand this. The cross frees you to truly worship. You don't do these things so that you might be accepted by Jesus. But when the gospel, when the message, when Jesus gets in you, you are transformed. You are like the harlot who has been forgiven, restored at the feet of Jesus, saying, "You have given me a life I could have never had, and it is so undeserved. Now I just can't help myself. I have to express it to you in worship."

Let me just linger here for a moment more, if I could. We were all made to worship. It would be inaccurate to say, "Well some people here are worshippers and some are not." The truth is, no matter who you are, you are worshipping something. You are either worshipping God, or you are worshipping something that God made. You either are looking to God as that which is ultimate. He is the key to your life. He is the key to your happiness. Nothing can take that from you. Or you are looking to something God made -- a relationship, an ideal, something monetary, some security that something made will give you. All of this will fall and fail to corruption. All of this can be taken from you. This can never fail, never be taken from you.

So when we come to Jesus and we experience life in his name, we are then free to use all of this to express worship to him. If that doesn't happen, then you will take even this message, and you will flip it. You will try to use God to get more of this. Are you with me? So, let's look at false worship, because that's exactly what happens in false worship. Judas sadly, tragically, gives us a perfect example. His worship is hypocritical, greedy, and selfish. We look at the verses there where it's described. Let me go through the points.

1. Judas' worship was hypocritical.

First of all, he claimed to be concerned for the poor, but in reality he just wanted the money for himself. Jesus talks about this. I referenced it earlier in the Sermon on the Mount. The person who stands praying, very public, acting like he is praying to God, but he is really praying to impress other people. False worship is hypocritical. There is an underhanded motive, a duplicity that is not clearly apparent to everyone, but it is always apparent to God. He knows the real motivation of our hearts. He is after our hearts.

2. Judas' worship was greedy.

He was a follower, supposedly, of Jesus. He was a disciple, but he was really in it for himself. He wanted more. He had failed to see what Jesus was doing and the true treasure that Jesus is. We are told that he was taking out of the moneybag. He was stealing from the treasury. When he was confronted with true worship, he just wanted it for himself.

It's tragic. He lacks a generous heart. He doesn't understand what Jesus can bring, so he fails to truly worship Jesus and receive the forgiveness of his sin that comes in Jesus alone.

3. Judas' worship was selfish.

He wanted to use it all for himself. He was his reference point. He didn't see the beauty of giving. He didn't see the beauty of the gift of Jesus and how Jesus came to transform him, so he rejected Christ, betrayed him out of hypocritical worship, greedy worship, and selfish worship.

I know that that's a strong indictment, but it's hard to be too strong when you're talking about Judas. He provides for us this picture of what we should be able at times to see in ourselves and say, "No, I don't want that. I don't want to be that person. I don't want to be the person who in my marriage is a hypocrite, who is just taking, taking, taking, who is just self-oriented. I don't want to be that way in my friendships. I don't want to be that way with material things. And I definitely don't want to be that way in my relationship with God. But when I'm honest with myself I see that no matter how hard I try, it's often just a matter of time until I bring it back to me. How do I get free of that?" Well, that's the extravagance of Mary's worship. Jesus frees us, he breaks that power. He breaks that cycle. He restores us to a humanity that we were intended to be before sin corrupted this world.

So, when Matthew tells the story about Mary, he records a prophecy that Jesus gave. There is this hypocritical push-back against her act of worship, right? Matthew tells us that Jesus said that "wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." That's Matthew 26:13. This is fascinating, isn't it? She comes. She makes herself vulnerable. This will encourage you, okay? This is good, trust me. She comes. She is vulnerable. She bares her soul. She is transparent.

I mean, have you ever given a large gift? So large that you put it in the offering box, you went outside, you sat in the car, and gasped, "What did I just do? Do they lock those boxes?" No, you've never done that, have you? Okay, have you ever done that? Just made yourself so vulnerable? Then, Judas comes in to judge. "Oh, how you've wasted this. Look at what practically could have been accomplished." This is a self-righteous hypocrite. Jesus, so sweetly, says, "Not only is she right, they will be talking about this in South Florida 2000 years from now." He was amazing.

He came to restore you to worship! He came to restore you to relationship with God! To a wonderful, glorious humanity! True worship is lasting! It changes lives! Not just you, but Jesus does something in you, and then all of a sudden he is using you to bless everybody! You! Me! Amazing! Miraculous! The saving work of Jesus Christ. He stands before you today and he says this: "I am the bread of life. I am living water. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the good

Life In His Name – Fragrant Worship

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shepherd. I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Now, we are beginning to see how he does that, and the promise of the Spirit, and how it then transforms us to walk and to live in a restored fashion.

Let’s go to the Lord in prayer.