

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters
Sermon Series - Focus On What Drives Us
Sermon Title - Focus On Purpose
Sermon Text - John 12:1-36
Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

“Who could imagine so great a mercy, What heart could fathom such boundless grace? The God of ages stepped down from glory to wear my sin and bear my shame. The Cross has spoken! I am forgiven! The King of Kings calls me His own! Beautiful Savior, I’m Yours forever, Jesus Christ my living hope!”

Those lyrics showcase the very reason our church purpose is to see The One who Gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed! We will focus on that today! Let’s pray!

Welcome to 2023! A New Year to Focus on what Matters! That’s our theme for 2023! With that in mind we are going to begin our year by focusing on what drives our church. And what drives our church? I pray that it is our purpose, our mission, our vision, our processes, our motivation, and our core values. Because we are not an institution but a spiritual organism, called the Body of Christ we will be taking our cues from the head of the Body of Christ which is of course Jesus Christ! Your staff and leadership team for this coming year will have the awesome responsibility to help lead our church to look at our present and our future needs! Not just in budgets and buildings, but in ministry leadership as we continue to seek to be the Church God wants us to be in 2023 and beyond! So with that in mind, today we’re going to focus on Purpose! I want to reiterate that our Purpose is why we do what we do, our Mission is what we do, and our Vision is what we hope to accomplish through what we do! Our Process is how we do what we do, and our Motivation is the passion that propels us forward! With all of these things in mind, today we will focus on Purpose!

Northshore Church’s Purpose is to see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed!

Our purpose should be, and I pray, will always be, the reason behind everything we do! Why is purpose so important and what does it mean to have purpose anyway? Good question! According to The Oxford Dictionary the meaning of purpose is...

“the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists.”

You see, the very reason Northshore Church was started, the reason we do what we do, our very reason for existence is our purpose...

“to see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed!”

There are certainly two parts to our purpose! Exalting Jesus and transforming lives! Today we will focus primarily on the first of these two, exalting Jesus, but towards the end of the message you will be given clear examples of how when we exalt Jesus, lives will be transformed!!

So what does it mean “to see the One who gave His life for us exalted?”

According to the Oxford Dictionary to exalt means to...

“hold (someone or something) in very high regard; think or speak very highly of.”

“raise to a higher rank or a position of greater power” “make noble in character; dignify.”

So how do we exalt Jesus? To answer this question we will go to the Scriptures. John chapter 12 where we will discover that...

We exalt Jesus by Serving Him Faithfully

We exalt Jesus by Fellowshiping with Him Intentionally

We exalt Jesus by Loving Him Extravagantly

We exalt Jesus by Worshiping Him Joyfully

We exalt Jesus by Remembering Him Gratefully

It was not long before Jesus would be arrested and condemned to die. He had returned to Bethany to visit Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus. Scripture says...

John 12:1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

John 12:2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

John 12:3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

So a dinner is given in Jesus' honor and at this dinner Jesus was exalted in several ways and from this story we learn that...

We exalt Jesus by Serving Him Faithfully

John 12:2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served...

Martha was being Martha and serving faithfully! She had a servant's heart! It simply says “Martha served.” Books have been written about Martha's servant spirit! When we faithfully serve Jesus we are exalting Him by showing that our priorities revolve around Him! Paul reminds us of this important principle for followers of Christ...

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,

Colossians 3:24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

To do this would not be a bad New Years Resolution! Bob Dylan wrote a song called, Serve Somebody. In that song he is saying that everybody serves somebody or something, the question is, who or what do you serve with your life? The answer certainly has an impact on your purpose in life. Joshua told the children of Israel this...

Joshua 24:15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

Who or what do you serve? If you consider yourself a Christian, then you should ask yourself this question, "Am I exalting Jesus by serving Him? I think Martha was serving Jesus with such passion partly because she was so thankful for what Jesus had done when He raised her brother Lazarus from the dead! Let me ask you a question: Are you thankful for the resurrected life Jesus gave you when you accepted Jesus as your Savior? Are you thankful for the things He saved you from? Does your service to God bear that out?

However, in our text we see that there are also other ways to exalt Jesus!

We exalt Jesus by Fellowshiping with Him Intentionally

John 12:2 ...Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Sometimes Jesus just wants us to fellowship with Him! While I know Jesus appreciated Martha's faithful service, I also know Jesus was enjoying just hanging out with Lazarus. Can you imagine the conversation between Jesus and Lazarus? Lazarus was grateful to have more time with his family, but he may have leaned over and whispered in Jesus' ear, "I was reluctant to leave heaven and come back here. I mean, well you know what I mean, you've been there. It's awesome!!!" Sometimes we just need to take time to fellowship with Jesus. Just talk with Him as a friend. It's okay to have a prayer list, and an intentional set of things to pray about, but I think sometimes Jesus desires some intentional fellowship! Hangout time, you might say! Time to talk about your dreams and goals, your disappointments and setbacks. Your struggles and your victories! Your likes and dislikes! Your fears and questions. Jesus wants to fellowship with you. And remember that prayer is talking to God and reading His Word is God talking to you. And sometimes The Holy Spirit will remind you of God's Word even if you aren't holding your Bible in your hands. Some of my best fellowship with Jesus has been while I'm driving. And when we fellowship with Jesus, it exalts Him because it thrills His heart to spend time with you! In just a moment we're going to look at something Mary did on this occasion, but before we do, I want to say something about Mary's fellowship with Jesus found in Luke's Gospel. Luke says...

Luke 10:38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

Luke 10:39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

Luke 10:40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Luke 10:41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things,

Luke 10:42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

While serving the Lord is such an important and wonderful way to exalt Jesus, sometimes we can get so busy serving the Lord that we forget to spend time with the Lord! Malcolm Tolbert stated this...

"The scene is easily visualized. Jesus is the rabbi surrounded by his disciples. Mary was also there sitting at the Lord's feet. To sit at a person's feet was the idiom equivalent to our expression "to study under someone" (cf. Acts 22:3). So Mary is pictured as a student, in itself a revolutionary innovation, for rabbis did not teach women. Martha's sense of responsibility as a hostess will not allow her to follow Mary's example.

Malcolm O. Tolbert, "Luke," in Luke—John, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1970), 95.

Could it be that Mary understood this principle taught by Jesus?

Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

What happens next in our text shows us that...

We exalt Jesus by Loving Him Extravagantly

John 12:3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

There's so much in this act of love and so much more than meets the eye! You know that Mary was thrilled with the fact that Jesus had resurrected her brother Lazarus! The most expensive gift she could offer Jesus was not enough to show her gratitude! But as I said there's more than meets the eye! First of all, it was customary for a person's head to be anointed, not their feet! It was customary to wash someone's feet, but anointing their feet with expensive oil, while not unheard of, as we'll see, was not the norm! Bible scholar William E. Hull says this...

“The lavishness of her act was obvious both from the costliness of the perfume and from its use in such quantity that it was necessary to wipe the surplus off his feet with her hair.

The shocking originality of Mary’s method is immediately apparent from a comparison with the two anointings described in the Synoptic Gospels. In Mark 14:3 an unnamed woman poured this same pure nard on Jesus’ head, which was the customary way to anoint a king (e.g., 1 Sam. 10:1), but did not use her hair. Again, in Luke 7:38 a sinful woman used her hair to wipe away tears that had fallen on Jesus’ feet so that she could anoint them with ointment, an understandable procedure for one so disreputable. But it was unthinkable for a Jewish woman of Mary’s reputation to anoint someone by applying pure nard to the humblest part of his body, his unshod feet (cf. Luke 10:39), and then wipe off the perfume with the most “glorious” part of her body, her unbound hair (cf. 1 Cor. 11:15).

William E. Hull, “John,” in Luke—John, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1970), 318.

Powerful perspective on exalting Jesus!! As I was studying this God put something on my heart and led me to a passage in the Old Testament. I was astonished when I saw the connection. When asking the question, why would someone anoint Jesus’ feet, this passage may give us the answer! Isaiah 52:7-10...

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

Isaiah 52:8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.

Isaiah 52:9 Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

Isaiah 52:10 The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

As I read those verses I was like, that’s it! How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, Jesus brought good news! Jesus proclaimed peace, brought good tidings, proclaimed salvation, and showed the world that God does indeed reign! He brought comfort to His people and through Him salvation is offered to people to all ends of the earth!! That’s why Mary anointed His feet! Can you see why the exaltation of Jesus is so important?

And let’s not forget that loving Jesus extravagantly is many times accomplished by loving others...

Matthew 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Matthew 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

Matthew 25:36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Matthew 25:37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?"

Matthew 25:38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?"

Matthew 25:39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

Matthew 25:40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

In other words, Jesus takes it personally when we help those who find themselves in times of great need! Of course, we need to use wisdom so when we help people we are truly giving them the help they need and not enabling them to continue living destructive lifestyles, if that is what is going on. But we can find ways to help them without being judgemental. And we must remember that except for the grace of God we could be in the same situation. And I'm constantly reminded that without Jesus and His mercy and grace, I would be in the same situation! I'm but a sinner saved by the undeserved grace of Jesus, so I want to exalt Him with the way I love Him and with the way I love those He loves, and that would be everyone. We all know Jesus even loved His enemies! And we also need to be careful to be mindful of our motives. After Mary anointed Jesus with the oil, this happened...

John 12:4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected,

John 12:5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."

John 12:6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

John 12:7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.

John 12:8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Jesus wasn't saying not to care for the poor, but was simply saying to the disciples that they had a rare opportunity to show their love directly to Him while He was still alive and in the flesh on this earth. He was also calling out Judas and his insincere statement about helping the poor. For extravagant love to exalt Jesus it must be from the heart, real and genuine, not fake, false, or feigned! And the genuineness of our love is so important because the world is watching us! In fact in our text we read this...

John 12:9 Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

The world is looking, watching and waiting to see if this Jesus is real. Are we showing them Jesus by exalting Him in our daily lives and are we exalting Jesus as a church? If we are, then we can expect Satan to fight us and to try and stop us. Listen to what happened next...

John 12:10 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well,
John 12:11 for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

And this takes us to another way we accomplish our purpose as individuals and as a church.

We exalt Jesus by Worshiping Him Joyfully

John 12:12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

John 12:13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!"

John 12:14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

John 12:15 "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

Let me just say this, Jesus was riding on a lowly donkey when He entered Jerusalem and fulfilled the ancient prophecy, but someday, when He returns to fulfill another prophecy He will be riding on a white horse! But here's something to think about: Jesus humbled Himself in every way imaginable in order to be our Savior! That very fact should cause us to want to lift Him up in worship, not just on Sundays but every single day of the week. The disciples had a hard time understanding Jesus' humility. In fact it seemed that almost everyone, including the religious leaders who should have understood because of the prophecies they had studied and even memorized. In fact, our text bears this out...

John 12:16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

John 12:17 Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word.

John 12:18 Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him.

John 12:19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

What had they missed? Listen to the Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah found in Isaiah...

Isaiah 53:11 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

It's so sad they missed it! Let's not be guilty of missing it! We should live lives of gratitude that bring Him glory and worship! I love the way the Psalmist put it...

Psalm 100:title A psalm. For giving grateful praise.

Psalm 100:1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

Psalm 100:2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Psalm 100:3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

Psalm 100:5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

This leads us to our final point...

We exalt Jesus by Remembering His Sacrifice Gratefully

We're going to be remembering our Lord's Sacrifice on the Old Rugged Cross in just a few minutes. Jesus is exalted when we remember how He was lifted high upon the Cross to bear our sins, our shame, our debt! Listen to the words of Jesus in our text about the sacrifice He was going to make on our behalf...

John 12:20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.

John 12:21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."

John 12:22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

John 12:23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

John 12:24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

John 12:25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

John 12:26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

John 12:27 "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

John 12:28 Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

John 12:29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

John 12:30 Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine.

John 12:31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

John 12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

John 12:33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Jesus was going to be lifted up on an old rugged cross! And when He was, His words about drawing people to Himself were fulfilled! Remember the thief on the cross who asked Jesus to remember him when He entered His kingdom and Jesus said today you will be with me in paradise! Remember the confession of the centurion soldier who had been in charge of nailing Jesus to the cross?

Luke 23:47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

And it wasn't just the centurion...

Matthew 27:54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

And don't forget that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the ruling Jewish council asked Pilate for the body of Jesus and donated the tomb. And according to John 19:29 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, another Jewish leader. And later, others would come to faith in Jesus. And how does this continue to be fulfilled even to this very day? When we exalt Jesus in our church and in our lives people see a picture of Jesus and it leads to life transformation because they are drawn to what they see in our lives and that would be Jesus! Remember, we are the church, the Body of Christ! The church is not the building, as the old children's rhyme says... "it's not the steeple, it's the people!" Which is a good thing since we don't have a steeple! When we exalt Jesus in our lives, individually and corporately, people see the difference, the change, the hope, the joy, the peace, the truth, and the love. Of course, we can say we are different, and that we love God and have all these things in our lives, but as the old saying goes,

"The proof is in the pudding!"

And what is the proof to the world that we truly love God and are not just flapping our lips? Jesus tells us...

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

People read us like a book and the chapters that contain the way we treat one another are critical to our ability to exalt Jesus in a way that truly honors Him! So if we focus on our purpose...

to see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed

Then people will be able to see His love, His forgiveness, His Mercy, His offer of eternal life, His promise to never leave us! And as we exalt Jesus we will experience His power over sin, His power over death and the grave, His power over hate, His peace, His provision, His peace and so much more! When this happens, people will be transformed! As our team comes to lead us, if you have children who have been baptized and you would like to go get them from shore kids so they can participate, please do so now and after I pray, please make your way to a table and get the bread and juice. Then return to your seats and I'll lead us in remembering our Lord's sacrifice. Let's pray!

Mark 14:22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

Mark 14:23 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

Mark 14:24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

Mark 14:25 "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."