

LEARNING TO LOVE JESUS
By Andy Manning
John 12:1-12
The Gospel of John – Week 45

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Christian life is all about loving God.
2. One time Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was. Now remember, the Jews believed that there were 613 commands in the law of Moses, and they wanted Jesus to choose the most important. His answer was simple. **Matthew 22:37** “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”
3. So, as Christians we need to focus on loving God. That’s the purpose of life. That’s what the Christian religion is all about. But how do we do it.
4. Today we are going to learn some lessons about loving God from a woman in the Bible named Mary of Bethany.
5. Who is Mary of Bethany?
 - i. She, her sister Martha, and her brother were very close friends of Jesus.
 - ii. They lived in Bethany, about two miles away from Jerusalem.
 - iii. Our story picks up at the beginning of the last week of Christ’s life.

II. TEXT AND COMMENTARY: John 12:1-12

1. 1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, the one Jesus had raised from the dead.
 - i. The Passover festival was on Thursday at sunset through Friday at sunset. So, this event probably occurred on the previous Friday evening.
 - ii. Jesus went to Bethany, very close to Jerusalem, which was an act of great courage, because He knew that the Jewish leaders were trying to kill Him.
2. 2 So they gave a dinner for him there; Martha was serving them, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took a pound of perfume, pure and expensive nard, anointed Jesus’s feet, and wiped his feet with her hair. So the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.
 - i. Jesus was reclining at the table for dinner.
 - ii. Recall how they ate back then. The tables were very low to the ground, and they sat on the ground to eat. They would actually lay on their sides, resting on their left elbow, and eating with their right hand. Their legs and feet would be extended away from the table.
 - iii. Mary poured a pound of perfume on Jesus’ feet, and wiped it with her hair.
 1. The perfume was called nard, which was a fragrant oil extracted from the root of a plant grown in North India. It was red in color, had a sweet smell, and was often used by Romans to anoint the head.

2. This was a pound, or closer to 12 ounces, which was a very large amount. Most flasks contained only one ounce.
 3. We learn from Matthew and Mark that the perfume was kept in an alabaster jar, which is a beautiful and expensive vase with a long, slender neck carved from either gypsum or calcite (two types of crystal-like rocks). The jar was 5-9 inches high; this one was probably larger because it had twelve ounces of and.
 4. Matthew and Mark tell us that Mary also anointed Jesus' head; but John wanted to point out that she anointed His feet and wiped it with her hair, because those are very surprising aspects of the story.
 5. In those days, one way to honor someone was to anoint their head with oil or perfume. Mary did that, but also anointed His feet.
3. 4 Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot (who was about to betray him), said,
 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?"
 6 He didn't say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He was in charge of the money-bag and would steal part of what was put in it.
- i. Matthew and Luke tell us that Judas was not alone in his criticism. The other disciples joined in.
 - ii. The perfume was worth three hundred denarii. How much is that? A denarius was a Roman coin, worth about one day's pay. So 300 denarii was about one-year's salary for a common worker.
 - iii. Judas criticized her for how she chose to use this very expensive perfume. Why not sell it and give the money to the poor? But John provides some narration, pointing out that Judas wasn't really concerned about the poor; he was a thief. He was Jesus' treasurer, and he often stole from the money-bag himself.
4. 7 Jesus answered, "Leave her alone; she has kept it for the day of my burial. 8 For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."
5. 9 Then a large crowd of the Jews learned he was there. They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, the one he had raised from the dead. 10 But the chief priests had decided to kill Lazarus also, 11 because he was the reason many of the Jews were deserting them and believing in Jesus.

III. FOUR LESSONS ABOUT LOVING JESUS

1. Give extravagantly.

- i. Mary's jar of perfume was worth a year's salary.
- ii. Giving is an important way to show love.
- iii. John 3:16 "For God loved the world in this way: He gave..."
- iv. Gary Chapman wrote a book about the five love languages; the five major ways to express love. One of them is gifts.
- v. 2 Corinthians 9:7 "God loves a cheerful giver."
- vi. How do you express love to God through giving?

1. Tithe.
 2. Give money to causes that God cares about.
 3. Offer your possessions to God's service.
- vii. But Mary teaches us that our giving to God should be extravagant. Not only did she give a very expensive gift to Jesus, but she wiped His feet with her hair. This was an act of total dedication; of offering herself completely to Jesus.
- viii. When is the last you gave sacrificially? When is the last time that your giving required faith? When is the last time that you gave more than a tithe? When is the last time that your giving was a little crazy?
- ix. The story of the widow's mite is an example (Mk 12:41-44). Jesus was in the temple treasury, watching as people dropped money into the treasury. Many rich people were putting in large sums. But a poor widow came and dropped in two tiny coins worth very little. Notice what Jesus said. **Mark 12:43-44** "Summoning his disciples, he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had—all she had to live on.'" Extravagance is measured not by how much you give, but how much you have left over.
- x. I've told you the story of Rick Warren, a pastor and author of the book *The Purpose Driven Life*. He and his wife decided when they got married to increase their tithe by one percent every year; and they did it, even though some years were harder than others. But eventually he wrote some bestselling books, and now they are reverse tithers. Not only that, but he has paid back all the money the church ever paid him, and he now works for the church for free.
- xi. How to become an extravagant giver:
1. Start with the tithe.
 2. Consider increasing your tithe incrementally over time.
 3. Keep some money in your wallet at all times reserved for giving to needs, and ask God to lead you.
 4. Is there anything that you own that could be given away to someone who needs it more than you?
 5. Or that could be sold and the money donated to the church, or to another Christian ministry?
- xii. But remember to give discreetly, or you will lose your reward. **Matthew 6:3-4** "3 But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

2. Serve humbly.

- i. Mary expressed her love to Jesus by serving Jesus with humility.

- ii. First, she served Jesus. She poured perfume on His feet, and then wiped it off with her hair. Back then people's feet were very dirty and stinky. Mary served the Lord by making His feet smell good.
- iii. Second, she served Jesus with humility. Foot washing was the work of servants. But in this story, Mary recognized that Jesus was the Son of God, and that she was created to be His servant. So, she did what she was created to do. She served the King of kings and Lord of lords. Because Mary recognized who Jesus was, and who she was in relation to Him, no task for Jesus was beneath her. There was no job for Jesus that she would deny.
- iv. Third, by wiping His feet with her hair, she was expressing her willingness to serve Jesus in any way He chooses. She was saying, "I will do anything for you."
- v. Serving is a powerful way to show love.
 - 1. Along with gifts, acts of service is also one of Gary Chapman's five love languages.
 - 2. At the Last Supper with the disciples, Jesus showed them the extent of His love by serving them. He went around washing their feet – the feet of twelve grown men.
- vi. How can we love Jesus through serving?
 - 1. Serve in the church. The church is the body of Christ. Find ways to contribute to the church's health and mission.
 - 2. Serve fellow church members. **Galatians 5:13** "Serve one another in love." **Galatians 6:2** "Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
 - a. My brother Micah recently passed away, and immediately Herman and Donna cooked a meal and brought it over.
 - 3. Serve anyone in need. **Galatians 6:10** "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith."
 - 4. Lead people to Jesus. Start with your children and grandchildren.
 - 5. Be willing to do mundane jobs; hard jobs; dirty jobs; unrewarding jobs. Remember who you are serving – the King of kings and Lord of lords. Any job done for Christ is a great privilege.

3. Act unself-consciously.

- i. Mary expressed her love to Jesus in ways that most people would find embarrassing.
 - 1. First, she did the work of a servant.
 - 2. Second, used an entire jar of very expensive perfume on Jesus.
 - 3. Third, she used her hair to wipe Christ's feet. She exposed herself to criticism, and she paid for it. But she didn't care what people thought.

- ii. A third and surprising way to love Jesus is to stop caring what other people think of your devotion to Christ. Stop worrying about what people might say. Stop worrying about making a fool of yourself. Stop worrying about criticism. Focus on one thing and on one thing only – pleasing Jesus. Love Jesus passionately and forget about how it looks.
- iii. Many Christians are stuck in spiritual puberty. When you are child, you are not embarrassed to give your mom a hug and a kiss, and hold her hand in front of the whole world. But when you get to be an adolescent, you get self-conscious. And you die on the inside when your mom shows you affection in public. But then as you mature past adolescence, you suddenly realize that there is no shame in showing affection to your parents. That you don't care what people think.
- iv. Think about it. How much of what you do for Jesus, and what you don't do for Jesus, is regulated by the fear of embarrassment? The fear of offending others? The fear of criticism?
- v. As long as you are worried about people laughing at you, and criticizing you for your devotion to Christ, then you will never be fully devoted. Your love will never grow to maturity.
- vi. The point is not to be intentionally showy about your love for Christ; but to love Christ fully regardless of what people think.
- vii. How do you show Jesus you love Him? Stop being ashamed of Him.
 1. **Luke 9:26** "For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels."
 2. **Romans 1:16** "For I am not ashamed of the gospel,, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"
 3. **2 Timothy 1:8** "So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God."

4. Prioritize intimacy.

- i. Mary expressed her love to Jesus by prioritizing intimacy with Him.
- ii. When you study Mary's life, you see a theme. Her desire was to be close to Jesus. She was criticized for this, but in both cases Jesus defended her.
 1. First, when Jesus was dining at their house on a previous occasion, Mary was sitting at Christ's feet listening to Him while Martha was busy preparing the meal. Martha complained to Jesus, who defended her. He said that Mary was doing the more important thing. Serving Jesus is good, but spending time with Him is even better.
 2. Second, the story at hand. Mary used an entire pound of expensive nard on Jesus. This led to criticism from Judas, but Jesus defended

her. Giving to the poor is important, but spending personal time with Jesus is even better.

- iii. To love Jesus well, you must devote yourself to developing an intimate relationship with Him. Jesus does not need your money. He does not need your service. He wants you. He wants a personal relationship with you. The problem is that many people do a lot of giving, a lot of serving, they follow a lot of rules, they go to a lot of church meetings, but they don't spend much time with Him. That's not the kind of love Jesus wants. Yes, serve Him. Yes, give to the church and to the poor. Yes, go to church meetings. But first and foremost, spend time with Him. Talk to Him. Worship Him. Sing to Him. Listen to Him by reading His word. When giving and service and church involvement flow out of an intimate walk with Jesus, He is honored, and you will be empowered. But when they become a substitute, or even a distraction from intimacy with Him, He is dishonored, and you will burn out.
- iv. Think about your relationship with your spouse. Gifts are nice. Acts of service are nice. But if your spouse sent you wonderful gifts, and was always doing nice things to serve you, but you never got to speak to them or spend time with them, you'd be disappointed. What you most want is a relationship. You want communion. You want to share your life with this person. You want to talk together, and cry together, and laugh together, and have fun together, and travel together, and work together. Only when there is a healthy, intimate relationship do the gifts and acts of service matter.
- v. How to love Jesus by prioritizing intimacy:
 1. A daily quiet time.
 - a. Bible reading.
 - b. Prayer.
 2. Dates with Jesus. Periodically, when you have some spare time, or even put it in your calendar, spend an extra thirty minutes or an hour with God.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. How should we love God? What would it look like if we loved God the same way that unbelievers love their money?
 - i. They talk of it constantly.
 - ii. They write songs about it.
 - iii. They love people who have it.
 - iv. They think of it, and even dream of it often.
 - v. They read books and go to school to learn to acquire it.
 - vi. They look to it for happiness.
 - vii. They depend on it for security.
 - viii. They will sacrifice all other relationships for it.
 - ix. They will work day and night for it.

- x. They will move across the world for it.
 - xi. They will sacrifice their health for it.
 - xii. They guard it carefully.
 - xiii. They pay others to help them manage it.
 - xiv. They get angry when it is taken, or wasted, or threatened.
2. Mary gives us a good example: Give extravagantly. Serve humble. Act unself-consciously. Prioritize intimacy.