



## LIFE GROUP SERMON NOTES

### “Reach Up”

Ps James Lowe – April 13, 2014

#### WARM-UP (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. *No right or wrong answers.*

- What is the one thing that excites you the most?
- When you need help, who is the first person you go to?
- What's the most expensive gift you have ever received?

#### WORD (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at [bethelbrentwood.org/media](http://bethelbrentwood.org/media).



(God's hand is depicted on the right reaching out to Adam.)

Michaelangelo's famous painting in the Sistine Chapel depicting God and Adam conveys God's heart for humanity and Adam's consequent responsibility to reach up to God. Every day is a gift from God that we do not deserve, especially in light of our sin and guilt before him. We should begin every day with thanksgiving, praise, and adoration for God. God is worthy. If we have never been exuberant in our praise of God, it may be because we lack a depth of revelation for how great and good God is, has been, and will be to us. When we reach up to God, he responds to us with his presence.

*Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the*

*perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." (John 12:1-8 ESV)*

What is our motive for reaching up to God? **Mary** had a good motive. She was sitting at the feet of Jesus. Symbolically, it involves looking up to Jesus. It fits the image and spiritually meaningful metaphor of reaching up to Jesus. It is surprising that it is Mary and not Lazarus who is sitting at Jesus' feet. Lazarus had just been raised from the dead. Mary was especially thankful and wanted to be with him. She expressed her devotion with an extravagant expression of worship. Mary was most likely filled with love and adoration for all that Jesus had done for her and her family through the past several years.

But **Judas** had a different heart. He looked like he too was a genuinely devoted follower of Jesus. He protested her extravagant gift for presumably good reason. But his motives were actually selfish and evil. There are religious people involved in the life of the church who also are involved for the wrong reasons. Love and devotion for Jesus is the right motive; thankfulness and adoration are appropriate, even when they are extravagant. But Judas possessed none of these qualities. He had his own agenda based on his own values.

*The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"*

*The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. (John 12:12-13, 17-18 ESV)*

**The people** who later cried out, "Hosanna," as Jesus entered Jerusalem (John 12:12-19), also praised Jesus, but their understanding and motivation were misguided. As the Gospels reveal, their support of Jesus collapsed in the face of severe persecution and injustice in Jesus' hour of trial. They were excited about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, but from what we know they were looking for a Messiah who would come to overthrow their oppressors in violent measure and in short order. Although Jesus will deal with all oppression at his second coming, he did not come with violence at his first coming. He came to suffer for ours sins and make reconciliation with God possible. There were those in the crowd who apparently turned against him only a few days later when a crowd called for his crucifixion. Their example underscores the importance of examining our motives in reaching up to Jesus. They were praising him for what they mistakenly hoped to get, not what they had already received from Jesus. Are we serving and praising him for the right reasons?

### **PERSONAL APPLICATION (10-15 minutes)**

**Choose an item below to discuss, or introduce another related topic for discussion.**

- Can you recall the first time you reached up to God? What compelled you to do so ? If not, do you want to reach up now?
- The Bible says that the heart is deceitful, which therefore includes its motives. What practical actions do you take to check up your own motives?
- How do you express your gratitude for what God has done for you?

### **PRAYER (10-15 minutes)**

**Pray for any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.**

- That God would increase our revelation of what he has done, is doing, and has promised to do for us.
- That God would purify the motives of our hearts for serving and praising him.
- That God show each of us someone that we could reach out to in order to help them learn to reach up to God.