Last week we looked at sin and how it came into the world – introduced by Satan as a result of His jealousy and pride, because he wanted to be equal to, if not above God in terms of status and he didn’t want humans to have the relationship that God wants for us.

The word eternity is in the NIV only twice and both speak of God:

* **Psalm 93:2 – Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.**
* **Ecclesiastes 3:11 – He has… set eternity in the human heart…**

Every single person who has ever lived, or will live, has eternity set within their hearts. God has put that in place, so we are able to worship Him for ever and that was the order of things in the beginning.

But as we know since Genesis 3, a gulf has been opened between man and God, which needs to be closed.

It was God’s choice to send His Son, Jesus the Messiah, to enable that gulf to be closed and that is on Him that we will focus over the next few weeks, as we look at Jesus’ final week of His earthly ministry, before He was crucified.

**PRAY**

**SLIDE** **John 12:1-11 - …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. Then 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.**

Much of Jesus’ ministry cannot be exactly dated, but these verses can be. We know exactly where we are, **six days before the Passover**, John has been led to give us a definitive time marker – ensuring we know what is to happen is now within the last week before the death and burial of Jesus.

Despite knowing what is ahead of Him, Jesus is doing the ordinary things – spending time with friends and having a meal with them. The accounts of this meal in Matthew’s and Mark’s gospels tell us it was in the home of Simon the Leper, a man who doesn’t appear to be mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels.

We can only speculate about the mood in that house, but I am sure it was a time of celebration – certainly not sombre. A short time ago, Lazarus had been dead and buried, but here he was, alive thanks to the power of Jesus – that was cause for continued celebration.

Some translations indicate that this meal was laid on because Jesus had raised Lazarus. Possibly the host, Simon, had also been healed by Jesus – we don’t know, but again, not a reason for a sombre occasion.

Nor should Jesus being in your life, ever be a cause of sombreness. There may be occasions where we should rightly be thinking about the cost of Jesus’ actions, but even that should lead to greater praise to God.

This was a meal laid on out of gratitude, it would have been as lavish an occasion that the times and circumstances allowed.

Yet, Jesus knew what faced Him in the coming days, but there is no indication that Jesus introduced those matters into this event.

No doubt out of gratitude for Jesus’ love to her family and possibly in the middle of this meal, Mary gave a remarkable gift to Jesus.

Custom dictated that the guest’s feet were washed upon their arrival – a practical thing to do given the state of the roads and what was likely to have been on them.

I think given the circumstances of this meal we can be sure the necessary washing had taken place. Yet, some way through the meal, **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.**

Mary’s remarkable gift to Jesus broke the rules in many ways – she did it during the meal, she did it with **very costly oil of spikenard** and she wiped His **feet with her hair**, using the hair as a kind of towel.

Mary’s gratitude extended to:

* Being humble – feet washing was the task of the most lowly slave.
* Being generous – the spikenard is valued at 300 denarii, a year’s wages for a workingman, about £25,000 in today’s terms.
* Being unselfconscious - she **wiped His feet with her hair**. ‘… a Jewish lady never unbound her hair in public. That apparently was a mark of loose morals. But Mary did not stop to calculate public reaction...’ (Morris) - Her focus was on her Lord.

We may all want to judge our gratitude to God by those standards. I’m not suggesting we given away that level of money, or do the tasks that Mary did, but I am suggesting we need a perspective of what we have gained through Jesus’ love and sacrifice – what we have to give back to God, is nothing in comparison with the cost He was prepared make, nor is it anything in terms of our eternal benefits pf a Heavenly life.

Your life comes from God and all of your wealth and possessions come from God – so it is only right that we should give them back to Him for His glory.

Mary is example to us all in her devotion to Jesus. In Luke and John’s gospels, Mary was at Jesus feet on three occasions. There she:

* Sat and learned **Luke 10:39**
* Fell and surrendered **John 11:32**
* Anointed Jesus’ feet and honoured Him **John 12:3**

Spurgeon said, ‘You must sit at His feet, or you will never anoint them; He must pour His divine teaching into you, or you will never pour out a precious ointment upon Him.’

One of the results of Mary’s action was the **house was filled with the fragrance of the oil**.

The sense of smell makes for long-lasting memories – that smell would forever remind Mary and the others in that house that day, of Jesus.

The smell is described as filling the house – it got everywhere and that is how the Holy Spirit wants to occupy us. As the whole house was filled with the fragrance – every part of our being should be given over to the Lord – there should be no place untouched.

Unfortunately, not all of your expressions of love and service for God – your desire to use your time, energy and money to serve Him, will be appreciated by everyone.

The attitude of Judas Iscariot, who was the treasurer for the group, was to say the oil should have been sold and the money put into the equivalent of the disciples’ joint account.

Judas is described in the text as a thief, who would help himself to the funds that were for the entire group – so it is not surprising that he took a keen interest in such a large potential ‘donation’ going on what he saw as an extravagance.

Some chronologies record that Judas went out the next day and made his bargain with the religious leaders to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver (**Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11**) - that has led one commentator to write, ‘…the impression left is that Judas, seeing one source of personal enrichment lost, hastened to create another.’ (Morris)

But Jesus responds by putting the emphasis back on Himself, where it should rightly be. He says, **“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.”**

Jesus’ defence of Mary is not a criticism, He defends her love for Him and her actions. You may consider her actions as being at the extreme end of the scale, but in actuality many people give up financially more by leaving well paid careers to serve as missionaries.

Many people also leave what would be comfortable lifestyles to go and serve others – all in the name of Jesus, in the desire to serve their Lord.

Whatever we do out of love for Jesus, He will not criticise us. Through the Holy Spirit, He will support you, to build up your faith, to go on to greater things.

Jesus says Mary’s actions are **done… for the day of My burial**.

Jesus is talking here about something that is less than a week away, but probably not realised by anyone else who attended that meal.

In Hebrew, the word for anoint has both secular and religious meanings - such as rubbing a shield with oil, smearing paint on a house, anointing the body with oil.

The origin of anointing was from a practice of shepherds to stop lice and insects staying on the sheep. Oil was poured on the sheep’s head and this made the wool slippery and the insects would slide off.

From this, anointing became symbolic of blessing, protection and empowerment.

One of the NT Greek words for anoint means ‘to smear or rub with oil’ and from that came the Biblical practice of anointing people with oil, to signify God’s blessing or call on that person’s life (**Exodus 29:7; Exodus 40:9; 2 Kings 9:6; Ecclesiastes 9:8; James 5:14**).

People who had a special purpose would be anointed and in doing so, they were considered ‘set apart’ – whether that was to be a king, a prophet, or even someone chosen to do a specific trade.

In effect, they were being ‘chosen’ and that is what comes out of the Hebrew word for anointing.

When Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit to spread the Good News (**Luke 4:18-19; Acts 10:38**), He was set apart and chosen by God.

Mark’s account of this anointing doesn’t mention Mary by name, but it does record a bit more of Jesus’ response to her actions. Jesus adds, ‘**Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her**.’ **Mark 14:9**

Mary did not do any of her actions in order to be remembered in later years – she did them out of love for her Saviour.

That is the point for us in that comparison, it does not matter if our names are not remembered on earth, so long as they are recorded in Heaven.

John goes on to record, in complete contrast to Mary’s faithful actions, the Jewish people then attended, merely to see the results of Jesus’ miracle – the risen Lazarus.

John does record that Jesus’ message was being accepted, as **many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.**

That appears to be where the final straw as far as the chief priests were concerned. They were certainly looking to put Jesus to death and had been since early in His ministry, but now they extended that objective to Lazarus.

The **chief priests** were mostly Sadducees who didn’t believe in the resurrection. So, Lazarus, as a living example of life after death, was an embarrassment to their theology.

It shouldn’t be a surprise to us that they extended their death threats beyond Jesus, nor should it be a surprise if you are persecuted in any way because of your faith in Him.

Spurgeon said, ‘…when men hate Christ, they also hate those whom He has blessed and will go to any lengths in seeking to silence their testimony.’

How short-sighted to think that by killing someone who had already been raised from the dead, that same resurrection would not happen again.

The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead drew **many** people to Jesus – these were our early brothers and sisters in the faith.

**CONCLUSION**

If you have accepted Jesus as your Saviour, you are now anointed.

* **After Christ left the earth, He gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit** (**John 14:16**).
* **Your anointing means you are chosen for a specific purpose in furthering God’s Kingdom** (**1 John 2:20**).
* **Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.** (**2 Corinthians 1:21-22**).

### **Read Psalm 133**

This is how we should respond to the Lord’s actions. Believers living in unity is a precious sight to the Lord.

It shows we are set apart and that we are anointed for His work.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 promised something to come. Psalm 133 tells us God will give His blessing – that blessing is ‘life for evermore’. Take it…

**OFFER / PRAY**

**READINGS**

**John 12:1-11**

**Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3Then Mary took about half a litre 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.**

**4But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.’ 6He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.**

**7‘Leave her alone,’ Jesus replied. ‘It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.’**

**9Meanwhile 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. 10So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, 11for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.**

### **Psalm 133**

### **1How good and pleasant it is     when God’s people live together in unity!**

**2It is like precious oil poured on the head,
    running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron’s beard,
    down on the collar of his robe.**

**3It is as if the dew of Hermon
    were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
    even life for evermore.**