

John 12.¹⁻¹⁹ 'Love'

Background

This is the concluding study in the present Sunday morning series which has been running over the summer months, looking at some of the encounters Jesus had with different individuals – one-to-one encounters narrated (uniquely) by John in his gospel record.

The passage provides an appropriate conclusion to the series of studies, insofar as Mary's 'anointing' of Jesus' feet illustrates well how we all best respond to Jesus and how that response of faith on our part will find expression.

It also provides a very appropriate introduction to the new series of studies on Paul's letter to the Colossians, which I've entitled, "*Simply the best!*" – for it's that conviction, that Jesus is 'simply the best' (in every regard), which clearly lay behind the lavish display of love and gratitude which Mary exhibits in her anointing of Jesus here. There's a sense in which, therefore, the coming series on Colossians will be, I hope, a natural sequel to this present series, by setting out for us the range of different ways in which Jesus is indeed 'simply the best'.

Although the Sunday morning sermon concentrates on the opening 11 verses of the chapter, I've included vv.12-19 in the material for the Daily Bible Readings and the Community Groups, because there is a connection between the response of Mary in her anointing of Jesus, and the response of the crowd in their welcome of Jesus: and there is a sense, as Day 5 (Friday) on vv.12-13 indicate, that the 'fragrance' of the perfume poured over Jesus' feet didn't simply fill the house but, at least in some metaphorical way, spread out to fill the whole city: the 'great crowd' seem to have breathed in and been 'infected' by the fragrance of her lavish love.

In his book entitled '*Holiness*', J C Ryle, the great evangelical Bishop of Liverpool in the 19th century, wrote this – "*Of all the things that will surprise us in the resurrection morning, this I believe will surprise us most, that we did not love Christ more before we died.*"

Given that the first and greatest commandment is simply that you are to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*" ([Matt.22.34-40](#), especially v.37), and given, too, how the risen Jesus challenged the church at Ephesus on just this issue (see [Rev.2.1-7](#), especially v.4), this study obliges us to consider the nature of our own faith and the degree to which that is infused with a deep and growing and exuberant love for the Lord Jesus.

It may also prompt us to consider how our whole life as a fellowship of God's people may best cultivate such love for Jesus; and how it may best give a real and fragrant expression to such love.

I suggest '**days**' (1), (4) and (7) are worth focussing on if you're pressed for time; in relation to these daily Bible readings I've added some further questions which may prove helpful in the context of the Community Groups. May we be increasingly a people characterised by our obvious and lavish love for the Lord Jesus!

1) Monday 5th September – love

Read [John 12.1-3](#)

“.. the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume ..” (Jn.12.3)

The first commandment is always to love the Lord your God. Mary clearly did. Her ‘anointing’ Jesus was an expression of that love – her delight in all that Jesus is, her gratitude for all that He had done. And she thereby enriched everyone’s experience.

What helps cultivate in your heart an ever-deepening love for the Lord?

How does your love for Jesus find expression?

Consider the different roles in this cameo played by Martha, Lazarus and Mary: in what ways are each of these expressive of a love for Jesus?

How may such ways of expressing love be replicated in the life of Christ’s church today?

Compare Matt.22.37 with Deut.6.5 (which Jesus is quoting): what’s the significance of the words Jesus adds to the original?

Prayer: *O Thou who camest from above, the pure, celestial fire to impart, kindle a flame of sacred love on the mean altar of my heart [Charles Wesley 1707-88]*

2) Tuesday 6th September – sacrifice

Read [John 12.4-6](#)

“.. Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor ..” (Jn.12.5)

How subtly and easily we can disguise our essential sinfulness in the dress of apparent piety! For the self-indulgent individual, a life of sacrificial love is simply a waste. Jesus poured Himself out for His people: are you eager to be doing the same for Him?

How greedy and self-indulgent are you when it comes to money?

Have you sometimes been quite happy to take advantage of your situation and to ‘help yourself’ to what isn’t really yours?

Prayer: *Forgive me, Lord, for the ways in which my sinful self is ever seeking to assert itself: grant me the grace to be generous instead of greedy, kind and not calculating.*

3) Wednesday 7th September – opportunity

Read [John 12.7-8](#)

“.. but you will not always have Me..” (Jn.12.8)

There may be moments and occasions today which will give you the opportunity to honour Jesus before others – perhaps in what you say or in some act of generous love. Don't miss the opportunity: you may not have it again.

In what ways may you be able today to display the sort of love for Jesus which Mary had shown?

People struggle with poverty in every generation: in what ways do you respond to the increasing poverty in our society and in our world today?

Prayer: *Though You were rich beyond all measure, Lord Jesus, yet You made yourself poor for our sakes: show me how I may commend Your grace in the way I live today.*

4) Thursday 8th September – alive

Read [John 12.9-11](#)

".. on account of him many Jews were going over to Jesus .." (Jn.12.11)

It's neither the words (we hear none) nor the actions (all that he'd done is respond to the call of Jesus) of this man Lazarus which impact the lives of others: it's who he is – a new man who's come alive – which is used by God to bring many to faith in Jesus.

In what ways does your life and living evidence the fact that you have been made alive by Jesus?

Are there those who seek to stifle your testimony?

Have you been aware over the years of those who have 'gone over to Jesus' on account of you?

What are the ways in which, short of murder, attempts are made to stifle or destroy the witness which Christians bear to the life-giving work of Jesus?

How do the Scriptures suggest we cope with that?

Prayer: *Enable me, Lord, by the power of Your Spirit so to live that many 'go over' to You and place their trust in You on account of me. Use me to that end today!*

5) Friday 9th September – fragrance

Read [John 12.12-13](#)

".. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord .." (Jn.12.13)

The 'fragrance' of Mary's love for Jesus spread beyond the confines of the house! Her adoration seems to have been catching: the great crowd are breathing in that same spirit and rejoice in the king who has come among them in death-defeating power.

Mary poured out her perfume: the crowd raised their voices: what is there in your own delight in Jesus which mirrors this sort of 'excess'?

In what ways do you demonstrate the kingship of Jesus in your life and living?

Prayer: *Lord, may there be, through Your Spirit, something about the 'fragrance' of my love for Yourself which infects the people around me and stirs in them such praise!*

6) Saturday 10th September – understanding

Read [John 12.14-16](#)

".. at first His disciples did not understand all this .." (Jn.12.16)

The Old Testament can be strange and unfamiliar when you newly come to faith: it's often only gradually that you'll start to see how it all points forward to Jesus and sheds light on who He is and what He's done. God teaches His people very patiently!

What bits of the Old Testament do you find hard to understand?

In what ways has your reading of the Old Testament helped you gain a deeper understanding of the person and work of Jesus?

Prayer: *Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path. May my cry come before You, Lord: give me understanding according to Your word* [[Ps.119.105, 169](#)]

7) Sunday 11th September – resurrection

Read [John 12.17-19](#)

".. Look how the whole world has gone after Him .." (Jn.12.19)

Little did the Pharisees realise just how expansively true their words here would prove to be! The word has got out about Jesus and has been widely spread abroad: Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and He wonderfully raises the dead to life! Rejoice today!

What has been *your* experience of the resurrecting power of Jesus?

In what ways do you find that you are able to spread the word about Jesus?

What are the biggest challenges you face in 'spreading the word'?

What lessons do you think we need to learn as a church in terms of 'spreading the word' in the significantly changed world of 2022 and beyond?

Prayer: *May there be many today, Lord Jesus, who gather with the crowds of Your disciples in worship, and who, in and through that worship, meet You for themselves.*