

November 13th, 2016

OTHER WORLDLY WORSHIP

John 12:1-11

In this morning's passage, we see three profiles of worship: Mary's worship, Judas' worship, and the chief priests' worship. Mary is worshipping Jesus, Judas is worshipping money, and the chief priests are worshipping their power. And this is a picture of all of life. All of life is either worship or idolatry. There is no middle ground. There is no neutral territory. Jesus Christ is either worshipped in how we do life or He's not. Whether we go to work, pursue a business venture, raise our children, go on vacation, feed the poor, read our Bibles, go fishing, respond to a crisis, perform under distress. Every event under the sun is either an opportunity to worship the living resurrected Christ, or an opportunity to worship ourselves.

What was not so obvious to me as I prepared this message is *why* Mary was worshipping. Because if we look at it superficially, Mary's worship and Judas' worship may not be that different. There are scores of people who follow Jesus because of what they *gain from* Him, and not because they *gain Him*.

Consider the context of chapter 11. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead! Mary and Martha were on the verge of despair, their brother died when Jesus could have simply come when they requested Him. 4 days go by. He's dead beyond the help of any physician. And then Jesus comes "Lazarus come out." And then the dead man comes back to life.

Mary got her brother back! This is a cause for worship, is it not? I know that many of you have lost close family members, and close friends, and if Jesus were to raise them from the dead, certainly you would worship Him in grand celebration. And that would be right! But is that the *ground* of Mary's extravagant worship? This passage gets to the very heart of why we worship

Jesus.¹ What do we tell the scores of Christians who don't get their brother's back? What do we tell our brothers and sisters in North Korea who have their whole families tortured and killed if they leave the country? Is Christ worthy of worship then? That is where we are going in our passage this morning.

Mary's worship was not focused on her circumstances. Lazarus being raised from the dead was not, *emphatically not*, why Mary worshipped Jesus. She worshipped because she gained *Him*. Not *mainly* for her brother

If we worship Jesus *primarily* because He fixes our circumstances or because He gives us wealth or power, then we are worshipping Him but ourselves.

The Big Idea...

The main reason we worship Christ is because we gain Christ, all other worship is worship of self.

☆ Other Worldly Worship (v.1-3)

☆ Worldly Self Worship (v.4-11)

I. Other Worldly Worship

Six days before Passover

v.1 "Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead." Two important things to

¹ Remember what Satan said to God about Job "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." (Job 1:9-11) In other words Satan is saying 'Job is not worshipping you because of You God, but because of the stuff you give him. He worships Himself. You take that away, and you'll see where his real loyalties lie.'

see from v.1. 1) This was six days before *the Passover* in which Jesus died. John 12 to John 20 takes place in one week—passion week. 2) John 11 ended with the Jewish leaders signing a warrant for Jesus’ arrest. And then Ch. 12 begins “Jesus *therefore* came to Bethany.” Jesus’ hour had finally arrived, and He was not running from it. Jesus came right into the the heart of danger.

Proof of Life

When Jesus arrived at Bethany (less than 2 miles from Jerusalem), he arrived at Simon the Leper’s house. Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 record this same event, and they both tell us this event took place at Simon the Leper’s house.² Putting ourselves in the room, we know at least that the disciples were there, Matthew 26:8 tells us this, and so were Martha, Mary, and Lazarus and Simon. And a feast was prepared for Jesus—v.2 “So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.” This detail about Lazarus reclining at the table reminds us that Lazarus was in fact raised from the dead. He was no mere phantom. He lived, he ate, and he was at this feast celebrating Jesus with His sisters.

Other worldly worship

So Martha was serving the guests, Lazarus was reclining with His Lord, and we see Mary in v.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.” This pound—λίτρα *litra* in the Greek, was 12 ounces—the size of a can of pop. John MacArthur says that this ointment or perfume came from the “...root and spice of a plant native to the mountains of northern India.”³ And so on top of the

² The passage in Luke 7:36-38 is a different account altogether. The details are very different. In Luke’s account the dinner is at a Pharisee’s home, and the woman is unnamed and is “of the city”—immoral. The discussion Jesus has afterwards doesn’t focus at all on Jesus’ burial, but rather whether Jesus was a prophet or not since He allowed this sinful woman to touch him. And lastly, this event in Luke took place quite prior to passion week.

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 4

extraction cost, the distance alone would have skyrocketed the value of this perfume. v.3 further tells us that this was *pure* nard, not diluted, which would have made it all the more valuable. When Judas complains in v.5, he assessed the value at “three hundred denarii.” One denarius was a day’s wage for a laborer. So three hundred denarii after you subtract all the Sabbaths and holy festivals for the Jews was equivalent to a year’s worth of wages for a laborer. About \$25,000.⁴ She didn’t pour \$5,000 or \$10,000 on Jesus, but all of it. Not a few drops, but every last drop.

The other accounts in Matthew and Mark’s gospel tell us that Mary anointed his head (Matt 26:7) and his body (Mark 14:8), whereas John only mentions Jesus’ feet (John 12:3). But these are in harmony. The tables they ate at were low to the ground, and Mary no doubt started to anoint Jesus starting at his head and ending at his feet.⁵

But it wasn’t the \$25,000 perfume alone that was so shocking, it was also that she let down her hair to wipe Jesus’ feet. Culturally at that time, for a Jewish woman to let down her hair in public would have been seen as scandalous. That’s what immoral women did. Add to that, Mary was washing Jesus’ feet. Feet washing was a task only for the lowest slaves, not a woman of stature and prominence like Mary.

Mary sacrificed the most expensive object that she owned, *and* she sacrificed her reputation in anointing Jesus. Many Christians today are willing to sacrifice at least some finances so long as they don’t have to lose their reputation. Al Mohler was speaking on the Briefing the other day about a poll that was taken, where a staggering percent of parents refuse to pass their faith along to their children, so that their children won’t have tarnished reputations in the market place or at the university.

Not Mary. She said “To hell with my finances, and to hell with my reputation! This is my Lord and my God!” However what bothered me as I

⁴ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/leave-her-alone-judas-this-is-for-my-burial>

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 5

was preparing for this sermon was why? What was the ultimate reason Mary did anointed Jesus? Remember this was on the heels of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Was this act *merely* an act of gratitude for getting her brother back?

Why did Mary worship the way she did?

If we get this answer wrong, we will get our worship wrong. If Mary anointed Jesus merely because He raised Lazarus from the dead than she is no different than Judas. Dear congregation, why do we worship Christ? Because of the stuff He gives us? Because our circumstances are pleasant? Because we are comfortable? That's not worshipping Christ. That's worshipping ourselves.

If we look back in chapter 11, we see a desperate family. Martha and Mary were crying their eyes out and both of them said to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."⁶ But Jesus had told them "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4) Lazarus died so that Christ could be seen more clearly. The circumstances in your life are often being torn apart so that Christ can be seen more clearly to you.

Jesus purposely allowed heartache in their lives, and in our lives so that we will not worship our circumstances. I fear for the Christians in this country, and in this church. I'm so glad that socialism was not elected into the White House on Tuesday. And I'm so very hopeful that policies could change for the better. But we have not turned over a new leaf. Where's national repentance? Where is a people that have come to the realization that they have sinned against a holy God and are on their faces begging for mercy? Our circumstances are not our saviors. Our bank accounts are not our saviors. Our position in global politics are not our saviors.

Martha and Mary felt the sting of their circumstances crumbling around them, and at that pivotal point, Jesus declared "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who

⁶ John 11:21, 32

lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26). And Mary, when she saw her brother, said “Yes! I believe. Jesus you are my life!” That’s why she anointed Jesus. Mary realized Jesus was life itself. Jesus was *her* life. What is a year's worth of wages compared to life itself? What is her reputation compared to gaining everlasting life with Jesus? She tasted the truth of the Psalmist: “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psalm 73:25-26).

Mary had discovered Jesus to be the bread of life—“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever” (John 6:51.) And now she feeds off of Him for all her nourishment and all her satisfaction. Mary had discovered Jesus to be the wellspring of life—“The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). And now she drinks Him in as her life-giving water. That’s what coming to Jesus looks like. “Faith is coming to Jesus and drinking the water and eating the food so that we find our hearts satisfied in him.”⁷ And not in our circumstances. That’s why Mary anointed Jesus. Not primarily because she got her brother back⁸, but rather because Jesus became her everything.

II. Worldly Self Worship

The worship of Judas: money = self

v.4-6 “But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” 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 John Piper, *Future Grace*, (Colorado Springs, CO.,: Multnomah Books, 2012), pg. 85

⁸ This would have been self-worship, not Christ worship.

My main claim here is that Judas was engaged in *worship*. He had a love affair with money, but it was really a preoccupation with himself. The love of money is the love of self-sufficiency. People love of money because they think that they can *satisfy* their desires with it. “If I just have more money, I can get the things I *want*, and then I’ll be happy.” This is worship of self. Judas followed Jesus *because* he worshipped himself. As one commentator said

“[Judas] cast his lot with Jesus, expecting Him to usher in the political, earthly messianic kingdom most Jewish people were looking for. As one of the inner circle, Judas eagerly anticipated an exalted position in that kingdom. But now, for him, that dream had turned to ashes. Jesus had so antagonized the Jewish leaders that they intended to kill Him (John 7:1; 11:53)... Disillusioned, Judas—facing the end of his ambitions—decided to at least get some financial compensations for the three years he had wasted on Jesus.”⁹

And Judas masks his agenda by saying he wants to take care of the poor.¹⁰ This is how Jesus responds.

Jesus’ response

v.7-8 Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.” In this response, Jesus gives Judas two reasons to leave Mary alone. First Jesus says, “[Judas] **leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.**” This is a hard verse. Commentators disagree, but what makes most sense to me, is to understand Jesus to be saying ‘Judas, leave her alone, she didn’t sell the perfume because she was keeping it for Me. For My burial.’ Jesus was going to be dead and buried in less than a week. It’s highly doubtful that Mary knew this. But Jesus did. Just as Caiaphas prophesied beyond his knowledge in 11:49-52, so it seems that Mary acts beyond her knowledge here.

⁹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 7

¹⁰ And this argument is so convincing that Matthew and Mark record that at least some of the disciples agreed with him (Matthew 26:8; Mark 14:4)

The second reason Jesus gives to Judas is in v.8. **“For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”** Now I think this is interesting because we already know from v.6 that Judas didn’t care about the poor. But the other gospels, in Matthew 26:8 and Mark 14:4 record that at least some of the disciples were being carried away with this reasoning. So Jesus is addressing all of them. He’s basically saying ‘Being concerned about the poor is good, but you will always have them to take care of.’¹¹ But I am going away very soon to my death. It’s Me that you should have your eyes focused on right now. I’m worth that \$25,000. Judas can’t you see that? I give life. I am life. Mary has seen this, and she gave her most prized earthly possession, and spent it on Me, because I’m going to spend my life for her.’

Judas sells Jesus out

Tragically, Judas responds by selling Jesus out. This was the straw that broke the camel’s back for Judas. In Matthew and Mark’s account,¹² Judas goes and betrays Christ to the chief priests for thirty pieces of silver. He will not be robbed of his worship. That is the first profile of self-worship in our passage. The second profile comes in v.9-11

The worship of the chief priests: power = self

v.9-11 “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. 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.” My only focus here is on what the chief priests are doing.

¹¹ Jesus is not saying that the poor ought to be neglected. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus says when we are compassion orientated instead of consumption orientated that we are actually ministering to Him. **Matthew 25:35-36** “For I was hungry and you gave **me** food, I was thirsty and you gave **me** drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed **me**, I was naked and you clothed **me**, I was sick and you visited **me**, I was in prison and you came to **me**.’ Helping to the poor is not an option for Christians. It’s a command. To neglect them is to neglect Christ. But Jesus’ point here, is that Judas is using this idea of social justice as a means to avoid worshipping Christ.

¹² Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11

The Jews are flocking to Jesus. Why? Because through seeing the miracle of Lazarus being raised from the dead, some of them were radically born again. They discovered Christ to be the all-satisfying bread and the all-thirst-quenching water for their souls. And they turned their allegiance away from the chief priests and flock to worship Christ. And this provoked chief priests to murder. Now, they are not content by merely killing Jesus, they want to kill Lazarus as well.

What's going on? What provokes these highly religious men to murder another innocent man? John Piper answers "The itch of self-regard craves the scratch of self-approval. That is, if we are getting our pleasure from feeling self-sufficient, we will not be satisfied without others' seeing and applauding our self-sufficiency."¹³ These men were enraged because Jesus was stealing their worshippers.

True worship provokes the world

In the case of both Judas and the chief priests, when true worship of Christ is present, it provokes the world to rage. So take away two things from this section. **1)** If people are reviling you for your worship of Jesus Christ, take heart. Jesus said "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10). Both Mary and these believing Jews suffered the hatred of the world, because they admired and adored Christ for Christ's sake. They discovered Christ to be the resurrection and the life. They are eternally blessed right now and those who didn't are eternally cursed. **2)** If no one is reviling you for your worship of Jesus Christ, it's probably not going very well. Jesus said "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." (Luke 6:26) Worshipping Christ as our supreme treasure will gain the hatred of the world. There is no way around this.

¹³ John Piper, *Future Grace*, (Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah Books, 2012), pg. 92

Application

Our Doctrine: All of life is either worship or its idolatry

That's what 1 Corinthians 10:31 means. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Do everything for the glory of God. That's the command. Judas was required to respond to Mary's worship of Jesus in a way that honored God. He didn't. He was worshipping Himself. The chief priests were required to respond to those Jews believing in Jesus in a way that honored God. They didn't. They were worshipping themselves.

One thing that is inescapable from this passage is that we are worshipping all the time. We are never not worshipping. To worship is to adore, or give honor or ascribe worth to something—worth-ship. We are always worshipping. The question is, what are we worshipping?

God-honoring worshiping is coming to Jesus Christ because He is all-satisfying. When God says I will not share my glory with another, He means that if we need something + Jesus in order to be satisfied in life, we are idolators. "Wait a second, I'm a Christian, I don't commit idolatry." Test yourselves. What controls you? What objects or events determine your satisfaction levels in life? An idol is anything that if you take it away, you are devastated. **What do you need in addition to Jesus in order to be satisfied in life?** Judas needed money. The chief priests needed power.

This text was devastating to me this week because I saw how much of an idolator I am. I so often have a pre-occupation with myself. I so often look to my circumstances to be my saviors and not Christ.

If you are looking at circumstances for your joy, your worship of Christ will be paper thin. If you are waiting for your circumstances in life to be right before you worship Christ, you will never worship Christ. Not primarily because those circumstances will never line up (which they won't), but rather because even if they did line up, you would not be worshipping Christ but yourself.

What one thing are you waiting to happen in order for you to tell yourself “Soul now you can rest, all is right now”? If I could just get my wife/husband to be like this, then I would be ok. Or, if I could just get that job then I would be finally fulfilled. Or, I just had this much money then I wouldn’t have to worry. Or, if church life just looked like this, then I’ll be pleased. Or, or, or.

Our spouse is not our Savior. Our job is not our Savior. Our money is not our Savior. Our church is not our Savior. Looking to those things to satisfy you is suicide for your spiritual life. This is the opposite of faith. Instead of looking to Christ as your all-satisfying bread and drink, you look to other things. That’s what Judas and the chief priests were doing in this text.

Our Duty: Put our faith in future grace

So how do we turn from worship of our self to worship of Christ? First, if you have not been born again, you can’t. Jesus said “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” So I would just plead with you. Judas never stopped worshipping himself. And he was dead, by suicide in less than a week from this point. All who refuse to turn to Christ, share his fate in hell. To look at Christ and say ‘You are not satisfying, my money is, or my job is, or my hobbies are, or my sin is... is a damnable sin.’ Please I beg you, repent and turn to Christ. This offer will not be available for very much longer.

How do we as Christians, turn from worshipping ourselves to worshipping Christ? We need to put our faith in **future grace**. This is a term that John Piper uses in a wonderful book after the same title, and it’s actually a very easy concept. We often say that we need to preach the gospel to ourselves. But if we only look to the historical facts of the gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, our gospel is going to be very one-dimensional and it will not sustain us from our idolatry.

The *foundation* of the gospel include the historical facts that Jesus accomplished on calvary. The *fulfillment* of the gospel, is everything that Christ purchased for us—all the promises of *future grace*. **Future grace is everything**

that God gives us in Christ—both His help and Himself—from this moment to all eternity.¹⁴

This is what Mary saw. She saw in Christ everything that she ever needed. And it was on this basis that she brought her worship to God. So let's consider all the future grace that Christ purchased in order that we might turn away from looking at our circumstances. This is how we are to preach the gospel to ourselves looking forward.

When we become discouraged about our spiritual growth, trust in the future grace of **Philippians 1:6** “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you *will bring it* to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

When our eyes become too focused on our finances and our affections rise and fall with our checkbook balance, trust in the future grace of **Philippians 4:19** “And my God *will supply* every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

When we feel too weak and feel like giving up, trust in the future grace of **2 Corinthians 12:9** “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

When we feel unequipped to make decisions about our future, trust in the future grace of **Psalms 32:8** “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.”

When we feel the enemy closing the darkness upon us, trust in the future grace of **Romans 8:31** “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

When we are worried about how we will take care of ourselves when we get old, trust in the future grace of **Isaiah 46:4** “Even to your old age I am he, and to

¹⁴ John Piper, *Future Grace*, (Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah Books, 2012), pg. xii

gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.”

When Mary trusted that Christ was the resurrection and the life, she wasn't just trusting the historical facts of the gospel, she was trusting all the future grace that Christ purchased for her. That is what it means for Jesus to be the resurrection and *the life*. Our *very life* consists in constantly feeding off all the promises that He made to us.

Our Delight: Christ sealed the promises of future grace in his own blood

It is impossible that Jesus ever fail on any of His promises because He sealed them in His own blood. Jesus told Judas “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.” Jesus became the resurrection and the life *by dying*. He could only give us life if He took on our death—if He took on our sin. Mary offered this extravagant worship to Christ, because Christ offered the most extravagant gift in the universe: His blood.

Closing Prayer to Sermon

Oh God. I pray that you grant us two things as we close. First, please grant us a heart like Mary's where we would say "To hell with my finances, my reputation, my position, my power...I want Christ!" Lord free us from our false gods, and looking to our circumstances to be our saviors. Secondly Lord, help us to trust in all your promises of future grace. Lord help us to see that the gospel is still good news today because it holds out for us all your promises to help us and be with us from this moment throughout eternity.

Benediction:

"...my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen." Philippians 4:19-20