

Well...here we are.

The world MUST be coming to an end...*the WORSHIP pastor is preaching.*

At least, that's what my first preaching professor at seminary said as he went around the room on the first day of class, asking us our degree programs and plans, and he got to me.

That's PROBABLY not gonna happen today...

Of course, this is the same Preaching professor that said "Ladies and gentlemen, You can tell your church more to do from God's word in 15 minutes than they'll ever ACTUALLY do in 15 years, so...do us all a favor – don't preach for more than 15 minutes.

That's probably not gonna happen either...

OUR SUBJECT FOR TODAY

Today we are looking at another "Summit" in our series of The Seven Summits, 7 key places in the new testament inform and elevate our worship today. This morning, our theme is "Worship Lavishly". We will be looking at the incredibly beautiful story of a certain dinner party found in the gospel of John, and the actions of a true disciple of Jesus, one we met before just last week.

Our guest speaker last week, Rob Schrumpf, beautifully spoke about Martha and Mary of Bethany, and of the events that unfolded when Jesus visited their home to share a meal. Rob spoke of Martha and her gift of service to Jesus as the host of that large gathering, but had to remind Martha that everyone has their own unique gift and calling. And in Jesus words gentle rebuke of Martha, we learn of her sister Mary- *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset.."*

I can't think of those words of Jesus without remembering my first year in ministry, my first children's musical to direct, and my good friends, the Lalumia family. They were an awesome, Jersey-born Italian family that were in our Home group, with four little boys who were ALL in the choir. 8 year old Jay Lalumia was playing the part of Jesus, and when it was his time to speak his line- (New Jersey Accent) -

"Martha, Martha, ya so worried and upset! But Mary has chosen what is bettah!"

OK, I probably exaggerate a LITTLE...but it was definitely a new world for this Texas boy, for sure.

So today, we will be focusing on her sister, Mary. **A woman of few words...but amazing insight and action.**

To be clear, the Mary in the story is NOT Mary, mother of Jesus, or Mary Magdalene, but the sister of Martha and Lazarus. And this is actually a DIFFERENT dinner party than the one Rob spoke of from the Gospel of Luke. The story in Luke most likely happened at an earlier time in Jesus ministry, but the one we are looking at today takes place six days before Passover, only a week before Jesus was to hang on a cross.

BUT FIRST ANOTHER PASSAGE -

But before we dive into that beautiful story of "LAVISH WORSHIP" from God's word, I thought it might **put it into a slightly larger context** by looking at a different story from scripture, one that I think can add value and understanding to Mary's actions. It's a passage we know well here at Covenant – it's the one that we derive our "unofficial" motto that we've been using post-Covid here, to **"Love God and Love others"**.

This of course is taken from the story found in the gospel of Mark, chapter 12, verses 28-29. Lets take a moment to read those together –

Mark 12:28-29

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ^[a] There is no commandment greater than these."

Lets pause a moment to ask God to give us wisdom and insight today as we reason together. **PRAY**

So, two great commandments, the “greatest” commandments, according to Jesus. I believe these both are actually foundational to the understanding of “worshipping God Lavishly”.

Lets take a brief look at the first half – to *Love the Lord Your god with all our Heart, soul, mind and strength.*

How do we interpret that verse? How do YOU receive that verse in regards to your own life of Loving God?

I saw a WONDERFUL illustration of what that means to someone just the other week. It happened at SWAMP, our Summer Worship, Art, and Music Camp.

The plan was to teach the kids a new song – actually an OLD song, the song “You’re Worthy of our Praise”, taken directly from this scripture passage. James Gilmore, our camp Worship Leader, before teaching the saong shared that scripture passage with the camp kids, then we sang it and it was beautiful.

That day, I had noticed a little girl on the front row – this little girls was a WORSHIPER! If we were supposed to be singing loud, she was singing at the TOP of her lungs! If we were supposed to be moving or jumping, she was bouncing off the roof of the sanctuary!

Afterwards, I found myself standing near here, and so asked her – “What does it mean to YOU to ‘love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?’”. Sh thought about it for a second, then she did this (demonstrate the little girls action of closing her eyes and fists and clinching up her whole body while grunting in effort). When she was done, I laughed and asked her “What was that??” to which she replied with gusto, “I was loving God REALLY HARD!!!”.

I think she gets it!

What a delightful image of what it means to worship God with all our Heart Soul, mind and Strength!

And I love the fact the she paused to think about it before answering. Here’s why –

I would put this verse in a category of scripture passages that are so familiar that they tend to roll off the tongue easily...

Like the list of fruits of the spirit from Galatians chapter 5 - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, or John 3:16, “ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...”

But here’s the problem - These passages can become SO familiar, so a part of our history as believers, that they can roll off our tongue WITHOUT rolling through our brains. We can begin to think of them as a litany, a motto or saying, ones that we fail to look at critically or with a desire for deeper understanding. And therein lies the danger!

So I think it would be valuable and eye-opening for us to pause a **brief moment** and look at Jesus’ words a little more closely.

THE SHEMA

Jesus, in his statement of the first commandment, was actually quoting from Dueteronomy 6:45, **known as the SheMA** in Jewish tradition. It states, and listen carefully -

Dueteronomy 6:45

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your Strength”.

Notice something missing in that verse, compared with Jesus’ recitation? (pause)

YES, it’s the word “**Mind**”.

You may be tempted to think, “**whoops, Jesus misquoted scripture**”, but of all people, I think we can agree that if Jesus, the perfect Messiah, added a word, it was intentional. In fact, the Shema, the passage in Deuteronomy, was actually taught to Jewish Children and was a part of their daily devotion and prayers, much like we would view the Lord’s prayer today.

We will talk about why the word MIND was added a bit later, but I think it would be helpful to unpack briefly ALL four of these words of instruction from Jesus

1. LOVE WITH YOUR HEART

Our contemporary culture understands the “heart” as the center of emotions, but the Jewish culture in Jesus’s times understood it as more than that. For them, the heart of a person was the center of the will (Proverbs 4:23).

We can think of the heart as the place of our spiritual life, thoughts, feelings, motivations, reason, and understanding. Our decisions, our morals, and our will come from it.

So, loving God with all our heart is to have a strong desire and will towards Him, to make His will, our will.

2. LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR SOUL

The Hebrew word for “soul”, *nephesh*, gives the idea of the breath of life. The Greek word used here gives the idea of the **inner self**, our deep thoughts. It is the things unseen, the secret places of our heart and mind. We can say that it is the non-physical part of the human being (Psalm 16:10; Ezekiel 18:4).

It is what defines our personhood, who we are.

So, loving God with our whole soul is to love Him with everything we are inside, to find our inner self inclined to Him, seeking Him, having Him at the center of our attention and affections.

3. LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR MIND

The part that Jesus added! Many Bible scholars believe this was added to the original Hebrew Shema because the ultimate audience for this teaching was to the Gentiles – the Greeks and Romans. The Hebrew tradition would actually combine the idea of the Heart and the Mind as coming from the same place. However, the Romans and the Greeks – think, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato – thought of the mind and intellect as different from the will. **Jesus wanted it to be clear that we must also love Him with their whole minds, our intellect.**

This part of the great commandment shows how important it is that our intelligence is submitted to God, and that we worship him by increasing our knowledge of Him, in a lifetime of learning and growing **Romans 12:2** reminds us that we need to be transformed by the renewal of our minds to be able to test and approve God’s will – that is how we can love God with our whole minds.

4. LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR STRENGTH

Finally. Jesus also told us to love our God with our whole strength. We find the word “strength” in the Bible a lot of times, and most of them refer to the power of God. Strength refers to the physical aspect of loving God. It is how we **SHOW** that we love Him and put it into actual action for His Glory and Kingdom. If our inner motivation and desire are to love God, **Loving God means our outward actions and words will indeed show it.**

Notice one word that each of these instructions has in common – the word “ALL”

Jesus demonstrated great insight into his listeners, and wanted them to know that Loving God was not an easy, casual or occasional activity. It requires our -

- inner being,
- our outward activity,
- the releasing of our own will and
- the investment of our Intellect and intelligence in knowing more of Him

I heard it said once that nothing of value comes easy.

Jesus wanted his audience to understand that loving and worshipping the Lord was not something you could compartmentalize, something you only did on occasion. Greek and Roman religions actually had MANY God’s, and you worshipped and made offerings to one or the other when there was something you needed – health, your crops to flourish, your business to be a success. Jesus wanted to communicate that loving God was something you did 24-7. It requires bringing all that we are, before all that God is.

ALL that we are. Heart, Soul, Mind, and strength.

MARY OF BETHANY’S STORY

It’s with this background and understanding of Jesus’ teaching that I think ready’s us to hear the Story of Mary of Bethany. Let’s turn together to John 12, the first three verses.

John 12:1-3

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.

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.

What a beautiful image. Can you just see it in your mind? Well, more than just imagining it, I have actually brought some Nard for you to sample and smell this morning. Maybe we can fill THIS room with the smell of this ancient perfume as well?

(Tell of the Jar, open the packets with the tissue soaked in Nard. Tell folks at home what it smells like)

I Love multi-sensory experiences, and I'd like to ask you to engage another sense now.

Several months ago I came across a PAINTING by Christian artist Wayne Forte, and it stopped me in my tracks. I would like to share it with you now, and would ask that you simply take a moment to take it in, and let it speak to you. Take a look -

(SHOW PAINTING Mary of Bethany, leave up)

Isn't that powerful? I'll ask our production team to leave that up for the next few moments while we speak, and let that image be the backdrop of our conversation.

To wash someone's feet was an act of hospitality, but it was also an act of humility, and borne in a desire to honor the one who's feet were being washed. And it was no small commitment – in our sterilized, sanitized world its easy forget that people once walked everywhere they went, and there were no streets or sidewalks, instead simply dirt paths filled with the dust and effluvia of a first century community, , trash, mud, grime and animal droppings. **Look at the painting...(pause)**

Not only did she wash the filth and grime from Jesus tired feet, she anointed them with a costly oil. Anointing someone to us today sounds like a ceremonial act, a small gesture to symbolize a larger truth, but in those days it also had a purpose. The region around Jerusalem was really only one step above a desert, arid and dry, with a scorching sun. Living in that area and mostly outdoors, walking from place to place, Jesus feet and hands were most likely calloused and cracked, his hair sunburnt and dry. Some scholars believe that the reason it was mentioned that Mary used so much Nard was that she most likely didn't just wash and salve his feet, but his hands, face and hair as well.

Look at the painting once again

But not only did she wash and anoint the person of Jesus...she cleansed and dried his feet with her hair. She did this NOT because there was a shortage of towels in which to do so...but so that she might be close to him, to demonstrate her love in a way that was MORE than just a common ritual, a symbol of honor. She did so because she loved him.

Look at the painting once more...what is it saying to you?

Mary was worshiping Jesus with her heart, soul and strength. ALL that she had. AND, she was worshipping him with her mind as well. Listen to the words of verse three once more –

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

"Therefore" ...*Therefore?* Now listen to the verses that follow –

John 12:4-8

4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this ointment not sold for a year's wage 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."

(After reading, go back to Mary painting during the following paragraph)

Picture it again – Jesus seated, Lazarus reclining nearby, Judas...I don't know, counting the money in the money bag or something, Martha in the Kitchen – again – working away but maybe not feeling so bad about it, the other disciples apparently not even worth mentioning in this account...but Mary at Jesus feet. And we read the word, **"therefore"**...

That word in scripture is usually used to point out a cause and effect, an action/reaction type moment. ***"The people did this, THEREFORE God did this"***.

Mary saw what was happening, took in the scene before her, she heard the words of Jesus...and she thought, "no"....and THEREFORE, ***she retrieved the jar and began to minister to Jesus.***

Could it be...that Mary had discerned some truths about Jesus that even His disciples hadn't figured out yet? Having sat at the feet of Jesus multiple times while he taught (we know this from scripture)...had she discerned what was coming? **Look at the painting once more.**

I think she had. **Mary was a disciple of Jesus**, as was Martha, and in fact, though we have "The Twelve" disciples throughout the New Testament, even a fairly casual reading of scripture will point to MANY other women who were actually disciples of Jesus in all but name. I believe it was Mary's study and understanding of the teachings of Jesus that caused her to possibly know what was coming, what was waiting for Jesus in Jerusalem in the next week. Why else would she use Nard, a perfume used often to anoint and embalm a body for burial?

(Look at painting) Mary did not hold back. Heart, soul, Mind, strength...she brought all of them, all of who she was and could be, to the act of worshipping the Lord.

So how does that inform us today? Are we following in the example of Mary, bringing all that we are before all that God is?

One might say, it's **easy for Mary** to be motivated to pour out all that upon Jesus – he was right there before her, the one whom she had determined was the Messiah, one whom she may have discerned was headed to his death! **Of course she was motivated** – he was right there in front of her, to touch, to serve, to look in the eye.

And yet...We have the same opportunity. We know from God's Matthew 18:20 that where two or three are gathered in His name, there he will be in our midst. Right here, among us, before us!

And the work is done! Jesus is NOT headed to the cross, he has ENDURED the cross. He died, giving his life a sacrifice for ours. It's not conjecture or discernment like it was for Mary, it has already happened. And that was not the end, but as Jesus, our Messiah and Redeemer rose from the tomb, conquering death, we too now have the promise of life eternal with the Creator, our lives REDEEMED forever by his selfless, glorious act.

HOW MUCH MORE reason should we be on our faces before a holy God, pouring out the oil of ALL that we are at Jesus feet.

Look at Mary one last time (pause). When was the last time YOU brought that posture of the heart to your worship? That you came before Jesus, face to the ground, hands outstretched to simply touch the person of our Redeemer, our Healer, our Coming King.

What hinders you?

What would keep you from Joining Mary at the foot of Jesus, EVERY TIME we gather to worship? Bringing all that you are – your joy, your thankfulness, your reverence but also your pain, grief, shame...and pouring it out at the foot of Him who loves you more than you can ever imagine.

I was 16 when I had an epiphany of how and why we are to Love the Lord. I was singing in our church's student choir, sharing an anthem that we had worked on for weeks before...but the words simply hadn't broken through into my mind in all their meaning. The words are a rather dour series of questions, and the music matches it...until the very end, in which light an understanding break forth, and the music explodes in a glorious exclamation of celebration. I wish I could

demonstrate it for you, but the best I can do is share with you the words, and that last moment. The song is entitled,
MY ETERNAL KING

My God, I love Thee;
Not because I hope for heav'n thereby,
Nor yet because who love Thee not
Must die eternally,

Thou, O my Jesus, Thou didst me
Upon the cross embrace;
For me didst bear the nails, the nails and spear,
And manifold disgrace.

Why, then why, O blessed Jesus Christ,
Should I not love Thee well?
Not for the hope of winning heav'n,
Or of escaping hell;

Not with the hope of gaining aught,
Not seeking a reward;
But as Thyself hast loved me,
O ever-loving Lord!

E'en so I shall love Thee, and will love,
And in Thy praise will sing;
***Solely because Thou art my God,
And my Eternal King.***

PLAY SHORT CLIP OF ENDING Of song

Ends in prayer