

June 16, 2019

John 12:1-11

"Motivation"

John 12 is going to lead us in a conversation about motivation. Why do people do what they do? We're going to talk about why we do what we do. Chapter 12 tells us a lot about motivation.

John 12:1 gives us the context. "Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead." We are now entering the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

Jesus arrives back in Bethany. This is like his home base. It's where his good friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus live. And as if we might forget, John reminds us that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Who can forget, right? Here's why I think John includes this reminder. It's always a good thing to repeat stories of God's goodness over and over, to remind ourselves how great He is.

So, six days before the Passover, Jesus has a week left and he knows it.

What would you do if you knew you had one week left to live? Jesus wants to spend time with the people who were most important to him.

Here's the order of events leading up to Jesus' last week. In chapter 11, Jesus comes to Bethany because he has to. Lazarus is sick and then he dies. So Jesus raises Lazarus. But right after that he leaves, because the plot to kill him thickens. So Jesus heads back to the wilderness to be with his disciples.

Now, in John 12, Jesus comes back to Bethany because he wants to spend some time with the people who are closest to him. In these final days, spending time with those you're closest to is the most important thing to do. Think about it. If you had one week to live, what would you want to do? I know the temptation is to say something monumental. But really, when we think about it, I think most of us would want to do the simple things. Be with those closest to us. Talk about character and values and what's most important about life. I think we would want to talk about our faith, and the essential truths of our faith, and what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus is our example. That's why he returns to Bethany. He is

getting them ready for the struggles which lie ahead. Jesus is pouring his energy into what they need to understand about what's most important in life.

Here's what's going on now. There's a dinner in Jesus' honor. At some point, it takes on an air of worship. Mary takes a pint of expensive perfume and pours it on Jesus' feet. The perfume is worth about a year's wages. She then wipes his feet with her hair. We'll get into all that in a bit. But the key for us right now is to understand her motivation. What is Mary doing? She is motivated by a spirit of worship. Worship is her motivation.

John doesn't want us to miss the choice Mary makes. What she does is very important. There are many manifestations of worship. Worship is fellowshiping. Worship is serving. Worship is also sacrifice. Extravagant sacrifice. That's where we're at with the ointment. It is expensive. It's most likely an ointment made from an herb that grows in the high pastureland of the Himalayas somewhere between Tibet and India. It is worth around 300 denarii. A denarius is one day's wage. So you can see how expensive it is. And Mary pours it on Jesus' feet. That is sacrificial. And it comes from a

heart of love and devotion.

As we consider this gift, we can learn some things about extravagantly loving Jesus.

Here's a principle at work in Mary's extravagant gift. **Our values show up in our actions.** Our values are going to be shown in our actions. That's true for Mary. Mary's values are shown in the way she acts.

If I say I value exercise, but never exercise, do I really value exercise? If I say I value my kids but am not involved in their lives, do I really value my kids? If I say I value my kids' independence, but am a helicopter parent, do I really value their independence? If I tell you I value our relationship and then show up grossly late to dinner {the Mortimer family ethic is if you're not five minutes early, then you're late}, do I really value our relationship all that much? You see how this all plays out.

Mary gives all of something she spent a lot of money on in an extravagant act of worship. She shows how much she values who Jesus is and what

he's about to do. What she does with the perfume is a surprising act of generous worship. As expensive as it is, you'd expect her to dip a finger in to put it in his hair or on his clothes. But she doesn't. Mary breaks the jar. Can you imagine? She doesn't calculate the cost. She just does it. She doesn't wait to poll the room. She breaks the jar. When she decides she's giving everything, she gives everything.

What do you think of such extravagance? It all depends on what you value. It all depends on what you think of Jesus Christ. To people who are not followers of Jesus Christ, what you do in worship on Sunday morning makes no sense. You prioritize your time. It's clear that this time on Sunday morning is of utmost importance and nothing, barring serious illness or death, will bump it from your plans. Family or friends visiting for the weekend? Well, they can come to worship with you or do without you for an hour or so. It's about what's important. Big plans Saturday night? Well, I can't get too crazy because I have to be prepared to give my best in worship. Nothing is worthless or wasteful if it's done to honor and worship Jesus Christ.

What does Mary do next? She lets down her hair and wipes the feet of Jesus. This is an act of affectionate humility. You need to know that a woman would never be in public with her hair down. It would be humiliating to do that. But Mary, in her selfless love for Jesus, doesn't care what others think. She lets her hair down and wipes the perfume off of Jesus' feet.

Love for Christ is extravagant. Love for Christ is also a misunderstood motivation. That's Judas. He is more interested in money than in Jesus. He claims to be all about social justice, and maybe that is partly true, but how many times do people talk a big game about concern for the poor while taking expensive vacations and driving luxury cars? Judas can't begin to imagine any situation where devotion to Jesus Christ would be an extravagant or costly thing. It gets in the way of what he thinks is important.

That's why when he sees what Mary does, he scolds her. I always wonder about people who publicly scold others. What are they really doing? They're trying to make themselves look or feel better. It's called virtue

signaling, and it's all over social media. Judas can't understand her motivation. What do I like to say? "I can explain it to you, but I can't understand it for you." Just because Judas doesn't understand, doesn't mean Mary is wrong. Don't ever let anyone criticize you for giving your best for the Lord.

I love how Jesus responds to Judas. Jesus says, "Leave her alone." Mary doesn't justify, explain, or defend her actions. She is giving her best for Jesus. The only opinion she cares about is from Jesus. What a great lesson for us. If we are doing something out of devotion to or love for Jesus Christ, then we shouldn't care what anybody else thinks. Can I get an "Amen?"

Here's something you might want to write down:

There's always a good reason not to show great love.

Do you know what I'm talking about? A thought comes to you, *you know, I should send a text to my dad, telling him I love him.* But it's a busy time, and you think, *I'll do it tomorrow.* Or there's a family at the restaurant, and their kids are really well behaved, and you think, *I should have the server*

put their meals on my bill. But you hesitate, figuring it'll be too awkward. Don't miss one-time opportunities to show great love. Did you know that the Bible never says moderation in all things? Don't let constant needs cause you to miss one-time opportunities. There are some opportunities in life, if you miss them, you miss them. They will never happen again. Don't wait to show love.

The last motivation I want to look at from this story is a negative one. It is fear. The doctor says, "Quit smoking or you're going to die." That's a heck of a motivator, right? Listen to verses 10-11: "So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus." They think they can weaken Jesus' influence by destroying evidence. They use fear to motivate.

Fear is a powerful motivation. Ask any despotic leader, dysfunctional parent, or abusive pastor. Some people are motivated by fear.

In other words, some people are motivated to do things, and they think the motivation is from God, but motivation doesn't always equal Godly

inspiration. Moses was motivated to set his people free, but he did the wrong thing by killing an Egyptian. That wasn't inspired by God. James and John wanted to love Jesus and to do good by Jesus. So when they found a city that wouldn't receive the word of Christ, they asked Jesus to rain fire down upon the city. *See, Jesus, we're on your side.* They thought they were motivated - for more and more to love Jesus - but it wasn't a Godly motivation. Several years ago, there were people who claimed they loved Jesus and wanted to protect innocent life, so they went and blew up abortion clinics. Just because you feel strongly about something, doesn't make it God's idea. Someone whose spouse doesn't share their spiritual convictions thinks God wants them to get a divorce and start up with that person they found on *Christian Mingle*. Just because you feel strongly about something doesn't make it a Godly thing.

That's what's going with these religious leaders. At some point they were motivated to love God but they got so twisted up, they plotted to kill Jesus and Lazarus. Wrong motivation will always lead to wrong action.

We're going to end with a question:

What spiritual motivation is working in my life right now?

Is it worship? That's what motivated Mary. Is it selfless humility? That's what motivated Mary. Is it extravagant generosity? That's what motivated Mary. Is it love? Remember, fear is a negative motivator. But the Bible says that *perfect love casts out all fear*. That's Mary. Perfect love. And so she is not afraid. Perhaps Mary is a good example of the kind of motivation we want working in our lives.