John 11:55-12:11

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Date: 14 April 2024

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[0:00] Please turn to the end of John chapter 11. And we're looking at John 11.55 to chapter 12, verse 11.! The first half is all action.

Jesus does miracles. He does signs. He turns water into wine. He heals a man's son from a great distance. He heals a man who's been paralysed for 38 years.
He feeds 5,000 people with a packed lunch. He heals a blind man. He raises the dead, chapter 11.
In the second half of Mark's gospel from chapter 13, he goes away from the public.
He gathers his followers, his disciples, into an upper room and he talks to them about his death.
And chapter 13 onwards is all about his passion, all about his death.
Chapter 12 is the hinge between those two halves. And in chapter 12, Jesus says his last public words. He does his last public actions.
[1:21] And he explains why he's going to die. The heart of the chapter, the key that unlocks the chapter, is verse 23. Jesus answered them, The hour has come.

Now is the time for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.
Do you notice that word glory? It's one of John's key words. It's one of the words that Christians use. We use it for big things that we can't really describe.
Glory. And what Jesus is saying here is that the glory of God cannot be separated from the death of the Lord Jesus. The glory of God cannot be separated from his brutal, violent execution on the cross.
And that is strange. Glory is not just majesty, dignity and power. Glory has to do with suffering and sacrifice and with pain and with his giving of his life.
[2:35] And that's why Jesus says, And the hour has now come for the Son of Man to be glorified. The glory of God, the heart of God, has an eternal connection between suffering and love, sacrifice and honour.

Between expensive giving and love. Chapter 12, verse 1, Jesus comes back to Bethany, to the very, very happy home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus.
Why are they so happy? Well, verse 1, this is Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead in the last chapter. Verse 9, there is Lazarus.
The crowds are coming to see him. Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. It's just a little throwaway line in the story. Twice we are told, Lazarus is standing there.
He's a very popular boy. He is exhibit A. Everybody wants to get a piece of Lazarus. You can see down in verse 10 and 11 that. I'm guessing there would be movie offers if he was living today.
[3:40] Big interviews with Piers Morgan and Lorraine Kelly. And I think the question would be, what would you want to ask Lazarus? What would you want to ask Lazarus?

What would you ask him? Anyone want to shout out? What would you ask him? Anyone? I think you did. What were you going to say, John?
What was it like being dead, isn't it? Isn't that the question? Surely. The question I would want to ask Lazarus is, what was it like? What was it like going through death and then coming back again? I think that Lazarus might actually have been a bit disappointed, don't you? Coming back into this life, don't you? It's just my theory. We're not told. And I think we're not told because that isn't the point of the passage.
Here's the point. At the centre of this first episode in John chapter 12, Mary, Lazarus' sister, anoints Jesus for his burial. It's about Jesus' death.
[4:46] The story is framed with references to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Do you remember in chapter 11, he is the one who marched to the tomb and he said, Lazarus, come out,

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even though he'd been dead for days, he turned to Mary and Martha and he said, I am the resurrection and the life, which is not something you do, is it?

Unless you're able to raise the dead. And I think the shocking thing that we hear in John 12 is that Jesus, the resurrection and the life, Jesus, the eternal word of God, is going to die.
It's absolutely impossible. Absolutely impossible. The eternal word who was made flesh at the beginning of the gospel who says, I am the source of all life.
Who tells us, I am the bread of life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. How can he die? What would possess him to do such a thing?
And the answer is in verse 1. Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany. The Passover is the trigger for Jesus to go up to Bethany.
[6:13] Look back in chapter 11 and verse 47. The chief priests and Pharisees, they gathered to the council together and they said, what are we to do? For this man performs many signs if we let him go on like this.

Everyone will believe in him. The Romans will come. They'll take away our place and our nation. But one of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, that's how high priests are supposed to talk. He says, you know nothing at all.
You're absolutely clueless. Don't you understand? It's better that one man die for the people and not that the whole nation should die. So verse 53, from that day on, they make plans to put him to death.
In verse 54, Jesus goes into hiding. In verse 55, now the Passover of the Jews was at hand and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.
In chapter 12, it opens with the Passover. The Passover was the messiest festival in the Jewish calendar. thousands upon thousands of sheep and oxen are slaughtered.
[7:17] The historical records tell us that Jerusalem, the streets ran with blood. The stench would have been incredible. This is the great event in the Jewish year because it celebrated the great redemption of the Old Testament when God rescued his people out of slavery and Egypt and when God sent the angel of death into Egypt and the angel of death passed over every house that was marked by the blood of the Lamb and everyone whose house was marked by the blood of the Lamb was safe.

And the Passover comes and Jesus says, now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. We've gone through John's Gospel right from the start and we remember in chapter 1 when John the Baptist saw Jesus walking towards his baptism and John says, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
And here he is. Here is the one to whom all the Old Testament has been pointing. And it's such an irony, isn't it? It's an irony that the Jews are going up to Jerusalem to have their sins purified by ceremonies and in the midst of them is the one, the Eternal One, the Lamb of God who's going to take away the sins of the world.
The great rescue is about to come. The interesting thing, believe it or not, we're still in the introduction, the interesting thing is in this first story of John 12, Jesus is not the main character. Verse 3, we meet Martha and she is serving, serving, serving. She's going on serving. And then Mary does this extravagant action and Jesus is passive.
[9:08] It's one of those occasions in the Gospel where Jesus is not the main actor. And what Mary does is she takes a pound of extraordinarily expensive ointment, pure and hard, and she pours it over Jesus' feet.

And then she undoes her hair, which as a Jewish woman had been bound up and she wipes his feet with his hair, with her hair. Everyone present is shocked.
It is a shocking thing to do. It would be the same sort of thing if someone did that in your home today. And John is at pains to tell you how much it cost.
He says, it is pure nard, it's a pound of nard, pound weight. He tells us, and Judas helpfully fills in the details, this thing that she has just done is worth a year's wage.
It is deeply personal, creative, extravagance. And she takes her life's wages, she takes a year's wages, her life savings, and she pours it over Jesus.
[10:21] It is great humility and love. And John tells us this lovely little line at the end of verse 3. Can you see it? In fact, can you smell it? The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

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You don't actually know that unless you were an eyewitness or a nose witness. But it shocks the disciples. Look at Judas, verse 4, he's offended.
Why on earth was this not sold to the poor? To poor? It's said so aggressively that he expects everyone in the room is going to agree with him. It is a terrible waste. And Judas asks the most obvious question, doesn't he?
Jesus responds and says, let her alone now. Leave her alone, verse 7, that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you will always have with you, but you do not always have me.
Here is something that is socially awkward. It is quite inappropriate, to be honest, in a way. Jesus takes it and he brings it to the point of his death, his burial.
[11:33] I am not sure that Mary understood all of what she did, but by her extravagance she moves close to the heart of God. And Jesus takes it and he is honoured by it and pleased by it and he says this is an incredibly precious thing that she has done.

And incidentally, I don't know if you've had a debate on this, but in verse 8 when Jesus says the poor you always have with you but me you don't, Jesus is not saying there don't worry about the poor. There are better things to do with your money than them.
I've heard some people use the verse in that way. But actually Jesus is quoting, and this shocked me this week, Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 15. In Deuteronomy chapter 15 God is speaking to the people of Israel and in Deuteronomy 15 God is taking away the excuse of the people of Israel and he says do not be greedy and he is saying in Deuteronomy 15 you have to care for those who are among you who are poor.
That's the duty of the people of God. Let me quote you one or two verses from Deuteronomy 15. It says you shall give to him freely that's the poor and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.
Then he says there will always be poor in the land for there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you you shall open wide your hand to your brother to the needy to the poor in your land.
[13:11] Jesus takes that quote and he reminds them you've got an obligation to the poor but he says there's something more important here. that his death is more important than all the world's poor and that is shocking particularly as he quotes the verse where God says I stand with the poor.

It would have been wouldn't it a very good thing if Mary had taken this ointment and sold it and given the proceeds away that would have been a good thing but Jesus says actually she's doing something better and the fragrance of what she does fills the house and continues to fill the house.
Now the question is what are we to do with this contrast between Mary and Judas? What is behind it? And I think what we're meant to see in the rest of the time we have tonight is the contrast of faith. The contrast of believing and unbelief. Verse 11 if you just look at the end of the story John tells us that everyone is going away and believing in Jesus.
Everyone is going over to Jesus. It's the thing the authorities are most afraid of and if you go to the end of the gospel that is where the gospel is going.
[14:36] John writes all these words this book so that you might believe in Jesus and have life in his name and the contrast between Mary and Judas is a contrast between belief and unbelief between faith and unfaith.

We Christians speak a lot about faith don't we? We've said it already in our services that I confess that Jesus is we did it this morning I believe in God Father Almighty and here is a concrete example of what true faith looks like and John brings this out by showing true faith and unfaith there's three contrasts I'll be brief three contrasts the first contrast is a contrast of values real faith demonstrates itself in a contrast of values what Mary does is socially inappropriate but it's a perfect demonstration of real faith John drives this home in verse three the word there pure nard the word there is literally the word pure there is literally faith it's slightly odd it is literally faith nard it's the same word as belief that's there in verse 11 exactly the same word in other words what Mary is doing comes out of her faith
Mary values Jesus above everything else above even her financial security whereas Judas is a man of unbelief what motivates Judas is money and greed he values what the culture values I was on an excruciating long journey on a train last year for four hours and there were two young men who were opposite me sitting at a table who were with me the whole journey and they talked for the whole time about one thing quite loudly about money it was amazing to me they talked about how

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they were going to make it they talked about what they were going to do with it and they talked about how much they liked it it was remarkable I took notes no I didn't I should have taken notes the absolute unquestioned assumption of their conversation is that money was the ultimate good the primary good that's the way unbelief works it looks as if this world is a place of permanence and meaning and I think if you take
Jesus out of the equation Judas' arguments make sense it's very straightforward what he says you can hear what he says surely he says if we'd have sold this ointment it would have benefited far more people it's a waste if Jesus is about to die I mean how can you justify taking something that's worth a whole year's wages and wasting it on Jesus do you know what we could have done with that money we could have set up a community loan scheme we could have funded the food bank for over a year we could have given it to an orphanage we could have funded the night shelter and paid for a worker amongst the homeless for over a year and Judas could say well devotion to Jesus is all well and good I'm all for devotion but this is unqualified extravagance it is socially awkward it is inappropriate and Judas looks at
Mary and what she does is utterly bewildering to him he can't get his head around it it is utterly bewildering what a waste and that's always the way belief looks to those who don't believe if you are a believer if you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ that will always be bewildering to those who are unbelievers and then in verse 6 John reaches out and he flicks off Judas mask see verse 6 you find out this grubby grasping dried up deceptive little heart is because he's a thief he keeps the money bags for himself so he can help himself he doesn't care about the poor it's a devastating picture of
[19:43] Judas but what Judas has done is he has learned to describe disguise his greed as compassion isn't that devastating he's learned to disguise his grubby grasping materialistic heart in terms of social justice and it's because his eyes are closed to the glory of Jesus and he clings to his own self indulgence and his own emptiness because of unbelief and that is the contrast here between belief and unbelief that is the value system the second contrast is a contrast of audience a contrast of audience I think we get an indication of how inappropriate and awkward and appalling a thing it is that Mary's just done in the very next chapter I preached on this passage on this incident a number of times but I've not really made this connection before that in chapter 13 do you remember you've got the really famous incident where

Jesus washes the disciples feet and they're completely stupefied that anyone would do something so menial I don't know why we think Jesus' feet must have just been wonderfully clean in chapter 12 there is tremendous self-forgetfulness in what Mary does she doesn't stop and calculate what the public is going to think with what she does and she's not doing this for the benefit of an audience except one alone Jesus Christ and that's what faith does she wipes his dirty stinking feet with her hair and it doesn't matter how socially awkward that is what matters to her is that she is personally involved with the
Lord Jesus Christ and her humility is genuine because it arises out of a devotion to the Lord Jesus she doesn't think about the financial cost she doesn't think about how other people are going to look at her but she realises if he has come from God and if he has come to bring us to God then there is no gift too great no action too extravagant for him that if he is the Lord of life who is able to conquer death as she's seen in the chapter before nothing that she can do is too much and Mary does what is beautiful and right and that is the way of true faith of believing in Jesus to love Jesus more than all things and it will make you do things that look rash and extravagant and wasteful to our culture and so why on earth would you give 10% of your income to the church are you kidding in a city like London that's so expensive why would you give generously to the work of Christchurch when you haven't even paid off your mortgage or your loans why would you volunteer your precious precious holidays to serve a holiday bible club or a young people's camp that's crazy why would you not play sport on a Sunday because it's the Lord's day how ridiculous but if you see the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who is most important who is ultimately important you'll see that that's no sacrifice at all will you you see real faith will show itself in a way that is dangerously out of step with our culture in a way that is dangerously out of step with what normal people think because real faith looks at Jesus and sees in Jesus someone who is more important than more important than the world's poor who's more important than the world's rich who's more important than anything that's the second contrast contrast in values contrast in audience and then a third contrast is a contrast in deaths deaths plural

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I want to do a little bit more work on this but a contrast in deaths again look at the key verse verse 24 unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone but if it dies it bears much fruit and then it says whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life as you read through chapter 12 there's a contrast of deaths there are little deaths if I can put it like that and there are big deaths in this passage I think it's why Lazarus is so heavily relied on in this first section Lazarus death was a little death it was little because Jesus brought him back but Jesus death is the big death because he is the resurrection and the life it is a big thing for the resurrection and the life to go to death in surrendering to death wonderfully he will destroy it and real believing real faith in Jesus is a little death death it is dying to this world it is dying to my life it is dying to everything that I hold precious and that is why in verse 11 when the dudes describe those who believe in Jesus it says can you see what it says it says they are going away and believing in Jesus literally they are going over they are betraying us they're going over they are betraying us and they're believing in

[26:17] Jesus so here's the shocking thing believing in Jesus is fundamentally an act of betrayal here's the great choice in life listen to this the choice is to betray Christ as Judas did or to betray my own life as Mary did that's the choice the great choice in life betray Christ like Judas or betray my own life like Mary and so believing in Jesus means putting an end to loving this life it's a little death and Mary's faith shows a reckless disregard for everything that was expected it's a little death when I was a young Christian and I suspect I'm not alone in this when I was a young Christian I used to think that God might require me someday to offer my body as a martyr

I often used to think if a gunman came into this church I'd jump in front of the take the bullet and if I was called to stand for Christ and give my life as a martyr I would nobody go that's what being a Christian and I think many of us go through the Christian life thinking a bit like that we think that if there's ever going to be a call upon me to make a great sacrifice one day I'm going to make it but I've come to realise like I hope you have that the Christian life is actually made up of a thousand little deaths daily and that's what this passage does in a really lovely disconcerting way it connects our little deaths with his big death it makes sense of our little deaths it says that through his big death the death of the Lord Jesus and our little deaths we live and have eternal life in 1672 just before he was released from prison

John Bunyan who wrote Pilgrim's Progress he'd been in prison for 12 years he'd been in prison for 12 years for preaching without a license and just before he was released he was very conscious as a pastor of a congregation how he suffered was important he wrote this he quoted from 2 Corinthians 1 which says we felt that we had received the sentence of death but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead cast the sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called the things of life even to reckon myself my wife my children my health my enjoyment and all as dead to me and myself as dead to them and secondly he said to live upon God who is invisible that's it that's real faith it sees in

Jesus it sees in God more than we deserve and all that we desire and in his death the great death our salvation and his glory and true faith looks at that and says what Christ has given is everything and what Christ deserves from us is everything love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all let's pray

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