

LESSON 9

*February 21-27

A Devoted Soul *and an* Impending Cross



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 11:1–12:50.*

Memory Text: “‘I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds’ ” (*John 12:24, NIV*).

Key Thoughts: In the death and resurrection of Lazarus, John provides a foretaste of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the impending Cross that draws out of Mary the full measure of devotion.

We love Him because He first loved us. In John 11 and 12 the author of the Gospel begins a transition from the earthly ministry of Jesus to the events associated with the Cross. The two main incidents in these chapters occur in Bethany, just across the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem. In Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead and His anointing with perfume by Mary, John prepares the reader for the tragic but necessary events to follow shortly in Jerusalem.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead provokes contradictory reactions. For the Sanhedrin, it is seen as a threat to their own self-interest. As a result, they begin plotting the death of Jesus. In contrast stands Mary's glorious act of devotion. Her devotion was well timed. “As [Jesus] went down into the darkness of His great trial, He carried with Him the memory of that deed, an earnest of the love that would be His from His redeemed ones forever.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 560.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.*

SUNDAY February 22

The Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44).

Read John 11:1-44 and then answer these questions:

1. Why does Jesus wait so long before going to Bethany? See verses 15-17, 37, and 39. How did the delay make what He does even more miraculous?

2. Read what Jesus says in verses 25, 26. How does the act of raising Lazarus help prove the truth of those words?

3. Read what Jesus says in verses 41, 42. What do they reveal about the source of Christ's power? See also verse 22.

4. Read verse 27. What is so important about this confession of faith, particularly in regard to the time in which it was expressed?

The bottom line of Christian faith is that there is real power in the gospel. The power that raised Lazarus from the dead is real, and it is still available today. While tragedies always are not reversed in this life, the resurrection power of God will bring meaning and comfort to our souls if we allow it to.

We will all have the John 11 experience at one time or another; that is, death, betrayal, and destruction leave behind a real sense of loss that cannot be explained away. We are troubled by the sense that Jesus could have intervened to prevent them but did not. We struggle to understand what "glory to God" might possibly come out of tragedy. At low points such as these, we can remember that the God who raised Jesus from the dead is still able to create something out of nothing. Even when all seems hopeless, we still can place our trust in Him. We have to, for what else is there? Fortunately for us, we have accounts such as this in the book of John that can give us even more reasons to trust in God.

Read verse 37. Who has not found himself or herself thinking a similar thing in the face of personal tragedy? What is the only answer we can give?

MONDAY February 23

Mary and Martha.

What is the first thing that both Martha and Mary say to Jesus when they first approach Him? How do those words reveal both faith and doubt at the same time? See *John 11:21, 32*.

For Mary and Martha, the death of Lazarus itself was not the worst thing. The worst part about the situation was the delay of Jesus! The two sisters seem to have had a very different reaction to Jesus. When news of Jesus' arrival outside of town comes, Martha goes out to meet Him, but Mary stays at home until Martha comes and gets her. While both sisters are upset and distressed, Martha combines her statement of frustration (*vs. 21*) with strong statements of continued faith in Jesus (*vss. 22, 24, 27*). In response to her expressed faith, Jesus offers one of the most magnificent descriptions of His life and mission: "I am the resurrection and the life" (*vss. 25, 26, NIV*).

What do you understand the statement of Christ's in verses 25 and 26 to mean? What hope is implicit in those words for us?

When Mary finally goes out to meet Jesus, she repeats Martha's complaint but without any affirmation of continued faith. She receives no revelation from Jesus, and He draws no expression of faith from her (*compare verses 32, 33 with verses 22-27*). Jesus has come to invite them to behold the Resurrection and the Life, but their minds are fixed on their loss instead.

Beneath the surface of this story, it is not hard to catch a glimpse of the inner life of these sisters. Their hearts were a raging sea of turbulent emotions. The pain of sudden loss has all but crushed them. The actions of Jesus have piled doubts on top of their sorrows. While Martha seems to have been more successful at maintaining a semblance of emotional stability, even she did not grasp in advance what Jesus had come to do (*vs. 39*).

This story has a happy ending, of course. What hope do you find in this account for deaths that do not, at least for now, end as this one does?

TUESDAY February 24

The Plot to Kill Jesus *(John 11:45-57)*.

Read John 11:45-57 and then answer the following questions:

1. Did the leaders believe that Jesus had really performed this miracle, or did they think it was a trick? Explain the importance of the answer.

2. What justification did they give for having to stop Jesus? Does that argument not make sense?

In these texts we see the reactions of the religious leaders to the resurrection of Lazarus. Instead of the unlimited possibilities the resurrection of Lazarus would seem to open to the human race, the religious leaders can focus only on the threat to their own position and interests.

With delicious irony, John uses the leaders' own words against them. They plot to kill Jesus, because they fear that if they allow Him to continue His ministry, " 'everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation' " (*vs. 48, NIV*). To the first readers of the Gospel, the foolishness of this statement would have been plain. The very thing the religious leaders sought to prevent, the death of Jesus brought about: worldwide belief in the teachings of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Even their leader, Caiaphas, prophesies that they " 'know nothing at all' " (*vss. 49-52, NIV*). The council determines that, although Jesus has done nothing to deserve death, His death is the only way to maintain their position and the security of their nation.

However dramatic their example, the religious leaders here symbolize the danger we all face: rationalizing our actions, even those that fly in the face of what we know is right, for personal expediency. How have you done the same thing in your own life? What can we do to stop ourselves from falling into this common, but deadly, trap? Some verses that might help are Matthew 16:24, Philippians 2:4, and 1 Peter 4:1.

WEDNESDAY *February 25*

Mary of Bethany (*John 12:1-8*).

The anointing at Bethany probably took place on Saturday night, the week before the Crucifixion (*John 12:1*). Bethany was located about two miles east of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Mount of Olives.

Read John 12:8. Imagine yourself in the position of someone there who, not knowing about the impending death of Christ, witnessed the reaction of Jesus and Judas to Mary's act. What reasons would they have for, perhaps, thinking Judas was right? What lesson exists here regarding how we can not always judge actions by what we see?

The heart of the narrative at the beginning of John 12 lies in the deliberate contrast between Mary's wholehearted faith in, and love for, Jesus and the coldhearted calculations of Caiaphas (at the end of chapter 11) and Judas. Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet is motivated by unselfish love and sacrifice. The opponents of Jesus, on the other hand, are motivated by greed and self-interest.

In this scene we see Mary's total devotion of soul. Whatever doubts she may have had before the resurrection of Lazarus are gone now. Every emotion trembles with gratitude to the One who raised her brother and who is about to die for her. The perfume she pours on Jesus cost her a year of hard work, but it represents her whole life, gratefully offered to Jesus. Such total devotion is rarely popular, as Judas's reaction makes clear. "What a waste," people say. "You could have done great things with your life, but you chose to waste it on Jesus!"

Judas's reaction is normal and human. Mary's action does seem a waste. What church board would approve such an expenditure? To human reasoning, Mary seems emotionally disturbed. But notice again how Jesus feels about it, this time as recorded in Mark 14:6-9: "She has done a beautiful thing to me. . . . She did what she could. . . . I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (*NIV*).

Look at the reaction of Judas to Mary's anointing of Christ. In what ways can we be guilty of doing the same thing; that is, hiding our own spiritual weaknesses and defects behind a veneer of piety and self-sacrifice?

THURSDAY February 26

The Impending Cross *(John 12:9-27).*

John portrays three main reactions to the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

- The religious leaders want to kill Jesus and even Lazarus for fear of what will happen to them if they do not *(John 11:47-53)*.
- Mary, on the other hand, responds with gratitude and devoted, self-sacrificing love *(John 12:1-9)*.

At the same time, a third reaction occurs. What is it? See *John 12:9-11, 17-19*.

Of the three reactions, Mary's is clearly the one the author of the Gospel wishes the reader to see as the great model of response to Jesus and His miraculous signs.

What is Jesus' answer to the request of the Greeks? *John 12:20-27*.
What is He specifically telling us there about what it means to follow Him? How did Mary's act in anointing Christ's feet manifest what Jesus is telling us here?

John 12:26 shows that to follow Jesus is to disown self-centeredness. When our lives are filled with striving for advantage, security, and pleasure, we do not experience the fullness of life Jesus offers. In fact, what Jesus seems to be saying in verse 25 is that the only way we can truly follow Christ is to disown ourselves; this has to be a full, complete death to self. This, of course, is something only the Lord can do for us, if we allow Him, if we make the choice to follow Him; and to do that we must, like the kernel of wheat, first die. There is no other way. Judas, the leaders of Israel, and the crowd that came to Jesus as He entered Jerusalem all represent, to one degree or another, those who (at least at that point) did not make the full surrender.

Of those whom we have looked at in today's study, only Mary seems to have understood this, an understanding clearly made manifest by her works.

How would you explain to a non-Christian that what Jesus is saying in John 12:25 is to our immense advantage? How could you express it in a way to help him or her understand this in a positive manner?

Further Study: “Had Christ been in the sickroom, Lazarus would not have died; for Satan would have had no power over him. . . . Christ knew that as [the suffering sisters] looked on the dead face of their brother their faith in their Redeemer would be severely tried. But He knew that because of the struggle through which they were now passing their faith would shine forth with far greater power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 528.

“The Saviour understood the plotting of the priests. He knew that they longed to remove Him, and that their purpose would soon be accomplished. But it was not His place to hasten the crisis, and He withdraws from that region, taking the disciples with Him. Thus by His own example Jesus again enforced the instruction He had given to the disciples, ‘When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.’ Matt. 10:23. There was a wide field in which to work for the salvation of souls; and unless loyalty to Him required it, the Lord’s servants were not to imperil their lives.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 541.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If you had a year’s worth of salary or a year of time to use to honor Jesus, how would you use it? How would your friends be likely to react?
- 2 Read John 12:26. How do those words debunk the notion that Jesus wants us only as friends, not as servants? Why must we be both?
- 3 Look up these texts: Matthew 19:29, Mark 8:36, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:8. How do they express the same idea that we see revealed in Mary’s actions? What must happen in our own lives so we can have that kind of devotion?

Summary: In this lesson we have seen how the kindness of Jesus provokes contradictory reactions. His kindness in raising Lazarus from the dead and in showing acceptance to Mary draws out the full depth of her devotion to Him. On the other hand, the same actions lead to the murderous plots of the religious leaders, the greedy complaint of Judas, and the misguided praise of the crowd. The author of the Gospel would have us ponder our own reactions to the greatest kindness of all, Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross.

Muslims Find an Easier Way to Heaven

by J. H. ZACHARY

I have learned to have a profound respect for true Muslims. The main goal of their life is total surrender in obedience to the living God. Their lives are filled with godly activities. Hours each week are spent in prayer and memorizing verses from the Holy Qur'an. They faithfully give alms to the poor and live in strict obedience to the laws of health. It takes a lot of work to be a faithful Muslim. Assurance of salvation depends on much moment-by-moment effort.

Shah-jahan comes from this kind of family. He is a devoted follower of the living God, a son of Abraham. One day someone showed him the passage in the Qur'an that encourages believers to study the Tawrat (Pentateuch), the Zabur (Psalms), and the Injil (Gospels). The Qur'an often refers to Jesus as the Son of Mary. Shah-jahan was interested in learning more about Jesus.

He began to study the Bible, and his life began to change. A peace filled his heart. He experienced new power from reading the Bible. His wife noticed that he was becoming a better person. His daily prayer life became more precious. He began to understand more of the amazing love that Allah has for sinners. Shah-jahan was amazed to learn from the prophet Zechariah that God not only forgives sin, but He gives the repentant sinner a robe of righteousness.

As Shah-jahan began to accept this gift of salvation, joy flooded his heart. He eagerly shared his joy with relatives and neighbors. "I have found an easier way to heaven!" he exclaimed. What a precious assurance has come to Shah-jahan since he began following the instructions of the Qur'an to read the Bible.

In the Western world, church leaders and pastors spend considerable time making plans and developing materials to use to spread the good news of Christ. Shah-jahan and his friends found the good news simply by reading the Bible. They now are compelled to share the wonderful news of salvation with others.

Hundreds of Muslims throughout the world are rejoicing in this precious experience with the living God. Pray that others will open their hearts to receive the good news that Jesus saves.

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