

THE PASSION SERIES – THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTERS 12-21

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For the next six weeks or so until Easter we will look at John's account of the final week of Jesus' life. It also coincides with the release of the movie "The Passion of the Christ". John's gospel is profound and I am sure this will be a life-changing series so please tell your friends to subscribe to Eternity-DBS.

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John 12:1-8 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was (who had died, whom He raised from the dead). (2) Then they made a supper there for Him. And Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those reclining with Him. (3) Then Mary took a pound of ointment of pure spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. (4) Then said one of His disciples (Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who was to betray Him) (5) Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? (6) He said this, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and held the moneybag and carried the things put in. (7) Then Jesus said, Let her alone. She has kept this for the day of My burial. (8) For you have the poor with you always; but you do not always have Me.

This story connects the grand triumph of chapter 11 and the raising of Lazarus with the cross to come. It is six days before the cross and Lazarus is with Jesus at the table, as well as Judas! Mary anoints and Judas objects. The heart of evil manifests itself in the presence of a resurrected saint and an act of worship. We sense that things have reached a tipping point. The drama is about to unfold.

Bethany – the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus has returned to normal after the death of Lazarus. Martha was still serving, Mary was still worshipping and Lazarus was having fellowship with his Lord. Now we are left wondering where Mary got the spikenard from – it was expensive and they it seems that they were a poor family (there were no servants, Martha did all the work). Perhaps it was given to them when Lazarus died – for his burial but was now being used on Jesus. This was a year's wages for this little family with no savings and Mary poured it all out on Jesus.

Judas reacted to this worshipful extravagance with rage –and seems to have got others to join him (Matthew 26:8) in his indignation over "this waste" (Matthew 26:8). When we pour out our life in Christian service others look on and say "what a waste, a bright young man or woman wasting themselves as a missionary (or pastor)". Or they might say "Surely you should be a doctor and help more people than the few you are helping now." People do not understand a life spent on God and for God.

Similarly the line of Judas “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” has been applied to many things that were “extravagances for the Lord” such as cathedrals, stained glass windows, pipe organs and the like. Yet God deserves our extravagance! Money that is truly spent on God is not wasted, but money spent on our egos is. So if the church building is truly “for God” then it should be the very best, but if it is to glorify man and pander to pride, then it should not be constructed.

It was this waste of money that caused Judas to storm out and betray Christ to the Jews. But underneath the anger was avarice. Judas was a thief, the first pilfering church treasurer. According to statistics put out by the US Center For World Missions approximately 18 billion dollars a year or more is taken from church coffers by “ecclesiastical crime” this is greater than the 17 billion spent on the entire world missions budget!

“And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.” Grace fills the house. Sometimes people who have been miraculously healed say they smelled “ a strong fragrance of roses” in the room at the time. God is fragrant and beautiful and complex and wonderful.

Jesus defends the fragrant act of worship: “Then Jesus said, Let her alone. She has kept this for the day of My burial. (8) For you have the poor with you always; but you do not always have Me.” Jesus understands the heart of devotion and how often the pragmatists of this world attack it. Jesus points out that there are higher priorities than the ever-present social ills. There will always be sick people and poor people and sad people and needy people. But there will not always be Christ in our midst and when He turns up- that becomes the highest priority. Thus if there is a special work of God, a revival, a sudden awareness of His presence, that will be there a while, then be gone – we must seize the day, and leave other pressing duties aside.

The business mindset is of limited use in ministry. Yes it is good to be organized and disciplined, but too much pragmatism and focus on money and results can kill the heart of worship and stifle the aroma of fragrant grace. It can even lead us to betray Christ for gain.

There are those who have a deep heart for worship and will spend many hours making an elegant tapestry for the church. There are those who bring beauty into our midst and are the “incense-makers”. These are precious saints and need to be encouraged and defended – not seen as impractical.

Note that in John’s and Luke’s account the perfume was poured out on Jesus’ feet – on the lowest part of His body. In Matthew and Mark it is His head – anointing for Kingship. Probably she anointed His head then went down and poured the remainder over His feet – a pound of ointment goes a long way! Then in an utter act of devotion she washes His feet with her hair! This would have been so counter-cultural, so shocking, so appalling the room would have gasped. It didn’t make economic sense, and it wasn’t culturally appropriate but it was an act of love and worship that Jesus wanted us all to know about and appreciate which is why He said: Matthew 26:13 Truly I say to you, Wherever this gospel shall be proclaimed in the whole world, that which this woman has done shall be spoken of also, for a memorial of her.

Love the Lord – with ALL your heart – even when it makes no sense at all – and if you spend your life on God it will be fragrant with grace!

Blessings,

John Edmiston [johned@aibi.ph](mailto:johned@aibi.ph)

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