

*The Fragrance of Worship*  
John 12:1-11  
Reading: Genesis 1:1-8

Bethany Baptist Church  
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*...pray...*

The first article of the **Westminster Shorter Catechism** asks:

*What is the chief end of man?*

The correct answer is:

*The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

*Glorify God...enjoy God.*

That's **worship** and that's *our goal*.

How are you *doing* with that?

How is your *worship*?

John Chapter 11 documents a *riveting* example of worship.

Let's drop in on a *banquet* in Bethany (we've been here recently).

Jesus is the *guest of honor*. We'll know *almost everyone* in the room.

And we will *witness* a "follower of Jesus" *pour out her worship* on her Lord.

Worship that leaves a *fragrance like a spring bouquet* !

**Join me in John 12:1-11.**

Let's *set the context* from Chapter 11: Jesus *raised* Lazarus from the dead and many *believed*.

But *others* reported Him to the Sanhedrin who determined to *kill* Him.

The *Passover* approached, the *city* filled with worshipers, and *Jesus* was the theme of *every conversation*.

Jesus, meanwhile, had slipped from *Jerusalem* to *Ephraim* to *Samaria* and *Galilee*.

Then in the company of friends and fellow *Passover worshipers*, He headed *up* to Jerusalem, via *Jericho* and then to *Bethany*.

In Bethany He was honored by a meal with His friends *Lazarus*, *Martha*, and *Mary*.

And His *disciples* were there, including *Judas Iscariot*, the *traitor*.

The *banquet* becomes the setting for...

**Three very different responses to Jesus:**

- 1. Unforgettable worship (vv. 1-3).**
- 2. Unforgiveable treachery (vv. 4-8).**
- 3. Unrelenting hostility (vv. 9-11).**

**Mary sets an example of *unforgettable worship*.**

1. Several weeks after raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus is the *guest of honor* at a banquet in Bethany.
  - a. The *mid-afternoon meal* takes place on Saturday, and it could have lasted *on into the night*.
    - i. John tells us that it is six days before Passover Day.
    - ii. And **vv.12,13** He puts it the day before Jesus' *Triumphal Entry* into Jerusalem.
  - b. *Jesus*, of course, is there, as well as the *Twelve*, *Lazarus*, *Martha*, *Mary*, and a man named *Simon the Leper*.
    - i. In fact, this is *Simon's home* (Matt 26; Mark 14), **not** the home of *Lazarus* and his *sisters*.
    - ii. Which explains why Lazarus was *reclining at the table* with Jesus.
    - iii. Of course, *Simon the Leper* doesn't have *leprosy* any more, or no one could *enter his house*!
    - iv. It's likely that sometime in the course of Jesus' ministry, He has *healed* Simon.

- c. *So they made Him a **supper** there...* The Gr. term for “supper” indicates that this is the day’s *main meal* and the fact that the guests are *reclined* suggests a *full-blown banquet*.
- i. It seems likely that *Martha* and *Mary* (*they* – v.2) prepared the meal,
  - ii. ...and we **aren’t** surprised to find *Martha* serving it.
    1. She was *working hard in the kitchen* when we first met her in Luke 10.
    2. And *now* she is *serving* the meal to her friends. (John’s Gr grammar pictures Martha repeatedly *going through the tasks* of serving).
    3. Beloved, like many, Martha found joy in *doing* for others!
  - iii. So *Lazarus* is *reclining* at the table and *Martha* is *spooning out* the vittles, but where is *Mary*...!?!
2. Mary quietly approaches Jesus and offers an *exorbitant* and *shocking* and *unforgettable* act of *worship*. **Read v.3.**
- a. The **first** time we met Mary (Lk 10), she was *sitting* at Jesus’ feet, *soaking up* His teaching, and *enduring* the anger of her busy sister Martha!
  - b. So we **aren’t** really surprised when Mary comes to Christ. She has something in her hands. It’s a *vial of alabaster*, filled w/ *perfume*.
    - i. By *measure*, the *vial* contains a Roman pound, or about **11-12 oz.** That’s *a lot* of perfume!
    - ii. In *value*, the perfume is *very costly*. We’ll soon learn, from the lips of Judas the traitor (5), that the perfume is worth about **300 denarii**, or one year’s pay! How much do *you* make in a year? What would *motivate* you to spend it on *one bottle* of perfume?

iii. In *substance*, the perfume is *pure nard*.

1. *Nard* (spikenard) was made from the *nard plant* that grows in the *mountains of northern India*. That's a long ways from *Bethany*, and that helps explain its *value*.

2. And it was ***pure...undiluted***.

c. Then Mary *emptied out* the perfume, *anointing* Jesus. It was all *amazing!* You have to imagine that the room was *silent*.

i. She *poured* the perfume out on Jesus' *head* (Mk 14); she *bent down* and *poured it out* on Jesus' *feet*.

1. Only the lowliest of *household slaves* were expected to wash the feet of guests.

ii. She then *took down* her hair! **No** pious woman in Mary's culture *loosened her hair* in public.

1. It seemed *inappropriate*, **beyond** uncomfortable...

iii. She then *wiped* Jesus' feet with her hair.

1. That was *unheard of!*

2. Anointing perfume was only *put on*, never *wiped off*.

3. And to use her *hair* for a towel was unfathomable!

d. Mary's anointing actions (*pouring out*, *taking down*, *wiping*) are each more *humble* than the last: she *bent down* to anoint Jesus' feet, she *took down* her hair, and she humbly *wiped* Jesus' feet with her hair.

3. And Jesus says *nothing!*

**Then John remembers *one more thing* about Mary's *worship*:** "*and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*"

**But then the house was filled with angry complaint! Someone was offended by Mary's worship (read vv.4-8).**

1. **Judas Iscariot.** The Gospels always *points out* **two** things about Judas (4):
  - a. He was Jesus' *disciple*.
  - b. He was Jesus' *betray*er!
  
2. Judas accuses Mary's worship of being *extravagant* and *misdirected*.
  - a. We already know it was *extravagant*! Three hundred *denarii*. One year's *wages* for a common day-laborer. One year of *toil*, just *poured out* of that vial in minutes. Judas would day, *down the drain*...!
  - b. But self-righteous Judas *points out* all that money could have been put to *better use*. V.5 – Why not *give to the poor*!?!
  
3. But **John** now knows something about **Judas** that no one else in the room suspected, *all those years ago*.
  - a. Simon was Jesus' *betray*er, and...
  - b. Simon Iscariot was a *petty thief*!
    - i. Jesus and the Twelve kept a *money box*, probably *funded* with donations from His followers, and used for *daily expenses* and *alms-giving*.
    - ii. Judas had been *entrusted* with the box (I suspect he *volunteered*!).
    - iii. Because Judas was *thief* (6). He used to carefully *siphon funds* from the *money box* into his *own pockets*.

- c. **So now the traitor & thief is *angry!***
- i. ***“Why was this perfume not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor!?!”***
  - ii. **Sadly**, if you comb the four gospels you’ll find *these* are the first recorded words of Judas you’ll find.
  - iii. And *here* is Judas’ real concern: ***What a missed opportunity!*** If only **Miss Holy** had *sold* that perfume and *deposited* the proceeds in their box, **Judas** would be *living large...!*
4. I said *no one else in that room* knew about Judas, but I *misspoke...!* **Jesus knew** – Jesus knew that Judas was a *thief* and Jesus *knew* that Judas was a *betrayer* – **His** *betrayer!* **Read vv.7&8.**
- a. ***“Let her alone!”*** Do you have any questions about how Jesus is feeling about Mary’s *worship* and Judas’ *complaint!?!*
  - b. Then our Lord explains the *fuller richness* of Mary’s *worship*.
    - i. Not only was the “*perfume anointing*” an evidence of her *unforgettable love* for Jesus, it was her *preview* of His *crucifixion* and *burial*, now just six days away.
      1. 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish burial preparations included *spices* and *perfume*, often quite expensive, to offset the *odor* of decay.
      2. *Joseph of Arimathea* and *Nicodemus* will bury Jesus just before sundown on Passover, but they will be *rushed....*
      3. Mary’s preparation is *lavish!*
    - ii. ***“Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial.”***



- c. Then Jesus adds this famous admonition: “*For you **always** have the **poor** with you, but you do **not** always have **Me**.*”
- i. It’s *pointless* to argue about Jesus’ love for the poor; just go back and *reread* His story!
  - ii. The Son of Man *healed* the lame, *gave sight* to the blind, and *fed* the poor.
  - iii. And Scriptures teaches us to be *rich in good works* (1Tm 6:18).
  - iv. But life’s **first** *priority* is not to minister to the *impoverished* but worship the One who was *rich, yet for your sakes became poor* (2 Cor 8:9).
5. I assumed the celebration continued. *Martha* serving. *Jesus* teaching. *Mary* listening. *Lazarus* at the table of honor . All till *late* in the evening.
- ....with the fragrance of worship hanging in the room.**

**In His final hours in Bethany, Jesus was a *magnet* for the curious and a *target* for the hostile (read vv.9-11).**

1. The *banquet* began sometime in the afternoon on *Saturday*, and the *Triumphal Entry* was the *next day*...
2. So word of Jesus' *presence in Bethany* spread quickly! But now it **wasn't** just Jesus who *attracted* the curious!
  - a. Jesus *raised* had His friend Lazarus from death to life, and *everyone* wanted to *see* Lazarus themselves!
  - b. How often do you get to *shake hands* with a guy that was "*four days dead*"!
  - c. The presence of Jesus and Lazarus *also* drew the hostile attention of the *chief priests*.
    - i. Jesus was already at the *top* of Jerusalem's "*Ten Most Wanted*" list.
    - ii. Now the priests put *Lazarus* right behind Him!
    - iii. A *live Lazarus* drew people to Jesus, and...
      1. ...*also embarrassed the Sadducees*, because the Sadducees taught that a *resurrection to eternal life* was a lie!
      2. But *there sits Lazarus* w/Jesus, *breaking bread* and looking ***very much*** *alive*.
3. The crowd's *curiosity* is a reminder of how *crucial* the "sign of Lazarus" was. It encouraged *many to believe* after Jesus raised his friend,
  - a. And now, weeks later (here in v.11), Jesus' sign still had the testifying power to draw men & women to saving faith.
  - b. And so as they left Bethany and *were going away*, back to their homes, *many of the Jews...were **believing** in Him*.

Do you ever wonder if your worship pleases God?

There are some basic instructions on worship in the Bible.

1. Jesus told the *woman at the well* that God is looking for worshipers, and He wants them to worship Him in *spirit* (sincerity) and in *truth* (by Scripture).
2. Paul wrote that all worship begins by *giving your life to Jesus!* By writing Him a *blank check* to your day. Rom 12:1 – *Therefore, I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present you bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship.*
3. Paul also wrote that any lawful thing we *do* that is *done* for God's glory is *worship*. 1 Cor 10:31 – *whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*
  - a. Which suggests that Martha's *cooking* and *serving* was an offering of worship!
4. But there must be something *more* that Mary can teach us about worship.
  - a. Mary seemed especially *drawn* to Jesus (Lk 10; Jn 12). David wrote about *soul thirsting* and *flesh yearning* for God.
  - b. Mary's worship was *deliberate*. She *acquired* the perfume and she *approached* Jesus and she *endured* the stares. How do you *prepare* your heart to *glorify* God in this place on the Lord's Day?
  - c. Mary wanted to be *lavish* in her worship – *spare* no expense, *don't* hold anything back, *pour it all out!* Maybe your *alabaster vial* is more time poured out on Jesus in *prayer, mediation, the Word*.
  - d. Mary's worship *humbled* her. She *anointed* Jesus' feet and *loosened her hair* and *wiped his feet*. Only *servants* wiped feet. Godly women didn't *loosen their hair* in public. Are you *embarrassed* by *lowly tasks* in the Kingdom? Are you embarrassed to *openly express* your love for Jesus?

5. Jesus said something about Mary's worship that John didn't record. **Mark 14:9** – *“Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”*
  - a. Jesus' promise is true! We are still talking about Mary this morning!
6. Wouldn't it be *wonderful* (and maybe *scary*) if on Sunday morning's our worship would be so *biblical* and so *lavish* and so *selfless* that the *fragrance of our worship would fill God's house!*

*...pray...*