

NBC Devotional  
 April 28, 2021  
 True Devotion to Jesus Christ  
 John 12:1-8

It is interesting to me that I have just finished my third class at NBC, Biblical Interpretation. In that class, we were asked to choose a passage of Scripture and write a 15-20 page biblical exegesis paper. To say I dreaded that assignment is an understatement, but literally, by the grace of God, I made it through with a pretty good paper and 100% in the class. I also walked away challenged by that particular passage of Scripture. So, it seemed fitting and I was directed by the Lord to do this devotional on the Scripture passage from my exegesis paper.

**John 12:1-8**

*Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table. 3 Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, 5 “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denari and given to the poor?” 6 He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. 7 Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. 8 For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”*

In using this Scripture for my exegetical paper, it became very clear that the passage was dealing with complete devotion to Jesus Christ. Devotion means “love, loyalty or enthusiasm for a person, activity or cause.” We learn about devotion, or lack thereof, all throughout the passage.

What do we learn about devotion?

**Devotion to Jesus is costly...**

In verse 1, we see Jesus is back in Bethany after going to the wilderness. In the previous chapter, John 11 verse 54 says, “*Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there He stayed with His disciples.*” In verse 57, “*...the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest Him.*”

In John 12:1, we see that despite the rumblings of those in charge and despite reputation, Lazarus hosted Jesus anyway. There is no indication that he told the chief priests and Pharisees about Jesus being there. There was a cost in what Lazarus knew – it would cost his reputation - but there was also a cost he didn’t plan for.

In John 12:9-10 it says, “*When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of Him but also to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. So, the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well...*”

Lazarus was devoted to Jesus despite the cost he knew but even the cost he did not know. Devotion to Jesus is costly. It costs us in the things we are aware of but sometimes even in ways we did not expect.

### **Devotion to Jesus is consistent but not tedious.**

Something struck me in John 12:2, “*Martha served.*” We know that Martha is a woman who serves, because we also read about her in Luke.

Luke 10:38-42 tells the story of Martha in contrast to her sister, Mary. Luke writes about Martha: “*But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to Him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’*”

Here we see Martha doing what she is known to do, except in this case, she is flustered in her serving, as in John 12:2, Martha, simply, served.

It hit me when comparing Luke 10 and John 12, that we see a consistency in Martha. Her gift is the gift of serving. It’s what she does and how she honors Jesus. We see a shift in Martha, however. While Martha is honoring the Lord using her consistent gift of serving, what makes it different here, is the heart behind what she is doing. It does not appear to be tedious; instead, she is devoted to Jesus, serving Him freely.

### **Devotion to Jesus is an act of humility.**

Verse 3 is where we see true devotion come into play. In fact, everything in the narrative points to this. In a chiasmic structure, verse 3 would be where the emphasis is found. What Mary does, is the culmination of Lazarus and Martha in being a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ.

Where it was costly for Lazarus, it was costly for Mary, too. Her use of the pure nard was expensive and costly, yet she did not hold on to it for herself. It was given as an act of worship to Jesus as she poured it on His feet. What seemed like a waste to others because of the cost, was not a waste at all to Mary; she poured it out humbly.

While Martha modeled consistency, Mary did as well, as she found herself yet again at Jesus’ feet. Every time we read about Mary, we find her at some point at Jesus’ feet. She is at His feet as He taught in Luke 10:39. Mary falls to His feet as she grieved for her brother Lazarus in John 11:32, knowing that if Jesus had been there, he never would have died. We see her again, here, in John 12, anointing the feet of Jesus in full devotion.

Being at Jesus’ feet showed humility, but wiping His feet with her hair down, demonstrated humility as well. Cultural norms or political correctness did not matter in that moment; all that mattered was thinking of Jesus first and herself less. That’s what true devotion does.

### **Devotion to Jesus requires choosing Jesus FIRST.**

Verse 8 are Jesus’ words to Judas when questioned on Mary’s devotion. His response is a reminder to us that Jesus must come first even before all the good things. “*For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.*” He comes first, because He is the root of all of it.

It’s why He says in Matthew 22 that the “*GREATEST AND FIRST commandment*” is to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*” (verse 37-38). This is the definition of true devotion to Jesus. He then says the “*second is like it: You shall love*

*your neighbor as yourself*” (verse 39). I have heard many pastors put the two on the same playing field; they are not.

The second is exactly what it says – SECOND – because we cannot effectively do number 2 until we are all in on number 1...even when it comes to helping the poor or any other “good thing” in our lives. Jesus must come first in true devotion.

While we learn what true devotion means from this passage, we also learn what true devotion is not, from the contrast we find when we look at Judas when compared with Mary.

We can ask ourselves, how can we know if we possibly suffer from lack of true devotion to Jesus Christ?

#### **Lack of devotion to Jesus can be seen in the lack of cost.**

In verse 6, we learn Judas keeps the moneybag and steals from it. In verse 4, we read that he will betray Jesus. He is about money for himself but not for others. While he questions Mary on the cost of the nard being poured out on Jesus, it apparently never cost Judas anything to show his devotion to Jesus. He took money; he didn't give. While Mary poured out \$30,000 worth of nard on Jesus, Judas sold Jesus out for 30 measly pieces of silver.

#### **Lack of devotion to Jesus can be seen in a lack of integrity.**

Continuing with the above...verse 6 tells of Judas' reputation as a thief and in verse 4 of how he is the one who would go on to betray Jesus. Unlike the consistency we see in Martha and Mary in doing good, Judas consistently lacks integrity.

#### **Lack of devotion to Jesus can be seen in having just the appearance of holiness.**

In verse 5, Judas asks about the cost of the nard to “appear” holy, instead of actually having a heart of holiness that impacted his actions on the outside. Then in verse 6, John even writes that Judas says that, not because he cares for the poor, but because of what the money would have meant for him.

#### **Lack of devotion can be seen in choosing other things first.**

And in the summation of all those verses where Judas is involved, the overall takeaway is that Judas is not about Jesus, first. A matter of fact, Judas is not about Jesus, at all, but about, self-first. In verse 8, Jesus makes clear that the things of this world will always exist, but in the end, is Jesus FIRST?

In breaking down this passage in this way, it begs the question...how devoted are we to Jesus? This is a question that challenges all of us from the new Christian, to the student, to the teachers, preachers, and leaders at a Nazarene college. There was a time when I probably never would have thought to have asked that of those people with these positions in the Church of the Nazarene, but now, I am not so sure.

You see, for a long while, I have been grieved over happenings in the Church. I sit in leadership at my church. I sit on a District Advisory Board. I sit as a newly elected trustee on a Nazarene college board, and I see all the things. I have read the Facebook exchanges. I have seen the anti-biblical stances promoted. I have heard about the alumni and Nazarene parents who aren't sending their kids to Nazarene schools. I have heard of the donors, churches and districts who are pulling funding from Nazarene schools. Once great institutions in our beloved denomination are

losing money because they are consistently losing their way. Its why I chose THIS school, NBC, over any other place. But as I read this passage as part of my class...

I couldn't help but think...do we have a devotion problem in the Church of the Nazarene?

Are we in the Church devoted like Mary? Is our devotion costing us something, is our devotion consistent, does it come from a place of humility, and does it put Jesus first in ALL things, even good things in our lives?

Or... are we in the Church, devoted like Judas? If our devotion to Jesus is not costing us something, should it? Do we lack integrity in who we are as believers? Do we only offer an appearance of holiness in promoting all the "good things" but lack true biblical holiness that starts from the heart? And do we choose others and causes over truly loving God first?

As an NBC student, I pray that you are fully devoted to Christ, like Mary demonstrated and that your devotion pours into your roles at NBC, as you lead future ministers, like me, and have that type of standing at a Nazarene school.

And in your devotion to Christ, can I ask...

In a world that teaches personal truth, will you continue to teach Gods Truth?

In a world that preaches social justice and a social gospel, will you continue to preach God's biblical justice and THE Gospel?

In a world where leaders want to deconstruct our faith, will you continue to be leaders that build up our faith?

In a world devoted like Judas, will you continue to be devoted like Mary...and Lazarus and Martha...and all the saints of the Bible, and be the foundation of the Church of the Nazarene? And then, may we as students, who will be teachers, preachers, and leaders in this denomination, do the same, as we devote ourselves to Jesus Christ FIRST, consistently, humbly, and even in these crazy times, when it is inevitably costly.

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