

“Carpe Occasio” John 12:1-8

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Made For*

1. This is a screwdriver. But it's not just your run of the mill slotted, flat-head screwdriver – It's a Torx-head screwdriver.
2. It fits special screws found in newer model cars. The end looks like a star.
3. A regular screwdriver won't work on a Torx screw.
4. And a Torx-head screwdriver is useless for most screws.
5. Now, I **could** use this screwdriver for lots of other things.
 - a. I could use it as a **pry bar**. Or a **chisel**.
 - b. I could **scrape paint** with it. Or remove **staples**.
 - c. I could use it as a **punch**. To **pull weeds**.
 - d. I could use it after dinner at Wood Ranch as a **toothpick**.
 - e. Or to clean my **ears**. It would serve as a **doorstop**. Hammer **tacks**.
6. The problem is, if I used it for all these other things, I'd either damage the screwdriver, or the screwdriver would damage them.
7. Because **none** of these things are what the screwdriver were **designed** for.
8. It was created for a single purpose – to drive Torx-head screws.

9. You & I were created for a specific purpose. God designed us to know & enjoy Him.
10. Now, we can occupy ourselves in all kinds of other pursuits.
 - a. We can make the accumulation of wealth or power our chief aim.
 - b. We can define life through sex or fame.
 - c. We could make pleasure & thrills the highest good.
11. But because we weren't created **for** any of that, the pursuit of those things will only result in harm, both to ourselves & to those we use in their pursuit.

B. *Created For*

1. Boiling down Scripture to its essence, for generations theologians have said that the chief end of man is to Know God & to Enjoy Him forever.
 2. For years I agree with the first part, “the chief end of man is to Know God.” But I found the second part - “to Enjoy Him forever” - a harder to accept.
 3. It sounded **selfish**; too “me-centered” to be right.
 4. But the more I've grown in my knowledge of God, the more I've come to see the **truth** of it.
 5. You see, God doesn't just want us to know Him as a subject we study in school.
 - a. He wants us to know Him **personally, experientially**.
 - b. He wants us to **enjoy** Him, not just **study** Him as we would a distant star through a telescope.
 6. Irenaeus was one of the great theologians of the early Church. He said that “The glory of God is man fully alive.”
 - a. He meant that God **delights** when people realize they were created to know Him & orient their lives toward that end.
 - b. God's whole posture toward us is to **reveal** Himself, not hide.
 - c. Our response ought to be to seek after Him.
 - d. Mat. 7:7 promises that He will be found by those who seek Him.
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7. John tells us a great story about a lady who wonderfully illustrates this --

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

1 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.

1. The previous chapter tells the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.
2. Lazarus & his 2 sisters, Martha & Mary lived in the village of Bethany a short distance along the road East of Jerusalem.
3. The family was well-known & the news of Lazarus' death had spread far.
4. But Jesus came 4 days later & raised him from the dead while some of the Jewish leaders watched.
5. *They* came to faith in Christ, but the leaders who'd not been there only became more determined to *kill* Him.
6. Knowing their rejection of Him was final & that they were plotting to assassinate Him, Jesus took the disciples to a quiet rural area north of Jerusalem.
7. Then, a week before Passover, He once again went *back* to Bethany.
 - a. This is where Jesus usually stayed when visiting Jerusalem.
 - b. Being just short of 2 miles from the City, it was an easy walk for those who regularly traveled by foot.

B. V. 2

2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

1. This was a feast held in Jesus' honor.
2. The uproar following Lazarus' rising from the dead hadn't allowed for a celebration dinner, so now that Jesus is back, Martha decided to throw Jesus a party for the great gift He'd bestowed on her family.
3. John says that Martha served, which is precisely what we'd expect since this was Martha's way of showing her love of the Lord.
4. Lazarus was seated at the table, enjoying conversation with Jesus.
5. *Where's Mary?*

C. V. 3

3 Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

1. Follow Mary's story & you'll always find her at Jesus' feet.
 - a. When Jesus visited their home a couple years before, Mary sat at His feet as He taught.
 - b. When she ran to meet Him after her brother's death, she threw herself at His feet.
 - c. And now as He sits at supper, she kneels there once more.
 2. This time she's carrying a *pound* of expensive perfume.
 3. Spikenard was the Chanel No. 5 of the day. It was the *standard* by which all
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- other perfumes were weighed.
4. Spikenard was expensive because it was grown in only one place; India at the Himalayan foothills.
 - a. Its oil was drawn from the spikes that grow from its roots.
 - b. Once purified, the oil was poured into specially flasks carved from semiprecious stone. [alabaster]
 5. Chanel No. 5 is about \$300 an ounce.
 - a. The world's most expensive perfume is Clive Christian #1; at over \$2000 an ounce.
 - b. Mary brought a **pound** of spikenard; the Greek word referred to about 12 ounces.
 - c. So when John said it was very costly, he wasn't kidding!
 - d. In v. 5, we learn that it could have been sold for 300 denarii; that was equal to a full year's wages.
 - e. We'll see later where Mary got such a treasure.
 6. Spikenard was used in the homes of **the wealthy** to place a single drop on the head of a guest.
 - a. In a time when baths were rare & sewage was thrown onto the streets, personal hygiene & scent weren't always that great.
 - b. So, when you entered someone's home, the first thing you did was take off your sandals & wash your feet.
 - c. Then, a few steps into the house, you were greeted by the host who would embrace you, plant a kiss on your cheek, & anoint you with scented oil as a way to **refresh** you.
 - d. Most hosts used an inexpensive perfumed oil for this anointing; like spraying them with a shot of Glade air freshener.
 - e. Only the wealthy could **afford** spikenard.
 7. There are several hints in Scripture that Lazarus' family was fairly well to do – but this **proves** it. Mary had **a pound of spikenard**.
 8. But she doesn't place just a single drop on Jesus' head.
 9. She kneels at His feet & pours the entire flask on them.
 10. The table Jesus & the others were sitting at was low, about a foot off the ground.
 - a. They didn't sit on chairs, but reclined on pillows, on their left sides, with their left hands under the table, leaving their right free to eat with.
 - b. Their heads were toward the table, their feet stretched out behind them.
 11. Mary came in as the meal was being served, knelt behind Jesus, opened her flask, poured it onto His feet, then reached up, undid the scarf that held her hair in place, lowered her locks, & used them as the towel to wipe off the excess oil.
 12. At this time, women kept their hair **covered** in public because it was considered improper to reveal it.
 - a. The only time a woman uncovered & let down her hair was in private with her husband.
 - b. A woman's hair was one of the most important elements of her beauty, one she shared **only** with her man.
 - c. So what Mary did was against custom.

- d. She wasn't doing anything immodest because there was no nakedness involved – but what she did was **highly provocative**.
13. Here's why: That pound of spikenard was more than likely the **dowry** her parents had given her before they passed away.
- It was what she would give to her husband as part of the marriage arrangements.
 - It wasn't only a **monetary treasure**, it ensured she'd be able to secure a quality husband.
 - That she's **not married** & still has her dowry means that Mary was probably no more than 15, at the most 16 or 17 years old.
 - But by pouring the oil on Jesus' feet, she's **virtually ensuring** she'll be remaining single.
 - She wants to make that crystal clear to all who are watching – so she lets down her hair & wipes Jesus' feet.
 - She takes both her earthly wealth, and her personal glory, her hair, and spends them entirely on Jesus.
14. You see, better than any other, Mary understood what was coming.
- She'd been listening carefully to Jesus.
 - She'd heard Him speak of the lateness of the hour & how He would soon be leaving.
 - While the disciples had spun Jesus' words about dying to mean something else, she took them at face value.
 - And because she interpreted His words **literally**, she alone realized the moment for what it was.
 - She knew about the rulers' plot to kill Him & knew Jesus knew about it too.
 - So His return to Bethany could mean only one thing: Jesus was headed for His final showdown with His enemies.
 - She didn't know how many more opportunities she'd have to show Him just how much she loved Him.
 - So she **seized this moment** to do what **had to be done**.
 - By this act of worship & service, she was saying that He was the only One for her. No other man would ever have her heart.
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15. John says the house was filled with the sweet scent of Mary's devotion.
- Prior to this, the house had been filled with the smells of Martha's cooking,
 - The wholesome aroma of **food** that made people **hungry**.
 - But the scent of the spikenard stimulated a **deeper longing**.
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16. When we gather here at Calvary to study the Bible, we sit down to a solid spiritual meal.
- And as we eat, the aroma of truth makes the lost hungry.
 - It makes them hungry for a different **life** they see presented in God's Word.
 - As we go out to **live** what we're learning, people catch the scent of God's truth & realize their hunger.
 - But **worship** imparts a **different scent**.
 - When we **pour ourselves** out to God in unashamed adoration that maybe

- even skirts the line of what's acceptable –
- 2) That fills the place with a sweetness that speaks of *romance*, and a different kind of hunger is stirred in the lost – A yearning for *love*.
- c. Catch the difference !
- 1) Learning & Living God's Word makes the lost long for LIFE.
 - 2) Worshiping God makes them long for LOVE.
17. You can tell true worshippers by the sweetness that emanates from them.
- a. Mary couldn't help but get perfume on her hands & hair.
 - b. The worship we offer God *marks* us.

D. Vs. 4-6

4 But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, **5** "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" **6** This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

1. Judas was the treasurer for the disciples; he kept the purse.
 2. And here we learn that he'd been embezzling.
 3. Judas only followed Jesus for what he could get out of it.
 4. Here he criticizes Mary's act of devotion as being wasteful.
 - a. He doesn't see what she does as worship but as frivolous fanaticism.
 - b. As the oil pours, he seems money going down the drain.
 5. There will always be those among us who reduce faith to religion; who condense devotion to numbers.
 - a. They're *blind* to the reality that Christianity is about an intimate relationship → first with God, the with one another.
 - b. Faith isn't about having correct doctrines or lines of theologically correct code.
 - c. Faith is *trust* in a *Person* named Jesus.
 6. Mary got it. Judas didn't. She was *in tune* with Jesus. He was tied to self.
 - a. For her, fidelity to the Lord was love expressed in selfless worship.
 - b. For him, the bottom line was bucks – how much is in the coffer?
 - c. For Mary, it was about how *close* she could be to Jesus.
 - d. Judas wanted to channel her devotion into something HE could benefit from.
 - e. Jesus wasn't the object of Judas' devotion or worship.
 - f. He was Judas' paycheck – but no more than that.
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7. There will always be "Judases" in the church, people who just don't get it.
 - a. People who *use* the Faith of others as a means to set *themselves* up.
 - b. They might be pastors, elders, worship leaders, teachers, singles, or business-people.
 - c. When they're exposed, as they *always* are, don't be surprised.
 - d. *Even Jesus* had a Judas.

E. Vs. 7-8

7 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My

burial. ⁸ For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

1. Jesus told Judas to stifle it.
 2. I LOVE THIS! I just know that the disciples considered Mary something of an airhead.
 - a. Even her sister Martha expressed frustration with her for her wanting to sit at Jesus’ feet when she thought it was time for fixing dinner.
 - b. And we know that women were held in low regard by men at this time.
 - c. Women were generally thought to be inept in grasping spiritual things.
 3. But Mary *schooled* them all that day. She was the rookie who stepped onto the court and *destroyed* them.
 4. While the disciples were debating what Jesus *meant* by going to Jerusalem & dying, Mary was *responding in faith* to what He’d said.
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5. Many Christians struggle with Jesus’ words here about the poor & the seeming waste of Mary’s act of devotion.
 - a. It seems so *contrary* to the compassion Jesus showed the poor & downtrodden.
 - b. His selflessness in meeting their needs seems to stand in contradiction to His *praise* of Mary’s extravagance.
 6. What’s going on here? How do we reconcile this? Look carefully at what He says – v. 8

“The poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

7. The lesson is this – there’s a time to worship God by taking care of the needs around us & there’s a time to worship the *Lord directly & intimately*.
8. Jesus is not making light of the needs of the poor.
 - a. Look at His whole life!
 - b. Consider His commands to feed, & visit, & care for the needy!
9. But intimacy with Him cannot be *neglected* in favor of these other things.
10. Even extravagant acts of devotion to God *alone* are needed.
11. Many believers allow their service of God by serving others to consume them.
 - a. They become so busy working, they neglect God Himself.
 - b. When that happens, the work lose its edge & motivation.
 - c. Every morning before he starts chopping trees, the lumberjack sits down and sharpens his axe.
 - d. He knows that the key to effective work is a keen edge.
 - e. Attention to God is how we sharpen our axe & make sure our service is on *right*.
12. Empowered by a vision of a just society, many Christians over the centuries have engaged in social action that aimed at helping the poor & hungry.
 - a. But they often forget that the truest & greatest need is not food, but the Bread of life – Jesus!
 - b. Worship, regular, whole-hearted devotion to God keeps that focus sharp.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Carpe Occasio*

1. Mary saw Jesus sitting in her home & recalled His words about going to

- Jerusalem to die.
2. She seized the moment to do what needed to be done; to pour out her devotion on Him directly.
 3. She *didn't care* that others might see & misunderstand.
 4. She knew Jesus *would* understand.
 5. So she used that which would tell Him she was His & His alone, forever; Her dowry, her glory was spent on Him.
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6. Have you heard the phrase, *Carpe Diem*? It's Latin for *Seize the Day*.
 - a. It means *to live with purpose*,
 - b. To take hold of today and make it count.
 7. Mary lived "Carpe Occasio." 'Occasio' is Latin for "the favorable moment, the right time."
 - a. Mary recognized that the time was right for her to defy convention and what was expected and pour out her all on Jesus.
 - b. Her act of devotion has gone down in history as an example to all of us.
 8. We must do what Mary did – live Carpe Occasio.
 - a. Sure God is *always* with us.
 - b. But there are times when we *sense* His presence in a special way.
 - c. We ought to *respond* to those moments with intense devotion!
 - d. Not giving a rip what those around us think – but like Mary, only caring to show Jesus how much we love Him and that He's the only one for us, forever.
 9. A good number of us here today are married.
 - a. Because we're married, we spend a lot of time with each other.
 - b. Most of the time, everything is fine between us & we just go through life together, side by side.
 - c. But every so often, the companionship gets more, you know, intense.
 - d. We take advantage of those times to renew & deepen our intimacy.
 10. It's not for nothing that marriage is claimed in the Bible as a picture of our relationship with the Lord.

B. More Than Songs

1. But here's what we need to see – Mary's worship didn't express itself in song.
2. It came by way of perfume and hair.
3. Worship doesn't have to be expressed just by singing.
4. Prayer can be worship. Silence can be worship.
5. *Any act* of coming *consciously into the Lord's presence* to pour yourself out to Him is worship.