

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 *(John 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *John 12:24*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that Jesus' life and teachings make sense only in light of His death.
2. To understand that Jesus' death is the only Source of divine power for our lives.
3. To stress that the proper response on our part to Jesus' sacrifice is a willingness to surrender our lives to Him.

Lesson Outline:

I. A Single Kernel of Wheat.

- A. Lazarus's death and resurrection prefigured Jesus' own (*John 10:11*).
- B. The resurrection of Lazarus, in a way, sealed Jesus' fate.
- C. Lazarus can be seen to represent all of us in relation to Jesus.

II. The Power of the Gospel (*John 16:33*).

- A. Jesus' resurrection from the dead should inspire hope, even in seemingly hopeless situations.
- B. God's means of addressing our problems may not be immediately clear to us.
- C. It is inevitable that our faith will be mixed with doubt, but we should not allow those doubts to blind us.

III. Because He First Loved Me (*John 12:3*).

- A. Mary's act of anointing Jesus with extremely expensive perfume is the model for the boundless gratitude we should feel toward Jesus.
- B. The leaders' intensified hostility toward Jesus indicates that they did not realize, or chose to ignore, their need for what He had to offer.
- C. Judas's objection to Mary's action was important evidence that he, too, failed to appreciate the depth of Christ's mission and message.

Summary: Without Jesus' sacrifice there would be no Christianity and no salvation, for that matter. In His crucifixion, Jesus not only saved our lives; He showed us how we should live.

COMMENTARY.

John's narrative is fast approaching the closing scenes of Jesus' earthly ministry. To help us understand those scenes, John 11 and 12 record four great events: (1) victory over death, (2) vicious hatred, (3) vindication of genuine love, and (4) a voice of confirmation.

I. Victory Over Death: Lazarus.

The name *Lazarus* means "God is my help." And that is exactly what happens in the hour of Lazarus's greatest need (*John 11:1-45*). Although Jesus already had resurrected two other people (*Matt. 9:18-26, Luke 7:11-16*), Lazarus's resurrection is the most signifi-

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 (*vs. 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" (*vs. 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

cant, because it “was to be an evidence that the priests could not misinterpret. . . . This crowning miracle, the raising of Lazarus, was to set the seal of God on His [Jesus’] work and on His claim to divinity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 529.

The miracle of Lazarus’s resurrection has other timeless lessons. First, trusting in Jesus is never fruitless. Disappointment may come as an interlude, but for the trusting soul, disappointment turns into appointment with the Almighty.

Second, the divine schedule knows neither haste nor delay. Jesus came to Lazarus’s tomb four days after he died, not to weaken faith but to bring glory. Waiting in hope for the Lord never goes without an answer.

Third, for a disciple of Jesus, death is just a sleep (*Job 14:11; Pss. 6:5; 115:17; 146:4; Eccles. 9:5, 6, 10*) to be awakened by eternal life.

Fourth, Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life—both to awaken us from present death in sin and to resurrect us in the final victory. Where Jesus is, there is life.

Fifth, Jesus empathizes with us, as seen in His tears at the tomb (*John 11:35, 36*).

Sixth, even in the midst of pain, anguish, and grief, we must do our part. “‘Take ye away the stone’” was the Lord’s command (*vs. 39*). What we can do, He will not do. Divine grace does not turn us into lazy, spoiled children but empowers us to do good.

Seventh, the resurrection of Lazarus came second. His faith in, and friendship with, Jesus came first. This order is crucial if we would not be legalistic in our obedience.

II. Vicious Hatred: Christ’s Enemies.

It was before God’s throne that Lucifer became Satan. So it should be no surprise to us that Lazarus’s resurrection spurred satanic powers to convene the Sanhedrin and cause Caiaphas, the crafty high priest, to pronounce: “‘It is better . . . that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish’” (*John 11:50, NIV*). What an ironic prophecy! The way to the Cross is about to be flung open in order that Jesus may die rather than the nation, indeed the whole world, perish!

III. Vindication of Genuine Love: Mary.

Jesus’ impending death and rumors of priestly plots toward that end provided the moment for which Mary had long waited. John 12:1-8 and the parallel passages of Matthew 26:1-13 and Mark 14:1-9 tell us that Mary, in gratefulness to what Jesus did to reshape her life, brought “an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head” (*Mark 14:3, NIV*). John says she anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair (*John 12:3*).

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' " (*vs. 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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

This selfless act of gratitude immediately brought stern rebuke: “ ‘Why this waste . . . ? It could have been sold for more than one year’s wages’ ” (*Mark 14:5, NIV*). It has gone to waste. How many poor could have been helped? But the surge of the heart cannot be understood by the marketing forces of the mind. Love’s expression knows no cost, and Jesus readily accepted Mary’s ministry (*vss. 6, 8*).

Judas held on to his cash box. Mary, however, broke her alabaster box. The transition from one to the other is the mark of

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *John 11:1-4, 45-50; 12:8; 1 Corinthians 2:6-8; James 1:27; 5:16*

- ❶ Raising Lazarus from the dead would seem to be irrefutable proof of Jesus’ divinity. Many so-called wonder workers have claimed to be able to raise the dead, but how many have done it before witnesses? Why, then, do you think the religious leaders continued to oppose Jesus?
- ❷ All too often we regard prayer and faith in God as something to try when all else fails. By then we think the situation is truly dismal. However, is this attitude warranted if we truly believe in the reality of divine power?
- ❸ Why did Jesus seem intentionally to take His time in attending to Lazarus? How did Mary and Martha feel about this? What are the parallels with our own attempts to depend on a God who sometimes seems slow to act?
- ❹ According to basic Christian doctrine, Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. So, then, were the leaders and others who helped Him to that end playing a predetermined part? Are they morally responsible? Explain your answers.
- ❺ In John 12:1-8, we learn much about three people in particular: Mary, Martha, and Judas. Discuss the attitude of each of these people. In what settings might each attitude be appropriate? Have you ever been in a situation where you thought certain expenditures or extravagances were uncalled for? If so, what can we learn from Jesus’ response?
- ❻ What does Jesus mean when He says, “ ‘The poor you have with you always’ ” (*John 12:8, NKJV*)? Should we shrug off such suffering? What does the context tell us?

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 might such an eyewitness 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

spiritual beauty and maturity. In one moment of eloquent self-denial, Mary lifted gratitude to a priceless pinnacle of love. Genuine love vindicates itself in such self-abandonment as it places itself at the Master's feet.

IV. A Voice of Confirmation: The Greeks.

While the Hebrew religious leaders plotted the death of Jesus and Lazarus (*John 11:49-51, 12:10*) in order to stop Jesus' mission (*vs. 11*), a new door of opportunity opened. The Greeks visiting Jerusalem told the disciples that they wanted to see Jesus (*vs. 20, 21*). At His birth, the wise men from the East came to worship Him. Now at the close of His ministry, the Greeks from the West came to see the close of that ministry. In the case of one, a star in the sky guided them. In the case of the other, a voice from heaven gave its approval of His mission, and the people heard it like a thunder (*vs. 23-29*). To the Greeks, as to Nicodemus, Jesus revealed His impending death on the cross (*John 12:32*). "In these strangers He saw the pledge of a great harvest, when the partition wall between

Witnessing

At the end of the funeral ceremony, the young widow walked solemnly toward the casket. She carefully pulled up the satin blanket that covered her deceased husband and neatly tucked in the sides. Those who had come to pay their respects watched curiously. Finally, the widow tenderly kissed her husband's cold brow before returning to her seat. What an act of faith! This young woman knew that her husband was only asleep and would one day awaken to the loving call of the Savior. She not only believed her husband would live again; she acted as though he would.

Life comes with many disappointments, tragedies, and losses. But God's Word is filled with promises of hope and deliverance. Although we have heard and read these promises again and again, many of us cannot see the blessings they hold. We cannot see their fulfillment, because we are too focused on our trials.

Jesus promised to save us from our sins, and He will. Just as He keeps that promise "He that shall come will come" (*Heb. 10:37*). And we can be sure that until that day He will keep His word and fulfill every promise He has given.

Let us speak of God's promises in our witnessing to others. We can tell them of His assurance to supply every need (*Phil. 4:19*). We can point them to His commitment to direct us in life (*Prov. 3:6*). Then there is His pledge to grant us wisdom (*James 1:5*). Living by God's promises will strengthen our devotion to Him.

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Jew and Gentile should be broken down, and all nations, tongues, and peoples should hear the message of salvation. The anticipation of this, the consummation of His hopes, is expressed in the words, ‘The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified’ [John 12:23].”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 622.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The raising of Lazarus from the dead is not mentioned in the other three Gospels. Some scholars conclude that Lazarus must have been in a coma. Others have suggested that the story is an allegory written to solidify Jesus’ saying “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” “Renan suggested that the whole thing was a deliberate fraud arranged by Jesus and Martha and Mary and Lazarus.”—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, John 2*, p. 101.

Thought Questions:

- 1 The Gospels are filled with many miracles performed by Jesus—some more impressive than others. Why do you think that the raising of Lazarus from the dead has caused so much controversy? What are the elements of the miracle that raise doubts? Why are some miracles easier to accept than others?
- 2 Consider Mary’s act of anointing Jesus’ feet, the cost of the perfume, and the place where the act was done. What do they tell you of Mary’s devotion to, and love for, Christ? Now consider the church as Christ’s bride. What might we do as an expression of our devotion to, and love for, Christ?

Application Questions:

- 1 Life is sweetened with miracles every day. Most of these miracles are casually disregarded as lucky happenings or coincidences. Why is it easier to attribute an unusual turn of events to luck and not to the sovereign hand of God? Is there any danger of claiming everything to be a miracle? Explain.
- 2 Monday’s study tells us that for Mary and Martha the death of Lazarus itself was not the worst thing! The worst part about the situation, for them, was the delay of Jesus in coming to their aid. Compare and contrast this with your personal spiritual life. What lessons can be learned from how Mary and Martha waited for Jesus?

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.