

INTRODUCTION

Please open your Bibles to Mark 14. We're going to read the first ten verses as we consider the topic: Extravagant Love Offered to Jesus. I want you to consider making an extravagant love offering to Jesus. Recently, I saw a funny cartoon in *Leadership Magazine*. Two guys are standing outside church wearing nothing but their boxer shorts. One says to the other, "That was the best sermon on giving I've ever heard." We're not asking you to give the shirt off your back! Instead, we're asking you to make a Love Offering for Jesus. This morning, I want us to study a woman who made an extravagant love offering to Jesus.

Mark 14:1-10. "Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teacher of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot." While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table of in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. (John 12:3—"she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.") Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. When you compare this account to John 12 and Matthew 26 we learn the woman is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. The setting for this meal was in Bethany, and it took place only a few days before Jesus was arrested, tortured and nailed to a cross.

Try to imagine the scene that night. Men and women were segregated during meals, so this probably occurred after the meal had concluded as the men were sitting around swapping stories. I can imagine each one of them talking about the difference Jesus had made in their lives—each trying to outdo the other. Maybe Simon said, "Yeah, I used to be a leper, but Jesus healed me, and nobody calls me Scarface anymore!" Peter chimes in and says, "That's nothing. I was a foul-mouthed fisherman wasting my life on a stinking boat, and Jesus changed my life." Then Lazarus smiles and says, "You think that's something? Hey, I was stone-cold dead and buried for four days ... and Jesus called my name and, here I am!" Can't you hear them laughing as they realize nobody can top that story?

Then almost unnoticed, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, slips in carrying a very expensive alabaster vase. To their surprise, she crushes the neck of the bottle, and begins to pour the entire contents onto the head of Jesus. The perfume spills down Jesus' face and beard onto his clothes. Then she finished by taking down her hair, which was a reckless thing for a woman to do in public. As she bowed before Jesus she used her hair to wipe the perfume onto Jesus' feet. It was scandalous behavior. But she did it for one simple reason: She loved Jesus. She was making an extravagant Love Offering for Jesus. As we prepare to make a love offering to Jesus next week, there are three important lessons we can learn about extravagant love offered to Jesus.

1. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE FOR JESUS IS EXPRESSED AS A SACRIFICIAL ACT OF WORSHIP

The Bible describes her offering in verse 3, "A woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head."

Perfume can actually be very expensive. I discovered the most expensive perfume in the world today is sold by Clive Christian. It's called Imperial Majesty and one bottle sells for \$215,000. (That includes the five carat diamond that serves as the stopper for the bottle.)

Mary's offering to Jesus could be compared to that. According to Matthew, it was about a half liter of pure spikenard, which is a rare aromatic rhizome grown only in northern India. The alabaster flask itself would have been very valuable as well. In verse 5, we learn it was worth over a year's wages. The actual Greek language calculates it as "more than 300 denarii." One denarius was what a man would be paid for a day's labor. Today, most people work about 260 days a year, so if you want to understand the current value of Mary's love offering, figure what your total income is for 15 months. The median annual income in Tyler is about \$40,000, so when you add another three months, and the current value of Mary's gift is about \$50,000.

Scholars speculate this bottle of perfume might have been part of Mary's inheritance. Some suggest it was something she was saving it as part of her dowry in case she got married. It was probably the most valuable thing she owned—but she gave it all to Jesus.

Mary didn't hold anything back. I keep coming back to God's Word in Isaiah 54:2 when He said, "Enlarge the place of your tent; stretch your tent curtains wide; **DO NOT HOLD BACK...**" There are ways Mary could have held back. First, the alabaster flask was valuable itself. She could have simply poured the perfume out, and saved the bottle. But the word used indicated she crushed the neck of the flask. Or she could have simply poured out a few drops of the perfume, and saved the rest for later. But she didn't hold back—she poured it all.

Sometimes when we give to God, we are asking, "How **LITTLE** can I get by with?" As you've been praying about making a sacrificial gift to God, there has been a little voice saying to you, "What can I afford to give and not really affect my lifestyle, or have to give up anything?"

I heard about a man who stopped by a perfume counter in a department store to buy some perfume for his wife's birthday. The saleslady showed him a bottle of perfume that cost \$100. He said, "Can you show me something cheaper?" She showed him a bottle costing \$40. He said, "I'd still like to see something cheaper." The saleslady patiently produced a bottle of cologne that cost \$35. He shook his head and said, "Do you have anything cheaper?" Next she brought out a small bottle of cologne that cost only \$15. He said, "Can you show me something cheaper?" The saleslady smiled and said, "Certainly, sir." She pulled out a mirror and handed it to him!

That's our attitude sometimes. We figure, "How **LITTLE** can I give to God?" Mary's desire was to give the most valuable thing she owned. It was simply a matter of love. Her offering was a

sacrificial act of worship. Worship is simply an expression of adoration for God. Worship is not just a feeling, or a emotion, it always manifests itself in some expression of love. It may be a song, a prayer, an offering, or an act of service. But when you boil it down, worship is simply loving on Jesus.

Matt Redman has written a great song about worship. Mary could have been easily sung these words while she was pouring that perfume on Jesus: “When the music fades and all is stripped away; And I simply come; Longing just to bring something that’s of worth; That will bless Your heart.” The chorus says, “I’m coming back to the heart of worship; And it’s all about You; It’s all about You, Jesus. I’m sorry, Lord, for the thing I’ve made it. When it’s all about You. It’s all about You, Jesus.”

Redman has written a book entitled *The Unquenchable Worshipper*. He has this to say about Mary’s act of worship: “It was worship of a woman who didn’t know the rules—an unpredictable, untamed heart on a quest to see Jesus glorified... People in love do lots of crazy things. Sometimes they even become an embarrassment to those around them. The woman who came to Jesus that day with jar of perfume was probably an embarrassment to every person in the room—except, of course, to Jesus.” (*The Unquenchable Worshipper*, p. 51) That’s what our worship should be—an extravagant demonstration of love! When I made our gift to the Love Offering to Jesus, I wasn’t giving it to a program, or a project, or a campaign, or even to a church. I gave it to Jesus. I said, “Lord, I love you so much that I’m happy to make this sacrificial gift to You.” When you bring your Love Offering next week, don’t think of it as bringing it to a program ... bring it Jesus. Honor Him with a sacrificial act of worship like Mary did.

2. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE IS USUALLY CRITICIZED BY SPECTATORS

It’s interesting to note the reaction of the some of those who observed this act of worship. It says in verses 4-5, “Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.’ And they rebuked her harshly.”

Matthew and John tell us some of those complaining were the disciples. And John identifies the loudest critic as Judas Iscariot. These were such “practical” thinking men they immediately began to calculate the cost of her offering. They rebuked her harshly. We don’t know what they said, but perhaps it was something like, “You silly, wasteful, shameful woman—what a fool you are!” These are the kind of analytical thinking people who know the price of everything but the value of nothing. They never consider, “What price love?” They simply ask, “How much does it cost?”

When it comes to worship, there are two kinds of people: the participants and the spectators—and worship is NOT a spectator sport. People who are only spectators are usually quick to criticize the way the participants worship. It’s nothing new. In 2 Samuel 6 when King David danced before the Lord with all his might, his wife, Michal despised him in her heart. When he got home, she let him have it with both barrels. She lambasted him with withering criticism calling his act of worship vulgar and undignified. David’s response was simple, “I will celebrate

before the Lord...in fact, I’ll become more undignified than this!” (2 Samuel 6:22)

So whenever you express exuberance or extravagance toward the Lord, don’t expect people to compliment you. You’ll be the target of more brickbats than bouquets! I know you find this hard to believe, but did you know there are people who have even criticized me and the church for embarking on such a massive expansion project? I’ve even been told by some critics this project is too “extravagant.” I’ve had a few people email me almost the very same statements those spectators said about Mary’s gift. They say, “Why don’t you take that same amount of money and spend it on feeding the poor?” I’ve been criticized for trying to build some kind of monument to myself—I’ve had people refer to this building as the Dykes’ Dome and this expansion project as a monstrosity.

Does that upset me? Not at all. I want everybody to like me (because I’m such a lovable guy), and I wish everyone was as excited as I am about this project, but I know that’s never going to happen. In every building campaign in every church in history, there have always been people who criticize the cost without understanding the value.

Go back in your mind with me 46 years. The year was 1960. Green Acres was five years old and had about 700 members. Cecil Johnson had been the pastor since their inception in 1955. They were out of space so the leaders proposed to build a new sanctuary, which is now what we call the chapel. It was going to be a HUGE undertaking that would cost \$400,000 which was FIVE times their annual budget. To compare that to today, if we tackled a project five times our budget we’d be looking at a cost of \$65 million. Last year at our 50th Anniversary, Cecil Johnson was telling me there was vocal opposition to that construction project. Some members claimed it was too expensive, and the design was too ornate. A number of families left the church during that process, and before the project was finished Cecil Johnson left to pastor a church in Georgia.

So, I’m not surprised when a few people criticize us for this project. I want everyone to be on board, but after preaching for 36 years, the critics don’t bother me as much as they used to. I have a saying from Teddy Roosevelt framed in my study. He wrote: “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly...who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

So as we stand one week from our Love Offering for Jesus, let me ask you to examine your heart. Is your attitude that of the disciples who were sour and critical? Or, is your heart reflecting the attitude of Mary, who made a sacrificial Love Offering to Jesus? Next week, will you be a spectator or a participant? If you’ve got a bad attitude, will you say, “Lord, help me to change my attitude. I love you and I don’t want to allow a root of bitterness to grow up in my life.” If you pray a prayer like that, I believe God will change your attitude.

3. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE IS APPRECIATED AND TREASURED BY JESUS

I love Jesus’ response to the critics recorded in verse 6, “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “She has

done a beautiful thing to me...She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." Jesus defended Mary's extravagant love offering. The others were saying, "What a waste!" Jesus was saying, "What an investment!" They said, "What a foolish thing!" Jesus said, "What a beautiful thing!"

The disciples (especially Judas), saw only the cost, but Jesus understood the value. If I was doing a Master Card commercial, I'd describe it this way: Passover decoration for Simon's party: 100 denarii. Food and drinks: 200 denarii. Expensive perfume poured out: 300 denarii. Display of extravagant love for Jesus: PRICELESS! To worship Jesus you need a heart full of love—for everything else there's MasterCard.

Jesus noted Mary was anointing His body for burial. He predicted what Mary did would be a permanent memorial to her wherever the gospel is preached—and I'm fulfilling the prediction right now. Even though Mary was criticized harshly that day, today, she is honored for her extravagance. How many of you have "Mary" in your name? How many of you know someone named "Mary?" By the same token, is there anyone here named "Judas?" We honor those who express extravagance, and we shun those who betray their friends.

Have you ever made an extravagant love offering to Jesus? We know the meaning of the word "extravagant" but do you know its origin? It comes from two Latin words *extra*, which means "outside or beyond" and *vagar*, which means "to wander." An extravagant gift is one that wanders outside the usual. It goes beyond the normal—it makes you think outside the box and give outside the box. Have you always given the "usual?" It may be time for you to wander outside what you think you SHOULD do, and even wander beyond what you imagine you COULD do! So when you make your Love Offering to Jesus will you consider wandering outside the normal amount? That's extravagance!

CONCLUSION

One day we're all going to stand before God for a final exam. There will be a heavenly audit of our lives. The Bible says in Romans 14:12, "Each of us will give an account of himself to God." Fortunately God wants you to pass this test, so He's already informed us of the questions we'll be asked. It's like a loving teacher who lets you take an open book test—in this case, it's an open Bible test. The first question God will ask you will be:

(1) WHAT DID YOU DO WITH JESUS?

God won't ask you if you were a Baptist, a Methodist, or an Episcopalian. He's not interested in your religious background or your doctrinal stance. What did you do with Jesus? Here's the correct answer: I do not trust myself or my goodness for access into heaven. Instead, I humbly accept what Jesus did for me on the cross. I believe Jesus died for me, was buried, and You raised Him from the dead, and He is alive forever more! Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man can come to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). Got it? If you don't answer the first correctly, you'll be in for a world of hurt. But if you answer the first question correctly, you'll get to answer a second question:

(2) WHAT DID YOU DO WITH WHAT I GAVE YOU?

Being a Christian is about so much more than just getting your ticket to heaven punched. God will ask you, "What did you do with your life? Your talents? Your abilities? Your spiritual gifts? What did you do with the resources, the opportunities I gave you?"

Today, we saw our children literally act out Jesus' parable of the talents. We didn't give each of you \$5, but the Master has given you much more than that. In Matthew 25, the Master gave one servant \$5,000 and said, "Put this money to work until I come back." To another he gave \$2,000, and to a third servant he gave \$1,000. When he returned, he asked for an accounting. The two servants who had received \$5,000 and \$2,000 respectively had doubled their master's money. To them, the master said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Come share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:23)

But the servant who received \$1,000 was afraid, so he had buried the money. Now, notice, he did return all \$1,000 to the master. He gave back 100% of what he had received. But the master was not happy. He said, "you wicked, lazy servant. You should have at least put my money on deposit in the bank and gained interest." And the master took away the \$1,000 and gave it to the one who had \$10,000. One day, God will ask you, "What did you do with what I gave YOU?" How will you answer?

Before we leave Mary's act of worship, there is one final part of this story that fascinates me. The fragrance of her gift wasn't lost that night. By giving the perfume away, Mary didn't really lose it. She gave it to Jesus and because she also gave her heart to Jesus, her treasure was still where her heart was. And she was blessed as well. When she left the room, the fragrance of the perfume lingered on her hair and hands for many days afterwards. Every time she caught a scent of it, she was reminded of her love for Jesus and her act of preparing Jesus' body for burial.

But she wasn't the only one who was blessed by the aroma of the perfume. I believe that beautiful fragrance remained on the body of Jesus over the next few days. As He went to the cross, perhaps He noticed the aroma of that fragrance. And in those moments when men were doing the ugliest things ever done to Him, He caught a whiff of that perfume and remembered one of the most beautiful things ever done to Him. In those final hours when He was in agony and pain, maybe He caught one final hint of that aroma, and it gave Him strength as He realized someone really understood why He came to earth—to suffer and die for our sins. Jesus has a perfect memory and I think He never forgets extravagant love offered to Him!

OUTLINE

1. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE FOR JESUS IS EXPRESSED AS A SACRIFICIAL ACT OF WORSHIP

"A woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head." vs. 3

2. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE IS USUALLY CRITICIZED BY SPECTATORS

"Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly." vs. 4-5

3. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE IS APPRECIATED AND TREASURED BY JESUS

"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "She has done a beautiful thing to me...She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." vs. 6

WHEN WE STAND BEFORE GOD HE WILL ASK US TWO QUESTIONS:

- (1) What did you do with Jesus?
- (2) What did you do with what I gave you?



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes