

The Extravagant Woman

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I want to add to James' welcome and welcome you all today. And if you are new with us, we are in a sermon series that goes through the lives of a number of people who were really transformed by encountering Jesus.

It's called Meet Jesus. And these are people who, in very different ways, in different stages of lives, met with Jesus and experienced great change in their life, a very renewed, upside-down kind of life as a result.

And the person that we're talking about today is a woman who anointed Jesus' head with oil just days before he was going to be crucified on a cross. This woman was probably Mary, who was Martha's sister, and Lazarus was her brother who was raised from the dead by Jesus.

She was friends with Jesus, probably good friends, spent a lot of time with him. And this account is very helpful for us because it shows us how do you respond to Jesus who lavishes love on you and on the world?

How can I respond? And her actions are really compelling. They're memorable in this account. If you turn to Matthew 26, 1. And just to give a bit of a context here with this verse, Jesus has just finished teaching about how he would come to judge the world one day.

[1 : 3 5] And then, now, he calmly tells his disciples in verse 2 that Passover is coming. And he is going to be delivered up to be crucified in a couple of days.

You see, he's saying, I have God's authority as judge, and I'm going to use that authority to lay down my life for the world as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus' authority extends over what happens in the next verse where there are these leaders of Israel who are plotting to execute Jesus by stealth.

They don't want to do it during this Passover festival because it could easily cause an uproar. Now, that's because Passover was one of three great feasts that took place in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem increased five times its population during that feast. There was a real celebration and excitement. There was a buzz in the city because that feast remembers the Passover of the angel of death by the blood of the Lamb in Egypt.

[2 : 4 8] God did not judge them because of the blood of that Lamb. And there was with it this great promise of an exodus in Passover, looking forward to a life of worshiping God freely.

And with that came this looking forward to a Messiah who would free them. And that's why this is known as a feast of freedom. That feast took on an added meaning that year because they were occupied by Roman forces and they longed for a Messiah who would free them once again.

And Jesus was becoming known by many, many people. He had the qualities of Messiah. So there was this extra buzz in the city. But with all of this happening, Matthew then takes us to a private home in Bethany.

It's about two miles away from that palace where that plotting is taking place. And it couldn't be more different. It's probably a much more humble home. It is the home of Simon, the leper, it says, which means Simon was one who was cured from leprosy by Jesus.

And so that home would have been a place of great warmth and love and welcome to Jesus. That family would have been filled with gratitude for the rest of their lives.

[4 : 14] So Jesus' disciples and his friends were warmly welcomed for that meal. Well, at some point, as you remember, in that meal, Matthew says, Mary came up to him with an alabaster flask, a very expensive ointment, and he poured it all.

She poured it all on his head. You can imagine what happened to the dinner party at that point. It was a showstopper. It was a shocking thing to do.

But her anointment is very significant for us because it's a vivid picture of what it looks like to respond rightly to the love of Jesus.

If you know that Jesus died on a cross for you in your place, if he lavished his love on you personally, how do you respond rightly?

How do you do it? Well, Mary helps us answer this because in her anointing of Jesus, she, number one, responded to Jesus' love, his passionate love, passionately, lavishly.

[5 : 24] And secondly, she reflected Jesus' love for her as she could, in the way that she could in her life. And thirdly, she rehearsed Jesus' mission, his loving mission to us, very faithfully.

Now, I want to look at her response first. Mary knew Jesus. As we said, she knew his love. She knew of his power to save. She believed Jesus when he said, I am the resurrection and I am the life.

If you believe in me, even though you die, you will live. And she had heard him say, or she saw him, of course, raise Lazarus. And she had heard him say very recently that he would be crucified in the next few days for the sins of the whole world.

And so she responded to that extravagant, passionate love of Jesus with her own passionate and extravagant love. That oil that she poured on Jesus was from the spikenard plant.

And that's from the honeysuckle family. It grows only in these very high elevations in the Himalaya Mountains in northern India. So it was very expensive.

[6 : 43] It had an intense aroma. It was something that was used by royalty. It had a beautiful, sweet, intense scent. And the amount, we learned from John, that that jar of oil was worth, was a year's worth of wages.

You think about that here in Vancouver. A living wage is considered to be about \$40,000 a year. So that is how much that oil was that she poured out on him.

It's no wonder things stopped at that point. That oil was like an heirloom from her mother, likely. It was her security.

It was her savings. It was really like her inheritance. Because for her, especially, it was critical. She was not married. One of the members of my men's Bible study that I'm with every Tuesday night, who may remain nameless, said, this is a little bit like Jesus was pouring out, or that Mary was pouring out all her RRSPs on him.

And I think he was thinking a little bit, this person in my Bible study, about a certain deadline that's coming up very soon. But that is exactly right. She was pouring out all of her investments on Jesus' head in that moment.

[8 : 12] And it was irretrievable. There is no way that she could get that oil back into the jar. It was gone. It was never to come back to her again.

But she did it because Jesus was precious to her. Jesus, earlier in Matthew, had told a parable that you all know about a rich merchant who sees this pearl, this amazing pearl of great value.

And he wanted it so much that he gave everything that he had in order to purchase it. Mary knew in her heart that Jesus was that pearl of great value.

He was her future. He was her inheritance, her safety, first of all. And she expressed that in that pouring out on Jesus.

The response of the disciples couldn't have been more discouraging. What did they say? What a waste. What a waste.

[9 : 16] And it's an amazing scene. They respond to her passionate love with passionate anger. And it's very revealing of our world. And it's a thinking that can come into our own life as the people of God, too.

They're disciples. You can be deeply committed to all kinds of causes our world teaches. All kinds of good causes. But if you give your life completely over to Jesus, the world says that's fanaticism.

And that thinking can creep into us as well. You may have heard that in your own life. I remember when, after university, I talked with people how I was going to go into full-time ministry.

Several people said, what a waste. What are you thinking? And people may wonder why you're wasting half your day here at St. John's, hearing God's word, encouraging each other, and seeking to worship him in all of your life.

Your time praying and reading God's word, listening to Jesus, might seem like a waste by God's standard. Giving of what you have can seem like a waste to the world.

[10 : 27] But when you really know Jesus overflowing, his lavish love for you, that wholehearted response, a radical response of giving your life over to Jesus, makes perfect sense.

This is what Paul means in Romans 12. You know, he, in Romans, he goes through the grace of God for us, the lavish love of Jesus Christ for us, who gives us and lives the life that we cannot live for ourselves, simply so that we can be with him forever.

He has rehearsed this. And then he says this. He says, present your body as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable worship in the original.

And you hear that in the King James too. That's your reasonable worship. In other words, it makes complete sense to surrender your body to Jesus if you know that he has poured his love and his grace lavishly upon you.

And so in Jesus' view, Mary's gift was perfectly reasonable. So what was the other response of the disciples? Not only was it a waste, but it was a wasted opportunity.

[11 : 40] It was a missed opportunity. This wasn't a practical gift, they said. You should have given it to the poor. That would have made a lot more sense. And it's a compelling argument because Jesus has just taught them that the poor are precious to him.

If you do this to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do it to me, Jesus said. But Jesus tells them, you have missed the point.

And the point is in verse 11. You always have the poor with you. And the implication is that you will always minister to them. But you will not always have me with you.

And what Jesus was telling them, that he was with them for a very short time. And in all of human history, it was a fleeting moment. But it is the moment that changes everything in the world.

It is the moment that turns our lives upside down. And so he says, this is the time to recognize the treasure that you have in Jesus.

- [12 : 46] Of God with you. Of the Holy Spirit that will come to transform our lives. The practical needs of the world can very easily crowd out that truth.
- That Jesus alone is the hope of the world. Jesus alone is the one that can save you. And Mary's gift shows that all good things comes from worshiping Jesus first.
- That it is in him that our hearts change. And we take on God's values and priorities. And in this way, we can become channels of God's grace in the world.
- God wants us to minister to the physically poor and spiritually poor in our lives. Out of a devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ. Out of love for him and what he has done.
- In response to that love. Jesus loves you and wants you first of all. Not what you have to offer. And then he will do great things by the power of the Holy Spirit through you and in the world.
- [13 : 55] That is the gift of worshiping him with everything. Now besides this response to Jesus' love. Mary in that giving of oil.
- Actually reflects Jesus' love for us. So if you think of 2 Corinthians 8. Paul teaches us that Jesus was rich.
- And for your sake he became poor. So that by his poverty you might become rich. Well that is the gospel. Jesus was poor.
- In the sense that he, even though he was God. Did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But instead he took the form of a servant. But he became a man.
- And he was a servant who became obedient to God right to the cross. And that is reflected in his life. He was poor. He had no home.
- [14 : 52] No income. No inheritance. And in this week to come. He will soon be stripped of everything. In his suffering and dying. Even his life.
- So that we could have the riches of eternal life. As he reconciles us to God the Father. Mary's love is a picture of that love.
- Because in that moment of pouring the oil. She becomes poor. So that she might bless the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems strange to say.
- But in a way she was having mercy. Upon Jesus Christ. Who is the giver of all mercy. In the midst of all the hostility against Jesus. All that plotting.
- The betrayal. The suffering that will take place. That oil. Which is worthy of kings. Is poured out on Jesus. And it is a sign that he is loved deeply.
- [15 : 51] And that he has ultimate value. It actually tells the truth. That Jesus who will be crucified. Is worthy of all blessing.
- Of all honor. Of all glory. And all praise. And that one day. Everyone. Will know that Jesus is Lord. And will kneel before him. That oil expresses that.
- And that's why Jesus. So strongly affirms Mary. And rebukes the disciples. I love what he does here. He turns aside the grumbling. And he accepts the devotion.
- In verse 10. Look at it. It says. Don't trouble her. For she has done a beautiful thing for me. And it was beautiful. Because her love for Jesus. Reflects this boundless.
- Sacrificing. Overflowing love for each of us. Her radical giving. Is this massive contrast. To the chief priests. To the elders. To Judas. Who are seeking their own benefit.
- [16 : 50] Their own glory. And financial wealth. And it's particularly telling to us. That Jesus speaks those words. As the beautiful aroma of Mary's gifts.
- Surround him. And fill the house. I gave Catherine a hyacinth bulb. For our anniversary. A week or so ago. And it's finally started blooming.

And I know this. Because every morning when I wake up. I smell this incredibly sweet sense. Of the hyacinth. And I remember every time. That I gave that. That's coming from that. Well every time.

Those people. Those people. Those people. Who are in that house. Smelled that smell. They would think of Jesus being anointed. That smell would permeate that house.

It would stay with Jesus for a long time. It was the perfect gift. Because 2 Corinthians 2 says. That God in Christ. Through us. Spreads the fragrance.

[17 : 50] Of the knowledge of Jesus. Everywhere. Everywhere. You see. In the midst of the darkness and evil. Of plotting and betrayal. Mary's gift was a powerful memorial.

That there is nothing more beautiful. Than Jesus. And his love for the world. It is the beautiful thing. In the midst of every pain.

And every darkness. And that is God's work in us. That we spread the knowledge of Jesus. This fragrance of Jesus. Everywhere. In a world that is often spiritually dark.

And hostile. Mary did this as she could. With what she had. It was a very simple gift in one way. It was very messy. It was socially awkward.

It was disruptive. At first. But Jesus said. It is beautiful. And that says something to us. Jesus. Any devotion that we give to him.

[18 : 49] Any sacrifice that we give to him. As we can. May be imperfect. It may be messy. And awkward. But Jesus always says.

It is beautiful. He always accepts it. As a blessing to him. And he gives his Holy Spirit. To strengthen us. For that beautiful work.

It is always worthwhile. Jesus says. To take risks for him. He. It is always worth. Persevering. In the work. That he has given you.

And that brings us. To the third aspect. Of Mary's love. Not only was it a response. To Jesus' love. Not only did it rehearse. Jesus' love. But it was also. Or a reflection of his love.

But it also rehearsed it. And what I mean by that. It rehearsed his loving mission. Jesus said. In pouring this ointment. On my body. She has done it.

[19 : 45] To prepare me. For burial. It is a very odd thing to say. In that moment. But you see. What he is saying. Is that Mary's love.

Really grasped the purpose. The overriding great purpose. Of Jesus' life. And that is to die. On a cross. For the forgiveness. Of our sins. And it is only by that death.

Of Jesus. That people can become alive. To God. And that is why Paul. Says about his preaching. I resolve. To preach nothing. Except Jesus Christ.

And him crucified. And he said this. Because that good news. Of Jesus' death for us. Is what grips us. This is what gripped Mary.

When we know that Jesus died. In our place. When we grasp. That he took on. God's judgment. That is rightfully ours. How can we do anything. But love him in return.

[20 : 44] What can stop us. From surrendering our life. To him. It is reasonable. To pour out your life. In gratitude. Serving him. And reveling. In his amazing grace.

And so Jesus said. To everyone. In that house. Truly I say to you. Wherever this gospel. That gospel. Of his death. Is proclaimed. In the whole world. What she has done.

Will be told. In memory. Of her. So Jesus is saying. Two things there. We will proclaim. That gospel. Throughout the world. That gospel.

That filled Mary. With love for Jesus. And secondly. Her gift. Will always be. A memorial. It is the. Beautiful illustration.

Of the good news. Of Jesus. And his love. For us. Her love. Reveals. That the right way. To respond. To the good news. Of Jesus. Extravagant love.

[21 : 38] Is to love him. Extravagantly. So. As we close. The question. Comes to us. What does it look like.

For me. In my life. Really look like. To worship Jesus. Extravagantly. It is a very practical question. And very simply.

Mary shows us. That it is all about. Managing. Our time. Our bodies. Our possessions. And our gifts. That God has given to us. For the glory.

Of Jesus Christ. It is really about. Surrendering. It is believing. That all of your life. Belongs to Jesus. So. Your family life. Your leisure time.

Your life. In your career. And your work. Your school life. And your church ministry. All of that belongs to him. And extravagant worship. Is really thinking about.

[22 : 34] How can I glorify. Jesus Christ. In all of those areas. Of my life. With who I am. Uniquely. With how I can. And as with Mary.

It may mean. Facing hostility. From within God's family. And in the world. As well. It involves a courage. To stand. For Jesus.

And to persevere. With him. And it really means. A humility. To repent. Over and over. Turning yourself. Over to him. Again and again.

It means. A sacrifice. Of time. And money. And prayer. And praise. In order. To serve. The Lord Jesus. But as with Mary. This is all.

A glad. And joyful. Sacrifice. It's a thankful. Act. Act. It's a way. To respond. To Jesus. Immense. Love. To you. Extravagant.

[23 : 29] Worship. Is messy. And it may seem. At times. Imperfect. To you. And to other people. But Jesus. Will always say. To you. It is beautiful. It is beautiful. And there's a picture.

We could close with. At the end here. On the last day. When all. Of creation. When every person. Is gathered. Before the throne. Of Jesus. Who is the judge. He will look.

At those. Who took. All that God. Had given to them. And kept it. To themselves. Held on to it. Tightly. Did not take risks. With it. Spent it. On their own pleasures. And he will say.

To them. What a waste. What a waste. But he will look. At those. Who. Who knew. That Jesus. Great love. For them.

Was extraordinary. And extravagant. And looked. For ways. To love. Back. Extravagantly. In imperfect. Ways. But always. With a view. To how. Can I glorify.

[24 : 24] Jesus. In my life. With what I have. With what I have. Given him. Day to day decision. As Mary would have to have. After that big. Gift as well. And Jesus will say to you.

Will say to them. You have done. A beautiful thing. You've done. A beautiful thing. And may God. Help us. To live. For those words.

Every day. Amen.