

**WORD-ROOTED PRAYER AND WORSHIP - Keeping Your Heart Close To The Flame - Part eleven - Sunday, September 18th, 2022, 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

WORSHIP - AN ATTITUDE OF HEART, BUT *MORE*

John 12:1-8 - "Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. [2] So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table. [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. [4] But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, [5] "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" [6] 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. [7] Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. [8] The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

In our last two studies we looked at **Isaiah 6:1-8**. We studied the ***authority of the King*** in worship. Central to Isaiah's encounter with God was the pre-eminence of God's throne. First and foremost, Isaiah is confronted with a King. Worship is ***weightless sentiment*** without due caution and regard for the ***rulership of the King***. Worship sets my life before the throne and rule of God. In worship, I don't just ***admire God's greatness***. I ***bow before His throne***.

Today's text adds another dimension to our study of the ***theology of worship***:

1) **WORSHIP CANNOT BE SCRIPTURALLY EXPRESSED WITHOUT RADICAL DEMONSTRATIONS OF GIVING AND SERVICE**

This story of Mary anointing Jesus with expensive ointment is also told, with slight additions and omissions, by Matthew and Mark. And in very simple terms it expresses one dominant truth. Because **one big** truth is sometimes more forceful than **several smaller** ones, let me summarize the theological core of this event as it relates to worship:

Worship involves giving our Lord more than just **praise**. We'll see in future teachings that worship must **include** praise. But the point of **this** passage is different. Worship calls for the offering of something **tangible** of ourselves, our **time**, and our **resources**.

This seems the most obvious feature of this story of Mary and Jesus. Everything else seems small and pale in comparison to her instantaneous, almost reckless, pouring out of about **one year's income** over the head and feet of her Lord. Whatever else worship may or may not involve, worship is the opposite of **detachment**.

Who **told** Mary to pour out this perfume over the body of Jesus? Or, for that matter, who **told** the **magi from the east** to bring gold, frankincense and myrrh? **“We have seen His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”** So worship Him, already. But no, it’s not enough just to **bow** or **say** things to the Baby. Something must be **given**. Something must be **brought and offered along with the words of praise and adoration**.

This is the very same truth underscored by King David:

Psalm 96:8-9 - “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! [9] Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!”

Do come to worship the Lord. **Don’t** come without an offering. **Do** come into His courts. **Don’t** come without an offering. **Why? Because giving is part of what worship is all about.** You and I can’t worship without it. Worship isn’t just **mental**. And worship isn’t just **verbal**. Worship is **sacrificial**. You just can’t worship without **offering** something to the Lord.

What I'm trying to make clear under this point about worship - about worship being defined by **giving** and **sacrificing** - is that this isn't something **peripheral** or **optional**. The idea of **giving of oneself** and **sacrifice** and **service** is the very heart of worship. Worship is **presenting** something of ourselves to God.

Every one talks and writes songs about Mary pouring out her **love** to Jesus. But Mary didn't just pour out her **love**. Except perhaps, for Judas, everyone in the room **loved** Jesus. What Mary poured out was oil and perfume that were worth about **a year's income**. And Jesus didn't say **the disciples'** love would be remembered everywhere the gospel was preached. He said **Mary's** love would be. **Why?** Because her love was the kind of love that revealed the nature of true worship. Hers was an act worthy of **remembrance** because it taught the **pattern** of worship.

Mark 14:9 - "And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Her devotion was so precious to Jesus because she remembered something even religious people forget. **Words** of worship, while important, can become cheap and common. **Sacrifice** stands out. Giving and sacrifice are at the very core of worship in Jesus' eyes.

The most complete and extensive New Testament passage on the nature of spiritual worship is **Romans chapter 12**. Almost everyone knows the first two verses of that chapter: **Romans 12:1-2** - “**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.** (notice that even Paul can’t begin to describe “*worship*” without the use of the term “*sacrifice.*”) [2] **Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**”

Many Christians think that’s where the discussion of worship ends in this chapter. It isn’t. The rest of the chapter goes on to talk about ***how worship manifests itself in those who truly love God.*** Paul describes worship in terms of ***teaching, leading, encouraging, using your spiritual gifts, giving your finances, and serving in the Body of Christ.***

These are not ***different topics*** from worship. All of these things ***are*** worship. You and I can’t worship without them. Every once in a while someone will come up to me and say, “***Pastor Don, I’ve just gotten so busy. I think I’ll just drop everything I’m doing in the Church. I just feel the need to stop doing things for God and start just being a person of worship.***”

I think I know what that person means. I think he means he has **lost touch** with the **reason** for all his activity. I think he means he's lost **focus** in his life. I think he means he wants to return to the **simple devotion** he once had for the Lord.

And I commend that desire. Listen, it **is** possible to do all of the things we do, supposedly for the Lord, with a cold and distant and formal heart. It's possible to be busy **for** the Lord without any personal attachment **to** the Lord.

But if his diagnosis is **right**, his solution is **wrong**. Yes, it **is** possible to **serve** the Lord without **worshipping** the Lord. But after admitting that, everything else this person said was wrong. While you **can** serve the Lord without a heart of worship, you **can't** worship the Lord without a commitment in service. You can **serve the Lord without worshipping**. But you can't **worship the Lord without serving**.

If God has given me the ability to teach, I cannot truly worship the Lord without exercising that gift of teaching. If God has given me the ability to sing or play, I cannot worship the Lord without using those gifts to His honor and glory. If God has given me a job and an income, I cannot worship the Lord without giving tithes and offerings.

Those things aren't over and above my worship. They aren't ice cream that can be scraped off, leaving the chocolate cake unscathed beneath. Those things **are** my worship. I can't please God with worship that isn't accompanied by obediently offering those things in faithfulness to Him.

2) **THIS STORY OF MARY HAS MUCH TO TEACH ABOUT ORDERING OUR LIVES IN 2022**

There are times in life for **caution**, and there are times for **extravagance**. Worship always calls for the **latter**. It's amazing and instructive that, as far as we know, not one of the other disciples **endorsed** Mary's actions. In fact, as **Mark** fills out some of the details, we find that Judas wasn't alone in rebuking Mary for what she did for Jesus:

Mark 14:4-5 - "There were some who said to themselves indignantly, 'Why was the ointment wasted like that? [5] For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they scolded her."

Apparently, people can live very closely with Jesus for quite a while and miss the importance of extravagance in worship. You would think, just looking around that little room, they could have put it all together. They could have seen **why** Mary acted the way she did.

Consider the scene:

Mark tells us this gathering took place at the home of **Simon the Leper (Mark 14:3)**. While that may not seem that striking to you, it was actually a very unusual event. You see, not long before this, **no one** would have gathered at Simon's house. You didn't go to the house of a Leper. They lived like outcasts from the rest of the world. But all of that had changed because **Jesus had touched Simon and made him whole**. It was an unbelievable miracle that Simon would host a dinner.

Then there was **Lazarus**. If you think it was a stretch for them to be meeting in Simon's house, you're really going to have to adjust your thinking for Lazarus. You see, not all that long ago, Lazarus was a **corps**. He was stone cold dead. Jesus called him out of the tomb and now they were eating dinner together. Wouldn't you like to have over-heard **that** dinner conversation?

Now picture Mary. See her glance around the room. It's so good to have Jesus there. She looks at Simon. She remembers how lonely he used to be. She can't believe the change as Simon engages in laughter and conversation with Jesus and the others.

Then her eyes moisten as she looks over at Lazarus. She can't believe she has her brother back. How different life was in her little house now that family was all together again. And then she looks at Jesus. It's all because of Him. He's made all things new. Just His Word had brought such life and joy. Nothing was the way it used to be - ***all because of Jesus.***

So, without saying a word to anybody, she gets out the precious jar of perfume. It was kept hidden because it was the most valuable thing the family possessed. And suddenly she can't keep this all inside anymore. Without any announcement, she breaks it open, and pours it all out to show her love to Jesus.

She understands ***nothing less than her best will express her worship.*** Maybe that's the whole point. This account is recorded to confront my Canadian tendency to ***calculate*** and ***rationalize*** everything in my walk with Jesus. ***Nothing but my best is worship.***

There's a time to be cautious, and there's a time to be extravagant. ***Worship must be extravagant.*** Our hearts need ***big pushes*** toward the Kingdom of heaven, not ***little ones.*** Your kids need to see a ***passionate commitment*** to worship. What good is a ***moderate love for Jesus*** in their eyes? If spiritual decisions aren't ***big*** decisions, they're worthless. They will lose momentum before they get off the ground.

3) **WE WILL NEED THE EXAMPLE OF MARY PRESSED AND RE-PRESSED INTO OUR HEARTS UNTIL JESUS COMES AGAIN**

That sounds like a loaded statement, but Jesus is the one who says as much - **Mark 14:9** - **“And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”**

I mentioned earlier about Mary’s motivation for gratitude and worship. The text actually refers to something Mary probably never thought of. It comes in the words immediately preceding verse 9:

Mark 14:6-9 - **“But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. [7] For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. [8] She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. [9] And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”**

The text doesn't say **Mary** knew that she was pointing to Jesus' future death and burial. Jesus simply used this occasion to remind the disciples of His soon coming death. Mary's act was used by Jesus to **point to His death for sinners**. The idea seems to be that no act of devotion could possibly be deemed extravagant when offered to a **Redeemer**.

These words bear more weight for us than they did even for Mary. We **know** all about Jesus' death and burial and resurrection on our behalf. **We** have received greater riches from His hand than Simon or Lazarus ever did. **We** have more reason for giving our all - like Mary did - to our Lord.

We need the example of Mary because **that kind of responsiveness can grow cold**. Worship can turn so quickly into **empty ritual** rather than **passionate, sacrificial actions**. The disciples - the **disciples** - actually chastised Mary for her extravagant deed. They actually felt it was out of place - out of **proportion**.

Didn't they see what Mary saw? Had they already forgotten about the healing miracle for Simon? Had the resurrection of Lazarus left them cold? Why weren't **they** moved in the presence of Jesus? What are you and I to **learn** from their mental slackness?

I'm to learn even Christ's followers can **drift** and **cool** in their worship. It can happen in a church - **our** church. Worship can lose its passionate, devoted, sacrificial center. We can come to **perform** our worship. It's a slippery, hard to define process. But this much is certain - whenever the giving of our all becomes a **joyless chore**, we've lost sight of the wonder and beauty of our Lord.

The Scriptures simply will not allow worship to be reduced to creed and ritual. Worship may **include** these things, to be sure. But it can't be **contained** in them. It's not just **words** of empty, stale profession. And it's more than just **tears** of spent emotion. Worship, in the eyes of Jesus - the worship He **received** and **praised** - is the pouring out of all we hold dearest for His Person and Kingdom.

"Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

And nothing less than my all is true worship.