

Contrasting Hearts

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 11:45-12:11
Preached on: Sunday, November 30, 2014

Once again, we have the wonderful opportunity to look into the word of God and I would ask you to take your Bibles and turn to John's Gospel as we continue to examine it verse-by-verse. Today we find ourselves in John 11, beginning with verse 45. We're going to bite off a little bit larger unit this time; we're going to go through verse 11 of chapter 12. I've entitled my discourse to you this morning, "Contrasting Hearts." Follow along as I read our text. John 11, beginning with verse 45. Bear in mind that this is in the context of Jesus having raised Lazarus from the dead.

45 Many therefore of the Jews who came to Mary, and beheld what He had done, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.

47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." 51 Now this he did not say on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. 54 Jesus therefore no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples. 55 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. 56 Therefore they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" 57 Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it that they might seize Him.

1 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. 3 Mary therefore took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the

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perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" 6 Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. 7 Jesus therefore said, "Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial. 8 For the poor you will always have with you, but you do not always have Me." 9 The great multitude therefore of the Jews learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. 10 But the chief priests had counseled that they might put Lazarus to death also; 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

Having miraculously raised Lazarus from the dead to the astonishment of all who saw what happened, it is interesting that the Holy Spirit sees no good in telling us about Lazarus' reaction; telling us about his memory; telling us anything about what happened when his soul departed from his body. God obviously sees no need to satisfy man's curiosity for the sensational regarding these things but instead, he does something very fascinating: he goes into great detail contrasting genuine believers with that of unbelievers. This is much needed today even as it was in the first century because, frankly, most people are unable to discern between the two even within the ranks of so-called Christianity. As you know, Jesus has said that, "Not everyone who calls me Lord will enter into the kingdom, only those who do the will of the Father." Today there are many people who call Jesus "Lord," they tend to fall into three basic headings: first you have the institutional church that is thoroughly apostate; then you have secondly, the cultural church that is largely apostate; then finally, you have the true church, the ekklesia, the called out ones, those called by God to salvation, those who concur with Peter's great confession, "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God." In fact, the most defining characteristic of the true church will be their understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord. It was upon that great confession that the Lord promised to build his church, the institutional church. Even including things like Roman Catholicism and certainly the liberal denominations, have a grossly distorted Christology which in turn distorts all the other doctrines. Likewise, even in the cultural church, you see some similar distortions regarding the Lord Jesus Christ, man-centered churches as opposed to God-centered churches. Churches that would have us believe that basically Jesus died to make us happy and healthy and successful. He's certainly not exalted as Lord, as Master. He's not highly exalted. His word is not honored. He's not worthy of sacrificial worship and adoring praise which will be the mark of the true church.

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Well, in the first century like today, there were those who truly believed in Christ, only a handful, and then there were those who had a superficial belief, a self-serving kind of belief that would be a faith that would never manifest a true commitment to the Lord. And of course, as we look at Scripture, we see those who truly believed compared with those who adamantly hated Christ and we're going to see that today. These are the distinctions that the Holy Spirit seems to put on display in this passage of Scripture and I would ask you to examine your heart accordingly.

We're going to look at this passage basically under two headings. We're going to see first of all: hearts of hatred, jealousy and hypocrisy. This of course, would help us see the heart of an unbeliever. This will be contrasted with hearts of service, love and worship. So let's examine the history of what actually happened. Go back to verse 45, "Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him." I find it fascinating that obviously Mary's character and testimony was so powerful that others saw the love of Christ in her and because of that, were drawn to him. Isn't it amazing how God uses his own to draw others to the Lord Jesus? I pray that the same can be said of you and of me. So God used her to draw others to himself. Now, given the context, I believe that these people really, truly believed in Jesus, that they were genuine converts. This should be no surprise given the awesome nature of the miracle but also the Jewish leaders later on in verse 48, viewed them as genuine believers and therefore viewed them as a threat to their status and to their authority.

But then immediately John begins to contrast new believers with unbelieving, hostile skeptics so here we begin with our first category: hearts of hatred, jealousy and hypocrisy. Verse 46, "But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done." These were probably hostile spies, the inveterate enemies of Christ dead in their sins, double blind. Blinded by their own depraved nature that will never seek after God apart from God taking the initiative and then blinded by Satan of whom Paul said, "is the God of this world who blinds the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God."

Verse 47, "Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.'" That term "signs" is one that was used to speak of that which would authenticate both the messenger as well as the message and certainly, the messenger that was being authenticated was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel and his message was the kingdom and the Gospel. So despite their repeated efforts to kill the Lord Jesus, he continues to perform many signs. Many people are believing in him though, however, most would never manifest genuine saving faith. So the long-awaited King and the kingdom was actually in the midst of them as Jesus had said earlier. It had drawn near, Matthew tells us. The people had actually seen

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the face of the King. They witnessed his supernatural works which were the predicted harbingers of his kingdom but they refused to believe. The reason they refused to believe is because he did not meet their criterion of what they wanted as a Messiah. They did not want a suffering servant, they wanted a conquering warrior. But they are faced with a huge problem here: many people are following after him, now and you, most for the wrong reasons.

Verse 48, "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Our nation. You see, not only did these people hate Jesus but they were jealous of him. They resented his power. They resented his purity. They resented the ways he was constantly exposing their hypocrisy and they feared the consequences if the crowds would continue to follow him thinking that he was their Messiah because they understood that the Romans would not tolerate even a word of insurrection. They would squelch any popular uprising with barbaric cruelty as they did several years later in A.D. 70 when they destroyed Jerusalem. If this happened, the Pharisees and their political opponents who were the wealthy aristocrats known as the Sadducees, would lose their place of prominence and power over the masses which was their only motivation for being religious. Not because they loved the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength and neighbor as themselves, they were religious so that they could make money and have power. They were politicians.

Verse 49, "But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.'" So Caiaphas sees Jesus as the expedient scapegoat that could be sacrificed to save the nation, more importantly, to save their religious cartel. You know, wicked despots and self-serving political entities have always seen Christianity as a threat to their power because you must understand, they are ultimately ruled by Satan of whom John says, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Let me give you an example: we see this in the liberal progressive movement that currently exercises so much power in our country and holds the White House. They despise biblical Christianity because it opposes the killing of unborn infants; it opposes the wickedness of homosexuality; it opposes deception and fraud and the promotion of an entitlement mentality and culture and the deification of big government, elitists bent on controlling everyone's life. They cannot exist apart from a permanent ignorant underclass that can be easily seduced into believing that somehow they are victims targeted by the other side and must therefore vote for their version of hope and change. So there is always a war on somebody and today there is a war on blacks; there is a war on Hispanics; there is a war on the working man; there is a war on the uninsured; there is a war on women. You've got to have these wars in order for them to stay in power and they will do anything to keep their power. Folks, this is the same thing that was going on in the

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first century with the Sanhedrin even though the issues were different, the motivation was the same.

"So it is expedient for you," he says, "that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." Now, he did not say this on his own initiative but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation and not for the nation only but in order that he might also gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad, in other words, those given to the Son by the Father in eternity past who had not yet become true disciples of Christ. Once again, there is some profound irony here. To be sure, the words of Caiaphas had a double meaning and he was unaware of really what he was saying. Jesus would indeed die for the Jewish nation as a substitute but his death would be far more than a political sacrifice for the sake of national salvation. He would also give his life as a ransom for all who would trust in him. The prophet John the Baptist was correct when he said earlier that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and by his death, he would eventually gather a repentant and regenerated Israel, the scattered Jews of the diaspora. We're awaiting that today. We're seeing some of that happening even now even though they are coming back to Israel in unbelief, they are coming back. They are coming back into their Promised Land as the rightful heirs of the Messianic kingdom in harmony with Old Testament prophecy.

Now, don't be deceived, Caiaphas here was like most politicians today. His hypocrisy knows absolutely no bounds. He cares nothing about the nation. Even though his rhetoric sounds very altruistic, very patriotic but he only cares about his power, his prestige and the ruling class. So verse 53 says, "from that day on they planned," or literally plotted, "together to kill Him." Verse 54, "Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples." This was a little village on the edge of the wilderness, about 12 miles from Jerusalem, a place where Jesus could go with his disciples to get away for a few days before he made his final journey to Jerusalem and ultimately to the cross.

Verse 55, "Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves." Again, I find it ironic. John gives us this detail that they would go early for the purpose of purification. The leaders would do the same thing and yet the leaders are conspiring together to kill an innocent man. Hypocrisy that knows no bounds. It is estimated that more than a million people would have come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Many of them would come early for the purpose of this ritual cleansing. For this reason and because of the hypocrisy, Jesus said in Matthew 23, "For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish but inside you are full of robbery and self-indulgence." He went on to say, "You are like white washed

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tombs which on the outside appear beautiful but inside, you are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

Verse 56, "So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?' Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him." So no one knows where Jesus is and yet everyone is looking for him. Doubtless, the word of Lazarus' resurrection had spread like wildfire throughout the entire region.

So for a moment I want to transport you to Israel. I wish I could literally take you there. I've been in the very trails and roads that I'm about to describe. But this is what was going on: during the Passover season, large groups of pilgrims from the north, up in the Galilee, would travel together to Judea. But rather than going straight down to Jerusalem, they would make the long way around to the other side of the Jordan into the region call Perea which is now the country of Jordan. They would go the long way around in order to avoid being defiled by walking through that dreaded region of Samaria where those nasty Samaritans lived. So they would make the longer trek through Perea in order to avoid defiling themselves and as we examine the other Gospels we learn that Jesus and his disciples leave this little village of Ephraim and they move north through Samaria into Galilee so they don't mind being contaminated. They go all the way north where the rest of the people are going to be and then evidently just into Galilee, they cross over the Jordan rift there with the Jordan River and they join one of these pilgrim bands going up to Passover. So what you have now is Jesus and the 12 traveling along with a very large throng of Jewish pilgrims south through Perea and eventually they would cross the Jordan River at the region of Jericho and then they would make the steep climb up the Wadi Qelt up to the village of Bethany just outside of Jerusalem. Of course, Jesus is doing this in an effort to attract a very large crowd and this will be the crowd that will be there at the triumphal entry. Moreover, Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that he taught them along the way and worked miracles.

So this is what has happened and now we come to Bethany. It's probably late Friday afternoon. They are anxious to arrive before the Sabbath commenced at sundown and here now we witness a stark contrast between those hearts that were hateful, jealous and hypocritical to hearts, number 2, that demonstrate service, love and worship, marks of genuine faith. Notice verse 1 of chapter 12, "Jesus therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they made Him a supper there." Now, it's interesting Matthew and Mark tell us that this meal was held in the home of one Simon the leper, obviously a man that had been healed by Jesus otherwise they wouldn't be there with him. What a wonderful night of fellowship that must have been. Jesus finds safe quarters here with his friends. He knows that they

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are not going to turn him in to the religious authorities and have them come and arrest him. So this would've been a special meal in honor of Jesus, celebrating all that they had experienced firsthand from him, knowing that he indeed was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, the resurrection and the life.

Then John says this at the end of verse 2, "and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him." If we would've been there, we would have seen them resting on one elbow, most of the time they had like a pillow, and there would be a very low U-shaped table where the food would be and this would allow them to be able to communicate and talk with one another. Their feet would be out to the outside perimeter of the U-shaped grouping and that U would also allow a person access to serve them. So try to get that in your mind. That's what's going on here.

Then John adds this little detail, I love this, "Martha was serving." Isn't that exactly what you'd expect Martha to be doing? Martha is serving, consistent with her character, only this time, by the way, there's no rebuke. She's doing it out of desire, not out of duty. She's not trying to draw any attention to herself. Her motivation is pure here. She's focusing on Christ, not on herself. By the way, like Martha, would that we all be servants of Christ. Paul repeatedly described himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ, literally a slave of Christ and he exhorts us in 1 Corinthians 15:58 to be "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." Later on in verse 26 of chapter 12, Jesus makes a wonderful promise to all who faithfully serve him. He says, "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." Magnificent promise.

Now also notice how John speaks of the unique position that Lazarus enjoys. He's reclining at the table with Jesus. Folks, you just have to let that sink in. Don't gloss over this. Imagine if I came to you and said, "You know, last night I had supper with the Son of God." I mean, that's what's going on here but it's beyond that, "The Son of God who raised me from the dead." I mean, it's just an amazing scene. What an unspeakable privilege to be able to enjoy such sweet fellowship with the lover of his soul and what glorious condescension for the Son of God, the Creator, the Lord of glory, to make himself so intimately accessible to those that he loves.

What of Mary? Verse 3 we read that, "Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." You see, Mary's love for Jesus cannot be contained within her heart. It must find expression so in a dramatic act of worship, she anoints the feet of Jesus and wipes his feet with her hair, an act of love, by the way, that is no more praiseworthy than Martha's service. Now, what is nard? Sometimes it's called

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spikenard. Well, it is an oil that is extracted from the root and the spike of the nard plant that grows in India and given the purity of the oil combined with the amount and its origin from India, the value of the nard was enormous. In fact, Mark tells us in his Gospel that it was worth over 300 denari and, of course, a denarius was a day's wage for a common worker and so if you take out all the days a common worker would work minus the Sabbath, you would have a year's wages. So imagine pouring out a year's wages on your Savior. That's what's happening here.

Mark also tells us that she broke the vial indicating that she held nothing back. She gave all of this treasure to honor the one who would give all of himself for her so that she could have all that he had as her inheritance. An amazing thought. By the way in light of that, she really gave nothing at all and I'm sure she would admit that in comparison to what she received yet God is pleased with every sacrifice regardless of how big or how little when it's given out of a pure heart. But to give of a full year's wage is an enormous gift even for a wealthy person. It's probable that this was a family heirloom that would've made this even more valuable. The heart attitude of this kind of sacrificial giving reminds me of David. You will recall in 2 Samuel 24, David rejected Araunah's gift of his threshing floor at Mount Moriah, a hill where Abraham offered Isaac, by the way, the same place where later Solomon built his temple. David said to him, "No," in other words, "I don't want you to give it to me. No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing." Likewise Mary refused to give to the Lord that which cost her nothing, a lesson in personal sacrifice we would all do well to learn.

Now, Matthew and Mark tell us that she anointed this perfume on Jesus' head and John says that she put it on his feet. Why the discrepancy? Well, really there's no discrepancy at all, the point is she poured it over his entire body which Jesus alludes to in Matthew 26:12. I believe that Matthew and Mark emphasized the head because they pictured him being honored as the Messianic King of Israel but John chose to emphasize the feet since it was there that she could kneel down and wipe his feet with her hair but also more importantly, this would be a stunning picture of her self-perceived unworthiness and adoring worship. What a contrast to the religious elite who were trying to kill him. Now, in that culture, this would've been a supreme act of lowliness because only the lowest slave would ever wash a person's feet. By the way, just a week later, this would be the very act that the disciples would refuse to do, remember? When they came into the upper room? So what happened? Jesus took the towel and humbled himself and took upon himself that menial task.

Well, the Jews would have considered this such a degrading thing that it could ruin your reputation. You just wouldn't want to do such a thing, to lower yourself in such a way but of course, Mary didn't care at all about her reputation. She didn't care at all about

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potential ridicule which, by the way, is another mark of genuine saving faith. A genuine believer focuses on the glory of God, not on the esteem of men. And John adds that the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. I'm sure that was an aroma that he never forgot. In fact, Jesus said of Mary in Matthew 26:13, "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her." And here we are speaking of it today.

Now, before we leave this scene, perhaps we can look at it more closely and I don't believe it's beyond the spirit of the text to see some symbolism here. First, may I remind you that when we looked at Lazarus' death, we saw a dramatic picture of the state of the natural man without Christ, a spiritual corpse in a state of decay, incapable of self-resurrection. Then we saw Jesus coming to him and taking the initiative to do what only he could do because he alone is the resurrection and the life. As a result of his quickening grace, Lazarus is able to respond to the Lord's call and to come forth from the grave, a marvelous picture of regeneration when a rotting spiritual corpse is raised to walk in newness of life. Then we saw a picture of evangelism when the mourners were asked to remove the stone from the dead man's grave. We even saw a picture of discipleship when they were asked to come together and help remove the rancid and restrictive grave clothes that continued to cling to him, symbolic of the old nature that must be put off even with the assistance of unbelievers through discipleship, through intentional one anothering.

But what else happens to a man, to a woman, when they pass from death into life? When one is truly born again? Do we not immediately enjoy sweet communion with the lover of our soul? Are we not able to dine with him at a table of remembrance? Are we not able to experience his presence in private worship and even in public worship? To experience that ecstatic just exhilarating joy which Paul describes as the earnest of our inheritance? The first part, the initial payment in kind? Do we not immediately enjoy a subjective experience of the love of God, Paul says, that has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us? When we first come to Christ, don't we instantly have a glimpse of the glory of God as we experience the presence of Christ deep within our souls? Did not Paul speak of this when he said in Ephesians 2:13, "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Didn't Jesus pray to the Father that we may have his joy made full, made complete in us? When we're raised to walk in newness of life, don't we have instant access into the presence of God and experience the joy of that presence in so many ways? I believe this is pictured here with Lazarus dining with Jesus, his Savior and Lord. And immediately upon coming to Christ, do we not also want to serve him as Martha did with him and his disciples? Serving out of a heart of joy. And do we not also like Mary give him our best? Is that not our desire regardless of the cost, bearing witness to the inestimable value of the person of Christ? Of course this is true. So friends, don't miss this. These are marks of

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the true believer and what we enjoy. We have a passionate longing to enjoy the presence of God and find in him the source of our greatest satisfaction.

But notice the next disappointing contrast, one that exposes the heart of an unbeliever ruled by hatred, jealousy and hypocrisy in verse 4, "But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?' Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it." Unlike Mary who worshiped the Lord, who was willing to give up her greatest treasure because she valued him more than anything else, Judas is a hypocrite. He's just a greedy thief. Like all hypocrites, he sees Jesus as someone that can somehow advance his own self-serving agenda. He does not see him as the Son of God worthy of his utmost praise. Satan is already motivating his heart here. Judas is taking the focus off of Christ and putting it on something else.

You know, it's unbelievable, isn't it, to think that Judas would have been in the inner circle with Jesus for three years and yet betray him? It's an amazing testimony to the power of hypocrisy. Jesus said in Matthew 26:24, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Now, how could this happen? How could a man do this? The same reason why many people follow Jesus today: because he has followed Jesus for all the wrong reasons. Like all hypocrites, he hung around Jesus to find some kind of satisfaction for his earthly needs. He wasn't looking for a Savior because he was so overwhelmed with the guilt of his sin. He wasn't looking to him as God very God but like so many people today, he's thinking to himself, "God exists for me. I don't exist for him and so I'm going to use him for my own agenda, for personal gain." Certainly, he was expecting a prominent position in the earthly Messianic kingdom that he thought Jesus was about to establish but now all of his hopes are dashed. He can see that the rulers are after him and even Jesus is talking about his certain death and here we see his true colors being exposed. Isn't it interesting how none of the disciples saw this? The reason John describes this now is he's writing some 50 years later so he's looking back in retrospect but at the time, he didn't see it. Of course, Jesus knew it all along.

I want to digress for a moment because I marvel at the power of self-deception and the stealth of hypocrisy that can conceal such wickedness and even cause a person to be deceived with their own thinking. Jesus described hypocrites as tares among the wheat. They exist in every church. I'm sure they exist here. In Luke 12:1, Jesus warned, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Now, in that specific instance, he was saying, "Be on guard against the permeating and corrupting influence of apostate teachers." But my friends, hypocrisy exists among all manner of religious people just like Judas and like Judas, they're going to be hard to spot. But Jesus does give us some telltale

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signs to look out for. Can I just summarize a few for you? He tells us that they will lie and deceive and cheat people out of their earthly possessions. In other words, they're going to be materialistic. Their hearts are filled with avarice, with greed. Jesus says, "They will honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me." In other words, they will not practice what they preach. Their private life will not match their public persona. They will be like the chameleon and take on the color of whatever light they find themselves. Whenever they do act in a righteous good way, they only do it to be seen by men. Jesus says that they will clean the outside of the cup and the platter but within they will be full of extortion and excess. On the outside, they will look very spiritual but in their heart, they are wicked. We read how that they will not cultivate a secret devotion to God. To put it in our day and age: they are just Sunday morning Christians. They neglect inward religion, only observe the outward. They love to call attention to themselves through their giving, through their prayers, other forms of spirituality because they crave the spotlight. They want to be honored. They will see themselves as spiritually superior to other people. They will be hyper-critical and severe in judging other people and yet lenient with themselves. They can see the speck in your eye across the road but they cannot see the log in their own. Jesus says they will strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. In other words, they will obsess over the most ridiculous little things that are really unimportant and yet the bigger issues of the heart, they will utterly neglect. They will respond with malice if anyone dares to expose their hypocrisy, dares to challenge their doctrine. And they will lack spiritual discernment. He tells how they will have the discernment to predict the weather but they will not be able to recognize the obvious sign that the Messiah of God in human flesh was among them and they will lack genuine compassion for those who are suffering. They will only help if it will draw attention to themselves.

My friends, if this describes you, beware. You may deceive others, you may even deceive yourself but you cannot escape the penetrating eye of divine omniscience. Like Judas, you will abandon, even betray, the Lord if your faith in him comes under attack. How many times I have seen this. When the storms of persecution blow upon the church, it is always the rotten branches that are the first to fall and you will be among them. Spurgeon said it so well 150 years ago in England, "The minister may cease to preach this doctrine of hypocrisy in the days of persecution. When the faggots are blazing and when the rack is in full operation, few men will be hypocrites. These are the keen detectors of imposters: suffering and pain and death for Christ's sake. They will not be endured by mere pretenders."

Well, Judas was a master pretender. His heart was cold toward Christ and he complains about this waste, however his righteous indignation is just a clever way of masquerading his own greed and Jesus sees right through it. In verse 7 he says, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. For you always have the poor with you, but you

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do not always have Me." Here's a great picture, friends, of the Good Shepherd protecting his flock from a wolf and those that he might influence. It's sad. Matthew and Mark indicate that some of the other disciples kind of joined in with his little protest.

Notice carefully the phrase, "so that she may keep it for the day of My burial." This can be confusing because obviously she has already poured out everything so how does this make sense? Well, it's best understood here that there is an ellipsis in Jesus' admonishment. An ellipsis is a literary device that omits some parts of a sentence that are obviously understood so it could be translated, "Let her be, it's in order that she might keep it for the day of My burial," or, "Let her alone, she did not sell this perfume as you wish she had so that she could keep it for the day of My burial." He's speaking here figuratively that this burial here is so eminent, it's like it's already begun here and so the timing is right. Apparently Mary was quite certain that Jesus' enemies were going to put him to death and she may well have understood his role as the Lamb of God. This should be no surprise, should it? She was one of the most attentive of all Jesus' disciples. So she did this in anticipation of his death. So Jesus sees her actions as prefiguring the anointing that would later take place through the hands of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus when they would prepare his body.

So he says, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial." Then speaking to all of the disciple he adds, "For you always have the poor with you." Folks, by the way, underscore that for a moment: you will always have the poor with you. So much for the fantasy of socialism. "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." Bear in mind, he is not disparaging the poor. The Lord indeed loves them and we are commanded to care for the poor that are a part of the body of Christ, but he is telling them that right now, "I need to be your priority. I need to be your single focus."

Verse 9, "The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead." So you see, word had quickly spread that Jesus was in Bethany and, of course, this draws all of the curious thrill seekers to come and see him. Like most today, they did not come in repentant faith, they were just curious. They were looking for something sensational.

Verse 10, "But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also." Boy, how would you like to have these guys for your priests? You see, the chief priests were among the sect of the Sadducees and guess what? They did not believe in the resurrection so, "We've got a real problem here, guys. We've got a guy running around who says he was raised from the dead and there are hundreds of witnesses who saw it. We've got to get rid of this guy. He's got to be eliminated. Maybe this time if we kill him off, he won't be raised

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again somehow and we can tell everybody, 'See, we told you there's no such thing as the resurrection.'" Once again, the hypocrite will go to any length to avoid having his or her cover blown, even murder.

Verse 11, "because on account of him," Lazarus, "many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus." Folks, I hope that you have gone away believing in Jesus.

Let me conclude by asking you to do this: as you ponder this passage, it's so important that you bring your life to it, that you use it to challenge your own heart. May every true believer like Lazarus, enjoy the sweet and intimate communion of a felt Christ. He is just not some person that we read about. He is living within us and we need to experience that and certainly we do that by sitting around the table of remembrance, sitting around the table of fellowship, going into the word in our own private worship. I pray that you all will enjoy a little sample of what Lazarus enjoyed around that table. May I add that we are all in great spiritual danger if we deprive our souls from the ecstatic exhilarating joy of tasting of the Lord and savoring his presence in our life. Folks, this is absolutely essential for our sanctification and if you live at a distance from his love, what you will find is that your flesh will continue to draw you away from him into the shadows of sin and you will forfeit blessing in your life and you will even bring yourself into a place of divine chastening. May we all like Martha serve Christ and his church out of a heart that absolutely overflows with love and may we all like Mary worship our King with unrestrained devotion. May all of our homes and even our church be filled with the incense of sacrificial adoring worship.

Folks, if all this is foreign to the desires of your heart, if none of this is really characteristic of the way you conduct your life, may I challenge you with all love to be brutally honest because if that is the case, you really have no basis to call yourself a Christian and you need to ask yourself, "Do I really belong to Christ or am I just kidding myself?" If you believe that is true, may I give you the good news? Run to Christ. Confess your sin. Be honest with that which he knows to be true. Confess it. Repent. Plead with him for undeserved mercy and you will be saved and you will experience these glorious truths of which we have been speaking here today. I pray that that will happen, that today will be the day you experience the miracle of new birth.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths that are so practical, that give such insight into not only the heart of those without Christ but those who have been saved by your grace. Lord, we acknowledge that were it not for your grace, our hearts would be equally as hypocritical, as jealous, as wicked as anyone else so, Lord, we give you praise. May these truths change us for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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