

# THE HOUR HAS COME

---

## “He Holds His Priesthood Permanently”

by Andrea Burke

+

Four years ago, my husband and I went through the family court adoption process. The task was daunting but one that we knew needed to happen. The thing is we're not lawyers. We're not judges. We needed someone to step into that gap for us, and so, we hired the best adoption attorney we could find and set to work. After months of waiting for court dates, documents, and nervously awaiting phone calls, we eventually sat in a marble courtroom at an ornately-carved table where our daughter's feet couldn't even touch the floor.

Our lawyer arrived with beefy stacks of paperwork—all of the official documentation to present to the judge, who would give his final stamp of authority. It culminated in the moment he swirled his signature across the last line on the last page, stating this act was “final and irrevocable,” forever changing our lives.

I can't think of many modern examples of how we can understand the work of the high priest in Scripture, but that moment in that courtroom was one. The work of the high priest wasn't just the work of someone who knew all the religious laws, nor was it the priesthood as we understand it today—at best, denomination-dependent, or at worst, cloaked in scandal. The work of the high priest was one of maintaining not just a religious status but a legal one. Where the people could not make amends or sacrifices for their sins, the high priest

bore the weight and responsibility to follow and obey God's laws and rituals to stand in on behalf of the people. The high priest, if you will, knew the right paperwork to fill out, where to find the notaries, and what to say when standing before the judge. Where the people were guilty, the high priest stepped in as a lawyer—the kind no one could really afford.

### LEGALLY QUALIFIED

The high priest was a role that all of Israel was dependent on. As laid out in the book of Leviticus, under the law, the high priest stood as mediator between God and the people. Where the people fell short, the high priest made sacrifices. He stood as a “holier” priest, one who could step into the places where those who were unclean could not. He was like a lawyer doing what needed to be done on behalf of those who were not qualified. Clothed in glorious raiment, his role in the tabernacle was elevated and nearly royal.

Where the law stopped short and humans simply could not make the ends meet, Jesus arrived as our final High Priest. Christ reminds us in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Jesus was qualified beyond any other priest. Holier than any other man. Set apart in more ways than any other priest who came before Him. Able to make a perfect sacrifice and mediate to the fullest. Jesus had the

sinlessness, the access to God, and all of the qualifications to finish the work He set out to do.

### **MEDIATOR BEFORE THE JUDGE**

When we sat in the courtroom waiting for the judge, our lawyer filled us in on everything he knew about the judge. “He’s pretty straightforward,” our lawyer said. “And he’s always running late.” Clearly this wasn’t the first adoption case our lawyer had worked on. In fact, that’s why we hired him. He knew the judge, and as soon as the judge entered the room, it was clear the judge knew him. A familiar friendliness lingered as we waited for the small talk to subside.

*The Judge is eternally satisfied. The Priest has made perfect peace. The blood of the final sacrifice has been spilled. Sufficient. Done.*

Jesus does not come before God the Father as a stranger. He is not new to the system, bumbling along like a fresh-out-of-law-school attorney. The Judge is His Father. And Jesus stands as High Priest, reminding us that He also presents us as the ones He has atoned for. Not only is the Judge our Father too, but the lawyer is our Brother. His perfect record and perfect relationship with the Judge establishes Him as the perfect Priest. We have nothing to fear.

### **FINAL AND IRREVOCABLE**

The high priest was to bear the judgment of the people on himself. Part of his priestly attire literally called upon him to carry the names of the tribes of Israel etched on onyx stones on his shoulders (Ex. 28:9-12). No doubt, mediating the sins of God’s people was a weighty

and serious burden to bear. The Day of Atonement called for the high priest to make a sacrifice on behalf of the entire nation of Israel. On one day only, this anointed priest would strip himself of the colorful high priestly garments and put on a linen robe, putting aside the glory and beauty of his normal attire to take on the plain and humble. He would enter the holy of holies once a year to make this peace with God. Perfect animal sacrifices, without flaw or blemish, were required, and their blood provided the atonement. This imagery drenches the Old Testament, and begs the question—Is this really sufficient?

Then Jesus arrived, our ultimate High Priest, who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7), offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice once and for all. Just as our judge proclaimed the legal work was “final and irrevocable” as we sat in that courtroom, so God the Father accepted Christ’s work as final and irrevocable. The Judge is eternally satisfied. The Priest has made perfect peace. The blood of the final sacrifice has been spilled. Sufficient. Done.

If we’re honest, books like Leviticus cause our eyes to glaze over, and the fine details of the law are lost. Yet Christ’s being our High Priest is the great fulfillment of an echoing picture throughout Scripture. Someone holier than us had to come and make things right, for we cannot sit before the eternal Judge without a mediator. In stepped Christ to this musty earth, laying aside His glory to make final atonement. “The hour has come,” Jesus said in John 12:23, and into the heavenly holy of holies He stepped as our perfect mediator, our perfect High Priest.



# THE ANOINTED PRIEST

## + SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's followers sacrifice greatly for Him (John 12:1-3).
2. Jesus's followers prioritize being with Him (John 12:4-8).
3. Jesus's followers help others believe in Him (John 12:9-11).

Background Passage: John 12

## + WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Those who follow Jesus are called to sacrifice in order to show His worth, prioritizing Him above all as they point others to Him.

## + HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

When Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, she demonstrated that she was willing to sacrifice greatly because she treasured Him more than anything else. A short time after this, Jesus would sacrifice Himself on the cross so that we might be forgiven of sin and be made right with God.

## + HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus is our greatest treasure, we live with open hands, willing to sacrifice everything to make Him known to the nations.

# GROUP TIME

**Group content** found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



## SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



## CHRIST AS PRIEST

Scan this QR code for a brief theological reflection on Jesus as the High Priest and an explanation of the imagery in the poster.

## INTRODUCTION

**ASK:** As participants arrive, ask: **What is the best gift you have ever given or received, and why was it great?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

**TRANSITION:** No one is better than Jesus, and He deserves our best, our all. In this session, we'll read about an extravagant gift given to Jesus, but in essence, the gift was a costly act of service. Throughout history, believers have served Jesus to the point of giving up their lives for Him. They have done so because the gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure in the world and it needs to be shared. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him. The purpose is glory for the Lord, and the result is joy for us—always.

**SUMMARIZE:** Call attention to **PACK ITEM 7: CHRIST AS PRIEST**, noting the symbolism of anointing oil and blood, as you help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- One day before Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, six days before the Passover festival and His crucifixion, Jesus visited with His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Just a short time earlier, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, calling him to come out of the tomb that had been his final resting place for four days. This visit no doubt was accompanied by celebration and thanksgiving for the miracle Jesus had performed, but it also gave rise to acts of devotion and rejection that would culminate in the great High Priest's sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world.



**Listen to session-by-session training every week on** Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify:

[ministrygrid.com/gospelproject](http://ministrygrid.com/gospelproject) | [gospelproject.com/leader-training](http://gospelproject.com/leader-training).

# POINT 1

## JESUS'S FOLLOWERS SACRIFICE GREATLY FOR HIM (JOHN 12:1-3).

**SUMMARIZE:** Enlist a volunteer ahead of the group time to provide a summary of Jesus's first encounter with Mary and Martha from Luke 10:38-42.

- Once on His journeys, Jesus visited two sisters, Mary and Martha. The always-hospitable Martha opened her home to Jesus and His disciples. As she ran around the house preparing the food and setting the table, her sister, Mary, sat at the feet of Jesus, listening to what He said. Martha grew tired of Mary's idleness and filed a complaint with Jesus. In His loving way, Jesus told Martha that her sister had chosen the better path (see Luke 10:38-42).

**READ:** Call attention to the first Saturday on **PACK ITEM 3: PASSION WEEK TIMELINE** as the date for this session, a brief backtrack in the biblical storyline. Then invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 12:1-3** from his or her own Bible.

**1** 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 the 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.

**GUIDE:** Call for the group to identify the characteristics for Martha and Mary between Luke 10:38-42 and John 12:1-3 (*Martha: serving through hospitality; Mary: at the feet of Jesus*). Focus on Martha's service in **verses 1-2** with the leader content while inviting responses to the following statement (DDG p. 66).

Martha's service of hospitality was a sacrifice that revealed her devotion to Jesus.

- Martha's delight in serving Jesus was her sacrifice. Previously, her hard work of serving caused her to complain to Jesus about Mary's not helping, perhaps revealing a self-centered motivation. Martha had not stopped serving, but it seems as if she now continued with a mind-set of loving service. Welcoming Jesus into her home and serving Him was how she showed love to her Savior.
- Although we will see that Mary's sacrifice is the focus of the passage, Martha's act of service and hospitality did not go unnoticed as God inspired the apostle John to record it.

**ASK:** (DDG p. 66)

**What adjectives or characteristics express the way we should serve the Lord?** (joyfully; humbly; honestly; faithfully; lovingly; eagerly; without hesitation; without wanting anything in return)



### MARY, MARTHA, AND LAZARUS

Siblings from Bethany, a small town about two miles southeast of Jerusalem, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. They were close personal friends and disciples of Jesus. He often ate with them.

**ILLUSTRATE:** Focus attention on **verse 3** by presenting a bottle of perfume or cologne. You may pass it around for your group to smell, or you might spray a small amount into the air (don't overdo it!). The aroma can linger as you explain the significance of Mary's sacrifice with this statement (DDG p. 66):

By anointing Jesus, Mary was giving Jesus her very best, a sacrifice of devotion and worship.

- *Optional:* We don't know what Mary thought exactly as she anointed Jesus's feet and wiped them with her hair, but Jesus mentioned in verse 7 that in this way, she prepared His body for burial. It's possible that Mary, through the prompting of God, was doing more than she knew (ex. John 11:49-53).
- Mary knew the value of what she poured on Jesus. A pound of perfume was a lot of liquid. Judas put the price of this ointment made of nard at three hundred denarii in verse 5. With the common wage being a denarius a day, Mary anointed Jesus with a year's worth of wages. Her sacrifice was great.
- What Mary did was a humble act of love for Jesus. To wipe His feet with her hair meant she would have to let her hair down, no small thing for a woman of her time. A woman's hair was a woman's glory, and she was giving hers to her Lord. Mary's sacrifice was carried throughout the house as her perfume's aroma drifted from room to room. The entire place was filled with the smell of her devotion, an act of faith signifying Jesus's unique role and preparing Him for His unique act of sacrifice on the cross within the week (see v. 7).

**DISCUSS:** Set up the following question (DDG p. 66) with this reflection on the passage.

- Our service to Jesus is not a one-size-fits-all sacrifice. In the language of this narrative, some have the means to give expensive perfume, and others have only humble service and a plain meal. Jesus receives it all as service to Him—a fragrant offering (see 2 Cor. 2:14-16; Eph. 5:1-2). Because each woman found her place in service to the Lord, the house in Bethany that day was a joyous atmosphere filled with devotion to Jesus.

**What types of sacrifices can someone offer to Jesus today?** (their time in serving at church or a nonprofit or other places; their efforts in spreading the gospel; their finances to help in evangelistic efforts and social concerns; their skills and talents to help others for kingdom purposes)

**TRANSITION:** Followers of Jesus can sacrifice and show their love and devotion to Him in many ways based on each person's unique personality and situation. God honors it all if it is a natural outflow of a heart changed by the gospel of Jesus. But this is not the only way Jesus wants us to devote ourselves to Him.

### NARD

An oil taken from a plant grown in India. The extraction process was a slow, methodical one. Being imported and hard to extract, it was expensive.

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Martha herself was taking great care with the service and was ministering to Christ with all her heart. Mary herself was seated at the feet of Jesus and kissing them. . . . Christ beholds them both with his divine eyes and is cheered and rejoices over the purity of their mode of life and the offering to him of their undefiled service."<sup>1</sup>

—Athanasius  
(c. 296–373)

# POINT 2

## JESUS'S FOLLOWERS PRIORITIZE BEING WITH HIM (JOHN 12:4-8).

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 12:4-8** from his or her own Bible.

**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."

**CONTRAST:** In groups of 3-4, ask each group to make a list of the differences between Mary's and Judas's relationship and response to Jesus.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the content on **verses 4-6** to explain following idea (DDG p. 66):

Disciples must turn from sin and differentiate between doing the good things—good works—and the better thing—being with Jesus.

- To Judas, the perfume Mary used to anoint Jesus's feet was just an expense she wasted. The amount of perfume and its quality made it extremely valuable, about a year's wage for a common laborer. Sold and given to the poor, it could have done much good. Judas's stated point was not unfounded. In fact, Jesus's ministry was a testament to the world of how His followers ought to care for those in need.
- The Gospel writer, John, wanted his readers to see who Judas really was—a betrayer (v. 4) and a thief (v. 6). Judas didn't truly care about the poor any more than he cared about Jesus. Judas was bitter with Mary's sacrifice because he couldn't skim anything from it. He saw the perfume as an opportunity for worldly gain rather than spiritual devotion.
- *Optional:* Ironically, Judas failed to recognize the priceless treasure he had, being in proximity to Jesus. Jesus was on His journey to the cross, and the final push would come from Judas's betrayal for a few months' wages.
- *Application:* The point here is not that we shouldn't think through the best use of our resources but that we shouldn't miss the opportunity to worship Jesus with them. There is nothing better than being with Jesus.

**DISCUSS:** (DDG p. 66)

**Why is it sometimes easier to do good works than to spend time cultivating our relationship with Jesus?** (it seems more productive to do good works; cultivating a relationship takes time; we are results-oriented people; in doing good works, we feel good about ourselves and others see the results; we forget the reason why we do good)

### JUDAS ISCARIOT

Meaning "Judah from Keriath," a town near Hebron. He was one of the Twelve, Jesus's chosen group of disciples, and the treasurer of the group. He also betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

**EXPLAIN:** Help your group understand the meaning of Jesus's response to Judas in **verses 7-8**, specifically regarding His upcoming burial and His precedence over the poor.

- Regardless of what Mary understood about the value and meaning of her expensive sacrifice, Jesus made it clear that her humble act pointed forward to the day that very week when Jesus would die on the cross and be buried hastily in a borrowed tomb.
- To answer Judas's presenting complaint, which again was a false pretense, Jesus declared that His own sacrifice, resurrection, and exaltation were to take precedence even over the needs of the poor. Christians in every generation have the opportunity and responsibility to serve the poor in Jesus's name. But Jesus's presence on earth at this time was unique in all of history. So Mary's extravagance for Jesus's honor was appropriate and not to be castigated.

**SUMMARIZE:** Because Jesus is not physically present on earth, His disciples may wonder how they can worship and commune with Him. Jesus's disciples in the Gospels certainly struggled to reconcile His departure with His ongoing mission through His church. Though we do not see Jesus face to face, believers still experience Jesus's presence through union with Christ by faith, a union established by the Holy Spirit that empowers our service to the materially poor and especially the spiritually poor.

**INSTRUCT:** Encourage the group to read silently the key doctrine "Union with Christ" in their DDG (p. 66).

**Key Doctrine #70: Union with Christ:** At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all eternity.

**ASK:** (DDG p. 67)

**Though Jesus is not with us physically, how can we spend more time with Him?** (having a time of solitude and prayer with Him daily; reading and studying Scripture to know Him better; asking Him constantly how He would have us act in varying circumstances; having a heart that knows He's present and with us constantly; loving one another in the church)

**TRANSITION:** The household relished the holy moment of worship Mary just performed, even with Judas's foul-smelling question. And as the crowds outside discovered Jesus and Lazarus were both there, they had different responses.



# POINT 3

## JESUS'S FOLLOWERS HELP OTHERS BELIEVE IN HIM (JOHN 12:9-11).

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 12:9-11** from his or her own Bible.

**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.

**EXPLAIN:** Using the content below, explain from **verse 9** how the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection was both evidence of Jesus's power and also a potential distraction to some that kept them from seeing the miracle-worker in faith (DDG p. 67).

Jesus's miracles drew a crowd, but some simply enjoyed the spectacle and did not turn to trust the miracle-worker.

- Miracles draw a crowd because they point us to the supernatural and they stump us. We can't explain them. People flocked to Jesus to see what He would do as a miracle-worker. Jesus's miracles were not magic tricks or clever sleight of hand but real displays of His authority and power. When Jesus raised Lazarus in John 11, He prayed that His Father would open the crowd's eyes to believe in Him (11:42). The purpose of the miracle was for the salvation of many, not just the raising of one.
- Miracles are rare and can be viewed as a novelty, so they can attract what novelties attract. In John 12:9, people came not only to see the Lord but to see Lazarus, the living miracle. Lazarus was living proof that Jesus has power over death. For practically all people, when the dirt covers the casket of our loved ones, we will not be reunited with them in this life. But Mary and Martha received their brother back four days after he died (11:39-44).
- Jesus stated that He is the resurrection and the life (11:25), and He proved it by raising His friend from the dead. Lazarus's resurrection revealed that Jesus overcomes death on behalf of His people. Lazarus's resurrection also gives hope to every sinner who is dead in their trespasses and sins. When Jesus gets involved, He can bring to life what once was dead.

**ASK:** Direct groups of 3-4 to share their responses to this question (DDG p. 67):

**How have miracles in your life pointed you or others to Jesus?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

**INSTRUCT:** Invite learners to take a moment and ponder why people might reject and rebel against the evidence of a miracle, including the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Call for some responses. Then contrast the response of faith with the response of rebellion exemplified in **verses 10-11** (DDG p. 67).

Because of Lazarus's resurrection, many came to believe in Jesus, trusting in what He did in Lazarus's life and what He could do in their lives.

- Lazarus's miraculous resurrection was not only a sight to behold; for some it was also a problem to be solved. Lazarus was alive again—no one could deny that he had been dead four days—but the chief priests sought to kill him along with Jesus. They planned to undo what Jesus had done. Why? Jealousy.
- The chief priests' influence was diminishing and their power was waning. John said many Jews stopped following the chief priests and began to follow Jesus because of Lazarus. But the chief priests refused to accept Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise of sending the Messiah, yet the Jews who put their faith in Jesus recognized by His miracles and teaching that He is the Messiah.
- *Optional:* The chief priests' murderous response and plan validated Jesus's words in Luke 16:31. When speaking of the religious leaders through a parable, Jesus said, "Neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

**SUMMARIZE:** Followers of Jesus are always at risk of being persecuted simply for their association with Jesus. Miracles can draw a crowd, but it's not always a friendly one. Yet the miracle of new life in Christ is an opportunity to share the gospel with a dying world. All of us are dead in our sins until Jesus gets involved. The Holy Spirit gives life to our dead souls. He changes our desires. He redirects our actions. As a result, people will notice. People might follow Jesus because of you, or people might get angry because of your faith. Whatever the world throws at us, however, the worst it can do is kill us, which only ushers us into the loving and waiting arms of Christ (see Matt. 10:27-32). Death isn't final. Jesus will one day resurrect His people and give them a new heaven and new earth to enjoy forever in the fullness of His presence.

**DISCUSS:** Remind and encourage your group to keep up with the daily readings as you ask (DDG pp. 62,67):

From Day 2 in the DDG: **How does the hope of future resurrection strengthen you now to live for Christ?** (helps us realize our problems are temporary; encourages us to be strong in the Lord; gives us the urgency to spread the gospel)

**TRANSITION:** The miracle of salvation and new life through faith in Jesus may lead to rejection by some, but to others, it will be a cause to believe in Jesus.

# MY RESPONSE

**SAY:** When Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, she demonstrated that she was willing to sacrifice greatly because she treasured Him more than anything else. A short time after this, Jesus would sacrifice Himself on the cross so that we might be forgiven of sin and be made right with God. Because Jesus is our greatest treasure, we live with open hands, willing to sacrifice everything to make Him known to the nations.

## HEAD:

We often assume it was easier for eyewitnesses to Jesus's words and deeds to believe in Jesus. Yet Judas, one of the twelve disciples, failed to believe Jesus is the Christ. The chief priests, experts in God's law, failed to believe Jesus is the Son of God. We have the Holy Spirit and the record of Jesus's death and resurrection bearing witness that He is the Christ. May we believe in Jesus like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus did.

**What doubts do you struggle with about Jesus, and how does the Bible address those doubts?**

## HEART:

Mary's example of devotion and sacrifice calls us to examine our own life before Jesus. Do we adore Him as she did? Are we willing to give our best to Him? Is He our greatest treasure? Mary, of course, had the privilege of seeing and being with Jesus in person. But we have the witness of the Holy Spirit, and through Him, Jesus is present with us always. When we fail to sense His nearness on account of apathy or sin, we can ask Him to renew our affections for Him, and we can be sure He will answer that prayer.

**What about Jesus makes you love Him more? Meditate on those things until your heart warms toward Him.**

## HANDS:

Just as Mary is an example of the right affections for Christ, she is also an example of proper sacrifice. She gave Jesus perhaps the most valuable thing in her home. We all have something we can hand over to Jesus today. It may be our work, our money, or our time. Whatever it is, we should ask ourselves how we can honor God with what we have, and we should gladly give it to Him, which may open a channel for the gospel to be preached and heard.

**What can you sacrifice to help others see Jesus is everything?**

**PRAY:** Father, help us love Jesus, our Savior, with all that we are and everything we have, making Him and His gospel our first and highest priority for His glory and the good of our fellow human beings. Amen.

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"If we really see Jesus for who he is—the almighty, infinite God of the universe who condescended to take on human form so that he could die a brutal death in the place of his rebellious creatures—if we understand his beauty—that he is the all-satisfying, wondrous, joyful God who promises to give peace, blessing, and satisfaction in himself to those who come to him—if we get this, how can we possibly withhold anything from him?"<sup>2</sup>

—Matt Carter and  
Josh Wredberg

# EXTRA

## POINT 1: JESUS'S FOLLOWERS SACRIFICE GREATLY FOR HIM (JOHN 12:1-3).

### + COMMENTARY

“The word for ‘pound’, *litra*, denotes a Roman pound weighing 11.5 ounces or 326 grams. That much perfume was a very large amount indeed. Nard is an extract from an aromatic Nepalese plant, *Nardostachys jatamansi*. The perfume was expensive because it was imported from a great distance, as well as having to be extracted from plant material. The process of extraction usually involved large amounts of plant material yielding only a little aromatic oil. Just how expensive this perfume was is revealed in 12:5. Anointing Jesus’s feet with so much expensive perfume was an act of great devotion.

Mary’s wiping Jesus’s feet with her hair also expresses great devotion. A woman’s long hair was regarded as her glory (1 Cor. 11:15; cf. 1 Pet. 3:3). Each time Mary’s anointing is mentioned, reference is made to her wiping Jesus’s feet with her hair (11:2; 12:3). In Luke 7:44 Jesus contrasts the lack of love in the welcome accorded him by Simon the Pharisee with the love shown by a sinful woman: ‘Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.’ Whatever else it signified, wiping Jesus’s feet with her hair revealed the depth of Mary’s devotion to him.”<sup>3</sup>

### + ILLUSTRATION

In 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, Paul described how Christ leads believers in triumphal procession as we spread the gospel, using the metaphor of Christians spreading “the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.” Paul likened the expansion of the gospel to Roman soldiers returning from war. While the victorious soldiers were greeted by the people, priests carried giant censers of smoking incense. The smell would waft like a cloud over the triumphant soldiers as well as the defeated princes dragged behind, who were to be put to death imminently.<sup>4</sup> Depending on the hearts of those listening, the gospel brings hope or doom.

Our call is not to create the aroma ourselves. We can’t do that no matter how hard we try. Jesus will do the necessary work. He will provide the scent. His call to us is to go about our regular lives with the knowledge that He is Lord and Savior. The world will notice. Some will be saved. Some will not. But in it all, Christ will be honored.

# EXTRA

## POINT 2: JESUS'S FOLLOWERS PRIORITIZE BEING WITH HIM (JOHN 12:4-8).

### + COMMENTARY

“Are you like Mary? Or are you like the Judases of the world, who criticize those who are bountiful in their love? What a contrast there is at this point! Judas’s objection to Mary’s action contains the first recorded words of Judas in the Gospels. They are a carping complaint: ‘Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?’ Mary’s first words are a trusting confession, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died’ (John 11:32). Out of his greed Judas eventually sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver, an amount probably equal to 120 denarii. Mary gave Jesus an offering worth two-and-a-half times that amount. Judas kept the bag, from which he pilfered. Mary broke her box in order that all might be given to Jesus. Judas sought to turn attention from Jesus. Mary sought to turn it to him.”<sup>5</sup>

### + ILLUSTRATION

Imagine a regular Bible study on a Wednesday night. In this meeting, week after week, a group gathers to fellowship, read and study God’s Word, talk about Jesus, share the real state of their hearts in confession, and pray for one another. It is a holy gathering, encouraging the hearts of all who attend.

Now imagine an interaction among the group one night. The teaching time is rich, focused on Jesus and His gospel, and everyone is basking in the love of God in Christ. Then someone interrupts with an unfitting word. He begins to say it is okay if others don’t believe what we are saying. After all, there are varying views on many biblical topics. Perhaps he is not a Judas. His intentions are good, but they are misguided. Rather than add comfort, he takes it away. Rather than offer assurance, he diminishes it.

Not every viewpoint is worthy of interaction, and not every environment is the right one to hash out theological differences. Some moments are too holy for anything but savoring Christ. If it is the real Jesus we are rejoicing in—the One whose gospel is simple enough for a child to grasp yet deep enough that no scholar will ever reach the bottom—then we must be careful not to distract others from seeing and savoring Jesus. There is a time for nuanced theological conversations, but knowing the time matters. We may have good questions that deserve a hearing. But we need to be able to read the room and understand that sometimes we might just not understand. When someone is enjoying Jesus, it is wrong to change the subject.

## POINT 3: JESUS'S FOLLOWERS HELP OTHERS BELIEVE IN HIM (JOHN 12:9-11).

### + COMMENTARY

"12:9. After Jesus had raised Lazarus, he left almost immediately for Ephraim (11:54). Probably few people apart from the family, mourners and his own disciples had seen him since that time. The report that he was back in Bethany provided an opportunity for a large crowd of Jews . . . to come out and see him. Probably many came from Jerusalem; indeed, so close to the Feast of Passover, doubtless at least some were pilgrims. Lazarus himself drew spectators. If until this point he had shielded himself from much vulgar curiosity, the public nature of this dinner in Jesus's honour made such privacy impossible: the crowds wanted also to see Lazarus.

12:10–11. Thus Lazarus became a focus for the plots of the chief priests. His very life provided a ground for faith in Jesus, so he too had to be destroyed. . . . Although faith grounded on such a sign could not be as pure and strong as faith based on Jesus's word (cf. 10:38), it is far better than no faith. The calibre of their faith is not assessed (unlike the faith of those described in 2:23–25). What is clear is that the raising of Lazarus prompts many Jews . . . to 'go over' to Jesus and put their faith in him: the expressions assume a self-conscious conversion, a move away from the religion practised by the authorities and a move toward genuine trust in Jesus."<sup>6</sup>

### + OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

Miracles in the Bible often provided a platform from which the gospel was proclaimed. People heard God's word, and some were saved while some rejected Jesus. As the apostles went out into the world with the gospel, Jesus worked through them to heal the sick and even raise the dead. In many cases, the miracle provided an opportunity for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be preached, taught, or shared.

We cannot bring miracles about on our own. As we go about our lives, we may experience what we would call a miracle. Perhaps it is an unexplained cure for a disease. Maybe it is a close call where we can't help but sense the Lord's protection. Whatever the case may be, we can use these events as opportunities to share the gospel with those around us. Some may not believe it, but we leave that up to God. His call upon our lives is to bear witness to Him and to leave the saving in His capable hands.

Say: There are things in life that cannot be explained other than by divine intervention. Ask: How can those times become platforms for preaching the gospel, and what would you say to lift Jesus up?

#### References

1. Athanasius, quoted in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 11–21, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 41.
2. Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, *Exalting Jesus in John*, eds. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 242.
3. Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 258.
4. Charles R. Swindoll, 1 & 2 Corinthians, vol. 7, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017), 317.
5. James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 918-19.
6. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 430-31.