

Jesus my all

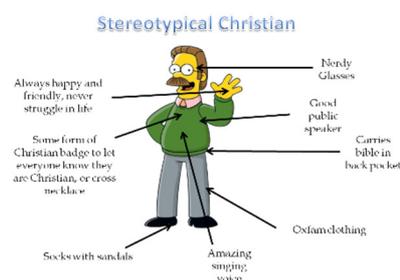
John 12:1-8, 23-26

If this is your first time to be with us, we are in a series of sermons meandering through John's gospel which we have called "Hi I am Jesus".

John's gospel really has two themes.

- The primary theme is that we would know that Jesus is God in the flesh. John writes, **"These things have been written so that you might come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that by believing in His name you may have life."**
- But the secondary theme in John's gospel is the response of people to that claim – are you for or against, are you moving closer to Jesus or further away? John does this regularly, putting people into this group or that group depending on what their response is.

Here in chapter 12 Jesus again is going to describe for us what it means to be a Christian. Jesus is going to reveal to us what it means to follow Him. So, before we get into the passage, if you could just ask yourself this question—it could be a great question for you to ask at your family dinner table or in your small group when you get together next—it would simply be this question. **What does a Christian look like?**



You might say, "Well, a Christian is somebody who wears a cross." But obviously that's not necessarily the case because a lot of non-believers wear crosses too. Some Christians dress very traditionally, some wear tight stuff and tattoos. What are Christians supposed to wear? What is a Christian supposed to look like? Is a Christian just somebody who believes? What is a Christian?

It's interesting what people outside the church think, it's interesting what people inside the church think? One of the challenges about religious instruction in schools today is that it has been forced to only be about values, it's restricted to giving school kids a moral framework. The powers that be say you can teach Christian values, but you need to leave out the "weird stuff" (that anything they don't agree with). But Jesus never said, "I want you to come and give a great set of values."

So what is a Christian? Being a Christian isn't merely about our values, or just what we believe—that is part of it — but it has to be more than that. Being a Christian is not just about being good, it's just not reading your Bible, or praying, or attending church—all those things are part of it—but it cannot be reduced to those things only. So what does it mean?

Let me give you the answer in one sentence.

**Becoming a Christian is simpler than you might think,
it demands more than you may have anticipated,
and it is ultimately more rewarding than you ever dared to dream.**

Let's look at the passage

John 12:1-8

12 *Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead.*

We heard all about Lazarus being raised last week with Matt, however don't think that chapter 11 chapter 12 are all on the same day or even the same week. There are probably a few months, between the raising of Lazarus and the meal they are about to have.

²A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honour. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him.

These guys were friends and they hung out quite a bit.

³Then Mary took a half a litre ^{of} expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

*⁴But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said,
⁵"That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor."*

Remember I mentioned John likes to put people into two camps, those for and those against, the good and the bad, and so here John is setting up a comparison, or contrast between Mary and Judas. We need to be careful we are not being too simplistic with this, but I would suggest that Judas represents 'religion' and Mary represents 'the gospel of grace'. Keep that in mind as we look at this.

So Judas jumps on Mary extravagance, to him a total waste of a years' worth of money and says, "...*why was this ointment not sold and given to the poor?*" Now, to be honest, and not too hard on Judas, I reckon that would be my reaction too. I find it hard enough when I'm walking out through Farmers and Gay pauses to try the expensive perfumes on display. But John gives us the hindsight perspective on the real attitude and character of Judas, that Judas was spiritualizing this because of verse 6

⁶Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

⁷Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial."

Here Jesus is giving us a clue into Mary's heart. It seems that Mary knew what Jesus had come to do far earlier than the other disciples around the dinner table. It seems that Mary knew that Jesus had come to die for her. That's what Jesus is saying. Without the benefit of hindsight it is a kind of weird thing to say, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial." Jesus is about seven days out from crucifixion when this happens.

⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Now, that's the event. Let's jump down to verse 23 as we get into Jesus' explanation of what just happened.

John 12:23-26

²³Jesus replied, "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. ²⁴I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. ²⁵Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. ²⁶Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honour anyone who serves me."

Let me read verse 25 again – on the one hand this is huge, but on the other hand it make no sense.

²⁵Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity.

In just a couple of sentences Jesus describes what it means to be a Christian,

Jesus says it a slightly different way in Mark 8: 34-36,

"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. ³⁵If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. ³⁶And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"

Jesus is saying here, "To be a Christian, to follow me, means that you lose your life willingly for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, then you will find it. But if you try to find your life, in an ironic twist, you will lose it."

I am not sure we talk about this enough in church, in our families, when we are sharing with our friends? We are too busy looking forward to heaven, believing this and not that and just being nice!

Now, I'm not saying that those things are wrong. I'm just saying that it's a bit minimalistic, and it's not what Jesus says here.

Being a Christian is not just about belief, it's not just an understanding of the gospel, **it's about receiving of the gospel**, and Jesus tells us the only way that you can receive the gospel is to lose your life, to die so that you might live. Too many people grow up thinking that the passage that we just read here out of Mark and John 12 are optional, extra-curricular activities. Too many think you just believe in God, ask Him to forgive you of your sins, get baptized—bam, you're in. The only way that you can receive the gospel is to lose your life, to die so that you might live.

Years ago I used to do a bit of white water kayaking – nothing big – but I did a 4-5 day journey from Taumarunui to Pipiriki. And I also did a three day kayaking adventure while at Outward Bound at Anakiwa in the Marlborough Sounds. At each of these places we had a few days of training and preparation beforehand where we learnt various kayaking skills and most importantly all about how not to die while kayaking down a river.

One of the hazards when kayaking large rapids are whirlpools, especially if you have come out of your kayak and therefore lost all your buoyancy. Whirlpools suck you under while you are trying to swim your way up and out of the danger.

Our instructors would tell us "The trick to save yourself is to go against all your natural instincts and allow yourself be dragged or sucked under. It feels counter-intuitive, totally unnatural. You have to find the mental discipline and

courage to let go of the fight to survive and allow yourself to be sucked to the bottom of the river and then hope and pray that the whirlpool will spit you out downstream. And in most whirlpools it does.”

In the same way Jesus says, “I know it feels unnatural, I know it doesn’t seem to make much sense, but trust me. The way to live is to die.” If you try to hold on to everything that you think will give you happiness in this world, you’ll actually lose it.

I don’t know how many times I have talked to people who say, “I tried church and I tried Christianity and it didn’t work.” And I just want to say, “No, you didn’t. You tried religion and that’s fundamentally a different thing.”

Religion—or religious behaviour is one of Satan’s greatest tools. He’ll say, “Just go ahead and go through the motions. Go on, knock yourself out. Go to church for all I care and you think that by being there that somehow you are doing God a favour. And if God doesn’t come through for you in the way that you think that He should, you’ll eventually give up, burn out, or feel let down, and you’ll walk away from everything. That’s religion, not Christianity!

So, **what does it mean to be a Christian?** There are three things in this passage. I’ll move through them briefly.

You want to die to yourself? Here’s what that looks like practically:

- Let go of your pride;
- Consider your motivations; and,
- Become extravagantly generous.

That is how you die to yourself. Now, that’s not a comprehensive list by any stretch of the imagination it’s just what is in John 12.

1. So, here in John 12 Jesus said, “You want to die to yourself? **Let go of your pride.**”

Mary is a picture of that. Mary completely let go of her pride.

She poured out so much ointment on Jesus’ feet that it says that the house was filled with the fragrance.

You may remember your kids when they first discovered perfume or cologne? They haven’t worked out subtle yet. Or if they are boys they are working the ‘shower in a can’ principle. You walk in and the whole house smells like lynx.

Mary dumped out the whole half litre. Yes the whole house smells like this amazing fragrance—not only that but she anointed Jesus’ feet which would have been a lowly task. Human feet were really disgusting in the First Century. They’re not much better today but they were really bad in the First Century - barefoot, open-toed sandals, dirt floors, dirt roads, not good. So to humble yourself, to actually wash somebody’s feet with perfume is basically saying, “I’ll take the lowliest task in the room.” The other disciples weren’t ready to do that. We’ll see that next week in chapter 13.

And then she takes her hair and she wipes up the excess with her hair which would mean that she had to unbind her hair. That was unheard of because for a Jewish woman to unbind her hair in public was a sign of loose morals. So basically what Mary was doing was she was swallowing her pride. She’s like, “Go ahead. Think less of me if you want. I really don’t care what you think about my devotion to Christ.”

Is that how your relationship with Jesus looks? Are you concerned about what others might think? I’m not talking about being obnoxious. I’m not talking about being ‘odd for God’. I’m talking about being humbly passionate to the point where you “live for an audience of One.”

2. Here’s the second thing: **You have to consider your motivation.**

In verse 7 Jesus shows us Mary’s motivation. He says, “*Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial.*” So Mary is basically saying, “Look. I don’t understand how or why but I understand that you’ve come to give your life for me, and I’m not trying to impress anyone and I’m not trying to earn anything I just want to show my gratitude.”

Her motives are contrasted with Judas’ here. You see as far as Jesus is concerned, motivation is everything. It’s not so much what you do, but it’s why you do it. You can be a very good, moral, religious person and still not be following Christ.

What’s your motivation? This is a huge part of being a Christian, a follower of Jesus. Yes, it’s as simple and practical as this. What was your motivation to get out of your warm, toasty bed this morning, try and organise your tribe of kids, get into your car and drive here?

There are all kinds of motivations for attending church.

- For some of us it's simply nostalgia. It makes us feel good, it reminds us of our childhood, or the good old days when life was simple, and also, it is just so comfortable. You feel glad that there is one constant in life and that is my church.
- Some of us came as a negotiation tactic, "Hey, God. I'm here, so now You owe me."
- Some of come out of guilt. You're like, "I feel guilty about something I did last night or last week." So you're trying to convince God, and maybe even yourself, that you're worthy.

So what are your motivations? Judas' motivations were selfish. He said all the right things on the outside, but his motivation was self-serving. Mary's motivations were not.

3. Here's the third thing: Jesus says, **"You become extravagantly generous."**

Again Mary is a picture of this. It says that she anointed His feet with this oil called nard. Nard is a plant that grew in the Himalayas between China and Tibet and they would harvest this plant. They would put it on the backs of camels, they would bring it down out of the mountain range, and they would go through this costly, time-consuming process to develop an oil. Then they would put it in an alabaster jar and sell it.

Scripture tells us that Mary took one year's salary of a day labourer worth of this stuff—now think about that for a minute. In today's terms the minimum wage \$15 would be the equivalent of \$30,000, or maybe take the basic super \$20,000, or even if halve that to \$10,000.

Think about taking all of that, and going to buy a bottle of perfume and then, dumping it on Jesus. Judas says, "This is irresponsible, waste. She shouldn't have done that." In fact, Judas spiritualizes it and says, "If she wanted to do a little bit, that's fine, but then she should have sold the rest of it and given it to the poor."

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Good point Judas, Mary. That was a little OTT." No, Jesus says, "Leave her alone. She is responding to me in her way. It is a transformed heart responding in an act of extravagant worship."

Sometimes we put a governor on our passion for God. Especially us blokes, because we are cool, and tough and not emotional, and actually that is just as ok as being OTT, because that is who we are. We need to be free to respond

to Jesus for what he has done in our way, and if that is occasionally OTT, or not, that is ok!!

Jesus says here...Mary's response was extravagant, no question about that. But generosity is one of the very first signs that Jesus has radically changed you. You are saying, "Lord, it's all yours anyway. It's all yours because of what you've done for me on the cross."

It might be generous with money, generous with stuff, generous with time, generous with forgiveness, generous with grace, generous with love, generous with everything. When you are generous in response to Jesus - that's worship. That's practical worship.

Generosity is the mark of a person who has been fundamentally changed by the gospel. We are saved by grace. That ought to make us gracious. Why is it that grace is oftentimes the thing that we are least known for as Christians?

So this is our challenge, easy to say hard to do. Jesus says in this passage, and I think he is specifically addressing the "religious", "Let go of your pride." He says, "Consider your motivations" and He says "be extravagantly generous."