John 12:1-11 *An 8-Day Revolution: Jesus Welcomes Death*

***A Strange Shopping Trip***Financial experts say you should try to have at least three months’ worth of wages in the bank, in case of an emergency. I don’t know how many of you have managed that, I know we haven’t, but it is a good goal to shoot for.

But for the sake of argument, let’s say you have managed to get your savings up. In fact, I’d like you to imagine that you’ve managed to save a whole year’s worth of wages—let’s say $35,000.

Now, I’d like you to imagine going to the bank and telling the cashier that you’d like to withdraw it all. You walk in and say you want to close your account and you want the cash.

The bank teller winces at the thought of just handing you your $35,000, so she calls over the bank manager. The bank manager invites you into his office. He says, “Uhmm, I understand that you want a cashier’s check for your whole savings account. Do you understand that that totals around $35,000?”

And you say that you do. So he says, “Uhh, I don’t want to pry and it’s your money and you can have it any time you want, so I’ll get the teller to make out the check, but I am curious: are you taking your business somewhere else? Because if you are, I would like to know if there’s something about our service or our rates that is causing you to go elsewhere.”

Now, imagine you look him square in the eye and say: “Oh no, I think you have a lovely bank. I’ve enjoyed your service very much. It’s just that I want to use the money.”

“Oh, are you buying a new car with cash?”

“No, I’m going to buy a vial of perfume.”

“Did you mean a vat of perfume? Are getting into the perfume business?”

“No, I’m just buying a vial. A small amount, about ½ a liter, a little under a pound.”

“You’re going to buy $35,000 worth of perfume today? Just ½ a liter?”

“That’s right. Is my check about ready?”

"Uh, just a second.  I just have a couple more questions.  Uhhmm, what are you going to do with that perfume? Is this some kind of an investment?"

"Oh, I guess you could call it that.  I plan to break the top of the bottle and pour it out on someone today."

”What?!?!  Who could be worth that?!?!"

***Extravagant Worship***Who could be worth that?

Today we are going to look at an act of extravagant worship. We’re going to see an over-the-top, I can’t believe she just did that, what a waste of money, act of devotion. And we’re going to ask ourselves: Who could be worth that?

The story is in the gospel of John, John 12:1-11 and I invite you to turn there in your Bibles now. Also, we’ll put the verses up on the screen as we go along. John 12:1-11.

We’re starting a new series of sermons today, one that goes along with small-group material we found on RightNow Media. It’s called “An 8-Day Revolution.” The idea is that we are going to be looking at the final 8 days of Jesus’ life before the cross—from Friday to Friday. And one of the things we are going to be trying to understand is why Jesus died. What did He do to get Himself killed? And was it a tragedy? Or, as the title implies, was it revolutionary?

We’re going to start on the Friday before Jesus’ death. The story known as “Jesus’ Anointing at Bethany.” Let’s look at **verses 1 and 2** of the text:

**1**Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. **2**Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Let me say something about time markers. The design of this series is that we are going to be looking at events from the last week of Jesus’ life. And we can tie them to specific days in that week: Palm Sunday, the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, etc. But some of the time markers in the text can be confusing. Like this one “Six days before the Passover”.

Traditionally, we have believed that the Passover was celebrated on the Saturday between Jesus’ death and resurrection. By our way of counting, then, six days before the Passover would be the previous Sunday. However, in Jewish reckoning, a day begins in the evening. So the Passover in question would have begun at sundown on the day we know as Good Friday. That means six days before would be the previous Saturday. However, since a day begins in the evening, and the meal described in this story seems to be the kind of meal that would be eaten at the beginning of the Sabbath, many believe that this story is set on what we would call Friday evening. Thus, Friday to Friday.

Confused? I am. The important thing is not so much to pinpoint the days of the week as the things that Jesus did and said.

So a dinner party is being thrown in Jesus’ honor. He’s in Bethany, which is basically a suburb of Jerusalem. When Jesus is in Jerusalem, He has a tendency to stay in Bethany. The other gospels say that this incident happened at the house of someone called “Simon the Leper.” It’s possible that this Simon, whom we know nothing else about, is a relative of Mary and Martha and Lazarus (maybe their father?) Or, it is possible that he has a nice house and is serving as the host while Martha helps to serve. John does not specify whose house it is.

But it is significant that Martha and her brother Lazarus are there. The last major story told in the gospel of John is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. It is a noteworthy miracle, and a huge story, that happened right on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The final part of John chapter 11 tells us that the raising of Lazarus was the incident that pushed the Jewish Religious Authorities into the decision to have Jesus killed. We are also told that following that miracle, Jesus has been laying low, staying in a village called Ephraim. (John 11:54)

But now, Passover week is approaching and Jesus is returning to Jerusalem. It makes sense that the people of Bethany would want to welcome Him, and honor Him, for what He has done for Lazarus.

Imagine the scene: Martha is busy serving—consistent with every other time she appears in scripture; Jesus and the disciples are sitting around the table; and, of course, Lazarus is there. And you can imagine the dinner conversation, a lot of questions for Lazarus: What was it like? Did you know you were dead? Did you talk to God? Was there a bright light? Stuff like that.

And then, the other sister, Mary, comes into the room. **Verse 3:**

**3**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.

This is an act of extravagant worship. Let me tell you about it:

Because of the conditions surrounding death—body decomposition and that sort of thing—strong perfumes were often used to treat dead bodies and were considered quite costly.

Remember when the wise men visited Jesus after his birth? One of the gifts they brought was a burial spice called myrrh. Because these perfumes had to be imported, they were highly prized and priced.

We’re told that Mary’s is a perfume called nard, which was a plant grown in India. She has about a pint. In metric that’s about ½ liter. By weight: 11 ounces. Maybe the size of a can of soda. It’s quite a bit of perfume, as far as perfume goes. But we’re not talking huge quantities here.

We don’t know how exactly Mary got her perfume. Some speculate that the family was wealthy. Others suggest that it was a family heirloom. In any case, this was undoubtedly one of the most expensive things she owned.

In a little bit, Judas will estimate its value at a year’s wages. Back then, a good wage was one denarius a day. Figure about 300 working days a year—remember to take off the Sabbath and a few religious holidays—and you come up with 300 denarii. Like I said in the introduction, about the equivalent of $35,000 today. That’s expensive perfume.

So, anyway, Mary gets this bottle that represents her life’s savings—and she enters the room where Jesus is and—Mark and Matthew tell us—she breaks the bottle and then she just pours the whole thing out over Jesus.

In that culture, people didn’t sit on chairs like we do—they reclined. The table was low to the ground and everybody would lie on their side with their heads by the table and their feet extending out like spokes on a wheel. So it would have been easy for Mary to pour the perfume over Jesus’ whole body—starting at his head and ending at his feet. And John, to highlight Mary’s humility, emphasizes the feet. She even let her hair down and used it like a rag to wipe his feet clean.

Now, imagine the smell! This is strong, expensive perfume. And she’s emptied the whole bottle! I’ve lived with teenagers, so I’ve walked into some clouds of perfume and cologne, but this is something else! John says the fragrance filled the whole house, and I believe it.

What’s the point? Why does Mary do it?

You could say that Mary is anointing Jesus. Oil was used in the OT to mark the king of Israel. So maybe Mary is saying that she believes Jesus is King. Symbolically, that’s happening, of course. But I doubt that Mary thought it was her job to anoint Jesus King.

Jesus makes reference to His death. It’s as though Mary is preparing Him for burial. And in that sense, this is a very prophetic act. But nobody believes that Mary actually knew what was going to happen in the next week.

So what is she doing? I think she is worshipping. I think she is letting Jesus know just how much He means to her. I think she is showing her commitment, her devotion.

Worship can be defined as declaring and demonstrating the worth of God. You can see that in the word itself, how you can get the word “worth” out of “worship.” So true worship—to really be worship—is any act that recognizes and demonstrates the worth of God. Singing and prayer is worship—if it is meant to acknowledge God’s value and worth. But so too can other acts be worship. Any act of devotion. Any act that says God is worthy of what you are doing, is an act of worship.

And by pouring out this expensive perfume—perfume worth far more that I can even comprehend—Mary is declaring and demonstrating Jesus’ worth to her. She is showing just how much she values Jesus. By pouring out her life’s sayings she is saying—in essence—that there is no part of her life that she is withholding from Him.

I read a story this week about a little boy who came to believe in Jesus. He had never been in church, had never heard the Bible stories, never prayed. But when somebody told him the story of how Jesus had died for him, he believed. So the next Sunday morning he’s in church for the very first time, and the offering is being taken, and he’s watching as this plate gets passed around and everybody puts money into it. And the plate gets to him and he feels bad because he doesn’t have any money. So he passes it on and he’s thinking about what he can give to Jesus. And then it hits him. So he scrambles out of the pew and he asks the usher if he can have the plate back and then he puts it on the floor and then stands himself in it. And he says: “Jesus, I don’t have any money to give you, but what I do have, I give. I give myself to you.”

And that’s what Mary is doing here. She’s coming to this man who has taught her about God, this man who has brought her brother back to life, and she’s giving her life to Him. No matter what it costs her. No matter what everybody else thinks about her. She’s worshipping Jesus.

***What a Waste***Not everybody is in a worshipping mood though. **Verses 4-6** contain the objection of Judas**:**

**4**But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, **5**"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." **6**He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Judas watches this whole display. He watches Mary enter the room, watches as she breaks the neck of the bottle, watches as she pours the perfume out on Jesus, watches as she weeps and wipes her Lord’s feet with her hair, smells the richness of the nard…and he thinks: “What a waste! What a waste!”

Now Judas, as everybody knows, is a bad guy. Apparently, he was the treasurer of the little band of disciples. Nobody knew it then, but he was skimming off the top—something they probably discovered after the cross. So his objection here loses some of its oomph.

But still, there’s got to be a part of us that agrees with him. I mean, this is an expensive bottle of perfume. This is one year’s wages. And it’s gone. Just like that, it’s poured out and soaking into Jesus’ feet. It’s not like you can sponge it up and put it back in the bottle.

I don’t know if Judas really cared about the poor or if he was just hoping to get a piece of what the perfume was worth…but still, it seems like there might have been a better way to use that perfume. It’s so extravagant. So over-the-top. So…wasteful.

For those who don’t know Jesus, I think worship often appears that way: wasteful. For those who don’t have a relationship with Him, any sort of commitment or sacrifice made on His behalf seems unnecessarily excessive. For example:

* A pretty blonde coed spends her Fridays and Saturdays alone in her dorm room because she doesn’t want to get involved in the wild partying of her classmates. And everybody looks at the cutie without a social life and thinks: “What a waste.”
* Or a young man has charisma and smarts. All his business professors tell him he’ll have his pick of high-powered companies and be worth millions by the time he’s thirty. But he feels the call of God; and decides to forego the job interviews for seminary. And everybody looks at this potential CEO turned preacher and thinks: “What a waste.”
* Or maybe it’s you. You like to golf. Your friends have a regular tee time on Sunday morning. They invite you to join them, but you have to decline. You want to be at church. And your friends look at you trading in leisurely Sunday mornings on the greens to be here, and they think: “What a waste.”

For Judas, and for the world, worship just doesn’t make sense. It’s alright to have a little religion, we’re told, you just shouldn’t get carried away. Once worship gets costly. Once it means sacrifice, it just looks like a waste.

***Leave Her Alone***But not to Jesus. In **verses 7 and 8** we read about the reception of Jesus. We see how Jesus received this extraordinary gift:

**7**"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. **8**You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Here’s where things get revolutionary. Here’s where Jesus begins to turn the normal way of things on its head.

For one thing: Jesus doesn’t agree with Judas. Jesus does not think that this is wasteful on Mary’s part. He receives her gift, and even seems to say that it is appropriate. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark He calls what she has done “a beautiful thing.”

Now, think about that a little bit. Who do you know that would say they deserve to have a $35,000 bottle of perfume poured all over them? I mean, if this happened to you, would you say: “Yeah, I deserve that…I’m worth it”? What kind of ego does it take to believe that about yourself?

Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying Jesus has an over-inflated ego. He is without a doubt the humblest man who ever lived. Remember, He gave up the riches of heaven to become poor for our sake. (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9)

But that’s kind of the point: Jesus knows He belongs in heaven. He knows that He is the Son of God. And so, He knows He deserves worship. He knows that it is appropriate and right for Mary to pour out her life to Him. If worship is declaring and demonstrating the worth of God, then Jesus knows that more than anything else in the universe He is worthy to be worshipped.

And don’t think that Jesus has anything against the poor. Of course, He was the greatest advocate for the poor history has ever seen. The poor can be and should be served all the time—in fact, one of the best ways we worship Jesus is by helping the poor—but right now--with Jesus in the room—there is nothing better Mary can do than to declare the worth of her Lord.

So Jesus doesn’t see waste, He sees a beautiful thing. He commends Mary for pouring out her most valuable possession. He commends her for her act of devotion. He commends her for her commitment to Him.

“I am worth it,” Jesus says.  “I am worth it!  Pour it out on me!  Pour it out.  Don't stop her.  Let her go!  What she is doing, God wants, and I'm worth it!”

Then, the other thing, Jesus sees a connection between what Mary is doing and His soon to be experienced death. Verse 7: “"Leave her alone. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.” There’s a connection between this expensive burial ointment and what is going to be happening to Jesus in the next week. Like I said, Mary didn’t know about that yet, but God is using her actions to point ahead.

In fact, given everything I’ve read about the strength of this perfume, and the extravagant way Mary poured it out, I wouldn’t be at all surprised if Jesus’ feet didn’t still smell of nard when He walked down the Via Delarosa. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if this was part of the aroma of His sacrifice.

The revolutionary thing for us to note here is that Jesus knows what lies before Him. We were just told that Jesus kept a low-profile after raising Lazarus and the rumors began to fly that the Jewish Religious Authorities were looking for an opportunity to eliminate Him. Now we know that Jesus wasn’t lying-low because He was scared, or because He was hoping to get away.

Rather, we see that Jesus was waiting for the right time. He was waiting for the Passover, and now that it is here, He is no longer hiding but He is stepping forward to take the place of the sacrificial lamb. He’s not running from death. The revolution is that He welcomes it.

***The Value of His Perfections and the Intensity of our Affections***The aftermath of Jesus’ visit to Bethany is recorded in **verses 9-11:**

**9**Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. **10**So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, **11**for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

When you put a guy who used to be dead in the same place with the guy who brought him back from the dead, you’re bound to draw a crowd. And of course, the Jewish Religious Authorities don’t like that Jesus is drawing crowds, so their resolve to have Jesus killed is that much stronger. And poor Lazarus finds himself on their hit list as well.

Matthew and Mark take it a step further and tell us it was right after this incident that Judas decided to betray Jesus. He saw Mary’s extravagant worship as a waste, and decided he couldn’t stand it any longer.

But again, the point is, Jesus doesn’t see it as a waste at all. The message of this story is that **worship of Jesus is never a waste**. The greatest commandment says that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. That’s worship. And that’s what Mary is doing here. That’s what she is offering to her Savior.

“It is a beautiful thing when the *worth* of Jesus and the *love* of his followers match — when the *value of his perfections* and the *intensity of our affections* correspond. And it is not beautiful, but suicidal, when they don’t.” (John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/leave-her-alone-judas-this-is-for-my-burial>)

Mary is being held up as an example for us in this story. Judas is being held up as a warning.

Mary loved Jesus. Judas loved money.

Mary’s heart corresponded to the treasure that Jesus is. Judas’s heart contradicted the treasure that Jesus is.

Mary was filled with wonder and thankfulness and joy overflowing with lavish demonstrations of affection. Judas felt none of that, but valued his own greed and pride more than he valued Jesus.

It is a beautiful thing when the worth of Jesus and the love of His followers match. It is a not beautiful, but suicidal, when they don’t.

***2 Questions***So to end today, I’ve got two questions for you to consider. Two questions of personal application.

The first question is this: **Do you believe Jesus is worth it?**

Is he worth it? That’s the question being asked. Mary believed He was worth it. Judas didn’t. What about you?

You need to answer that question.  If you are going to be a worshipper of Jesus, you need to have settled the question of whether or not Jesus is worth your time, resources, your attention, and your life.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, come from heaven to earth, to earn your salvation from sin and judgment? Do you believe that just one week after this story, He went to a cross and died—paying the penalty not of His sins, but of yours? Do you believe that three days later He walked out His own grave—marking forever the defeat of death?

Because if you do believe that, then you should believe that Jesus is worthy of anything you can give Him. He is worthy of your commitment, your obedience, your sacrifice, your time, your money, your life.

And then, the second question is this: **What is He asking you to pour out?**

If you do believe Jesus is worth it, then what might He be asking you to pour out to Him today? What revolutionary act is He calling you to right now to declare and demonstrate His worth?

This will be different for different people.

Maybe He’s calling you to worship with your time. Maybe He’s asking you to get involved in ministry. Maybe He’s calling you to get involved with the youth ministry, or the children’s ministry, or to open yourself up to community by getting involved with a small group.

That’ll cost you in your time. It might mean something else comes off your schedule. But what do you think, is He worth it?

Or maybe He’s calling you to worship by giving up a bad habit. Maybe you’re fighting an addiction. Maybe you’ve fallen into a pattern of being short with your spouse. Maybe you’re having a tough time telling the truth. And He’s calling you to change that.

That’ll cost you some pleasure. It might mean some uncomfortable moments as you seek to change. But what do you think, is He worth it?

Or maybe He’s calling you to worship with your money. I don’t know if He’s asking you to give up a year’s wages, but maybe there’s some sum of money that you sense He would have you use for His kingdom.

That’ll cost you. But what do you think, is He worth it?

What is Jesus asking you to pour out to Him this morning?

Understand, giving yourself to Him does not earn your salvation from God. You don’t purchase His love. But God does call us to obediently and joyfully declare and demonstrate His worth in our lives to the world that is watching us. It is the only conceivable response when you understand what He has done for you.

It might seem like a waste to those who don’t know Him, but to Jesus it is beautiful.

Let me take you back to that bank where we started.  The manager asks you the question:  Who would be worth pouring a year of your life out onto?

The answer is Jesus.  He is worth it.  He is worthy.