

WORSHIPPING JESUS – MARY’S PERSPECTIVE

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JOHN 12:1-11

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

This is the second time, that we have in Scripture, a home setting with Mary and her sister Martha and then in this account their much alive brother, Lazarus. The first account is in **Luke 10**. You would likely think that since this was after the raising of Lazarus from the dead by Jesus that this narrative would focus around him with a great celebration feast for Lazarus, where Lazarus, during their festivities would give a grand and beautiful speech, maybe even speaking of seeing the light on the other side or something. After all, it is not every day that someone has fellowship and/or a meal with a person who had been raised from the dead, after being dead for four days. In fact our Scripture in John 12 says that they had made HIM a supper. Not Lazarus, although he ate of it too, but it was for Jesus. Lazarus was raised from the dead for sure, but it was by Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. Lazarus hadn't been resuscitated by hospital staff or given the proper treatment or care at a hospital to where he was brought back from the brink of death. He wasn't zapped back to life in the ER. He had been dead for four days!

There are three accounts total in the gospels involving Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and this was the last of the three. Both of the stories that were in the home setting with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus have a distinct and similar pattern among them. Martha was doing the serving and Mary was at the feet of Jesus. I'm guessing Lazarus knew better than to step foot in Martha's kitchen and he probably had learned to just let the sisters do the talking. Perhaps too, he was still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that here he was with Jesus after being dead for four days! What we'll see in this story and the other accounts with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus was that Mary a true perspective of Jesus and then a good response to that perspective.

An interesting thing to note about Mary, Martha and Lazarus is we don't know really anything about them other than they were siblings and they had befriended Jesus. We don't know whether they were older,

like as in retirement age, whether Mary and Martha then were spinsters that had never married or whether they were widows. We don't know what sort of profession Lazarus was in or had been in. All we know about them is based on their relationship to Jesus. Of course for Lazarus, he had the distinction of being one of the first that Jesus had raised from the dead but beyond that we just know they were friends of Jesus. I might want that to be my epithet, which means something in a word or two that describes you. A friend of Jesus! In comparison of the two sisters in the two home settings, Martha is always doing the serving and Mary is at Jesus' feet. While Martha seems to be the outspoken one, of which she can kind of remind you of Peter, Mary was a listener and a worshipper of Jesus, which she can then remind us of John.

We know from the story of the resurrection of Lazarus that Martha did have a belief and understanding as to who Jesus was. Jesus, when He said to Martha that He is the Resurrection and the Life, He asked her if she believed that. She stated, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is come into the world." She got it! Likewise, when the disciples had been asked by Jesus who they thought He was, Peter exclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (**Matthew 16:16**) While Mary was pointed out by John to be at the feet of Jesus, it is no coincidence, I think, that John took note of that. John, was, as he claimed, the one whom Jesus loved, and who rested his head on the bosom of Jesus. (**John 13:23**) Mary is only recorded to have said one thing in the three accounts involving Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. When she was told that Jesus had come, after Lazarus had died, she rushed out to greet Him and she said, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (**John 11:32**) Mary may not have said a lot but she always wanted to be right at the feet of Jesus. She wanted to be near Jesus! This was clearly not just an infatuation of a woman for a man. No self-respecting woman, especially in this day and age, would waste their costly oil

by rubbing that oil on his feet with her hair. She too knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God and she wanted to be right at the feet of her beloved Lord, God, and Savior! In our passage of Scripture therefore in **John 12** we see from the actions of Mary that Jesus isn't someone who we just treat as our pal, someone we hang out with, and share experiences with or to replace as our spouse.

Much has been made about the sacrifice and the worship of Mary from this account in John. Yet for us the overall message isn't to put Mary on a pedestal or name a cathedral after her (or Lazarus for that matter). In a book called That You Might Believe, Stacy Watford makes mention of how we can read that story and then put ourselves in Mary's place and recall how we have surrendered our all to Jesus. Yet what we should get out of this is that as much as we may give to Jesus, in response to what He's given us, as Pastor Watford states, "when we pour it out on Christ it is barely enough to wash His feet. However when died on the cross for our sin, He can wash your entire soul and make you clean."¹ In the words of the Apostle John in explaining his reason for writing this gospel he says, "but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (**John 20:31**)

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God! Have you ever heard the argument that Jesus never wanted for people to worship Him for He was always pointing them to the Father? I guess they overlooked the story of the blind man that Jesus restored his sight and then Jesus told him that He is the Son of God to which the man cried, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him." (**John 9:38**) Another example is Doubting Thomas, after Jesus had risen from the dead, when he saw the holes in Jesus' hands and side declared, "My Lord and my God!" Why didn't Jesus rebuke them and say to only worship God the Father? Jesus was and is God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and

1 Stacy Watford, Rev., B.S., M.A.T.S, That You Might Believe, pg. 198 (Independently Published, 2019)

the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (**John 1:1-5**) Both Mary and Martha did though didn't they? Lazarus too, who had been raised from the dead after being dead for four days. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (**John 1:14**) That is why we find in our passage of Scripture in John 12 that it was quite appropriate for Mary to be at the feet of Jesus worshipping her Lord, her Savior, and God! But there should be no disrespect to Martha though. She may have had some issues that needed working out (don't we all) but she also knew that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God and she was serving Him.

In the first story of Jesus with Mary and Martha in **Luke 10**, we have Martha slaving away in the kitchen (presumably) and Mary at the feet of Jesus. Lazarus isn't mentioned as being present in this short story so perhaps it was just Mary and Martha. Martha though takes enough time out of her busy-work to come out to the gathering room or dining room and complains to Jesus, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." (**Luke 10:40**) What was Jesus' response? "**Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.**" (**Luke 10:41-42**) Jesus wasn't scolding Martha for doing the cooking or the serving though. She *could have* been honoring and worshipping Jesus in what she was doing and let Mary worship and honor Jesus in what she was doing.

So then, you know what that one thing is? There have been commentaries galore that have speculated on the one thing that Jesus was speaking about. In the Compact Bible Commentary they simply state

the obvious. As Jesus was speaking and Mary was listening, "Mary did what was right by devoting herself to Jesus' teaching."² In Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes says the one thing that was needful that Jesus was speaking about was "religion or piety. This is eminently and peculiarly needful."³ At my first reading of that I shrunk back and thought, "religion and piety? Huh?" The word religion has been used and abused so much that the mere speaking that word can turn off a listener's ears. Yet really, religion is the putting in action or practice one's belief system of the divine. Simply put, it is in the reaching out to and attempting to please or at least appease God or in the pagan beliefs-the "gods". Yet then I looked up the word piety in the Webster's Dictionary. It defines piety as "**reverence for God** or devout fulfillment of religious obligations."⁴ You may be familiar then with what James said was pure religion, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (**James 1:27**) What James is getting at as was Albert Barnes in addressing the topic of religion, is that it is in doing the will of God, what is pleasing to God and is honoring of God. Getting back to that word piety let us look at our passage of Scripture and see how it points to the having reverence for God.

Once again, we have Martha in the kitchen getting dinner ready and likewise we have Mary, who sat at Jesus' feet. At least there is a difference this time in Martha's perspective. The last time she complained to Jesus that Mary wasn't in there helping her get the meal ready but this time she remains quiet. The first recorded visit, Mary sat at Jesus' feet as she heard His word, that is, the Word of God was speaking the Word, and Mary was right there at the feet of Jesus soaking it in. This time she was at His feet but she had also taken her jar of costly spikenard oil and was rubbing it on Jesus'

2 Earl Radmacher, Ron Allen, & H. Wayne House, Compact Bible Commentary, pg. 718 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004)

3 Albert Barnes, Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, pg. 214 (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1966)

4 Random House, Webster's Dictionary, pg. 499 (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996)

feet with her hair. What then was the difference between Mary and Martha? Generally speaking, could it not be said that Martha was serving the Lord out of duty, initially at least, whereas Mary was loving the Lord in reverence? Was what Mary was doing in the first and second visits of Jesus the only way that could honor God in piety? In the first episode, so to speak, Mary was said to be listening to Jesus. She was, in school terms, sitting in the front row and learning on the edge of her seat. Intently, she was listening. Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God is speaking and she was listening. Martha likely had actually interrupted Jesus to have Him tell Mary to get in the kitchen and help in that first account. Martha was not honoring Jesus with piety, she was serving Him out of duty. The second episode in our Scripture in **John 12:1-11**, Mary is rebuked again, this time for wasting costly oil to just pour it all over Jesus' feet instead of using that oil to feed the poor. Of course that was Judas Iscariot, a thief and the betrayer of Jesus who said that. Jesus then said to leave her alone that she is preparing Him for His burial, that the poor you will always have with you.

Why do we do what we do in ministry? Is it out of duty? Or is it out of piety, honoring God and loving God as He has loved us? We can then look at this story and find application for ourselves in our day to day going about our lives? When Jesus was asked what is the great commandment of God, Jesus stated, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (**Mark 12:30-32**) God wants us to love Him as He has shown that He first loved us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (**John 3:16-17**)

God sent His only begotten Son Jesus, to come to this earth, to die on a cross for our sins, taking our sins upon Himself, so that we can be forgiven of our sins, be reconciled to God so that we may have fellowship with God, and to be a child of God to where we will live with Him for all of eternity. What about our everyday ordinary routine of working and serving God trying to just hang in there until Jesus takes us home? A much quoted Scripture that is used in addressing prayer has an answer to that question. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand [or the Lord is near]. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (**Philippians 4:4-7**) There's a lot in those few verses but we can be at peace knowing that not only is God Sovereign over all His creation, He has not left us out to dry up and blow away. "THE LORD IS NEAR." Jesus promised, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (**John 14:23**) Mary found the revelation that is in Christ Jesus. She bathed Him in her worship with her costly oil. Really, isn't it the goodness of God, the love of God that leads us to repentance, to turn from our wicked ways, and look to Jesus for His Wisdom and Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. (**1 Corinthians 1:30**) We can only find that in Christ Jesus! Just as Jesus said, "without Me you can do nothing" [spiritually speaking that is]. (**John 15:5**) We love God as He loves us, He died for us. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (**John 15:13**) Jesus said that just prior to His giving up His life for us, for our sins against God.

Without possibly understanding the doctrine and all of the points of religion in her worship of Jesus, Mary just wanted to honor and

revere and worship Jesus, her Lord and her God. Jesus speaks of that when He was ministering to the woman at the well, saying, “the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24) How does that help us then in the ordinary day to day living? As God is dwelling in us, the Lord indeed is near and thus as the Apostle Paul said, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.” (Colossians 3:23) Not out of duty but out of piety and reverence in honoring God for He is worthy of our worship and praise! As Robert Gundry put it, “To demonstrate God’s love, Jesus descended from the Father and worked toward His “hour”, the time of His suffering and death on behalf of the world. For revealing the Father’s glory in this way, the Father in turn glorified the Son with heavenly exaltation.”⁵ So with Mary, the Lord was not only near but was representing the love and glory of God and she poured out her expensive oil on His feet. With Martha, perhaps she was getting there. At least she wasn’t complaining the second time. That brings up a valid consideration. Was there anything wrong with what Martha was doing? What about Lazarus? Why wasn’t he said to have been gushing over Jesus? After all, Jesus raised Him from the dead. Perhaps Lazarus was thinking along the lines of Paul when Paul stated, “to live is Christ, to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21) I know I quote that probably way more than I should to where I’m not rejoicing in the Lord always, I’m looking to heaven instead of Jesus. Where is our consolation and then where can we find peace in this crazy, sin-plagued world. How can we take our focus off of heaven and live in the here and now for the glory of God? Isaiah prophesied, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; **The chastisement for our peace was upon**

5 Robert H. Gundry, Survey of the New Testament, A, pg. 290 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012)

Him, And by His stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5) Do you recall what the angel said to the shepherds at the birth of Christ? "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11) Then verse 13 says, "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'"

From day to day, God is teaching us, renewing our minds, changing our hearts, to understand and to live in the glorious victory we have in Christ Jesus and to do all things as unto the Lord. There was nothing wrong with Martha fixing the dinner. There wasn't anything wrong with Lazarus sitting in His EZ chair listening to Jesus. The question for us from moment to moment and day to day is, what will I do right now as the Lord is near. We don't have to wait for Jesus to show up riding on a cloud with power and glory to begin to worship Him in spirit and truth. For the Lord is near!

Our story has Jesus, who not only claimed to be the Resurrection and the Life but He proved it, and then we have the sisters Martha and Mary, their brother Lazarus and then also Judas Iscariot, the thief. From your perspective, who do you say that Jesus is? What then will be your response to that perspective? It's a wonderful thing to be a friend of Jesus but will we honor Him to seek the "good part" to worship Him in spirit and truth? After all, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God who gave up His life so that we may have life in His name-in Him! AMEN.

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