

The Extravagant Woman (Evening Service)

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[0 : 00] So we're in a series called Meet Jesus, where we look at how people are changed when they meet Jesus. And our passage tonight is very helpful because it shows us that when folks meet Jesus, it's not all roses.

We've got, in Matthew 26, we've got this amazing display of devotion, and then we've got a whole group of people that want to kill him. So let's have a look at what's going on there. So we are jumping into the end of Matthew, so context, a little bit of context is probably helpful.

So this is the beginning of the last section of Matthew. So this, what we just read, this is the beginning of the last section of Matthew, which is mostly to do with the crucifixion. We get a clue here that this is the case of verse 1, when Jesus had finished all these sayings.

So, the preaching part of Jesus' job is done. So no more sermons, no more parables, just an announcement.

And the announcement is, I will be crucified after the Passover. So that's context. Now let's walk through the passage. So Jesus announces his crucifixion, and then there's a change of scene, verse 3, you're in this big meeting room, it's in a palace, and the chief priests are gathered, and they're working on how to get rid of Jesus.

[1 : 23] And so the first bit is, Jesus says, I'm going to die, and then the chief priests say, let's kill Jesus. Obviously, order is important here.

Jesus calls it, right? He calls it. He calls it before the priest's plan. It tells us Jesus is in control of the situation, the arrest and the cross. It's not like Jesus is caught off guard.

But who are these chief priests? Who are these guys sort of planning this stuff out? Why would they do this kind of thing? It seems so brutal. So Jerusalem was this, you know, like a vassal state of Rome.

So there was this council that was in charge of running the place. And they looked after the civil stuff. They looked after the religious stuff. And the big boss of the council was called the high priest. And the high priest, the first high priest was a guy called Aaron back in Exodus. And it was a hereditary role. It was passed through generations. But, you know, after God's people sort of kept getting taken over and stuff, it all went a bit sideways.

[2 : 24] And eventually it became a role that Herod, who was the Roman appointee to look after the place, he could just appoint a high priest. He could just go, okay, I want you to do this job. So these folks in Matthew 26, they're called the chief priests, but they're not pastors.

They're politicians. They're aristocrats. They're kind of, like today, it's kind of the wealthy, older white men that kind of run big things, right? This is the situation here.

And there's one guy called Caiaphas. So he is the head of all of this. Again, he's not a priest. He's just, he's an appointee. But apparently a quite a shrewd appointee, because normally people only last about a year in this job.

It's quite a difficult job to do. This guy was around for 18 years, so a bit of a political animal. So, the chief priests. From our little window into their meeting, we see that they're a callous bunch, I think. The reason I say that is, is they're talking about killing a guy, and in the same sentence, they talk about this big religious festival.

[3 : 39] They're saying, hey, let's not kill Jesus during the Passover, because, you know, a lot of visitors in town, there could be a riot, everything could go sideways. Anyways, the fear of the Lord of the Passover, of the festival, is obviously not there.

The fact that this thing's going on, and what it means, this Passover, it's just, it's not really on their radar, is it? It's like me saying, is Tad here? He's not here. Okay, that's fine. So it's like saying, oh, let's, let's just kill Tad.

But during, not during the first couple of songs, because the kids are in, right? It's going to upset them.

Like, it's ludicrous. Like, how could you think? Like, this is basically the kind of thing they're thinking about, right? The Passover remembered God's terrible judgment on Egypt, and the freeing of Jews from captivity.

And they talk so casually about it. But God has no bearing on their considerations. It's not like they're kind of opening the scriptures to see who Jesus is. They just want to get rid of him. But they're supposed to be a group of people that lead people to God.

[4 : 47] That's the job description. But clearly, their interest was self-preservation. They want to keep their position. And Jesus is rocking the boat.

He's upsetting the apple cart, you know, with, let's get rid of the guy. He's a threat. Then we jump down to verse 14 there, if you have a Bible's open. Jump down to verse 14 there.

We see Judas. So the chief priests are trying to work out, okay, how are we going to do this, right? How are we going to do this? Can't do it during the Passover. There might be a riot. Makes sense. So they must have been delighted when Judas turns up on their doorstep unexpectedly.

They're trying to work out how to take out Jesus quietly. Judas turns up and says, so what will you give me to deliver him into your hands? 30 pieces of silver, turns out.

That's what the asking price was. In Exodus, that was the amount you paid in compensation if one of your animals killed a slave. So you paid the slave owner 30 pieces of silver.

[5 : 55] A really good question is, why did Judas do it? I mean, after all that he saw, and all he saw Jesus do, and all he heard, why would he sell Jesus out?

It's about sort of like a month's salary. I think Jesus just never captured his heart. It's kind of like what Tad was talking about, actually.

Jesus never captured his heart, never captured his imagination. His heart was captured by money. We know this from John's Gospel. It was simply greed that drove him.

He probably thought, you know, this whole Jesus thing's going nowhere. Let's cash out.

Let's at least, you know, I've been tracking with this guy for a few years. Let's at least, you know, get some money out of this. Okay, let's look at the big picture again.

[6 : 57] So the start of the story, you see, as you look at the chapter, we've got the start. It's just all about treachery. And the end of the story, it's just all about betrayal. But in the middle, sandwiched between these two things, you have this picture of just outrageous devotion.

And you can't miss the contrast. So let's spend a few minutes just in this middle bit. Let's talk about this wonderful woman. And her story is recorded in all four Gospels.

So, must be significant. So Jesus was at Bethany. So that's like a place, like a town. Verse 6, he's at the house of Simon the leper.

So straight away, we get a big contrast here. About where Jesus is, and about where the chief priests are. Think about this. Because it makes a big deal, right?

It says, the murder was planned where? Where was Jesus? In the house of a leper.

[8 : 05] So anyway, so Jesus is relaxing at this house. Woman comes up, breaks open this jar of expensive oil, and anoints Jesus. Now, who was she? Well, the Gospel of John tells us it was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

And they all lived in this sort of house together. That Jesus had risen Lazarus from the dead, if you know the Bible stories. So what's this oil thing about? Because that just seems like it's quite unusual, right?

Well, back in the ancient Near East, people would come over for dinner. And it wouldn't have been unusual for hosts to put some oil on the heads of people when they come over for dinner.

You remember, these were years before regular bathing and deodorant. So they were smelly times, I guess you'd say.

And so the oil was this sort of lovely thing you'd do, make the place smell a bit nice. This is not what Mary did, though, right? This is not just a little bit of delicate, you know, nice bit of nice smellies around.

[9 : 09] This is not what Mary is doing here, is it? She breaks open the whole jar of this perfume and uses the whole thing on Jesus. And it goes down all over him.

And it's not just any old jar of perfume. It's a ridiculously expensive jar of perfume. It's called sort of nard in one of the other Gospels. So it's this root only found in India, so it's imported.

And John's Gospel. Another Gospel actually says it's worth 300 denarii. So that's about a year's wage for a day worker. So that's some pretty fancy odored toilette right there, you know. So you may ask, why is Mary, why would she have like this \$50,000 bottle of nice smelling perfume oil?

Like what's she doing with this? Is she fabulously wealthy? We don't have any evidence of that. Unlikely. It's far more likely that this was probably the most expensive thing she owned.

[10:12] When I did some reading on this, it was, for some people, this was like a family nest egg. Like an heirloom passed down.

And it was kept in case of an economic downturn. Like somebody loses a job or there's a famine or something like that. But you have this treasure. This very, very expensive thing that you can sell. And you'll be good for a year on that money. I know it sounds like, you know, sort of mad. But this is the kind of thing that happened back in the days.

It was the kind of thing that people had back in the days. So she broke open this family treasure, anointed Jesus with it. This outrageous display of devotion and affection. Unconditional.

Unconditional devotion. Unconditional devotion. She was a follower of Jesus. And clearly, she wasn't thinking, well, Jesus, I'll follow you as long as it doesn't eat into my leisure time.

[11:18] Or I'll follow you as long as it doesn't impact my finances. I'll follow you as long as it doesn't make me look foolish in front of other people. No, she was all in.

She was all in no conditions. What an amazing example to us. And compare her reaction to that of the disciples in verse 8. Notice it doesn't say the disciples were quite surprised.

It doesn't say that they said, oh, this is a bit unusual. Didn't see that coming. Or this happens all the time. About time somebody did this. It says they were indignant.

Strong word, right? They were indignant. They looked at her and said, this is ridiculous. We could have sold that and given the money to the poor.

What a reckless thing to do, woman. What a waste. She's probably a bit unstable. A bit needy, perhaps. That's just...

[12:21] How do I say this? A life that is really committed to Christ often looks like a waste. It looks like a wasted life.

It looks like a life where you're missing opportunities. St. John's supports quite a lot of missionaries. And one missionary support is a woman called Sharon Thompson with Wycliffe Bible Translators. She's in Burkina Faso in Africa.

And St. John's has supported her for 30 years. 30 years. So her life's work is translating the word of God into this minority African dialect in this very small country that's only spoken in that country. This is her life's work. Now, if you've met Sharon, she's brilliant. Like, she is brilliant. She could have had an amazing career in the academy.

[13:27] She's just a remarkable woman. She has poured her life out for Jesus. But there are people who would look at her and go, Oh, what a wasted life.

You could have done so much better. So much more. Well, Jeremy Curry is in YWAM in Nepal. He's been there for eight years. And our church supports him as well.

And if you know him, the guy is just a... He's a powerhouse. Like, if you said to him, can you go and, like, take over Alaska?

I don't know. Just... He could do it. Like, the guy's... The guy's ludicrous. So... He would have succeeded at anything he put his hand to do.

He lives with his family in one of the poorest countries in the world. I remember speaking to him, why did you choose Nepal? And he goes, I read that was the hardest place to share your faith in. That was the hardest missionary ground. So he's there telling people about Jesus.

[14:32] Goodness, what a waste, eh? That's what people would say. What a wasted life. You could have done so much. Now, you folks here, none of you are missionaries. Well, maybe there's one or two secret missionaries.

I don't know. But you're not missionaries. You kind of... You do regular work, right? You're at school. I'm not trying to make you feel bad about these examples.

Like, oh, I'm supposed to feel... I should be in Equatorial Guinea. I don't even know where it is, but I should be in Equatorial Guinea, you know. That's not the point of these examples.

The point is, any life that you live, whether it's a student, it's in the workplace, you're just a kid. Any life that is ordered around Jesus, any life that is centered on Jesus, and you make decisions based

on that, that is a life that will invite ridicule.

It will invite misunderstanding. But Jesus says to you, you have done a beautiful thing for me.

You've done a beautiful thing for me. Let's get back to Mary.

[15:39] Why would she do this? Like I said, you know, obviously she's very devoted, but why? Where did that come from?

What kind of person would do this? It's very interesting. If you read... You read the gospel stories, and you look for...

You go home, do a search on this woman, Mary. There's a few Mary's, but it's confusing. There's a few Mary's, sorry. Mary of Bethany. She's only mentioned three times by name. So this is the fourth time by not name, right?

But three times by name. But whenever she's mentioned, very interesting, she is always... You always see her at the feet of Jesus. Always at the feet of Jesus.

Luke 10. Jesus visits his family. Mary sat at the Lord's feet, listening to a teaching. John 11. Mary came to where Jesus was, saw him, fell at his feet.

[16:40] In John 12. She anointed his feet. She's always at the feet of Jesus. And this is the place where the affections of our heart are converted. This is the place where the affections of our hearts are converted.

We are changed there. This is the place where we rise above. A life devoted to self-interest. It's at the feet of Jesus. She heard his words.

She saw him bring life from death and it awakened her. She stared at the beauty of what Jesus had said and done.

And she was changed and she was transformed. So she could pour herself out for Jesus.

Symbolized in this amazing thing she did when she cracked open this incredible jar of oil and anointed him.

What a remarkable woman. Don't you want to be like her? I want to be like her. I want to be like Mary. And we get there by sitting at the feet of Jesus. Okay, let's keep moving.

[17:41] So she anoints Jesus. Disciples, they just don't get it, right? All they can do is focus on the value of the oil and not the value of Jesus.

They miss the beauty of the whole thing. And it's such a lovely scene. She defends, Jesus defends her and he says, Why do you trouble this woman? Leave her alone. She has done a beautiful thing for me.

And then Jesus says something interesting which can be confusing. He says, The poor you'll always have with you. This is in response to them saying, We could have sold her and given the money to the poor. The poor you'll always have with you. They'll always be around. She's preparing my body for death.

What's all that mean? Well, first of all, it's not saying don't worry about the poor. We're not concerned with them. Because Jesus has just preached in the previous chapter about the importance of serving the marginalized.

Christians, we have an ongoing duty to care for the poor. Jesus can't be saying ignore the poor.

What he's saying is something special, something amazing is happening right now.

[18:43] Don't miss it. And he goes on and says what she's done. It's great. And it's so great. You're going to keep hearing about her. We're going to keep telling this woman's story. And we are. Like 2,000 years later, here we are.

That's the story. That's the chapter right there. Let me finish up. So we have a story of treachery and betrayal, all driven by self-interest.

And in the middle, outrageous devotion. And it's in all four Gospels. So the Bible is saying to us, Remember her. Remember what she has done.

Consider it. This amazing picture of love and commitment. But also the story, it's not just about her, because it points forward.

Jesus takes what she has done and points forward to his own death. Somehow it appears that she had some kind of understanding of the value of Christ's death, what was coming down the pipeline, and the significance of that.

[19:46] The men in the story had such small hearts, had such a small vision for their lives. They wanted power. They wanted money. And she, this amazing single woman, she seemed to get that, you know, no matter what she had done for Christ, it was nothing compared to what Christ had

done for her and what he was going to do.
And that's Matthew 26, Mary of Bethany. Amen.