



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sermon Title Was **"The Extravagance of Love"**

Sermon Series: "The Way of Jesus"

Mark 14:1-11

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Mark 14:1-11 (New International Version)

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

¹Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. ²"But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."

³While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table 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.

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

⁶"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Footnotes:

- a. [Mark 14:5](#) Greek than three hundred denarii

Introduction.

Did you happen to hear of the way former UT quarterback Colt McCoy proposed to his fiancée Rachel Glandorf back in January? He brought her to Darrel K. Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium and arranged to have the words flashed on the giant scoreboard – "Rachel, I love you. Will you marry me? Colt" When Rachel turned around, Colt was on one knee with a ring in his hand. Here are a few pictures from the fateful night. By the way, she said, "Yes!"

Way to go Colt McCoy! VERY cool! The only problem is that now the bar has been set pretty high for those of you who were thinking about popping the question and asking someone to marry you!

When people are in love, they tend to be extravagant in demonstrating that love. You want to do something stunning and life-changing, and you want to make a memory that will last forever.

This morning we read the story of an act of extravagant love on the part of one of Jesus' disciples. It wasn't a romantic gesture; it was a sacrifice of devotion, and her example is a lesson to us all.

I. An Extravagant Act.

The text tells us that when Jesus traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for the last time, He stayed in the town of Bethany, a village two miles east of Jerusalem and the last stop on the road from Jericho to the holy city. Throughout His time Jerusalem, Jesus appears to have stayed in Bethany. On this particular occasion He was entertained for a meal in the home of a man who was known as Simon the Leper. The retention of the name "the Leper" possibly suggests that he was previously a leper who had been healed by Jesus at some point during his life. Was the dinner an expression of gratitude? We cannot say for sure.

The passage goes on to say that a woman took an alabaster jar of expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' head. Mark does not tell us who the woman was, but we know from John's Gospel that she was Mary, the sister of Martha and



Lazarus with whom Jesus often stayed in Bethany. The alabaster jar was of pure nard, which was a costly perfume made from the oil extracted from a root native to India.

It was probably a family heirloom that was passed down from one generation to the next, mother to daughter. And it was very expensive. The text tells us it was worth over a year's wages, so in today's dollars it would have been worth about \$25,000! I'd say that's pretty expensive perfume! It was a little nicer than the perfume you got for Christmas, I suspect!

II. A Harsh Reaction.

The reaction of some of the people in Simon's home that night revealed the indignation they felt over Mary's extravagant gesture. It appears their primary concern was mercenary, and they suggested the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. The mention of the poor here was natural in that it was the custom of the Jews to give gifts to the poor on the evening of Passover, which was near at hand.

The reaction of these people to this expression of love reveals the depth of their feeling. Mark uses a Greek word (*embrimaomai*) which means "to be angry" and "to express violent displeasure." In other words, it's like they said, "What an idiot! What is she thinking?" They could not see the beauty of this generosity, and they concentrated only on the negative.

At first glance, I think that had I been there, I may have shared the opinion of the critics. What a waste. How impractical. We could have leveraged this expensive perfume for the kingdom. And yet love isn't always practical. It is generous to a fault. And there are times when love should be extravagant, especially when it comes to our devotion to the Lord.

Whenever we react with harshness, with a critical spirit, it is usually a reflection on us to some degree. Have you ever noticed that when you point a finger at another person, there are 3 fingers pointing right back at you? Jesus urged His followers to take the log out of their own eyes before they tried to remove the speck in their neighbor's eye. The people in the room apparently had forgotten this admonition, and they were quick to point out what they perceived were misplaced values in Mary's actions.

There was a town in Connecticut a few years ago where 53 residents of a particular neighborhood signed a petition to stop reckless driving on their streets. The police responded by setting up a stakeout in the neighborhood to ticket violators, and a few nights later 5 people were caught. All 5 had signed the petition!ⁱ

You and I should be careful that in the criticism we level against others we aren't guilty of the very same thing, and with the measure we measure it shall be measured against us.

III. A Gentle Rebuke.

Jesus rushed to Mary's defense, and instead of condemning her, He suggested that her critics should have commended her. Mary's act of anointing Jesus with the alabaster of perfume was a beautiful expression of her love and devotion. In addition, Jesus said He would not be with them very long, and the time for expressions of devotion was running out. In contrast, opportunities to help the poor would continue.

Jesus' statement does not indicate a lack of concern for the poor. On the contrary, there are plenty of examples elsewhere in the gospels that demonstrate Jesus' concern for the poor was very close to His heart, and our Lord urged His followers on several occasions to help people who were considered "the least of these" in this world. In fact, Jesus said whenever we give a cup of cool water to someone in need, it is as if we are giving it to Him. Our Lord had great compassion for the poor, and this statement does not contradict that at all.

Mary's act was interpreted by Jesus as an anointing of His body in preparation for his burial. It was the practice of the Jews at the time of Christ to anoint the bodies of the dead with perfume and spices before they were buried. Was Mary aware of this aspect of what she was doing? Perhaps not, but it is possible she had a greater sensitivity to what was about to happen than anyone else.

IV. A Living Testimony.

"I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (14:9). You and I are talking about Mary today as evidence of the truth of these words. Her loving act has been retold in countless settings, and wherever the gospel has been proclaimed, we have remembered this woman. The memory of Mary's noble act has been kept alive these many years, and the Master will not let it be forgotten.



God takes great delight in rewarding the faithfulness of those who honor Him? Whenever we speak of the attributes of God, we should remember the fact that He is indeed, as the writer of Hebrews put it, "*the rewarder of those who seek Him*" (11:6). God sees what is done for Him, and it will not go unnoticed or unrewarded.

One of the great scenes in the movie "Chariots of Fire" is when an American sprinter hands a note to Eric Liddell just before the finals of the 400 meter race. Liddell had refused to run in his favored event, the 100 meters, because, as a Christian in 1924, he believed it was wrong to compete on the Sabbath. The note, a American man named Jackson gave him was a quote of an Old Testament passage which said, "God honors those who honor Him." Eric Liddell went on to win Olympic gold in the 400 meter race - a living testimony to God's grace and a person's faithfulness, just like this woman and her alabaster jar of perfume.

Conclusion/Application.

I think this passage reminds us we should always give the best we have to offer to Jesus. Mary sacrificed a family heirloom worth \$25,000 to show her devotion to the Lord. It was the best she had to give Jesus. What do you and I give to Christ today? It is our best, or does He get the leftovers?

- The best part of my day?
- The best part of my life?
- The best part of my heart?

If it is the best I have to offer, it will always be enough for Jesus.

When our youngest son, David, was about 2 or 3 years old, on many occasions he brought to Lorie a fistful of dandelions he picked in our yard. He would come bouncing into the house with a grin from ear to ear and say, "These are for you, Mommy!" And Lorie would always be touched by his generous and loving spirit. Dandelions were enough for David to bring as a child as a gift for his mom. But if I tried to do that, it would not have the same effect on Lorie! And the reason is that dandelions are **not** the best I have to offer.

The same is true in our relationship with God. As we grow in that relationship, as we mature in the Lord, the best we have to offer deepens and expands and grows.

This passage also presents the contrast of two people. Consider the woman. Jesus said what she had done was a beautiful thing, and it is remembered of her, even to this day. But notice also what is said in this passage of Judas. "*Then Judas Iscariot, one of the 12, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over*" (10,11). What Judas did is also remembered of him, and he is recognized as one of the lowest characters in all of human history.

What about you? What will you be remembered for? What will be your legacy?

- When you finish school?
 - When you leave your company?
 - When you move to another community?
 - When your kids go away to college?
 - When you pass from this life to the next?

What will you be remembered for? What will be your legacy?

We've only one life;
Twill soon be past.
Only that which is done
for Christ will last.

Mary gave the best she had to offer to our Lord. May we do the same today. Amen.

ⁱSource unknown.

