

Sermon Series: “The Gospel for Life”
“A Time for Priority”
Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.
Sunday, November 8, 2020

It is always important in life to set our priorities. It is important to do this because if we don't set our own priorities, life has a way of setting them for us—in other words, there are consequences that come when we don't set our priorities. E.g., when I was little I did not like to brush my teeth at night, it just wasn't my priority. So eventually I got my first cavity, and getting it filled became a priority forced on me by my parents. And it taught me to start making brushing my teeth a priority. As we get older we face similar situations. E.g., I recall in college I had a friend who did not like to study at all and really struggled his first two years and basically flunked out; he suddenly got the inspiration to get his life in order and started studying. I asked him about his studies and how long it would take him, and he said he was on the six-year plan. I asked what that was, and he said it was taking him six years to get through college! He did make getting his degree a priority, and eventually went on to get an MBA and got hired for a very good job. If we don't set our priorities, life has a way of setting them for us. Today we will see Jesus set a priority, but one we may not have expected.

READ John 12:1-8 (p. 106)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just resuscitated Lazarus from the dead, and people are starting to follow Him. The religious authorities get wind of this and decide Jesus is too popular and could get them in trouble with Romans, and they decide to kill Him. Passover is approaching, and they want people to tell them wherever He is.

READ vv 1-2. “Jesus was a man who enjoyed a good dinner party! Cf. Matthew 11:18-19.” Jesus loved being with people, and He enjoyed a good time. This is true so much so that He was even accused of being, in contrast to the ascetic John the Baptist, a glutton and drunkard who hung out with unsavory sinner types like tax collectors. Have you ever seen Christians like that, who just loved to hang out with others, whether believers or unbelievers? E.g., I know of someone who loves to go to gatherings with other people and enjoy events and meals together— even going on vacations with other couples and families. Jesus similarly loved people. But He seemed to love especially *these* people— Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Have you ever felt really at home with someone and had a meal together? E.g., I recall I feel that way with Elena, and I feel it with many of you after church grabbing something to eat, or a couple of pastors I get together with once a month and we have fellowship and relax. Jesus must have felt this way, which was in many ways the calm before the storm in His life, as we’ll see.

READ v 3. “Mary’s act of devotion could be seen as foolish by some, but was actually perfectly appropriate! Cf. Matthew 26:6-13/Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50.” She gave Jesus some very expensive perfume over Him. You may recall similar stories of this in the other gospels. This same account seems to be in Matthew 26 and Mark 14 where Jesus goes to a certain Simon the leper’s house in Bethany and a woman poured costly ointment on Jesus’ head. But this event is different from the one in Luke 7 where a Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus over and a prostitute cries over Jesus’ feet and wipes her tears with her hair and pouring ointment on His feet. These acts of devotion may seem over-the-top, but only for those who don’t understand our need for mercy. We do express emotion and

passion like that at sporting games. E.g., seeing people interviewed after Saints games with their costumes and face paint and emotion over the games, even crying for happiness and sadness. E.g., people's emotions this past week speaking about how great their candidate is, and even getting outside in cold weather to express their point of view. We are a people who inherently worship— it is in our DNA. E.g., I recall going to a church where people raised their hands in worship and expressed much emotion in their worship, and I admit feeling uncomfortable. But as I reflect on it, I see how very appropriate it is.

READ vv 4-8. "Judas' criticism shows he was a pragmatist at heart, but Jesus' response puts the situation in the correct perspective/priority. Cf. Deuteronomy 15:11." We need to watch being pragmatic followers of Jesus— in the sense of pragmatic as the world understands it. Follow Jesus, just don't go overboard; serve in the ministry, but don't have it take so much of your free time; be a prayer warrior, but keep the prayers short and unemotional; read your Bible, but spend more time reading books about the Bible and what people have to say about the Bible instead of spending time focused on God's Word. I like devotionals like *The Upper Room*, *Jesus Calling*, and Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*, but these are supplements, not replacements of, Scripture. E.g., I recall the ministry of the Doulos where once a week, from what I recall, they would spend an entire evening in prayer seeking the Lord. E.g., I read an online article from 2010 about South Korean students at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; these students decided to meet at 5:30 AM each weekday for prayer for an hour! E.g., I recall a woman who wrote a man asking whether it was ok to have her prayer time while she exercised, and he answered we should be willing to spend time with Jesus without other distractions. I believe it is best to do both— I pray when I run, and pray when I drive, and pray when I have time on my knees away from other things. It is interesting Jesus' response to giving to the needy from Judas— you will always have the needy and poor, but Me you will

not always have. This is similar to Deuteronomy 15:11, but we are commanded to keep our hands open to the poor; READ. Helping the poor and needy can be overwhelming, because we will always have them to some extent. What Jesus is emphasizing is priority in ministry. It is like a marriage. E.g., I have said it before and emphasize it— to have a good marriage, it not only means paying the bills well and raising the kids, but also having time for the priority which keeps the family going, one-on-one dates. E.g., C.S. Lewis once said in effect, we need to spend times feeding on the Word, not just ministering it. We need time with Jesus, one-on-one.

“When it comes to showing honor to the Lord, where are our priorities?” If we don’t keep our priorities in worshipping the Lord, there will be consequences, just like there were consequences when I decided not to brush my teeth when I was younger. The consequences for not spending time worshipping the Lord is a stale, frosty relationship with God— all pragmatism, whatever works practically, instead of a living, loving, sacrificial relationship with Jesus where we are trying to reach the world for Jesus’ Kingdom, not building our own Kingdom on earth. Before we do anything to prepare for this week, I encourage us to spend time with Jesus, in His Word and in Prayer.