

# Supper for Lazarus

*The Story Of Jesus*

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**Bible Text:** John 12:1-11; Matthew 26:6  
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So as I was preparing for the message this morning, it became abundantly clear that I would need a new Bible or to preach from a different Bible. The Bible I normally preach out of does not have maps. So I wanted to start with the maps today. Do you have a map section in your Bible? Possibly? Well, let's go to John 11 and 12 and let's find that map section.

So in my Bible the map that I'm wanting to look at is the map that shows the ministry of Jesus. So I don't know if you've got something close to that, but my map says the ministry of Jesus and we use that map just a little bit; it helps us have a visual on where Jesus is located and where he is going. So back to John, we just have two things to do, right? We're in John 11:54 and following. We'll just look at a couple of verses there real quick and then we can flip back to the map and I hope your map is similar to my map and that the information that we're looking for is contained in the map that you're looking at. Is that enough for an introduction? I guess it is. That's enough for me.

John 11:54 and following, "Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews." So this is a break in the ministry. He has been among the crowds. And as you well know from your study, that following the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, he is faced with much opposition, the religious leaders double down, they want to kill him, the chief priests primarily, and those chief priests were Sadducees, one of the leading religious groups, and the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. In fact, they did not believe in miracles. They really disregarded the word of God so it's not surprising that the chief priests, the Sadducees, and really the rest of the religious elite in that day felt threatened by Jesus. And so here we read that Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, so from this point on, the ministry of Jesus will be concentrated among his disciples, among his followers.

Let's read on, "but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples." So we all know that Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, lived in Bethany. Bethany is located about two miles from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the hotbed of religion, of Judaism, and that is the place where Jesus faced most of his opposition. So he is going to retreat, he is going to go to a city called Ephraim, and there he's gonna be with the disciples. At this point, we go to our

map because this is the last trek of Jesus to Jerusalem because within a week of where we are reading in John 11, Jesus will be crucified, he will be buried, and so all everything is culminating.

So let's look at the map. I'm looking at my ministry of Jesus map and what I want you to do is find the Dead Sea on your map, if it's there. We have no Plan B if it's not there other than to look at your neighbor and see if they're smiling because it is there and grab their Bible from them and use it for the time being. No, find the Dead Sea and then look Northwest of the Dead Sea and on my map, there's a place called Ephraim. That's where Jesus is. That's where we just read that he is. He went to Ephraim. He was further away from Jerusalem. He's having a ministry there in Ephraim. He has put some distance between himself and the opposition.

Now, I want you to look Southeast of Ephraim and you'll find the city Jericho. You see Jericho right there? So what I want to bring out is Matthew and Mark's gospel on what Jesus did in Jericho, because he is headed toward Jerusalem. He is going there to make that ultimate sacrifice of his life, shedding his blood for the sins of the world. There has never been an event that even comes close to what Jesus is about to do, what he is about to accomplish in Jerusalem. So these last steps of Jesus as he goes to Jericho from Ephraim and then on to Bethany, where we'll be today, reading about the supper that was held there for Jesus and Lazarus.

So Ephraim to Jericho and the Bible tells us we learn this from the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, there were two noteworthy events that took place in Jericho. The first one. I'd like to describe the first one with a song. "Well, brother Bill, I didn't know you sing." I don't. Don't be confused. Remember the little song? We used to sing it. "Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. And he climbed up in the sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see." The first thing happens when Jesus goes to Jericho is the crowds are, they're just massive crowds. Everybody wants to see Jesus. Everybody's heard about Jesus. You know, it's not unlike today when you hear about somebody famous, people want to see someone famous, someone of note. They'll do about anything to go line the street. They'll hold their baby up so the baby can see, like the baby would remember, right?

So Jesus is going into Jericho and there's these massive crowds and Zacchaeus really wants to see Jesus, but there's one problem. He's a wee little man. So he climbs up in the sycamore tree so he can get a view of Jesus because if there's anything that anyone's talking about, it's Jesus. They may not know him personally, they may not have any kind of real connection with him, but they want to see him. They've heard about his miracles. They've heard about his teaching. They want to see him. And this Zacchaeus is no different.

He climbs that tree and what did Jesus do? Well, he does, Jesus does with Zacchaeus what he does with all of us, he calls us out of our tree. Yeah. He calls us out of that place where we're comfortable and distant from him and he says come on down here because, what? He wants to fellowship with us. That's the whole point. Jesus wants a relationship

with you based on his sacrifice and the forgiveness that comes through that sacrifice. He wants a relationship with you. Christianity is not about do's and don'ts. It's not about some kind of a legalistic religiosity. It is about a relationship with Christ.

So Jesus calls Zacchaeus out of his tree. He says, "I'm going to fellowship with you today," and the story goes on. It's a beautiful story of how Jesus restores Zacchaeus. He does something on the way out of Jericho. You remember blind Bartimaeus, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Yep, Jesus is headed right out of Jericho and he is on his way to Jerusalem where he faces his fiercest opposition and Bartimaeus is just clamoring at the top of his lungs, "Have mercy on me!" Blind Bartimaeus, there he is and Jesus facing the test of his life and all that's going to go on that last week of his life, takes time out and heals blind Bartimaeus.

So we learn two things. These miracles, the miracle in the life of Zacchaeus and the miracle in the physical life, the sight, giving sight to Bartimaeus. Those things happen for a reason. Jesus is putting the exclamation mark on his ministry. He's saying, "I want fellowship with you based on the forgiveness of sin." Jesus opened his arms wide to Zacchaeus, this tax collector, this one that people, especially Jews, despised. Jesus welcomes him and then Jesus is saying, through the healing of blind Bartimaeus, "I am the One who will give spiritual sight to the blind." And that's what he does.

So he is on his way back to Jerusalem, and he's going to go to Bethany first. So right there, Ephraim to Jericho, Jericho to Bethany, and then Bethany two miles from Jerusalem. Now, we're back to our text. That's it for the maps today. I love maps, but we're done. We'll go to verse 55. We'll read the text all the way to 10 and 11, 11 verse 11. Remember, I'm using a different Bible and the Scripture verses are embedded in the text. They're not on the side like I'm used to. So there's, we'll read through 11. But let's look at this. There's important teaching here. Make no mistake about it. I've been living with this all week and this text will not let me go, and I trust it will never let you go or me go from it. You might say, "What is the Lord saying?" Well, here it is, verse 55. "Now the Passover of the Jews was near" So what did that mean? It meant that Jesus wasn't the only one going to Jerusalem. I mean, the crowds are going to Jerusalem. Back then they had no Motel 6. If that's not good enough for you, they had no Hilton Garden. People would camp outside. They would make that trek to Jerusalem. That's where the Feast of the Passover is held. They're there. There were no hotels. There were no accommodations like that. They would either have to stay with someone they knew or they'd have to camp out, what have you.

"The Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. So they were seeking for Jesus." Who's "they"? The crowds. "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?'" Put it in modern lingo, "There ain't no way He's coming to the feast. Jesus ain't coming to the feast, is He? There's no way He'd come back to Jerusalem where the people, the chief priests, the religious leaders want to kill Him. There's no way He'd show up on this occasion." "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." Hmm, that's interesting.

Verse 1, chapter 12,

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 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. 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 Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. 8 "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." 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. 10 But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

The word of the Lord.

*Father in heaven, we thank You for the public reading of the text, the Bible. We thank You for this word and we pray that You would teach us, that we would be at Your feet learning of You and that we would grow thereby. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen and amen.*

So we have three points. We have fans. We have fans of Jesus. We could call them fickle fans, but nevertheless, they're fans. The crowds. Point 2, is the foes of Jesus. Foes. We've already remarked on the foes just a little bit, but there they are popping up again at the end of this text there in verse 10, "But the chief priests," did you get that, "the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also." So they not only had it in for Jesus, they wanted to put Lazarus to death. That's how intent they are on erasing any evidence as if they could erase evidence of Jesus' work in Bethany. And then the last point would be his friends. Now, with that last point, we're going to look at the friends of Jesus and I'm going to throw this out there so your mind begins to work, there is a mystery friend. There's a mystery friend. Do you know who it is? There's a mystery friend. There's a friend of Jesus that is going to pop up out of the blue and we're gonna go, "That's the mystery friend." And do you know what it's gonna make you do? It's gonna make you smile. I can't help but smile just thinking about this mystery friend of Jesus.

Well, let's look first at the fans. We talked about it, all of these people. We don't fully appreciate the buzz that was going through all of these towns. Everybody had heard of Jesus. Everybody had heard of him. He was the talk of the town. I mean, you can't do the miracles that he did, you can't bring the teachings that he brought and not cause a stir. But that's exactly what he had done and now that the Passover is here, the people are wondering what's next. What's Jesus going to do next? But as we note that they are fans, we must think about this: they are, for the most part, uncommitted fans. They're curious about Jesus. Who wouldn't be? I hear of folks even living in our own day, you know, you can bring up church and they might yawn, but you bring up Jesus and they're ready to engage, they're ready to talk a little bit about what this man accomplished when he walked the earth. Let's, uh, let's say it this way: curiosity concerning Christ is no substitute for commitment to Christ. I hear people curious about it all the time. They'll even use his name. They'll throw his name around. They'll even know a little bit about him, but their life is disconnected, remains isolated from Christ.

Those are the first group that we note. It was true back then, it was true now. We've got an example. If you turn in your Bible over there to John 6:66, Jesus has quite a large following of people who were, it was basically a mixed multitude. There were people that believed in him, his disciples, and then there were others. Look at verse 66, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." What are they? Fickle fans. They're curious. "What's he going to do next? What's the miracle worker going to do next? Are we going to ruin another roof so they can let a paralytic down and Jesus can heal the paralytic? Is Jesus going to spit in the dirt and rub the dirt in the guy's eye and heal him of his blindness? What's he going to do next? Is he going to speak to a storm and calm it? What's he going to do next?" But they're just there for the thrill. They're not there because they're committed and the Bible tells us here, there were many, and they call them, John calls them disciples who withdrew and were not walking with him anymore, and that's not good. It's not good to refrain from walking with the one who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." If he's the way, you and I better be walking with him.

So there they withdrew. So those are the fans. I want to encourage you today to get beyond curiosity concerning Christ and commit your life to Jesus. Point number 1 out of the way. Is that okay? It's in the books, all right? Point number 2, we're going to go to really what, according to the text, would be the last point but I want to wind up with the friends. So remember, we have a mystery friend. Look at verses 9 and 10 there, "The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there." So there's a large crowd of them, they learned that he's there. Where is he? He is in Bethany. "And they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus." So you still have some of that fandom there. "We want to see Jesus, but we sure want to see Lazarus!" I mean, how many people do you know that died, were buried, were in the grave four days, and Jesus just comes up to the tomb, looks death in the eye, and says, "Lazarus, come forth," and he comes forth? How many people you know like that? Well, not many. "Well, let's go check this out. Let's see Jesus and let's see Lazarus. And if he did that for Lazarus, what's he going to do next?" There's that curiosity.

The chief priest, we know they'd already planned to put Jesus to death, the Bible says they're planning to put Lazarus to death as well. Can we acknowledge this this morning that Jesus has his foes? There are those who oppose Christ then and there and here and now. In this world, in this current existence that we enjoy, in this world, among the population are people who are against Christ. They are adamantly opposed to Jesus. We should recognize that. We should acknowledge that. Not everyone is going to be friendly to Jesus. Point number 2 is in the books. How's that feel? We're already two thirds... I can't say that. There's some friends we've got to discuss. Let's look at the friends and I trust today that you are among those friends of Jesus, that when you think of your life and your relationship with God, that you would consider yourself not just a curiosity seeker, and certainly not someone who opposes Christ and his work, but that you would consider yourself a friend. Let's see if we meet the criteria.

Look there in verse 1, and we'll read on down a little bit, because John mentions some friends of Jesus. "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." In fact, the title of the sermon could be a misnomer. I called it "Supper for Lazarus," really, it's Supper for Jesus and Lazarus. It's just a big supper. It's a supper. It's a celebratory supper for all that Christ has done.

Look here. So they made him a supper there and Martha was serving, friend number 1, Martha. Martha. You know, you go to Luke 10:38, and there's a very brief description of Mary and Martha and what do we see Martha doing in Luke 10:38? Well, we see her doing what she's doing here, we see Martha serving, but the only difference is the first time we see Martha serving, she's not only serving, she is, what? She's complaining. Remember that? She is, I mean, Martha's getting after it. She is serving the people and she says this, she makes a remark to Jesus, she says, basically, "Jesus, can you do something about my sister? Mary's killing us here. I'm doing all the work and Mary's over there sitting at your feet. Look at this." And Jesus does, what? He rebukes Martha. We see Martha serving here, but there is no hint that she is complaining. Amen.

So she's serving. Martha is a friend of Jesus and she is serving and in her service, she is demonstrating her friendship to Jesus. You ever thought about that? You ever thought about what a friend does? Martha is serving. So she is a friend. She is connected with Jesus and she's serving Jesus. And then we have another friend, friend number 2, Lazarus. Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with him. You know what's interesting here? Lazarus is this focal point, really Jesus is, but Lazarus is the one on whom the miracle of being raised from the dead, being brought back to life, he was the one who experienced that, we don't have one word in the Bible from Lazarus. We don't even have a, "Wow," or a, "What just happened here?" We have none of that. No words from Lazarus.

But we have him seated at the table. There he is. What happened at a table? Fellowship. Fellowship. Even more so than in our own culture, there's a lot of fellowship. There's a lot of eye contact there at the table. There's lots of, they're relaxing, they're relating, they're conversing, and there we have Lazarus and he is there reclining at the table and

notice those last two words, "with Him." Lazarus is a friend of Jesus and he is seated at the table with him. And make no mistake, Lazarus is a witness for Jesus. Even though he doesn't say anything, everybody knew what happened to him. We don't have any words of Lazarus in the text, but we know what happened to Lazarus and there are people there because of him.

And then we get to the third friend. Highly controversial. Mary. There she is again, Mary. Mary then, so all this is going on. Martha's serving, Lazarus is at the table. "Mary then took a pound," they tell me a pound back then was 12 ounces, "of very costly perfume," the word there is *muros*. Have you ever heard of a woman's name, Muriel, comes from this and it's sweet fragrance. It's a perfume. And this Mary did the unthinkable, she "took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard." So this was not a knockoff perfume. This was not a substitute perfume. This is not a cheaper perfume that's in a fancy box or bottle. This is the real deal. Pure nard. You could only find this stuff, how they described it, it's an aromatic herb grown in the high pasture land of the Himalayas somewhere between India and Tibet. So it was not native to their region, to their world. This is rare stuff. You're not going to find it at every bazaar, on every street corner, and the Bible says that Mary had the audacity to take "this very costly perfume of pure nard and anoint the feet of Jesus," and the Bible says she did another unthinkable thing, she let down her hair in public. Now if there's one thing that a woman doesn't do in that culture is let down your hair in public, but there's so much perfume that she is letting down her hair so she can dry the feet of Jesus. There it is. The Bible says that she "wiped His feet with her hair and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." The fragrance floated throughout the house so the effect of the event goes beyond what just happened. They could smell it and when they smelled it, they were reminded of what Mary did. They just saw her do it with their own eyes.

And that smell is in the house. And there's Martha's servant. And there's Lazarus seated there in verse 4. But Judas Iscariot, okay, all right. We have the first words of Judas Iscariot in the Bible, right here. Judas is going to chime in here, he is going to have something to say, and this is what he says. The Bible says, John gives us some information, "But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said." So according to our physical eyes, had we been there, we would have said Judas is a friend of Jesus. I mean, he's one of the apostles. He's one of the disciples there. He's right there with them and your eyes would say Judas is a friend. But we find out something very different about Judas.

Judas said in verse 5, he asked this question, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii," so this is the perfume in cost was equal to about a year's wage for a working man, okay? A year's wage. That's a lot, right, for pure nard perfume, and Judas, he just pipes up and asks, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" And again, as they hear Judas, they're thinking, everyone's thinking, he's one of the group. He's not distinguished himself yet as one who is not of the group.

"Now he said this," John is good to supply us with some info. "Now he said this," and John's gonna tell us why, "not because he was concerned about the poor," he wasn't, "but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer," or bear away, "what was put into it. Therefore, Jesus said," so silence, right? I mean, Mary does this, and it's obvious to all, there's fragrance floating in the room, and what's going to happen next? Judas asked this question. Why? I mean, this is a, he's basically, this is not good stewardship of God's money. I wonder what Jesus is going to say. You could have heard a pin drop in the room, right? You know what I'm glad about? I'm glad Jesus set the record straight, aren't you? I'm glad we don't have to wonder what Jesus thought about it. Jesus tells it very plainly what he thought about it.

"Therefore Jesus said," this is verse 7, "Let her alone." He shields her. Stop the talk, stop the fuss, let her alone, let her be. Hmm, I wonder where he's going with this. He tells us, "so that," there it is, "so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." Jesus shields her. Jesus approves of this lavish act of worship done to him. It's so beautiful because this is evidence of Mary's friendship with Jesus. It is a lavish gift. It is a demonstrable act. It is a bold, spontaneous act of worship on Mary's part and Jesus comes to the rescue and says, what? He says "that she may keep it for the day of My burial."

Now, we're gonna go to one or two other passages. There are two, one in Matthew 26, verse 6, and then there's one in Mark 14, and we're gonna find the mystery friend in those passages and we're gonna find out more about why Jesus would defend Mary's act. So let's go to Matthew 26:6. Matthew even puts Jesus in Bethany but where are they in Bethany? Are they at Mary, Martha and Lazarus' house? Nope, they're not. The Bible says this, this is Matthew 26:6, "Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper." Now, I don't know about you, but that makes me chuckle because Simon the leper wouldn't be hosting a dinner party if he still had leprosy, and you would think that he only had the title Simon the leper, that he was only known as Simon the leper because he at one time had leprosy, that he was afflicted with leprosy.

So the conclusion is that Simon is able to host this dinner party for Lazarus and for Jesus because Jesus Christ did something spectacular in the life of Simon. He cured him of his leprosy. But here's the other funny part. I have a quirky sense of humor sometimes, but even after being healed of leprosy and hosting a dinner party, he's still known as Simon the leper. That's something you really want to put behind you. If you ever got to the point where you were healed of it or beyond it or whatever, you would want that not remembered. But he's still Simon the leper. That's him.

The mystery friend is Simon the leper. What's he doing? He's hosting the dinner party. Do you remember what we read? The chief priests want to seize Jesus and they said, what? "If you hear about His whereabouts, report it to us." And I'm just here to say that friend number 1, who's Martha serving, friend number 2, who is Lazarus seated there in fellowship around the table, friend number 3, Mary, and friend number 4, Simon the leper, chose rather their friendship with Christ rather than to report Christ to the opposition. I just give them a big hand. I love that. They are so faithful. They love Jesus.



They're throwing this party because of all that Christ has done for them. It is to honor Jesus. It is to lift him up and they don't care who's against them. They don't care who could report them. They're going to host the dinner party. They're going to honor Christ. And may that attitude be in all the hearts and minds of those who love Jesus and consider themselves to be his friend.

You ever heard of Wordsworth? He's a poet and there's part of his sonnet written in the King's College Chapel in Cambridge, England. I'll see if I can recite it. It's got some old English in it. He says, "Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore of those who calculate less or more." You know what we love about Mary? She didn't, "Will this be too much? Will this not be enough?" No, she took that perfume bottle, it was an alabaster jars so that was made of fine gypsum, and she broke the neck of that and dumped it all on Jesus. And the word today for all your friends is that Jesus wants all. In this whole miserly calculating, "Oh, this is how much I'll give. This is how much I'll keep. This is this." I wonder where that came from because it didn't come from God. I mean, I can give you examples. When you came in, anybody thinking about a shortage of air today? No, you can take a deep breath. You can take a bunch of them. And there's plenty of air. Why? Because God's merciful to us and God has plenty of air for us all to breathe. Anybody ever run out of flowers? I'm not talking about wintertime. I'm talking about summertime. No, he gives us plenty of flowers to enjoy. Plenty of blue sky or rainy skies or cloudy skies to enjoy. Our God has lavished the blessings of creation on you and I yet what do we do? We want to calculate. We want to parse it out and God says through this, "I want it all. I want all your service. I want all your life. I want all your heart. I want everything you've got to give and you'll be blessed for it." That's our God.

Let me ask you this, did God do that when he gave his Son? Did God just give us a little? Just maybe barely enough to be saved? Or is there an ocean of forgiveness in God that comes through his Son for you and I just to jump in and enjoy? Now you know the answer to that. There is so much mercy in God, there's so much grace in God. We don't have to fight for grace. We don't have to fight for mercy. We don't have to worry that it's going to run out, that there's a cap on God's grace, on his provision. No. God doesn't deal with us that way. God lavishes gifts of creation and salvation in our lives and what do we think? We are so audacious to calculate in our little minds how much we're going to parse out to God and what we think he might be happy with when he says, "I want all of you," and me. And I trust that word never leaves you and that it will draw you and I into a closer friendship with God. I'm reminded of the song we sing. We sing it.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That would be an offering far too small.  
Love so amazing and so divine,  
Demands my life, my soul, my all."

That is a relationship that God wants for you and me.

*Father in heaven, thank You for the day. Thank You for Your word. Thank You for these four examples of Your friends: Simon the leper, Mary, Lazarus, and Martha. Thank You*

*for their testimony of You. And I pray, Lord, that we would be in that circle of friends with them, honoring You through service, through testimony, through worship, and through hospitality. So we give You praise and thanks in Jesus' name. Amen and amen.*