

November 11, 2012 - Jesus and The Worshipper

Review of Orange Cards.....

Who recognizes this name? See if you know who this person is. The name is Isaiah Mustafa and no, it's not the guy from Lion King, just to clear that up. Anyone know who that is? Anyone recognize that name? The Old Spice Man, yes! He's actually, technically an NFL player. Played for the Raiders and the Sea Hawks and the Browns and some other teams, although he mostly sat on the bench, but he is most famous known as The Old Spice guy who did all of those Old Spice commercials awhile back. In those commercials he would claim to be, he would say "I am the man that your man could smell like if he stopped using those lady scented body washes and used Old Spice, instead." And that was kind of the big ploy of all of commercials that he put out trying, he always spoke to the ladies, I don't know why, maybe the men just weren't interested in soap. He spoke to the ladies and tried to convince the ladies that "Ladies, if your man used Old Spice Body Wash", then you would have this guy who not only smelled like him but would have Barry White's voice and Ryan Reynold's abs and would just be everything you wished he could be, if only you could just change his smell by getting him to stop using those flowery lady scented body washes. Well, scent is a powerful thing, maybe not quite that powerful, maybe not quite powerful enough to make those kind of changes but scent is a very powerful thing. My father-in-law would attest to this because whenever we were out with him and were going through a Mall we'd have to kind of detour way around the outside of the store to make sure we would avoid the perfume area because if we got anywhere near that thing, I feel like I'm going to have to carry him out on a stretcher because the smells of that overwhelm him. I some of you here kind of have that same reaction to strong perfumes and smells. Smell is a powerful thing. Scent is a powerful thing. They say that smells and scents can be one of the most powerful triggers for memories. So if people are trying to remember something they often bring in familiar smells or maybe you just happen to come across a smell and then all of a sudden this memory this sense of being somewhere else just kind of floods over you just because you've caught a whiff of this certain scent. Maybe you come across this certain smell and you remember being at your grandma's house when you were a young child. Or maybe you smell a cologne, maybe even Old Spice, and you remember sitting in your dad's lap as a child. Or maybe you smell pine wood chips and you remember being out camping with your family somewhere at one time in your life. Or you smell chocolate chip cookies and you remember being in the kitchen with mom, baking cookies when you were younger. Powerful smells, things like that new car smell, which as soon as you smell that new car smell you know what that is and you kind of have that sense, I think it's especially stronger if you're a guy. But there's something built into that smell that, Oh! You like that and you don't know why but it just makes the car's value just rise because it's got this smell to it. Or maybe, perhaps it's not that, it's the smell of an old book. You know the smell that it has when you open up an old book and it just kind of wafts over you and all of a sudden it just triggers these emotions and thoughts and memories in you. Smell is a very powerful thing.

I looked up a few things this week, and I tried to see what is the most expensive smell in the World and I came across this. This is a perfume by Clive Christian. It's called Imperial Majesty. Comes in a 16.9 oz. bottle and it is worth, are you ready for this, \$215,000.00 for this almost 17 oz. bottle of perfume. Now, to be fair, it comes with an 18 Karat gold collar, and a 5 Karat diamond attached to the bottle but nonetheless, it is a very expensive bottle of perfume. Clive Christian makes the World's second most expensive bottle of perfume, it's called Clive Christian No. 1. This goes for \$2,150.00 per ounce. And that's how much this little gem of perfume costs. Now, I'm telling you about all these expensive perfumes not because I'm a secret collector of expensive perfumes, I'm probably the opposite of whatever that person is. But I'm telling you that because our story this morning is all about expensive perfume. It centres around this one act that is just focused on this expensive perfume.

Reading in John, Chapter 12:1-3: Here's what happens in verse 3:

“Jesus is at Lazarus' house and Mary took a 12 oz. jar of expensive perfume made from the essence of Nard and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance.”

So Mary takes this 12 oz. jar of perfume and anoints Jesus' feet with it. Now, Nard or Spiked Nard, comes from India. It's a plant that comes from India and they make this perfume out of it. Because it comes all the way from the Himalayas and has to be brought to Palestine, that's what made it so very expensive. Scholars tell us that this 12 oz. volume was actually an over-sized volume that someone would use for this purpose. So this is what Mary had when she came to Jesus. I imagine, when John is recounting this story, I imagine he says that the smell filled the room, and I imagine that every day after that as John walked through the market and he walked past the merchants who were selling different spices and perfumes, every time he walked past someone who was selling perfume made of the Essence of Nard, I imagine he just stopped for a second and something peeked up his nose and his mind and his ears and he kind of flashed back to this moment. I imagine that, even 50 years later as he was writing this story down in his Gospel as he was probably dictating to his scribe who was writing this for him as he was telling this story “she poured it on his feet and she wiped it up with her hair” and I imagine him kind of closing his eyes and taking a deep breath in and saying “the aroma just filled the whole room” and instantly, 50 years later, he's taken back to that place, right to that moment.

Well, that's what's happening here in Chapter 12. But if you ask me, what happens in Chapter 12 is really all about what happened previously in Chapter 11. I'm going to put you to the test. Without looking at your orange card, what happens in Chapter 11? Lazarus, yes! Chapter 11 is all about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus gets word that Lazarus is sick and so he wait's a little while then eventually comes to where Lazarus lives and when he gets there, Mary and Martha tell Jesus that it's too late, Lazarus has already died. And so Jesus says “Well don't worry about that, just take me to the tomb where he's laid.” And when he gets to the tomb he tells them to move the stone away. Do you

remember what Martha said when Jesus told them to remove the stone? “He stinketh” Yes! She said “There is a smell going to be here and it’s not going to be a good one. And I think John is kind of juxtaposing these two stories and he’s making note of these little details because he wants to have a contrast going on here between the story in Chapter 11 and the story in Chapter 12.

So, they move the stone anyways and Jesus calls Lazarus out and he comes out and he’s alive and he’s healthy and they take off the bandages and then it’s just a short while later that we move on to Chapter, that’s the verse out of John 11:39, where they say the smell will be terrible when they move the stone. Just a short while after that, we move into Chapter 12 and that’s where we have the story we’re reading this morning. This is how the story starts out.

“Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived at Bethany the home of Lazarus, the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was being prepared in Jesus’ honour. Martha, served and Lazarus was among those who ate with him.”

So that’s kind of the setting that we have for our story this morning. Now, a few things to note about this. Jesus was at Lazarus’ house and there was a meal being prepared in honour of Jesus. Now, this is possibly the first time Jesus has been back since he raised Lazarus from the dead. We don’t know for sure but it’s quite possible that that was the case. It’s also possible, at least in my mind, that this dinner that is being held in Jesus’ honour, would be at least partly connected to the fact that he had raised Lazarus from the dead. And so, that is where they are at, that’s the occasion for the meal. Martha is there and we’ve talked about Mary and Martha before. Martha is the fixer, Martha is the doer. Martha is there and John makes note that Martha is doing what you’d expect Martha to be doing, she was preparing the meal and serving the meal and that’s what you would expect to see from Martha.

Now, Lazarus is there, and John makes note of a couple of things. One, he makes note that it’s at Lazarus’ house and then he says “that Lazarus was there and he ate with them.” Now, you could read that and noting the fact that Lazarus was present. But what came to my mind as I was reading that and seeing John kind of pointing that out specifically, was the story out of Luke Chapter 24. In Luke, Chapter 24, this is after Jesus has been crucified and buried in the grave and he’s come back to life and in Luke, Chapter 24, starting at around verse 36: Jesus appears to his disciples and when he appears to his disciples, the disciples kind of freak out a little bit and they think that they are seeing a ghost. Do you remember what Jesus did to prove to them that he was not a ghost. He asked them for something, do you remember? Fish. He said “do you got any fish?” And they say “Yeah, we’ve got some fish”. And it says “Jesus took the fish and he ate it in their presence.” Why? Because ghosts don’t eat. And so Jesus took some fish and he ate it and then, obviously, he’s not a ghost. And I couldn’t help but think that maybe John is just kind of underlining this a little bit for any of you who are thinking that this Lazarus resurrection thing was just a hoax or maybe he’s just a ghost or aberration or something. Lazarus was there, he was sitting down and he was eating

with them. And so, Lazarus is there and John makes not also in Verse 10, after all of this, after our story for this morning is over, the Pharisees decide to kill Lazarus, as well. You may wonder why are they going to bother to do that, why not just get rid of Jesus. Well, getting rid of Jesus was a lot harder to do. They'd been trying that for awhile. But also, if you want to discredit a guy who claims to be risen from the dead, what's the best way to do that? Kill him again! And if you kill him again and if he doesn't rise again, then you can start making a case that the first time was just a hoax or a fake or something. But that was what you do. And so the Pharisees, after this story was over, they say "You know what? This Lazarus guy, he's bringing way too much attention to Jesus." And as the end of the passage reads, they said "the whole world's going after Jesus because they see what he's done with this Lazarus guy so we need to deal with him as well and get rid of him."

So that's Lazarus and that's Martha but the one that we want to key in on this morning, is Mary. Now, if you remember from when we've talked about Mary and Martha previously, Martha was the fixer, the doer, and Mary was the feeler. Mary was the emotional expressive one. So when Mary comes into the picture in this story, Mary does something very 'Mary like' and it's something entirely unpractical. She takes this jar of perfume, which John notes is worth a whole year's wage, and she pours it on Jesus' feet. If you read Luke's version of this story, it says she breaks the jar just to be sure that you understand that she's dumping the whole thing here. She pours it all out on Jesus' feet. A whole year's wages. I did some math here and figured out that at minimum wage, here in Saskatchewan, a full year's wage, we're talking about \$20,000.00. Now can you imagine taking \$20,000.00 worth of anything and just dumping it out on someone's feet and knowing that that's going to be it. It's going to be gone and absolutely worthless after you do that. Now, for Mary this was a grand gesture of gratitude for God's Grace. That's what this was all about for Mary. Now some people would say that this was way overboard, that this was too much, too extravagant. Martha might have felt a little bit of this herself, this flagrant use of, I want to say expense of money, but Mary probably would have said: You know what, this wasn't overboard this, in fact, wasn't nearly enough to repay Jesus for what he had done. Not nearly enough to honour Jesus for who he was.

Have you ever had someone do something for you that you felt like you could never adequately repay? Have you ever had that experience in your life? Maybe someone provided you with financial assistance when you were in desperate straights. Maybe someone stuck with you during some really difficult times. Maybe there was someone who was there for you when you were grieving and really hurting inside. Maybe there was someone who blessed you with some kind of gift that was just too good to be true and you felt like there was no way I could adequately say thank you or repay you for this gift that you have given to me. If you have ever had that experience in your life then you know you have a sense of where Mary was coming from here. By pouring that perfume out on Jesus' feet, she is expressing in the very best way she knows how, how she feels about what Jesus has done. And that is the very simple heart and message of this text.

Now, this text is a challenge for us to recapture our own sense of wonder at what Christ has done for us both on the cross and in our lives from day-to-day. It is a reminder for us to continue to display our own grand gestures of gratitude for God's grace. Not because the gestures themselves are so impressive, but because the grace that we've received is so immense. And that to me is the very definition, the very heart of what worship is all about. Worship is this expression of gratitude to God. So sometimes we come here and we get together on Sunday mornings and we worship and so when we sing our song together we're not just singing songs so they sound nice and God gets to hear nice music. No! What we're doing when we sing those songs is we are expressing our gratitude to God for what He's done. And when we pray our prayers or when we read from God's word and when we share around the communion table, or when we visit out in the foyer afterwards, all of that is worship because what we're doing is we're just expressing to God our gratitude for what He has done. Our gratitude for the grace that He has given us in our lives. And that to me, is what worship is all about. And worship doesn't only happen inside this room for an hour and a half each Sunday, worship is happening as you walk down the street. Worship is happening in your homes. Worship is happening at your jobs. Worship is happening wherever you go. Whenever you go somewhere and whenever you express by the way you are acting, or by the way you are talking, or by the things you are doing, that you are saying "God I am so thankful for what You have done for me" in that moment, you are a worshipper. Now, for most of us, that's probably not revolutionary news, but we forget these things sometimes. We know them but we forget them. We get busy. We get preoccupied. We get caught up in our own little world and the things that are going on in our life and we kind of overlook them. We forget how incredible the story that we are a part of, really is. And sometimes we kind of end up like Judas in this story, where Judas looks up and says "Wow! That was a total waste of money! We could have done so many practical valuable things with that money." And of course, John slips in a little note in hindsight, and says "Yeah well! Judas was just trying to skim off the top." But there were probably others in that room who were thinking the very same thing and they kind of got lost in the moment and they didn't realize, they got caught up in the dollar signs of the thing and the math of the thing, that they forgot and they overlooked, that this was just an expression of Mary's heart to God.

So, lest we get distracted by the dollar figures, we need to be reminded that this is not about the expense of the perfume, the key to this story is about the expression of the person and that's what counts. It's not about the oil on Jesus' feet, it's about the thanksgiving in Mary's heart. Now, Martha's heart, I think, was probably equally full of gratitude and she expressed it differently. She held a party in Jesus' honour. And said "Everyone come and celebrate what Jesus has done." I have no doubt in my mind, I guarantee you, that Lazarus was very, very, grateful for what Jesus had done and I'm sure he showed that in his own way too. Lest we get lost in the dollar signs, there's a story in Mark, Chapter 12, where a widow comes to the Temple and Jesus and his disciples are watching people come to the Temple and put in their offerings and there are several people who come and they bring in these large amounts and they put them into the Temple collection box and kind of make a big show about putting

this in. Then this widow comes along and out of her pocket she takes two very small and monetarily, not valuable coins, and she drops them in. Jesus says “You know what, this woman has given more than any of these other guys.” It’s not about the dollar amounts that were going in. Not about the size of the cheque but it was about the heart that it was being given with. The woman who gave these two small coins, these two pennies, as it were, was giving it with that same heart and thanksgiving, and for her, it was a grand gesture in response to God’s grace. You see, it is about the motivation not the money. It is about the attitude more than the amount. It is about what is in your heart, not what is in your hand. It is about expressing your thanks to God in the most genuine and extensive way you possibly can.

And that’s the simple challenge of this text, to follow Mary’s example of extravagantly expressing our thanksgiving. To find our own grand gestures of gratitude for God’s grace and lay those at the feet of Jesus. And that’s really a hard message for me to preach because I can’t tell you what your grand gesture should be. I don’t know what that will look like for you. I’m not even always sure what that’s supposed to look like for me. But what I do know, is that it needs to feel to me like pouring out that perfume did to Mary. It should have the same feeling as dropping those two coins into the box felt like for that woman. It should be the most heart-felt response that I can give. And there it is. No bells and no whistles, no shiny wrapping paper to close it in, just a simple reminder what God has done and to respond appropriately. You see, what God desires is not one big grandiose act, but rather a consistent awareness of what He has done and how that affects the way we live on a day-to-day basis. An awareness of His grace in my life that affects the way I run my business or do my job. An awareness of His grace in my life that impacts the way I treat my spouse. An awareness of His grace in my life that influences the way I raise my kids. An awareness of His grace in my life that changes the way that I interact with that guy I get along pretty good with; and the way I interact with the guy I totally cannot stand. How I give context to my successes and achievements. How I cope with the times when my life just isn’t going the way I planned for it to go. It is about an awareness of His grace in my life that shapes the way I enter this room every Sunday morning and shapes the way I walk out of this building and shapes the way I walk the World the rest of the week.

Now, when our service is done this morning, you’ll get up and you’ll start mingling around and you will get busy visiting with one another and you will start herding your kids or slowing your kids down as they run through the hallway down there and you will start making plans about lunch or start worrying about the thing you put in the oven and whether it’s going to be done, or too done, by the time you actually get home. So, you’ll be preoccupied with a lot of these things once our service is over. And so, this morning, I want to use the rest of my time here, not for preaching, but for pondering. And so, I want to give you a few moments to ponder because what I really need on subjects like this, sometimes I need someone to come along and remind me: Mike, this is important. You need to be conscious of this. You need to be aware of this you need to take time and focus on this. I need that from time-to-time. But even more, I don’t need someone to keep telling me that.

You need to be doing this! You need to be doing that! What I need is just a few minutes of peace and quiet to sit down with God and say “Okay God, what is it that I’m missing here? Okay God, what is it that I need to be focussing on that I’m overlooking?” So I’m going to take that moment this morning and since you’re stuck here with me, I’m going to give you a chance to take that moment, as well.

And so, I have a couple things here that I want you to ponder this morning and I’ll tell you them one at a time and I’ll give you a few moments to do that. The first thing that I want us to ponder this morning, I just want us to take a couple of minutes here, and simply ponder what God has given you. What grace God has provided you. And I know some of you have lives where there is some junk in it as well and I appreciate that. But I want you to spend a few moments looking at your life, reflecting on your life for where God has been present and where God has been working and what blessings He has provided me with. (End of tape)

2. How might my gratitude for these blessings be expressed this week?