

Reconciliation

John 12:1-19

Key Verse: 15

“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

Have you ever had a huge argument with someone where afterward you didn’t want to talk with them? Maybe it lasted a short time or maybe it broke your relationship forever. One time, when I was a little boy, I was at a family party. I have a pretty good size family with over 40 first cousins. And at this party a lot of us were in this room when one of my aunts came into the room happy as can be. She made a big scene saying, “Look everyone, I lost 10 pounds.” And then my dad, who is very outspoken says to her, “wow turn around and show us.” So she happily turns around like this and as soon as she turns her back to my dad, he says in front of everyone, “Uh oh, I think I found it.” The room went silent and she was fuming mad. That day the relationship within our family was broken. And the sad thing is, I had 3 cousins from their immediate family that I didn’t see for years and years until after that aunt passed away because she hated my dad for his rude comments. To this day, I have some cousins that I don’t know very well because I never really got to know them because of our broken family. This can happen anywhere even in the church. We find in the book of Acts, Paul & Barnabus had such a sharp disagreement that their ministry split and I’m not sure if it was ever healed. If you’ve had such an argument, how can it ever be reconciled? In today’s passage we will see Jesus as the king of peace that brings reconciliation.

Take a look at verses 1-3. “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.”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.” Our passage starts out six days before the Passover. The Passover was the Jewish annual holiday celebrating their freedom from being enslaved in Egypt. This is similar to our 4th of July holiday in which we celebrate our independence from England. John recorded for us in chapters 2, 6 and 12, how Jesus spent three consecutive Passover celebrations. This is how we know that Jesus’ ministry lasted a little over three years. But what you may not realize is that at this point in the book of John, we are now in the final week of Jesus’ life. And chapter 12 marks a turning point in the book where Jesus’ public ministry comes to an end and from chapters 13 to the end, we get to see how Jesus spends the last few days of his life right up until the time of his murder.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, a dinner party was being held in his honor. The family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus were throwing this party to thank Jesus for bringing Lazarus back from the dead. One of the things that we notice about this party is that this family is one in spirit in honoring Jesus but distinct in their methods of how they do it. This is one of the beautiful things that we learn from God. God gives us principles but leaves the methods up to us. And what you find is that this gives us wonderful freedom in serving and honoring our Lord. In verses 2-3 we find Martha honoring Jesus through her hospitality. Martha was the kind of person who served. This was how she was wired. She was active in preparing a welcoming atmosphere. She didn’t wait for others to serve, she took the initiative. She cooked and made sure others were all taken care of. This was how she honored that Lord. On the other hand, Lazarus honored Jesus through his testimony. In actuality, we never hear a word from Lazarus. Yet people are coming from miles around just to see him and because of him, Jesus. So even though Lazarus didn’t say a word, just the fact that he was breathing was enough to testify to what Jesus had done for him. His life became a testimony of what Jesus did for him. His greatness is that he was dead but now he’s alive. And in reality this is what every believer’s testimony boils down to. All believers were at one point spiritually dead, but we have been made alive through Christ. (1 Cor 15:22) And we can honor Jesus simply by telling others what Jesus has done for us. And then there was Mary. Mary honored Jesus through her devotion. Mary loved to sit at Jesus’ feet and give her full attention to him as he taught the word of God.

Mary revealed her utmost devotion to Jesus by willingly giving up something that was very valuable to her. In this family we see a single principle but different methods to carry it out and this is the wonderful freedom of God.

However let's take a closer look at what Mary did because it causes some controversy. Let's look at Mary's devotion. Mary poured out a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume, on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. In her act we see that she does two things, she humbles herself before Christ and then she gives everything to him. After Mary poured it on Jesus' feet, she wiped them with her hair. People's feet would get dirty because they wore sandals. Not only would they be covered in dust and mud, but often also in animal crap because donkeys and other animals would walk down the street. Therefore the servant that was lowest on the totem pole would be given the task to wash the guest's feet. That servant was the unlucky one. It was a thankless job however Mary took it upon herself to wash Jesus' feet. To clean someone's feet is one thing, but she went farther than any servant ever would, she dried Jesus' feet with her hair. Our hair is very personal to us and we go to great lengths to make it look good. We wash it, color it, condition it, gel it, spike it. Just look how many hair products there are in the store. Who would in their right mind would use it to wipe mud off of someone's feet? This revealed the extent of her humbleness and love for Christ. However what Mary did goes even beyond just a cleanliness issue.

When Mary sat at Jesus' feet wiping them with her hair, she broke a cultural standard that would have been considered a major faux pas. In their culture, when women reached adult age, they would bind their hair up so that no other men would see it. Because when God created women he gave them their hair to be their glory. (1cor11:15) However a women's glory should be bound up and saved for her husband only to be revealed on her wedding night so that only her husband can enjoy her in that way. And so when Mary let down her hair and was touching a man's feet in public, who was not her husband, it would have been perceived by others in the wrong way, such as a sexual advance. And as a result most people would have felt uncomfortable because men, especially Rabbis, would talk to women in public who weren't their wives let alone touch them. It must have been awkward for Jesus to receive such a forward expression of love from any woman in public.

Mary had the same way of thinking as John the Baptist, who said, "I must become less and Christ become more." This is what she did when she gave up something so valuable to her. Judas tells us that the nard/perfume was worth about a year's wages. She gave up almost a year's wages to Jesus in a single moment. In Cook Country the median household income is \$46 K. This wasn't a small amount. How long would it take to save up \$46K? Imagine the devotion she had to make this kind of sacrifice. And she knew that to get down on her knees and pour it out all over Jesus' feet in front of everyone surely would have brought some criticism. But she didn't care what others thought about her because she wanted to give everything to Jesus. This was her expression of love to Jesus. However when you decide to devote yourself to God like Mary, inevitably you are going to encounter opposition. It's because we live in a fallen world that has rejected its creator.

And sure enough Judas, who was one of Jesus' own disciples objected. When you devote yourself to Jesus, expect criticism maybe even from within the church. Judas objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." (v5) At first Judas looks noble as he expresses his concern for the poor people. However in verse 6 John tells us Judas' real motives. He was a thief. He didn't care about the poor, he only cared about himself. Often people, especially politicians, will make pleas on behalf of poor people, or children and they look noble, compassionate and caring. Don't be naïve. While some really will be concerned for the poor, however the majority are not. They use it as a tool to look good in front of others so that they can hide their real intentions. Judas was a classic picture of this. He was one of Jesus' disciples, in fact he was one of the most trusted disciples because he was the one that held their money. Most likely Judas was the one who was gifted in handling their money, by negotiating and investing. So it made sense to trust him with it. And often we find that we are more

vulnerable to sin in the area that we are gifted. Judas was gifted with money, he fell prey to stealing. David was gifted with passion, he fell prey to murder and adultery. Solomon was gifted with wisdom he fell prey to pride and became a fool. So we have to be careful with our gifts and give them to God to use properly.

In this scene, on the outside Judas looks like the righteous one, while Mary looks like the one with wrong intentions. However God can see our hearts. Jesus can see our true motives. Mary broke the cultural rules but her heart was right before God as she worshiped Jesus with everything she had and was. On the other hand Judas upheld the cultural standards and seemed pious, but he was living a double life hiding his true character eventually betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

It must have been uncomfortable for Jesus to walk around smelling like a perfume factory. Since they didn't take baths regularly back in their day, this very strong fragrance would have stayed with Jesus for quite awhile. Even today people make fun of anyone who wears too much perfume. Either they are trying too hard to get people's attention, or they are covering up their bad body odor. Jesus however defends Mary's actions. Verse 7 tells us, "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial." Mary had opened herself up in front of all those people, exposing her inner desire. This took tremendous courage. Whatever her intention was, Jesus accepted her action as the anointing for his burial. Mary was in a vulnerable state when Judas takes his shot at her. She would have been deeply wounded if left alone exposed like that, however Jesus accepted her love and protected her and reassured her that he loved her too. Actually Jesus reveals that Mary's action was divinely inspired. I don't think Mary knew what was going on spiritually, she only knew how much she loved Jesus and expressed her love in the best way she knew how. God used her actions and folded them into his divine plan. It was said that the Passover lamb was chosen during that final week before Passover – this was Jesus being chosen as the sacrificial lamb to die for the sin of the world.

Take a look at verse 8. "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." Through this verse Jesus shows that we have to be spiritually alert and aware of the opportunities around us. If we are not alert, golden opportunities pass right by. God may choose to bring those opportunities around again, but maybe not. Those present had a rare opportunity to worship Jesus. The prophets of long ago looked forward to this time, but Judas missed a once in a lifetime opportunity, a once in history, to worship Jesus. How many times have you let an opportunity pass by without acting on it? How many times have you had the opportunity to share the gospel with a friend or loved one, either because of a death in the family or some other situation and you let that chance go by without action? What a tragedy. We have to be alert and have courage to act when God presents opportunities for us. Don't miss the chance. Don't live with that regret of "I should have done...." Be like Mary and give your all to Jesus.

"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." (v9-11) The word about Jesus spreads like wild fire and as a result, the chief priests harden their hearts even more. When people hear about Jesus' great miracle, raising someone from the dead, everyone came to see him. It must have been a mad house. Imagine if it happened today, Lazarus would have been on every news program in the world with the paparazzi swarming around him and Jesus. Some would come because they believed, others would come because they wanted to see if it was really true and others would come just to discredit what was really happening. Those are the religious leaders. They were upset that they were not the center of attention and afraid of losing their positions of prominence.

Verses 12 -13 say, "The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed

is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!" Palm branches were used in the celebration of victory. It would be like us waving our national flag in a parade. Hosanna means save. So essentially they were imposing their agenda on Jesus. They wanted Jesus to come as their political leader and save them from Roman rule. This is the underlying theme of this scene. Verse 13 comes from Psalms 118:25-26, in which the Israelites would sing when a king came in from a great victory. However don't be fooled by the crowd's praise, because in a few days these same people will be screaming for the Romans to crucify Jesus.

Even though the people were singing songs of victory, Jesus found a young donkey and rode in on it. It is said that if a king entered a city on a horse, it was a sign of conquest and victory, however if a king rode in on a donkey, it was the sign that the king brings peace. And ultimately this is why Jesus came, because he brings peace. This is why verse 15 is so beautiful to me. Let's read verse 15 together. "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." We don't have to be afraid because Jesus is coming in peace not conquest. Jesus brings peace between God and man. Because of our sin, we have become the enemies of God. We are essentially at war with God because of our sin. And it's not a good place to be in being the enemy of God who is more powerful than us and can destroy us. So it is wonderful news to know that our King, Jesus comes not to destroy us but to bring us peace.

It is also interesting to note that when Jesus rode in on a donkey, he fulfilled the prophecy that Zechariah made around 500 years before this. (480 B.C.) This shows that Jesus was fulfilling God's plan to save the world. These were not just random events, these things were the unfolding of God's plan. Throughout this passage people didn't realize what they were doing was actually according to God's plan. Mary was anointing Jesus for his burial, the disciples and the crowd were singing Hosanna. They didn't realize what was going on until much later after Jesus died and rose again that they actually participated in fulfilling prophecy. This shows that our King, Jesus, is in control of history, he is sovereign and he used their actions in his plan. Even the fact the chief priest were trying to kill him was used for his good purpose. Therefore, we can trust in Jesus because he is in control and this gives us inner peace.

What we learn through this passage is that we can either welcome Jesus as our king or stand opposed to him like the chiefs priests. Either way we will confront Jesus at the judgment and he will either bring us peace or vengeance. He will bring peace and reconciliation back to our Father God to those who love him like Mary and her family, or bring judgment to those who reject him like Judas and the chief priests.