

“A DAY I’LL NEVER FORGET...”



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- John 12:1-11
by Pastor Tim Dodson
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John 12:1-11 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. 2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. 3 Then Mary took a

pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. 4 Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, 5 “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” 6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. 7 But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. 8 “For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.” 9 Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. 10 But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, 11 because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

A Texas woman, Carol Denise Richardson, was convicted by a federal jury in June 2006 and sentenced to life in prison for “conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute” 50 grams or more of crack cocaine. Yet in 2016 then President Obama pardoned her and she was miraculously given clemency and freedom. One can only wonder how it would feel to have such a sentence hanging over your head only to be so suddenly and inexplicably set free! Undoubtedly it was a “day she swore she would never forget!”

But according to the *Houston Chronicle*, Richardson was arrested again less than a year later for theft in Pasadena, a Houston suburb, as well as for 5 other violations of her parole conditions that were imposed when she was released from prison. “This defendant was literally given a second chance to become a productive member of society and has wasted it,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Ted Imperato said in a statement released by his office. “She has clearly shown a willful disregard for the law and must face the consequences for her crimes and actions.”

Hmmm. I guess she *did* forget. Ephesians 5:15-16 “*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*”

Over the many years of serving Christ as a pastor, I have been blessed to see so very many grace-filled second chances. I have been witness to lives that have been pulled from the depths of sin and ruin. Some of those individuals went on to embrace their second chance and are even yet today living full and productive lives and kingdom service! But sadly, I have also watched at least as many take what was undoubtedly a precious gift from God...a renewal and redemption, a restoration of life and purpose, and subsequently squander it. A “new lease on life” thrown away. An opportunity for a new path and a new joy, lost in the midst of weakness, selfishness, laziness, and sadly, often just outright hubris. Some of this group are dead. Many went back to jail. Even more have abandoned the faith and are literally languishing out there. Some were given even opportunity here to serve and teach others, and they went on to do nothing but maybe warm a church pew somewhere else.

Hebrews 6: 4-8 says “...it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened — those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come — and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame. When the ground soaks up the falling rain and bears a good crop for the farmer, it has God’s blessing. But if a field bears thorns and thistles, it is useless. The farmer will soon condemn that field and burn it.”

1 John 2:19 tells us why: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”

In chapter 11 of the gospel of John we saw an event that would have...*should have*, staggered the minds and souls of all those that were present. A man was literally brought back from death after being gone for 4 days! No doubt all witnesses there thought “this is a day I will never forget!” Certainly if ever an event fit the bill, it would be seeing the resurrection of a dead man.

Many people were there that day when Lazarus came back from death. Some believed and thus followed Christ from that point forward. Others however we either nonplussed or unimpressed. According to 11:46, some even promptly left that scene and went and snitched to the Pharisees that were out to stop Jesus and eventually would kill Him.

Amongst the many who witnessed this incredible event included Lazarus’ sister Mary, and it is here that we pick up the story: Six days before the Passover, Jesus rolled down to Bethany once again. Finding himself eating dinner with His friends...Lazarus included...Mary enters the scene and brings with her a bottle of very costly perfume. What happens next is legendary. For Mary that day literally poured herself out at the feet of Jesus along with that bottle of perfume. Mary knew what it meant to “... *love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.*” (Matthew 22:37) It was an act of intense worship and adoration. It was an act of sacrifice, humility, and a submissive heart. It was an act demonstrating clear understanding and most of all, *a clear memory.*

Mary didn’t begin to follow Jesus in chapter 11 of John, but rather she had been a disciple for some time. However no one would doubt that her faith was written in stone that day at the cemetery! It was an event that she would indeed “never forget.” It seemed that what transpired between her and Jesus, and Jesus and Lazarus, would forever alter the trajectory of her life, and would eternally possess her love and her soul. She would not forget what Jesus had done. She had *witnessed* the power of God!

There was another individual at the table that day in chapter 12, who also had been present at the raising of Lazarus: an infamous apostle by the name of Judas. He too heard the same words spoken by Jesus that Mary heard: he also heard the same command to “come forth” from the dead. He saw the tears Jesus shed, and the brazen promises of seeing the glory of God if there was true belief. He witnessed the same miracle, he saw the power of God manifested, and saw the same result. And yet on this day...one so soon after that miraculous event, there was a vastly different response to Jesus. A very different response to the events that had transpired.

For Mary responded to Jesus willingly, surrendering what was quite likely her most precious and valuable possession, while Judas was still concerned about temporal possessions, passing financial standing, and ultimately just *himself*. One wonders how bearing witness to the same miracle could have such drastically different affects...drastically different responses between people that witnessed the same events! And today we might step back and ask the same question...

Revelation 3:3 *“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”*

Eph 2: 1-12 *“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil — the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.”*

“Don’t forget...Therefore remember...” The past is not for fueling disappointments, painful memories, anger and grudges. Those are all misuses of the past, and not why God wants us to “remember.” Paul warned us about that kind of memory, in Philippians 3:13 saying *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...”* Paul was moving on from debilitating memories and regrets knowing that Christ makes us into a new person with a new life. Allowing the past to render us spiritual impotent and unfruitful is a sin, for that is not what “remembering” is for nor is it what we are to retain through such. There are positive uses of looking back that God **did** ordain. Things such as gratitude, repentance, faith, knowledge, and a thankful heart.

We should forever remember our lost, hopeless condition before God saved us by His grace. Paul describes our condition before the cross as one of utter hopelessness and despair. But we are reminded rather of Psalm 77:11 - *“I will remember the works of the Lord; Surely I will remember your wonders of old.”* And Psalm 103:2 which says: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”* We were *lost* without Him! He died that we might have life and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10) He has given us purpose and clarity. A fullness and fruitfulness. A richness and joy. It was all done through HIS work and remains a part of HIS presence in us. He has allowed us now to even participate in His miraculous! But *“Without Him, we can do **nothing**.”* (John 15:5)

John Piper says *“... history is an ever-growing reservoir of past grace where the thankfulness of our hearts can drink and drink with continual pleasure. That is what (the past) is for, the drinking of thankfulness. And when I say past I mean five seconds ago to five thousand years ago. It is all past.”*

When we fail to remember from where we came, we will cease to be thankful. When my wife and I were married, we were 19 years old and didn’t have two quarters to rub together. So now when we have a nice meal, or the car starts and has heat, or we are able to travel around on a motorcycle, we don’t feel entitled, but are deeply acknowledging and wholly verbal in our thanks.

So many people spend their lives endlessly reviewing their past days, often murmuring and complaining about their present days, and beneath it all constantly worrying about their future days. Poet and literary critic Randall Jarrett once said: “The people who live in a golden age usually go around complaining how yellow everything looks.” How often we don’t realize the best days of our lives are the best until it is too late. Even as believers, the deep cracks of an unthankful spirit can easily show... and we don’t realize how destructive those cracks are in our lives.

1 Timothy 3:1-5a says this: *“You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.”*

How does one know whether they are truly in this camp if sin is so blinding? The one who hears these scriptural words and the correcting words of their brothers and sisters is the one who has “reborn ears” and responds. But the one who plants his or her feet and just offers excuses is the one who is lost. Because the one who is lost is unable to see an unthankful heart and a complaining spirit through God’s eyes. They are unable to see the miraculous around them or the wonder of His grace. They know nothing of what true worship is. They reject any and all authority in their lives, for they do not grasp the miracle of the cross and the miracle of someone coming back from the dead.

2 Peter 1:9-10 speaks of such a man or woman saying *“...he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.”*

Mary responded to Christ by finding her way to His feet in worship and thankfulness. Judas however was seemingly unaffected, and was only concerned about his own well-being and pursuits. It is quite possible that Judas also was responding with a bitter spirit against the actions of Mary...wanting to “rain on her parade.” Many of us do that also. We will criticize and complain about others and seek to “take them down a notch” because their joy and worship gnaws at our soul and guilt comes knocking. We can’t have that, so instead of repentance we act rather out of jealousy. Such is not a pretty thing to witness, and is generally evident to everyone except ourselves.

The actions of Judas showed that he was a “ticking time bomb” at this point. It was only a matter of time now. Unable or unwilling to see and appreciate the work of Christ. Unwilling to take the humble position of awe and worship. Unable to remember what Christ had done and was doing presently. Unwilling to not be first in his own heart. And his heart naturally grew harder and harder, until finally there was complete apostasy.

Two people at the same table. Just like all of us here today. Hearing the same words, seeing the same miracles, witnessing the same power of God in our midst. Some will “fall at the feet of Jesus.” Some will just repeat the same mistakes...the same selfish errors, the same self-centered acts and history will repeat itself. Writer and philosopher George Santayana, gave us the famous quote which still stands true today: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Mary took her second chance at life, and was thankful. At the feet of Jesus, she “wiped His feet with her hair.” Judas wasted his second chance. He bristled and planted His feet. And even after literally walking with Jesus for 3 years...seeing it all, hearing it all, experiencing it all, He was still lost.

What will you do with *your* second chance?