

## JESUS OF NAZARETH IS PASSING BY

### An Opportunity to Worship

#### I. Last opportunity for Mary;

#### II. Lost opportunity for Judas.

John 12:1-8

**TEXT:** *Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the moneybag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "[It was intended] that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

Have you ever left the hospital room of a friend or loved one, thinking, "is this the last time I see or speak to them until I see them in heaven?" Pastors do that quite a lot. I visit one of our members suffering from effects of extreme age, or suffering from a terminal disease are in the hospital or in hospice, and after that particular visit with God's Word and prayer, or if they are able to receive it, the Lord's Supper, and after saying "I'll see you again!" I walk out of their room wondering if the next time I see them again will be here or in heaven.

Once in a while there is that surprise visit when I've left a hospital room expecting to see them again here on earth only to receive a phone call later that says, "He died! He was so young! We didn't expect that to happen!" Young David, the future king of Israel once said: *... as surely as the LORD lives ... there is only a step between me and death.* 1 Sa 20 David was a young man when he realized this truth. But it is a truth that should permeate every human heart since death is no respecter of persons, or their age.

This Lenten season I am extending our Wednesday Lenten service theme to include our Sunday worship service: **JESUS OF NAZARETH IS PASSING BY**. This Lenten theme is meant to consider opportunities people who were there in Jesus passed by, in and out of their lives 2000 years ago. There were opportunities that turned out to be the last time they would see and touch Jesus who passed in and out of their lives. And there were opportunities that were lost opportunities. The LAST TIME or THE LOST MOMENT in time.

Before us is the account of **An Opportunity to Worship**. It would be the last time for Mary, but a lost opportunity for Judas. Since what David said is true: *... as surely as the LORD lives ... there is only a step between me and death...* Let us consider these thoughts prayerfully.

I. For Mary, this would be the last opportunity to worship her Savior. Jesus himself reveals that somehow she knew: *Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.* Mary and her sister Martha and her brother

Lazarus believed what we say we believe. In the previous chapter of John the death of Lazarus is recorded and the raising of Lazarus from the grave is recorded. Just before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead Jesus asked Martha if she believed him when he said: ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*** Jn 11 Martha declared: ***Yes, Lord, ... I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*** This was the faith and confession of these people.

That's your faith and confession also, is it not? Then your reason for coming here to worship is the same for what is revealed in Mary's actions as Jesus, her Lord and Savior, her Creator God, passes through her village, into her life and into her home. It was an opportunity to worship God who had become man according to the Scriptures. According to Isaiah's word that he would be Immanuel, which means ***"God with us."*** Jesus was only 33 years old when they crucified him. He was younger than most of us here today. I'm almost twice his age when He died. To me Jesus was just a boy. No wonder the Jewish religious leaders had a difficult time accepting Him as their Lord.

We do not know if Mary knew that this would be her last opportunity to worship her Lord and Savior. But it would be her last opportunity before His crucifixion. Yet she spared no expense. What she did was a very expensive act of worship. What she poured on Jesus feet was worth a year's wages. If Judas' calculations were based on the "minimum wage" of those days, then extrapolation to today's minimum wage for federal workers would value her sacrifice to about over \$10,000. Based upon this, some assume that Mary might have been rather wealthy. But that is such an unfair judgment. We do not know if she was wealthy or poor, for all Jesus who knows all things said was this: ***It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.*** Jesus looked at the INTENTION, the motive, and the faith that moved Mary to worship in this fashion.

What does this say about our worship? What does this say about our offerings? What this says is this: those who know Jesus as Mary did look for each opportunity to worship Him as if it were to be their last opportunity. And those who know Jesus to be the Lord and Savior, Creator God, worship with offerings that are given as if they were our last opportunity to give to him an expression of faith and love.

Don't let me or anyone ever tell you how much this should be. If worshipping your Savior only on Christmas and Easter is what is in your heart, then go for it. If worship for you is once every few months, or when you can find the energy, then who am I to say that you should love Him more, or less. If your offering is your cheerful expression of love and trust that He will always bless you, then who am I or anyone else to tell you otherwise? But each time I take this pulpit, baptize your babies, or distribute to you Jesus' Holy Supper, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. And for each and every one of us, we never know if this might be our last opportunity to worship.

Mary made the best of that opportunity that would be her last opportunity. No one knows when that Last Opportunity will be for us. For Judas, this would be a LOST OPPORTUNITY.

II. What was this dinner to celebrate? John writes: ***Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.*** Matthew's account reads: ***While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with***

*an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.* Mt 26 There were others also honoring and worshipping Jesus. Mary wasn't the only one. Simon the Leper probably had no family because of his former leprosy. It seems that Simon threw the party, perhaps paid for it all, supplied the location, but needed his friends, Mary and Martha to do what women do best: throw a party.

But attention is drawn to Mary because of the hypocritical judgment Judas in regard to her stewardship: *But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the moneybag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.* The Bible tells us that Judas was a hypocrite. He was an unbeliever pretending to be a believer in Jesus. Yes, he was a greedy thief. But what was worse is that he was an unbeliever. Even though Jesus would soon suffer and die for his sins, he would go to hell because he did not believe in Jesus as his Savior.

Jesus' rebuke is strong: *Leave her alone, ... It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.* Our Lord's rebuke to Judas is a strong reminder to all of us of what is most important in this life. What is most important is what Jesus once told Mary's sister Martha at another dinner party these same two sisters held for Jesus. If you recall the situation, Martha was very busy preparing that dinner. It was an act of love. But as Mary just sat there at Jesus' feet listening to His Word, Martha got upset and told Jesus to tell her sister to get into the kitchen to help her. Instead, Jesus said: *Martha, Martha ... you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.* Lu 10.

May it never happen to any of us that our busy-ness in this life should ever turn any opportunity to worship our Lord and to hear His Word into a lost opportunity. Amen