



This past week Cassie and I were on vacation in Las Vegas. One of the shows we saw there was *Illusions* with Jan Rouven. People have different responses to illusionists. Some people are mesmerized. That's me! He did one trick where he was in a locked clear-sided box of water, chained. His assistant was sitting high above him with a curtain covering the box. The assistant jumps down. She's hidden behind the curtain for about one second. Jan comes leaping out of the water and his assistant is inside the box, chained up. So fast, so amazing!

Some people compare him to others and word on the street is that he did some of his acts better than magician Chris Angel. Some try to solve the mystery. Some watch *Magic's Biggest Secrets Finally Revealed* on TV, figure out the mystery and don't enjoy the experience at all.

In the scriptures today we're continuing to read through the book of John. From the very beginning Jesus' invitation was "Come and See". People have done just that. They've come and listened to Jesus' teaching. They've come to him with broken bodies and dead souls and seen him perform miracles. They've come and seen him compassionately love the outcasts and the forgotten, and opinions are forming. Three years in the spotlight has given people many opportunities see who Jesus is. Some of these opinions are dead wrong. Some are a mixed bag. And one opinion, one response is perfect. It's honest and good.

**Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead (John 12:1).**

After the miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and Pharisees intensify their efforts to arrest Jesus in order to kill him. Jesus lays low in the outlying area of Ephraim (early February), on the edge of the wilderness. Many weeks later, the Passover (April) is approaching and Jesus knows that the time of his crucifixion is approaching. He travels to Bethany for a last visit with his dear friends, Lazarus, Martha and Mary.

**Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.**

**But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this**

**perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the moneybag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."**

**Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.**

**The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,**

**"Hosanna!"**

**"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"**

**"Blessed is the king of Israel!"**

**Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."**

**At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.**

**Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!" (verses 2–19).**

#### **Four Responses to Jesus**

In these verses we see four responses to Jesus. I'll point them out to you and then I'll explain each of them in order from the worst response to the best response.

#### **The Chief Priests hated Jesus**

**So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well (as well as Jesus) for on account of him many**

**of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him (verses 10–11).**

Think about the evil in their hearts. In order to eliminate the miracle worker and the example of the miracle power, they've progressed down a path of thinking an idea, discussing the merits of the idea, and now deciding the idea was right and justified.

There are always people who stand against Jesus. We have them today and here they were in Jesus' day. It defies logic that God in the flesh was walking right in front of these men, teaching so they could hear him; demonstrating miracle power so they could see it, and they did not believe. Similarly it defies logic that God's truth is taught and available in the Bible and some people hate Jesus today. As difficult and disappointing as that is to us, our behavior and response to this doesn't change our role; we are his ambassadors.

**The Crowd—half loved Jesus for who they wanted him to be**

**The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,**

**'Hosanna!'**

**'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'**

**'Blessed is the king of Israel!' (verses 12–13).**

This portion of the crowd is in Jerusalem for Passover, not Bethany where Jesus has been. But the buzz in the city of Jerusalem has been about Jesus. With news on the street that the Chief Priests have an arrest warrant out on Jesus, everyone is wondering if Jesus will show up in Jerusalem for this festival. When word spreads that Jesus is coming to Jerusalem, this is a "can't miss" event. The journey from Bethany to Jerusalem is about two miles. People line the streets to watch him enter the city. Someone goes to a nearby palm tree and cuts branches off. They want to wave the branches as Jesus enters to symbolize the righteousness and spiritual vigor of God's children.

Waving the palm branches expressed their joy. The crowd is rejoicing. At last, victory seemed assured, for if this Jesus was able to raise Lazarus from the dead after four days, where were the limits to his power? Surely he could shake off the yoke of the Roman Empire.

Hosanna = "to save, save now or save, pray." It amounts to "We beseech you, O Jehovah, save now!" But what were they asking for salvation from? Most likely from Roman occupation.

The last line in their chant is "Blessed is the king of Israel." The inspiration for their chant comes from Psalm 118:25–26. But the words "Blessed is the king of Israel" are not in the Psalm. They are new. Why are these words added? What can we learn from these words? I think they represent the expectation of the people.

**Half believed in Jesus and testified about him**

**Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead ... many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him (v. 9, 11).**

**Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word (v. 17).**

This group of people went to Jesus in the city of Bethany. They put their faith in Jesus because they heard about Jesus' miraculous power; they saw the evidence of Jesus' miraculous power; they believed in Jesus. This is a pattern of how we should share about Jesus too.

This pattern reminds me of so many of us. Nine out of ten Christians can point back to a specific person who told them about Jesus or invited them to hear about Jesus at an event. That's exactly what this crowd is doing here.

**The Disciples are confused**

**"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." These were the words of Judas but in the other Gospels we're told that the other disciples were in agreement with him (v. 5).**

**At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him (v. 16).**

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey he was fulfilling a prophecy about him from Zechariah 9:9. They didn't know because they dropped out of Old Testament school before they were 10 and started learning their life skill.

**Mary—an honest and good expression**

**Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (v. 3).**

This was a lavish gift! Pure nard is an aromatic herb grown in the high pasture-land of the Himalayas, between Tibet and India. In view of the fact that it had to be procured in a region so remote, and carried on camel-back through miles and miles of mountain passes, it was very highly priced. The synoptic gospels point out that it was in an alabaster jar, i.e., a jar of white fine-grained gypsum. Mary was intending to use this little treasure to anoint Jesus' body when he died.

Why would she buy this? Mary owes Jesus so much. He brought her salvation and the raising of her brother from the dead. Why

anoint him now? Mary had this jar of expensive perfume that she was saving to honor Jesus when he died, which was a common ritual in their culture.

Anticipating Jesus near death from the hands of his enemies, she sees her opportunity at this dinner. Consider Jesus' predictions of his death: John 8:21–23, 10:31; 10:45–57. Perhaps she even feared that his friends would be prohibited from anointing his body after death so she's probably thinking about this, thinking about how much she loves Jesus and her heart tells her, "do it now." Imagine her fear of being judged (and she was). Imagine her love—so lavish and extravagant that she'd defy cultural norms to show her love. Mary knew how to listen at her Savior's feet.

What do you think of this lavish response? Do you think, if I had that much money, I'd spend it the same way? Or do you think, that's ridiculous and immature and child-like behavior?

It's important in answering this to personalize this question. Don't answer this for me. "Oh, that'd be fine for Shawn to respond in some crazy way!" What about you? What do you know about your cultural background that affects your lavishness or inhibitions? What do you know about your family background that affects your lavishness or your inhibitions? What do you know about your personality that affects your lavishness or your inhibitions?

When I was in college I attended "high hands" Highland Baptist Church. I was drawn to these groups of Christians because they showed their affection to Jesus in ways that seemed heart-driven, not obligatory. During worship, people would respond according to what was going on in their hearts: sitting quietly with their head bowed while everyone else stood, standing with hands held high, singing with boisterous enthusiasm, smiles on their faces if the song was about Jesus' love, or contrite facial expressions if the song was about our sin. I loved it! It tapped into recesses in my own heart. They taught me how to be more authentic in my expression to Jesus. This is what Mary is expressing when she pours the perfume on Jesus—an authentic expression from her heart.

I want this to sink in, so I'll say it again—Mary's response of love to Jesus was lavish. There was NOTHING measured or carefully calculated about this gift. Mary broke the jar and emptied it completely. Her devotion was unrestrained. And as you are pondering the questions I asked you a moment ago, what do you think of this lavish response? Do you think, if I had that much money, I'd spend it the same way? Or do you think, that's ridiculous and immature and child-like behavior?

Jesus says, "leave her alone." This reminds me of King David, a man who loved God in a lavish manner. When the Ark of God was being returned to Jerusalem, David was so excited that

the Lord's presence was returning to his city that he danced during the parade. What made this worse was what David was wearing—only his linen ephod, the equivalent to his underwear. His wife Michal rebuked him when he got home that night. *"How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" David said to Michal, 'It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel—I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor.' And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death"* (2 Samuel 6:20–23).

The message or point is not that we repeat David or Mary's actions. Removing our clothing and dancing before the Lord or breaking a bottle of perfume don't fit in our culture like they fit in their cultures. But note one of the things David said, "I will be humiliated in my own eyes." What is he saying here? He's saying that he will not allow his pride to get in the way of his honest and good response to the magnificent God of the universe. It's as if Mary is so lost in her adoration of Jesus and David is so lost in his adoration of God the Father that they lose their typical inhibitions.

Instead, the message for us today is this: expressions from an honest heart will be lavish. Perhaps you need to loosen your inhibitions a bit and give yourselves the freedom to respond genuinely from the heart to Jesus. Some people won't get it and they'll judge you. That's what happened to Mary and David.

Some of you, at this moment, might be a bit concerned that I'm going to ask you to do something uninhibited during this worship service or next week. I'm not; take a deep breath! Instead, I'd like to start you brainstorming on potential expressions that might be the perfect overflow for your heart. Here are ten examples:

Story telling **Acts 2:14**

Painting or building **Exodus 35:33**

Dancing **Exodus 15:20**

Giving \$ **Mark 12:41-43**

Serving behind the scenes **Numbers 4:46**

Writing songs or poetry **Psalms 45:1**

Reading and thinking **Psalms 119**

Prayer walk **Mark 1:35**

Playing an instrument **Psalms 71:22**

During worship, clapping, lifting hands, bowing low **Psalms 47, 134, 38**

Ten examples where you could show a lavish response to Jesus for his love to you. You could come up with more examples and I encourage you to do so.

Note the difference between Mary and Judas in this episode: Judas failed to complete the circle and Mary, by God's sovereign grace, completed it. Here's what I mean. Mary understood that when love descends from heaven in deeds of might and mercy, such as the raising of Lazarus, it must be returned in the form of gratitude. Judas was a thoroughly selfish person, a cold calculating thief. He did not return the love. The beauty of Mary's response was that love answered love. Woe to the man or the woman who fails to complete the circle.

How are you completing the circle of love? Consider the lyrics to David Crowder's song *After All (holy)*:

I can't comprehend your infinitely beautiful and perfect  
love  
Oh I've dreamed dreams of majesty as brilliant as a billion  
stars  
But they're never bright enough after all  
You are holy Oh holy holy, holy, holy  
I will sing a song for you my God with everything I have  
in me  
But it's never loud enough after all  
Heaven and earth are full, full of your glory, glory  
My soul it overflows full of your glory, your glory  
Oh blessed is he who reigns, full of your glory, your glory  
My cup, it can't contain all of your glory, your glory  
Hosanna we are found after all you are

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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