



## Fruit Cove Baptist Church

THE JESUS ENCOUNTER 2025 SERMON SERIES CG LESSONS: •  
GIVING AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP • JOHN 12:1-8 • 6/8/2025

### MAIN POINT

We worship Jesus when we serve Him with our very best.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**How does your checkbook or schedule reveal your priorities? Are these things good examples of revealing a person's priorities? Why or why not?**

**How does the giving of Christians reveal what they support?**

**How do these priorities compare to priorities in God's kingdom? How should they?**

How we use our time, money, and talents reveals what we value. When we steward these areas in ways that reflect worldly priorities, we don't show the honor due Jesus Christ. Jesus calls every believer to focus on Him and not the things of this world. Jesus' life was one of love given freely. Today we will see how Mary recognized Jesus' love and responded with an extravagant gift that reflected her love for Him. She is an example of one who gave her best to Jesus.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Luke 10:38-42 records one of Jesus' previous visits to the home of Mary, her sister Martha, and brother Lazarus in Bethany. Luke notes that while distracted Martha prepared for company, Mary remained at the feet of Jesus, listening to Him. The choice Mary made kept her focused on the truth rather than on the trivial. On another occasion, Jesus came after

Lazarus's death and raised him back to life. Just days later, in John 12, Mary's story continues to serve as an example of someone whose unwavering focus was on Jesus.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:1-3.

Jesus went back to Bethany with His disciples six days before the Passover and His death on the cross. During the meal in Bethany an extraordinary event happened. Mary took a pound of fragrant oil, valued at 300 denarii or the equivalent of a man's yearly wage, and used it to anoint Jesus' feet. Mary's heart was a place of complete, simple devotion.

**How did Mary give her best to Jesus?**

**What message does Mary's example of extravagant love and unwavering devotion for Jesus hold for believers today?**

**If you were to give your very best to God, what would that include?**

**What would you find the most difficult to freely hand to God without further claim to it?**

**Why do you think people often have difficulty giving God the glory He is due?**

**How valuable is Jesus based on your generosity?**

Mary's act of extravagant love was focused on Jesus. Believers, whether in the 1st century or the 21st century, keep their focus on Jesus by giving Him the best of who they are and what they have rather than holding back for themselves. By doing so, we show our reverence to Him as Savior and Lord of our lives. Giving our very best to Jesus serves as a testament to the importance of His kingdom and values, not those of this world, our temporary home.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:4-8.

Mary humbled herself by wiping Jesus' feet and displayed great devotion to Him with the expensive fragrant oil. After a display of love came a display of selfishness. Mary's generosity was misunderstood and criticized. The other disciples present at the dinner and Judas voiced their objection to what they perceived as extravagant waste.

**How did Judas respond to the situation? Doesn't Jesus care about the poor and want us to do the same? Explain.**

**What was Jesus' response to Mary's anointing Him with costly perfume? Why did Jesus respond in that way? What does this event teach us about approval?**

**When have you faced criticism for seeking the approval of Jesus over the approval of people?**

**What does a believer's life look like when he or she is seeking Jesus' approval?**

**What problems do believers often face when they choose to seek Jesus' approval rather than that of others?**

Concern for the poor was not the real motive behind Judas's outburst; greed was. Mary's generosity was less about cost and more about the cross. Jesus' words about the poor did not mean His disciples should think of poverty as inevitable and therefore do nothing. Rather, Jesus meant that believers will always have opportunities to help poor people, but this was Mary's last opportunity to minister to Him before His death. Likely Mary did not realize that Jesus' death was near any more than the disciples did. Jesus, however, viewed Mary's actions as a kind of pre-anointing for His death on the cross, His sacrifice that gave humanity a gift unsurpassed by all others.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Mary worshiped joyfully and willingly—two attributes that are found in our giving when our hearts are right. Our attitudes toward money and use of material possessions always reveal the true nature of our hearts. When our hearts are in sync with God we give freely and are not pressured, enticed, manipulated, or intimidated. And, we give without reservation to God's work and His kingdom cause, the true response of a loyal follower and wholehearted devotion.

**Why do you think an upright heart pleases God?**

**Who is watching you and following your example of generosity? How does this affect your giving? What do others see from your example?**

**How does our attitude in generosity reveal our relationship with God to others? How might we misrepresent God if we're not joyful givers like Mary?**

## **How might our attitude in giving serve as a witness to those who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ?**

### **PRAYER**

Close by praying that your group would worship by giving God your very best. Ask Him to reveal areas that need improvement so each of you can glorify and honor God through each area in which you're called to be generous.

### **COMMENTARY**

| JOHN 12:1-8

Jesus went back to Bethany six days before the Passover, meaning that Mary's anointing of Jesus happened on Saturday. At this Passover, Jesus, the Lamb of God, would die on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Lazarus was there at Bethany, still giving testimony to Jesus' resurrection miracle. Lazarus's resurrection had made him something of a celebrity, and a "large crowd of the Jews" wanted to see him as well as Jesus (v. 9). The dinner evidently was the Saturday evening meal. The hosts included Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Martha as usual was serving them. Other disciples were present as well, including Judas.

During the meal an extraordinary event happened. Mary took a pound of fragrant oil, which was about 12 ounces and a lavish amount to pour on someone. The oil was pure, of the highest quality. Mark said the amount of "nard" was valued at 300 denarii (John 12:5), obviously expensive because of its high grade. The nard was imported from India and came from the roots of the nard plant. Mary then anointed Jesus' feet. Twelve ounces of oil was enough to anoint Jesus' head and feet, and the oil dripped down from His head and covered most of His body. Mary's heart was a place of complete, simple devotion, and her actions showed her devotion.

Mary acted with humility as she wiped His feet with her hair, a fact only the Gospel of John mentions. In the first century, Jewish women did not unbind their hair in public because doing so was thought to be immoral. But Mary's deep love for Jesus was more important than propriety. It was easy for Mary to anoint Jesus' feet because the guests reclined on mats with their hands and heads close to the table and their feet extending away from the table.

What did Mary have to lose? What could she gain from this example of unwavering devotion? She could have once again incurred the displeasure of her sister, or the criticism of Jesus' disciples. But these concerns were no longer in her range of view that she would worry on such matters. Mary had abandoned all in the form of the gift. Neither friend nor foe could affect the outcome of this lavish gift now. The love she shared with Jesus was so lavish that the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But why did Mary love Jesus so much? No doubt one reason was Jesus' powerful and gracious act of raising Lazarus from the dead. When a male head of a household died and only females were survivors, the women could become destitute or have extreme difficulty making ends meet. This may not have been the situation with Mary and Martha, but if it was, the sisters were grateful to Jesus for restoring their brother to them. Even if they had money, and the expensive fragrant oil suggests they were well off financially, perhaps even rich, the resurrection of Lazarus was more than enough reason for gratitude and love. Mary had been waiting for a chance to show her heartfelt devotion. The dinner was her opportunity, and she took it joyfully and gratefully.

The Gospel of John does not say whether Mary anointed Jesus out of gratitude for raising Lazarus or whether she knew in her heart that Jesus was the Messiah. But there was messianic significance in her action. Old Testament prophets (1 Kings 19:16), priests (Ex. 28:41), and kings (1 Kings 1:38-39) were anointed. And of course the word Messiah means "the anointed one." Mary's act of extravagant love was focused on Jesus. Believers, whether in the 1st century or the 21st century, keep their focus on Jesus by giving Him the best of who they are and what they have rather than holding back for themselves. Just as Jesus was pleased with Mary's gift, He also is pleased with our gifts to Him. Her example leaves us wondering about the last time we gave anything to Jesus or the last time we gave our best. When was that in your life? Jesus is unconcerned whether we can match Mary's gift dollar for denarii. Believers who adjust their focus on Jesus by giving Him their very best find they never have to worry whether He is pleased with their gifts. He is.

Some believers find value in other people's favorable opinions of their actions for Christ. This may be good. At other times, however, in seeking others' approval we may lose our focus on Jesus. When we ache to please others or ourselves, we are not focused on Christ.

Mary had humbled herself by wiping Jesus' feet and had displayed great devotion to Him with the expensive fragrant oil poured out on Him. After a display of love came a display of selfishness. Mary was misunderstood and criticized. The other disciples present at the dinner, and Judas, voiced their objection to what they perceived as extravagant waste. In that culture 300 denarii was pay for a working man's yearly wage. Concern for the poor is

understandable. Jesus showed His concern for the poor on numerous occasions (Matt. 6:2-4; 19:21; John 13:29). Furthermore, it was a custom that the Jews gave gifts to the poor at Passover time. So they asked themselves if Mary couldn't have done a better thing with the expensive oil than wasting it on Jesus? But concern for the poor was not the real motive behind Judas's outburst. He was a materialist and a thief. He often stole money even from the disciples' money-bag! Disloyalty marked him from the moment he met Jesus. So in an angry and sarcastic tone Judas scolded Mary and by implication Jesus, "Why wasn't this fragrant oil sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?" Before the fragrance left the room, Judas displayed an air of selfishness that starkly contrasted with Mary's giving. Her love poured out on Jesus as the oil poured from the bottle. Judas cared merely for himself.

When others criticized Mary, Jesus affirmed her when He said, "Leave her alone." Mary's unwavering focus was less about cost and more about the cross. Her gift personalized her love but also prophesied the near future. Jesus was headed toward the crucifixion. His death and burial were near, and she had performed an act that was for the day of [His] burial. Likely Mary did not realize that Jesus' death was near at hand, any more than the disciples did. She had anointed Him because of her love, just as mourners anointed the bodies of their dead. Jesus, however, viewed the anointing by Mary as a kind of pre-anointing for His death on the cross. Joseph of Arimathea would follow through with the burial custom (19:38-40). It's good to lay flowers on the graves of our loved ones. It's best to give flowers before the funeral!

Then Jesus likely startled the dinner guests. He said, "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." Jesus' words did not arise from arrogance. He was not saying His disciples should think of poverty as inevitable and therefore do nothing. Rather, Jesus meant that believers will always have opportunities to help poor people, but this was Mary's last opportunity to minister to Him before His death. Mary's presence at the dinner that day was a unique opportunity for her to do a noble thing and contrasted with the ongoing need of disciples helping the poor.

While others criticized, Jesus affirmed Mary. And that made all the difference. People important to us often, knowingly and unknowingly, give and take their approval. Sometimes opinions keep our focus wavering between finding approval from others rather than seeking God's approval. But believers should keep their focus on Jesus by seeking His approval above all.