

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
Giving Thanks through Worship
John 12:1-11

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 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 For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”⁹ When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well,¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

Have you ever asked yourself the question: “After all Christ has done for me, how can I give thanks to Jesus?” Well the short answer is found in a line of a contemporary chorus, “I will give him all my worship.” Now of course you are asking just exactly what does that worship look like. Well as we come to this passage Jesus has been invited to a “thank you dinner,” a celebration of the resurrection of Lazarus. It is six days before the Passover and Jesus probably arrives sometime after sundown on Friday or on Saturday. By the next Friday he will have given his life as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the whole world. As he sits down for dinner, Martha is in her usual place organizing the meal and making sure it is well served. Mary is about to express her heart to Jesus in a lavish unusual way. And Lazarus, the

guest of honor, is quietly reclining at the table watching the one who gave him his life back. This supper was unusual in many ways. For one, the Sanhedrin had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they should inform them so that they might arrest him. So to have this lengthy public meal was an act of laudable courage in and of itself. But what I want us to take note of is that from this “thank you” supper we learn four ways to give thanks through our worship:

I. We Give Thanks through Heartfelt Service in Worship.

(12:1-2)

Martha’s act of worship was to thank Jesus by seeing to the details of the dinner. She gave thanks and honor to Christ through her selfless act of service. She honored him in the best way she knew how. And it is important to realize that the gratitude and worship of Martha was just as much a welcome act of worship to Jesus as what Mary was about to do. Was it not Jesus who said, “The greatest among you shall be your servant; I am among you as the one who serves; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” Loving selfless service... anywhere from giving a drink of water in Christ’s name, to making a meal, to kindness toward your employees, to loving acts daily for your children, to fixing the car, to mowing their lawn, to helping with a homework assignment, to cleaning the church, to counting the offering, to leading the band, to planning a church event... is a pleasing act of worship and a wonderful way to give thanks to God.

II. We Give Thanks through Humble Sacrifices in Worship (12:3)

Mary’s role was to thank Jesus by pouring expensive ointment on his feet. Mary comes to the place where Jesus was reclined and pours over his feet about 11 ounces (about the size of a can of soda) of a very highly valued fragrance and expensive ointment that came all the way from the mountains of northern India. She then dries his feet with her hair. This perfume, of the finest quality and of absolute purity, was made from the nard plant called “Indian spike” by the Romans. Its rich rose red color and very sweetly scented fragrance not only filled the room, but because it was on her hair, its fragrance poured out from her everywhere she went. The extravagance of this gift is noted by the banquet attendees for it was worth over 300 denarii - a little over

\$30,000 in today's money. (A denarii was a day's wage and since the common laborer worked 12 hours a day, if we take the average minimum wage times 3600 hours we come up with that amount. Of course, we would exclude Sabbaths and feasts when no work was done.) There are several things to notice here:

1. True gratitude in worship involves costly sacrifice.

This perfume likely made up a sizable portion of Mary's net worth. And even if the family was well-to-do, it was still an extraordinary gift. We are reminded of what David said, "I will not offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing." Sacrificial giving is truly a wonderful way in which to show your gratitude to Christ. It may be expressed by giving him every coin in your piggy bank, the money you were going to use to buy a new car or the latest high-tech electronic device, the time to take a week of vacation to be alone with God instead of engaging in a week of recreational activity, or the giving up of one or two hours of TV a day to spend time in prayer, Bible study, and/or to serve in the community.

2. True gratitude in worship involves humility.

What you might not know is that in this culture wiping Christ's feet with her hair would often have been seen as degrading and even inappropriate. Respectable Jewish women never let down her hair in public and to do so was considered indecent. Loose hair was a sign of loose morals. Note that Mary did not consider the economic cost, nor was she concerned with the loss of reputation she might receive in this act of unusual humility. When we worship Christ we are focused on him alone, not on false piety, and are willing to do things that might even be unpopular. Further, we are not concerned with how our worship looks to others (how good or how bad), but only desire to give adoration thanks to the one who has done so much for us

3. True gratitude in worship affects those around you.

Not only did the fragrance fill the room, but it went with her everywhere she went that day. When our acts of humble worship become a lifestyle they affect others in our home, at school, on the job, and everywhere we go. We do not worship in a vacuum. Others see our humbleness of spirit.

III. We Give Thanks through Sincerity in our Worship (12:4-8)

Almost immediately Judas protests, but very quickly Jesus reveals his hypocritical self-interest in his larcenous behavior. What we discover is that all along Judas had been a thief instead of being a sincere devoted follower of Christ. His dishonesty and hypocrisy is revealed in that he did not care about the poor, but said so to both buttress his opposition to what Mary had done and to display a false sense of spirituality. He wanted to appear to be philanthropic. In sharp contrast to Judas, true worshipers do so with a sincere and grateful heart. Their worship is not pretense but comes from deep rooted admiration and gratitude. Jesus tells Judas to leave her alone for two reasons:

1. True sincere worship is singular in its mindset.

Instead of worshiping a building, charitable acts, money, liturgy, our theological distinctives, true worship is focused on that which is infinitely more valuable - Jesus! To know Christ, to see Christ, to hear Christ, to fellowship with Christ is the ultimate in worship. The poor they would always have with them, but Christ would only physically be with them a little while longer. To give to the poor is important and even commanded in Scripture, and under normal circumstances Judas would've had a point, but these were not normal circumstances. Their time with Christ and our time alone in prayer and Bible study with Christ, our meeting him in Christ-centered songs and in the celebration of the Lord's Table is the most valuable and most important time of our week.

2. True sincere worship has a deep profound significance.

Jesus looked at what Mary had just done and saw it as a symbol of his death and burial which would occur in less than a week's time. Her anointing prefigures the wrapping of his body with aromatic spices by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. She is preparing his body for burial. Jesus may also be saying, "You be quiet and let her get on with what she is doing - including keeping the memory of this moment at my burial and beyond." Jesus does not want her to lose the thrill, the gratitude, the wonder, the feeling of extravagant love for him as the one who is the resurrection and the life. When we come to God in sincere worship we begin to recognize the wonder of all the amazing things about who Christ is and what he is done. Our worship also prefigures a

time when the saints of all the ages will gather around the one who died and rose again for us, and the One who will have raised and glorified our own bodies. Every moment of sincere worship is profoundly significant and forward looking.

IV. We Give Thanks Fearlessly Even in the Face of Hostility towards Our Worship. (12:9-11)

1. Following Christ will bring with it hostility.

We cannot move quickly past the fact that this “thank you dinner” did not go unnoticed by the chief priests and was consequently a dangerous undertaking. Lazarus was living proof of the very thing that the Sadducees denied - the resurrection. *He was an embarrassment exposing a false theology*, for the raising of the dead was something that only God could do. This, the grandest miracle that Christ ever performed, loudly proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah that he claimed to be. It was inescapable evidence. Indeed, they are so angry that instead of plotting the death of one man, they are now plotting the death of a second man as well - the death of Lazarus. News of that sensational miracle has spread and now the curious crowd flocks to see both the miracle worker, and the one Jesus had raised from the dead. Something had to be done about this! Jesus was threatening their authority and gathering a large following. *He was a political liability* for even a small insurrection caused by this man Jesus would endanger their position at the top of the social heap. It would mean a loss of power.

Have you ever been a threat to someone because of your testimony? Does your life challenge anyone through its Christlike character and morality? If it does, then prepare to be attacked. Your integrity will be questioned, and you will even face verbal or physical abuse. Your love for the lost will expose the great hate and selfishness of the world around you. It will bring hostility.

2. In the midst of hostility, you will be a blessing!

Many will believe in Jesus because of your sacrificial love and willingness to suffer injustice for his name. Your godly life will be a vibrant testimony that will attract others to the Savior that you adore. Here was a man Lazarus who once was dead and is now very much alive. Because of this people believed on Jesus. I wonder, has anyone

believed on Jesus because of you? Can it be said of you, on account of him or her many put their faith in Jesus. If you are living a godly life, even what seems to you to be an average menial task, God is taking the small things that you are doing and from them will work a life-changing miracle in the heart of those you love and even those whom you have never met.

Conclusion

How can I give thanks to Jesus? The ultimate expression of thanks is through a life of worship. We give thanks by being a hard-working servant to Christ and others. We give thanks by costly sacrifices of our time, talents, and treasure for God. We give thanks by a sincere, heartfelt singular focus on Christ in our worship. Instead of looking back or looking around we look up. We give thanks by fearlessly following Christ even in the face of open hostility. But this morning I want to conclude by challenging us to give thanks to Jesus by committing ourselves to daily thanking him in prayer. Whether it is five minutes or fifteen minutes, why not today begin to make thanksgiving a priority in your prayer life. **Tim Keller gives the following thoughts on his rediscovery of prayer.** “In the second half of my adult life, I discovered prayer. I had to. In the fall of 1999, I taught a Bible study course on the Psalms. It became clear to me that I was barely scratching the surface of what the Bible commanded and promised regarding prayer. Then came the dark weeks in New York after 9/11, when our whole city sank into a kind of corporate clinical depression. For my family the shadow was intensified as my wife, Kathy, struggled with the effects of Crohn's disease. Finally, I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. At one point during all this, my wife urged me to do something with her we had never been able to muster the self-discipline to do regularly. She asked me to pray with her every night. Every night! She used an illustration that crystallized her feelings very well. As we remember it, she said something like this: ‘Imagine you were diagnosed with such a lethal condition that the doctor told you that you would die within hours unless you took a particular medicine—a pill every night before going to sleep. Imagine that you were told that you could never miss it or you would die. Would you forget? Would you not get around to it some nights?’

No—it would be so crucial that you wouldn't forget, you would never miss! Well, if we don't pray together to God, we're not going to make it because of all we are facing. I'm certainly not. We have to pray, we can't let it just slip our minds.”

So how will you give thanks to Jesus? As we partake in the Eucharist (the giving of thanks) this morning, the Lord's Table becomes an act of giving thanks through worship. I will give him all my worship this week. Will you?