

LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

John 12:1-11

Key Verses: 12:7,8

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

In John's gospel chapters 1-11 we studied that Jesus is God. Jesus manifested his divine glory and power through seven miraculous signs. Especially, chapter eleven taught us that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. When we take away the stones of unbelief and believe in him, Jesus raises the dead Lazarus from the tomb; thus we can see the glory of God. Chapter 12 is composed of four incidents. The first is Jesus anointed by Mary at Bethany (1-11). Second is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12-19). Third is Jesus' teaching about the kernel of wheat to the Greeks (20-36). Fourth is the Jews' violent rejection of Jesus, which rather caused the gospel to spread to the Gentiles (37-50). Today we want to study only one topic: Jesus is anointed by Mary at Bethany (1-11). Jesus is God Almighty and God's anointed King. But he came to this world as a humble shepherd to shepherd God's flock so that they might repent and believe in the Son, and that none of them would perish but have eternal life. Today we learn how Mary was changed from a sorrowful woman to a woman of love.

First, Mary, a forgiven sinner (1-3). Look at verse 1a. "Six days before the Passover..." The Passover was the day of commemorating God's grace of delivering the Israelites from the bondage of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. When the angel of death was sweeping the land of Egypt to destroy all the firstborn of the land on account of Pharaoh's stubbornness, the angel passed over the houses of the Israelites, looking at the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. Since that event, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. We remember the beautiful story about Jesus who went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover when he was twelve years old. Jesus must have gone up to Jerusalem annually to celebrate the Passover. This was the last Passover for Jesus, and it was time for him to prepare himself for his death on the cross. This time Jesus himself would become the Lamb of God. Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus had been raised from the dead. There, a special dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor at the home of Simon the Leper (Mt 26:6). It was to celebrate the divine power of Jesus who had raised Lazarus from the tomb (1b,2a). It was a village-wide feast. Martha served, while Lazarus was reclining at the table with Jesus among the honorary guests. Lazarus was the manifestation of divine glory to Jesus, and, on the other hand, he was a source of anguish to the Jewish leaders, who could not deny the divine power of Jesus because of Lazarus.

As soon as they began to eat, a dramatic event took place. Mary took about a pint of pure nard, a very expensive perfume, and poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (3). It is said that nard was a very expensive perfume produced in India. In the past, when Mary lived in her woman's cursed desire, she must have made many plastic smiles and cried many tears to steal many boys' hearts. In this way,

she gratified her carnal desire. One medical student was so pure and studious. But a foxy girl flirted with him through her habitual way of talking, "O, you are a most exemplary boy among students whom I know, and you show yourself a man in your appearance." From then on, the boy could not study medicine. He was too shy to hang around her. He first lost his heart. Next he could not get out of his obsession of her. Finally he became sickly. Two years later, he died of one-sided love. The woman's sinful lifestyle stumbled at least twelve boys' lives of faith. The woman inflicted eight boys with fatal blows. This might have been Mary's past life. Mary had a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume which was worth about a year's wages (5). In the past, Mary thought that she had everything--boys and material possessions. But she was not happy. She felt as if she were someone else. She felt that she had no life in her, since her purity was stained to gratify her sinful desires. She was not sure that her future marriage would be successful, for she had lost the essential elements for a happy marriage.

Mary was very sick with sins. Her sinsickness drove her to suffer from a guilty conscience. When she suffered from her guilty conscience, she felt that committing suicide was easier than enduring the torments of a guilty conscience. Leo Tolstoy's works "Anna Karenina" and "Resurrection" describe the results of a guilty conscience.

We can understand better about the suffering that comes from a guilty conscience when we think about King David's case. God anointed David as king of the United Kingdom of Israel. Since he was blessed by God, King David should have maintained God's blessing. For the most part, King David was right with God. But one day he overslept, while Joab and his soldiers went out fighting. He saw from the roof of his palace that a beautiful woman was bathing. She was Bathsheba. King David brought her and slept with her. After committing adultery, he became insane to cover up his sins. He killed his most loyal general, Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. But since he was rebuked by Nathan the prophet, his conscience was stricken. He felt that he was unclean like a leper. He felt that his heart was as dirty as the mouth of a crocodile in the dirt. His kingship, power and honor were totally useless to heal his guilty conscience. Finally King David went to God and confessed his sins. He also asked God to cleanse his guilty conscience. Psalm 51:1,2 says, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquities and cleanse me from my sin." Again in Psalm 51:7 he says, "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." Finally David asks God to give him a pure heart. Psalm 51:10 says, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." King David's joy of life was restored when God cleansed the poison of his guilty conscience and when God set him free from the torments of a guilty conscience.

In short, King David was happy when God forgave his sins. David became a root of Jesus Christ mainly because he knew God's grace of forgiveness of sins. Romans 4:7,8 says, "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." When King David confessed and realized that he was a terrible sinner before being a king, God forgave his sins and restored joy in his soul.

There are two kinds of people among Christians. One is habitual Christians. They say that they are Christians. But they look so weird and bitter. They look like they were made of rotten fungus. They received God's grace. But they never say, "Thank you." The other kind of people are those who know that they are sinners before the presence of God, but that by the grace of God they were saved. It is important for one to realize his sins in his soul. Once there was a medical student who really enjoyed movies in third-class theaters. He also gave all his time to study to pass the American Medical Association test. Since Jesus came into his heart, he did not spend his time for himself. He spent his time for others in teaching the Bible. Now he is a grandfather with two grandchildren and with a heavy load of being a medical doctor. He works two night shifts in the hospital. But he does not enjoy resting his tired body at home. After three hours of sleep after the night shift, he teaches the Bible to his sheep. These days his doctor inserted a plastic tube line below his left kidney. But he overcame the pain caused by surgery. He gives his time for God's flock. He can do so because he knows that he is a sinner, but that Jesus saved him from his sins. He is happy to live by the grace of God. His joy is overflowing always. He is very proud of his wife, saying, "My wife is a noble woman from heaven."

There is another person who is thankful and joyful. He was a young man from a poor family. He wanted to be a multi-millionaire and president of a pharmaceutical company. One day Jesus visited him through one-to-one Bible study. He was touched by John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Since then he became a man after God's own heart. He could have gone to Los Angeles and taken exams for the pharmacist's license. But he remained to take care of the Circle campus ministry. He rented an apartment near the Circle campus. His apartment became a Bible house in which, sometimes, seventy teams of one-to-one Bible study were carried out each week. He had to study pharmacy all over again. He also challenged Pharm.D. course work. But he never missed any leader's meeting. Thus he has proven himself to be a man in Christ. He was joyful when he had no child. He was not worried but prayed when his wife was hospitalized several times for heavy operations. He is happy since he confessed his sin of selfishness and was changed into a sacrificial servant of God.

We cannot omit St. Paul. He was a man of political ambition. He called himself Saul, which meant, "I am the greatest." Under the rule of the Roman Empire he did not despair. Rather he was ambitious enough to call himself "the greatest." Paul was a man who would stop at nothing to achieve his own ends. He was a dangerous man. He was a man who should not exist in this world. Once Paul was on the way to Damascus to persecute the early Christians. He met the Risen Christ. The Risen Christ forgave all his sins unconditionally. Paul realized that he was a great sinner. Later he confessed that he was a sinner. He said in 1 Timothy 1:15, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst." He also said in 1 Corinthians 15:8, "...and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born." Again he said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than

all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." Paul expressed his joy in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. It says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Paul was happy when he realized that he was a sinner. Paul was happy when his sins were forgiven and when he lived by the grace of God.

Now we understand why this woman expressed her love in such a surprising way. Since Jesus came into her heart, Jesus became her source of joy, because he forgave her sins. Jesus was all the world to her. According to Jewish custom, obviously she should pour perfume on his head first, and then on his feet. After pouring it out, she wiped his feet with her hair. To a woman, hairstyle is very important. Suppose a woman had a sportsman's haircut. How repulsive she would look! 1 Corinthians says that long hair is a woman's glory (1 Cor 11:15). But Mary did not mind wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. This was her expression of respect, joy and thanks to Jesus since Jesus came into her heart. She poured perfume on him, but in actuality, she was pouring out her heart to Jesus out of the unutterable thanks in her soul. More than that, she expressed her love to Jesus because Jesus saved her from the power of sins. Jesus also forgave all her sins which were higher than the Rocky Mountains. She expressed her love to Jesus, realizing that she was a sinner, but that Jesus is the Son of God and that he had made her a heavenly princess. In this part we learn that it is very important for each one to know that he is a sinner, but that by the grace of God he is a holy child of God. How difficult it is to recognize oneself as a sinner! But this is the beginning point of receiving God's grace and joy.

Second, a man of impure motive (4-6). Verses 4-6 comment on a man called Judas Iscariot. He looked at the woman's genuine love for Jesus and was furious about her wasting perfume. He could not see the heart of the woman linked with the grace of Jesus. He only looked at the material waste for nothing. He said a very offensive thing about the woman. It is common sense that even an angry man should not talk to a woman in such an indecent way. Look at verses 4-5. "But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.'" He appeared to be a world-famous philanthropist. He appeared to be a renowned altruist. He appeared to be a patriot who was mindful of poor people. But John comments that he said this because he was a thief. Look at verse 6. "He 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."

Here we see that purpose is purpose and motive is motive. Judas Iscariot's purpose of following Jesus was to become one of his disciples. Purpose shows one's life direction and goal. But his motive was not in Jesus. When he followed Jesus, he became a treasurer of Jesus' band. This shows us that he was interested in money more than in Jesus' words. As the Apostle John commented, his motive was not in Jesus, but in money.

We have to think about how motive makes people different. Would you like to hear a story? Me, too. There were two students who got room and board at their uncle's house in Korea. Their purpose was to finish

high school. In order to do so, they had to study high school English. But their motive of studying English was to get good grades and pass the college entrance exam. They were not fully motivated to master English; their motive was only to pass a test. As a result, they studied every night for three or four hours. But they could not get even one A. If they had been motivated to master English, they could have gotten all A's. On the other hand, a factory boy, who was the house owner's son, was motivated to study in great hunger. So he overheard their English study and memorized everything. He mastered high school English in one semester. Next, he began to teach his cousins. When he understood high school English, he was greatly motivated and wanted to become an English Bible teacher for American students in the future. Then God gave him a photographic memory. After three months, he could memorize an English dictionary which contained 25,000 words, and review it two more times. In the course of studying English he was beaten by his step-mother, who said he was burning a kerosene lamp too much. She beat him until one of his eyes was bleeding, and later, legally blinded. Then he was even more motivated to study English. God had mercy on him and he is now an English Bible teacher to gorgeous American students.

There is a movie entitled, "The Mission." One low-ranking priest went to an unknown jungle and began to evangelize people. Almost all of the natives were evangelized. His name was Father Gabriel. Later an envoy from the Roman Catholic church hierarchy visited and saw the great revival on the mission field. He was not happy about it. He ordered Father Gabriel to stop any further revival. But Father Gabriel continued. Then the envoy ordered that soldiers of the Catholic church be sent and they killed all the natives, both old and young, including infants and Father Gabriel. The envoy might have thought that that was the way to protect the Roman Catholic church. But his motive was murderous, and it was not pleasing to God. In this way he displeased God. His motive of ministering to God's flock was not to bring them to God for repentance and salvation. His motive was to protect the authority and power of the Roman Catholic church. They say it is a true story. Even if it is not a true story, but only a movie, it is a sad story about an impure motive.

These days most churches think that those who do not accommodate with modern culture are cults. What is their motive? Their motive is to justify their sinful lifestyle. Genuine Christians are influenced by church leaders, and these days many Christians just believe in Jesus and at the same time enjoy the perverse and immoral cultural lifestyle. The deep motive of the Christian church should be like Jesus in a manger. Outwardly, the manger looked humble and smelly, but in it was baby Jesus, who has the life of God within him. Their numbers are an absolute minority, but those who keep the character of the manger ministry are right with God, and they are right in the sight of God.

What happened to Judas Iscariot, who had an impure motive in following Jesus? He could not remain as one of his disciples. He sold Jesus for 30 silver coins. But his conscience was stricken, and he could not keep the money. So he tried to return the money, but the priests didn't accept it. So he threw the money away on the floor of the temple and hanged himself on a tree. But the rope was loose and he fell down on the ground and his intestines spilled out. God blesses

those who have a pure motive in the sight of God. God curses those who have an impure motive before the holy God.

Third, Jesus' value system (7-11). How did Jesus interpret Mary's action? Look at verse 7. "'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. 'It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.'" We cannot say that Mary poured perfume on Jesus knowing that it was for his burial and death. But Jesus accepted her act preciously and credited it as a part of God's work. Here we learn Jesus' value system. Jesus valued this woman who gave what she had to him, and he attributed the meaning of her giving as the anointing for his burial. Here we learn that Jesus values not the achievement but the heart. Once the Roman Catholic church sold indulgences by the order of Pope Leo X in order to build St. Peter's cathedral in Rome. Pope Leo's achievement looks great. But Jesus does not value his dishonesty and deception or the huge cathedral which is full of coffins.

These days due to technological development, most people study science or technological skills at schools. In the past, they were known as professional people. In the past, a Ph.D. was not given to such professional people. But these days, those who major in various kinds of skills get five times more money than those who study humanity or a kind of art. This country no longer values history teachers or literature teachers or music teachers or art teachers, especially music teachers. One of our leaders majored in clarinet. But in order to marry and support his family, he studied engineering all over again. As a result of such a trend, the humanity of this nation has been drained. Also, classical music, which purifies people's souls, has long been ignored. Rock band people who use heavy metal and who express their despair and frustration and immorality are overwhelmingly welcomed. Human beings need to study humanity, art, and music more than they need to be craftsmen. Here we must review world history and invest much money in raising men of noble character and women of high moral standards. Then God will surely bless this country. Money gained through technology is not everything. True human beings who grow through humanity study are invaluable to this country. Jesus valued Mary's pouring perfume on his body as a part of God's work. We must learn the value system of Jesus. Without a proper value system, we are no more than animal men.

Verses 9-11 tell us that the religious leaders made a plan to kill Lazarus, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him. So they decided to kill poor Lazarus, who was once dead and was raised by Jesus. Their spiritual condition was not a degree of corruption, but a state of deadness.

May God help us to know that each of us is a great sinner before God. Then God will give to each of us his forgiveness. Then we will come to know God's love and put our faith in the Son.