

PSALM 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,^[a]
we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”

³ The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵ May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

⁶ Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

JOHN 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them^[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii^[b] and the money given to the poor?” ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it^[c] so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

ALL FOUR GOSPELS INCLUDE A STORY ABOUT A WOMAN ANOINTING JESUS. THEY HAVE SOME SIMILARITIES, BUT ALSO MANY DIFFERENCES.

THEREFORE, RATHER THAN COMPARING THEM OR TRYING TO COMBINE THEM, LET US LOOK AT THE MESSAGE THE GOSPEL WRITER JOHN DELIVERS THROUGH THE VERSION HE SHARED.

THE WORDS OF A POEM ENTITLED: “AT HIS FEET” BY RONALD FERGUSON, SET THE STAGE FOR THE MEANING OF THE EVENT ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

THE OPENING VERSES SAY: “AT HIS FEET, I KNOW HIS PEACE. AT HIS FEET, NO MERCIES CEASE. AT HIS FEET, I FIND TRUE REST. AT HIS FEET, THIS PLACE IS THE BEST.

MARY KNEW THAT PLACE SO WELL. GRATITUDE, HER ACTIONS TELL; HER DEVOTION CLEARLY SHOWN. LOVE'S WARM TEARS WAS LOVE SHE'D KNOWN.”

YES, MARY'S GRATITUDE WAS OFFERED THROUGH THE COSTLY GIFT SHE LAVISHLY POURED OVER THE FEET OF JESUS.

PSALM 126 CAN ALSO HELP US PLACE THE STORY'S CONTEXT, IN PARTICULAR, VERSES FIVE AND SIX DESCRIBE THE REASON FOR AND THE MOOD OF THE MEAL IN THE HOME OF LAZARUS.

THE PSALM PROCLAIMS: “THOSE WHO SOW WITH TEARS WILL REAP WITH SONGS OF JOY. THOSE WHO GO OUT WEEPING, CARRYING SEED TO SOW, WILL RETURN WITH SONGS OF JOY, CARRYING SHEAVES WITH THEM.”

TRULY, THE TEARS OF GRIEF SHED UPON THE DEATH OF LAZARUS WERE TRANSFORMED TO ACCLAMATIONS OF JOY, AFTER JESUS RAISED HIM BACK TO LIFE.

CHAPTER ELEVEN OF JOHN'S GOSPEL DESCRIBES HOW JESUS ARRIVED IN BETHANY AFTER LAZARUS HAD DIED AND BEEN BURIED.

ALL SEEMED LOST, MARTHA AND MARY SHARED A GRIEF BEYOND WORDS.

THEY NOT ONLY LOST A WELL-LOVED BROTHER, BUT SINCE WOMEN COULD NOT OWN LAND OR OTHER PROPERTY, THEY LOST EVERYTHING.

THIS LOSS WOULD HAVE INCLUDED THE TWO GRIEVING SISTERS BECOMING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THEIR CLOSEST MALE RELATION WHO HAD INHERITED EVERYTHING.

BUT JESUS ARRIVED DURING THE PERIOD OF OFFICIAL MOURNING, AND BY RAISING LAZARUS TO LIFE AGAIN HE RENEWED THE LIVES OF ALL THREE SIBLINGS.

IT IS NO SURPRISE THEY WISHED TO ENJOY A SPECIAL MEAL WITH JESUS AS AN EXPRESSION OF THEIR GRATITUDE.

WELL ACTUALLY, ONLY LAZARUS WOULD HAVE SHARED A MEAL WITH JESUS, SINCE MEN AND WOMEN DID NOT EAT TOGETHER.

THE MEN WOULD RECLINE AT THE TABLE WHILE THE WOMEN SERVED THEM, AND THEN TOOK THEIR MEAL AT A DIFFERENT TABLE.

WE KNOW FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE THAT MARTHA WAS A NATURAL WHEN IT CAME TO PREPARING AND SERVING A MEAL.

SHE TOOK THOSE WOMANLY DUTIES SERIOUSLY. MARTHA WAS A HARD WORKER, AS WELL AS A WOMAN NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK HER MIND, EVEN TO JESUS.

HER SISTER MARY WAS MORE CONTEMPLATIVE, SHE WAS LESS GIFTED IN THE AREA OF TRADITIONAL WOMAN'S WORK.

INSTEAD, MARY WAS LESS LIKELY TO SPEAK AND MORE LIKELY TO LISTEN AND LEARN.

HOWEVER, SHE WAS WILLING AND ABLE TO SERVE IN HER OWN WAY, WHICH IS WHY SHE OFFERED SUCH A COSTLY GIFT TO JESUS.

IMAGINE THE SCENE-MARTHA AND PERHAPS SOME OTHER WOMEN WERE BUSY IN THE KITCHEN, AS MARY SLIPS AWAY.

SHE REAPPEARS IN THE ROOM WHERE THE MEN ARE GATHERING AND CONVERSING, POSSIBLY ABOUT THE COMING PASSOVER FESTIVAL.

MARY MOVES SILENTLY, CARRYING A BOTTLE THAT CONTAINS A VERY EXPENSIVE PERFUME, OFTEN USED FOR BURIAL.

WITHOUT UTTERING A WORD SHE KNEELS INFRONT OF JESUS AND BREAKS THE SEAL, AND POURS HER COSTLY GIFT OVER HIS FEET, WHILE THE MEN STARE IN SHOCK.

THEN SHE WIPES HIS FEET WITH HER HAIR, WHICH BY THE WAY, NO DECENT WOMAN HER AGE WOULD LET DOWN IN A ROOM FULL OF MEN.

SO EXTRAVAGANT IS HER ACTION THAT THE WHOLE HOUSE IS FILLED WITH THE FRAGRANCE OF HER LOVE AND GRATITUDE.

IT IS INTERESTING THAT HER BROTHER LAZARUS, WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR HER UNDER JEWISH LAW AND SOCIAL CUSTOM REMAINED SILENT.

PERHAPS LAZARUS KNEW BETTER THAN TO TRY TO CORRECT HIS SISTER, BUT JUDAS HAD NO SUCH HESITATION.

IT IS JUDAS WHO SPEAKS UP IN PROTEST OF WHAT HE SEES AS A WASTE OF THE PERFUME.

BUT, MUCH LIKE JESUS SIDED WITH MARY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, WHEN MARTHA PROTESTED HER UNCONVENTIONAL BEHAVIOR AND NOT HELPING HER, HE DOES SO AGAIN.

JESUS RESPONDS TO JUDAS' WORDS ABOUT THE POOR WITH A PARTIAL QUOTE FROM DEUTERONOMY 15:11, WHICH SAYS:

“SINCE THERE WILL NEVER CEASE TO BE SOME IN NEED ON THE EARTH, I THEREFORE COMMAND YOU, “OPEN YOUR HAND TO THE POOR AND NEEDY NEIGHBOR IN YOUR LAND.”

THE SAVIOR WAS SAYING THAT WHILE GOD COMMANDS THE POOR AND NEEDY SHOULD ALWAYS BE HELPED, MARY'S ACTIONS AT THAT TIME WERE WELCOMED BY HIM.

JESUS INTERPRETED HER DISPLAY OF GRATITUDE AS A PROPHETIC ACT.

SHE WAS ANOINTING HIM FOR HIS BURIAL, JESUS ALONE KNEW WHAT WOULD SOON TAKE PLACE, AND HER ACT WAS A BLESSING TO HIM.

WE MIGHT ALSO SEE IT AS AN ACT OF LOVE THAT HELPED TO SOOTH OF HIS TIRED FEET, GIVING HIM BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL COMFORT.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE NEXT VERSES OF THE POEM, WHICH DIRECTS OUR ATTENTION TO ANOTHER WAY WE CAN INTERPRET WHAT MARY DID.

“MAGI WHO HAD TRAVELLED FAR, WHO HAD TRACKED THE INFANT'S STAR, STOOD BEFORE HIM WORSHIPPING; AT HIS FEET WERE HONORING.

ONE CLEANSED LEPER AT HIS FEET FREELY WORSHIPPED THERE - SO SWEET. HE RETURNED TO GIVE HIS THANKS - JOINED THE PRAISING, THANKFUL RANKS.”

THESE VERSES DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TO OUR WORSHIP OF AND GRATITUDE TOWARDS, GOD.

WE CAN VIEW THE GOSPEL INCIDENT AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP- BY LOOKING BACK AT MARY'S ANOINTING OF JESUS FROM OUR TIME AFTER CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

YES, INDEED, ALL WHO BY FAITH ACCEPT JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR GRASP THAT HE IS ALSO GOD, AND THEREFORE THE WORSHIP OF JESUS IS APPROPRIATE.

FURTHERMORE, THE RESPONSE OF JESUS TO MARY'S ACT IS HELPFUL FOR US TO NOTICE WHEN WE CONSIDER OUR OWN PRACTICE OF WORSHIP.

MANY PEOPLE EXPRESS DISMAY AT PUBLIC WORSHIP IN PARTICULAR, COMPLAINING THEY DO NOT GET MUCH OUT OF GOING INTO THE CHURCH BUILDING TO WORSHIP WITH OTHERS.

BUT CONSIDER THIS, WHETHER SPEAKING ABOUT PRIVATE OR PUBLIC TIMES OF PRAISE AND WORSHIP- IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT WHAT WE DO OR DO NOT GET OUT OF IT.

WORSHIP THAT INCLUDES GOD, AS IT SHOULD, IS ALSO ABOUT HOW GOD IS PLEASED BY IT.

THIS IS SOMETHING TO KEEP IN MIND THE NEXT TIME OUR THOUGHTS ARE MOVING IN THE DIRECTION OF VIEWING WORSHIP AS A WASTE OF OUR TIME.

JOHN TELLS US THE FRAGRANCE OF THE PERFUME FILLED THE HOUSE. SIMILARLY, THE FRAGRANCE OF OUR PRAYERS AND PRAISE REACH INTO HEAVEN WITH ITS PLEASING SCENT.

IN THE NEW LIVING BIBLE TRANSLATION -2 CORINTHIANS 2:15 SAYS: “OUR LIVES ARE A CHRIST-LIKE FRAGRANCE RISING UP TO GOD. BUT THIS FRAGRANCE IS PERCEIVED DIFFERENTLY BY THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED AND BY THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING.”

TRULY, OUR WORSHIP OF THE LORD IS WHAT ENABLES AND EMPOWERS OUR LIVES TO BE PLEASING TO GOD, AND TO BE A TESTIMONY ABOUT CHRIST TO OTHER PEOPLE.

BUT LET US ALSO REMEMBER THAT SERVICE IN CHRIST'S NAME IS ANOTHER FORM OF WORSHIP, WHEREBY NOT ONLY HEAVEN BENEFITS, BUT THOSE ON EARTH RECEIVE A TANGIBLE BENEFIT AS WELL.

EPHESIANS 5:1-2 REMINDS US ABOUT THIS BY SPEAKING ABOUT HOW WE CAN WITNESS TO JESUS THROUGH OUR ACTIONS.

“THEREFORE BE IMITATORS OF GOD, AS BELOVED CHILDREN. AND WALK IN LOVE, AS CHRIST LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR US, A FRAGRANT OFFERING AND SACRIFICE TO GOD.”

SO, WHILE WE CANNOT ANOINT THE FEET OF JESUS IN THE SAME WAY MARY DID, WE CAN BE A BLESSING TO THE POOR AND TO THE RICH, AND THOSE IN BETWEEN ALIKE., AND IN THAT WAY MINISTER TO JESUS.

REMEMBER, OUR SAVIOR HIMSELF TAUGHT THAT WHEN WE HELP, OR IN ANYWAY ARE KIND TO OTHERS- WE SERVE HIM.

AND CONVERSELY, WHEN HAVE THE MEANS TO HELP OR TO SHOW KINDNESS AND WE FAIL OTHERS, WE FAIL JESUS.

THUS, THE SAVIOR REMINDS US THAT SERVICE IS A FORM OF WORSHIP.

A MAN NAMED DANIEL BAUMANN DESCRIBES WORSHIP AS GOD'S MOVEMENT TOWARDS US AND OUR MOVEMENT TOWARDS GOD.

IN OTHER WORDS, IN SINCERE WORSHIP- WHETHER ALONE OR WITH OTHERS, DURING A TIME OF PRAYER, OR IN DEEDS OF SERVICE-GOD IS DRAWN TO US AND WE ARE DRAWN TO GOD.

WE COME NOW TO ANOTHER PORTION OF THE POEM THAT DRAWS OUR ATTENTION TO A COSTLY GIFT FAR GREATER THAN ANY OTHER.

“SOLDIERS STOOD BEFORE HIS FEET. A THORNY CROWN, THIS KING TO GREET. MOCKERY ALONE THEY BRING, IGNORANT OF CHRIST, THE KING.”

TRULY, JESUS' WILLINGNESS TO DIE FOR OUR SAKES IS A COSTLY GIFT THAT FAR EXCEEDS ANY OTHER GIFT WE COULD GIVE OR RECEIVE.

HIS GIFT TO US COST JESUS EVERYTHING- HIS FREEDOM, HIS DIGNITY, A GREAT DEAL OF SUFFERING, AND HIS VERY LIFE.

AND THIS POINTS BACK TO TODAY'S GOSPEL STORY ABOUT HOW MARY ANOINTED THE FEET OF JESUS.

THE MENTION OF JESUS ON THE CROSS REMINDS US THAT THE FEET MARY ANOINTED WERE THE SAME FEET THAT, NOT LONG AFTER, WERE NAILED TO THE CROSS.

THIS BRINGS TO MIND ISAIAH 52:7, WHICH PRAISES THE FEET OF GOD'S MESSENGER, AND WHILE IT WAS NOT ORIGINALLY ABOUT JESUS, IT CAN CERTAINLY BE APPLIED TO HIM.

“HOW BEAUTIFUL UPON THE MOUNTAINS ARE THE FEET OF HIM WHO BRINGS GOOD NEWS, WHO PROCLAIMS PEACE, WHO BRINGS GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS, WHO PROCLAIMS SALVATION, WHO SAYS TO ZION, ‘YOUR GOD REIGNS’!”

YES, THE BEAUTIFUL FEET THAT, BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION AND THE REIGN OF GOD, COMPLETED THEIR MISSION WHEN THEY WERE NAILED TO THE CROSS.

ALTHOUGH SHE DIDN'T KNOW IT, MARY'S MINISTRY OF GRATITUDE TO JESUS FOR THE RETURN OF HER BROTHER'S LIFE, FORESHADOWED THE GREATER GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE JESUS WOULD SOON PROVIDE.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE FINAL VERSES OF THE POEM THAT POINT TO THE WONDER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION, AND OUR ETERNAL GRATITUDE TO GOD OUR SAVIOR.

“JOHN FELL AT HIS FEET THOUGHT DEAD. MAJESTY HAD CAUSED SUCH DREAD; MUCH TOO GREAT THE GLORY SEEN - OVERPOWERING IT HAD BEEN.

ALL THE GLORY HIS ALONE. WORTHY LORD, UPON THE THRONE! ELDERS' CROWNS CAST AT HIS FEET. HONOR, POWER - FOR HIM, MEET.

AT HIS FEET, NO BETTER PLACE TO APPRECIATE HIS GRACE! AT HIS FEET, NO BETTER CHOICE COULD BE MADE WHERE TO REJOICE!”

LET US NOT HESITATE TO HONOR THE BEAUTIFUL FEET OF OUR SAVIOR AND THE COSTLY GIFT OF HIS LIFE FOR OUR SAKES.

MAY WE NEVER COUNT THE COST TO US OF LIFTING UP OUR PRAYERS TO GOD WHO WILL RECEIVE THEM AS INCENSE.

MAY WE BE EVER WILLING TO RAISE UP OUR HANDS IN PRAISE TO THE LORD EVERY DAY, AND ANY TIME WE REMEMBER GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE.

FINALLY, MAY WE OFFER TO CHRIST OUR GRATITUDE BY LOVING AND SERVING JESUS WITH OUR LIVES. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: JOHN 12:1-8

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