

John 12:1-11 “Extravagant Love”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you so much. So much to celebrate this morning. All of it pointing us to Jesus, right? It's the reason that we celebrate all of the things that we're celebrating. It's how wonderful and good and glorious He is. Turn with me this morning to John chapter 12.

We're going to see some more of this together. In our study of this account, John's account of Jesus of Nazareth, His life, we've just been seeing His glory in the last of seven signs.

Signs that Jesus performs to point us to who He is. And just in this last one, He has raised Lazarus from the dead and said, I am the resurrection and the life.

[1 : 06] After several weeks further away from Jerusalem, away from the leaders who are plotting His death, Jesus now heads back towards Jerusalem.

And He stops in Bethany again, that same town where Lazarus is raised from the dead. And maybe no surprise, they throw a dinner in His honor.

Lazarus and His sisters are guests at the dinner. Before we read about that extravagant celebration of Jesus, let me just make one point from verses 9 through 11.

We mentioned last week that not only did the Jewish leaders begin to get concerned about too many people believing in Jesus, so they wanted to kill Him, but also Lazarus became a problem. Lazarus was walking around alive and telling his story and causing too many people to believe in Jesus, so they decided they needed to kill Lazarus too.

[2 : 11] All of a sudden, Lazarus is a star witness for Jesus, isn't he? But as far as we know, Lazarus never taught a class, never led a community work day, never did anything at all that we know of besides walk out of a grave at Jesus' calling.

And I hope that is an encouragement to you, that being someone who shares the good news of Jesus is not about what you have done for Jesus, but about what Jesus has done for you.

Lazarus shows us that that's what makes for a star witness, friends. It is a powerful testimony to say, I was dead and Jesus made me alive again.

I once was lost and now I'm found, was blind, but now I see. And every single one of us who knows Jesus has a version of that story to share with others.

Every one of you lined up out here, every one of you who has taken those vows before, who's been washed in baptism by the blood of Christ, it is your story that it's not what I did for Jesus, it's what Jesus has done for me.

[3 : 27] I hope that you get to share that story and that you will with joy, even if it costs you dearly, to point others to your Savior. Well, let's go back now to the dinner and read this account of how Jesus is honored and how some, even those close to him, are bothered by it.

Verse 1 of John 12, God's holy word. Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, he who was about to betray him, said, why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?

He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief and having charge of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

[4 : 51] The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me. This is God's word. Let's ask for his help as we look at it.

Father, would you show us Jesus that we might worship him, that we might give all that we have to him, that we might be transformed as we see him, that you would actually make us into his image. Teach us from your word, by your spirit, please, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I love efficiency. I coast toward a red light for better gas mileage. I use disposable razors, often two to three months at a time before disposing of them.

Ouch. I plan ahead multiple days to run multiple errands in the same shopping center all at once and of course to try to make sure I don't get caught buying anything without a coupon or a BOGO sale.

[6 : 08] Stewardship. Efficiency. Wisdom. Amen. Amen. But, there is a version of me known affectionately, I think, as Vacation Dad.

Vacation Dad does very crazy, inefficient things like allow you to get a drink other than water when we go out to eat at a restaurant. Extravagant.

A couple years ago on our anniversary, we were traveling in Scotland on sabbatical and I thought, when will I have another anniversary where I can take my wife to tea at a fancy British estate mansion to celebrate?

The cost was irrelevant to me and it was covered by the sabbatical grant which was really generous but don't take all the credit away from me. Still, still, I found the place that was most like a castle and I booked tea for two without a coupon.

In fact, when I found out that Christy was planning to wear heels to tea, I splurged. I think it was ten bucks for a cab so that we didn't have to walk two miles to tea and it was great.

[7 : 30] I'm so thankful that I got to celebrate my love for my wife and our anniversary with her and right outside the window, next picture, there's a peacock right outside our window.

It's in the back. You might be able to see it and it's there for Adriana because she joined the church this morning and that made it really special. It is actually hard for me to admit extravagant.

But sometimes, especially in love, extravagant makes more sense than efficient. And that seems like a contradiction in terms for many of us.

It does for me. And Judas actually shares my opinion. Now, I know, not great company, you may be thinking. You're not making a good case for yourself. But actually, Matthew and Mark tell us that others among Jesus' disciples are thinking the same thing about Mary's expression of love.

Those who are right there with him think, what's going on? Why is she doing this? Listen, we are Presbyterians, right? Most of you are going to feel some of this this morning.

[8 : 43] When we hear of the glories of God's grace, we say, hmm, hmm, yes. Measured practicality, I would say, is our MO.

Measured practicality is an occupation for some of you. This is how we function day in and day out. I'm not here to tell you that stewardship and planning and efficiency are always bad.

But Mary and then Jesus are going to challenge those of us who love them not to hold on too tightly. There are other things that are valuable. It's really a pretty simple story to understand as we read, isn't it?

Mary expresses her love for Jesus extravagantly. Judas objects to her decision. Jesus defends her extravagance.

But can we be honest that when Mary empties perfume on Jesus that's valued at a full year's wages, just think about that. What that would mean for you.

[9 : 52] Many of us want to ask the same question Judas does. Why? Why such extravagant devotion, Mary? You've never done this before that I know of.

You've been with Jesus before. Think of all the good that we could do with that money. Jesus is great and all. I mean, sure, but let's keep our responses within reason, our hands below our shoulders, our hearts under control.

Let's not get carried away. Will you let Jesus press on our efficiency idol this morning? He says, we need to leave extravagant Mary alone and instead examine our own hearts.

Mary rightly values Jesus. Extravagance makes sense here, he says. Why? Why might extravagant love make sense?

What motivates Mary? What's the driving force behind this? What motivates her here that should also motivate our love for Jesus? Would motivate us in relationship with him to live for him?

[11:07] Well, first, it's what Jesus has done. Mary plans this expression of love ahead of time. Clearly, she has brought the perfume from her home to the dinner because Jesus has raised her brother from the dead and she wants to thank him, right, to celebrate him.

Lazarus is alive, is seated at the table eating with Jesus. Don't miss that. This is not where he was just in the last chapter.

He was in the grave. She was weeping for him. Mary, therefore, took expensive ointment and poured it on Jesus.

Mary, therefore, because of Jesus had come and Lazarus was there, so Mary responded. Think of all the blessings Jesus has given to you.

All of the things for you to enjoy life. It's extraordinarily valuable, isn't it? In particular, the lives of those we love. If that's true of their physical lives, like Lazarus physically standing there having walked out of the grave, where we would acknowledge that our very breath is a gift from God, how much more is that true spiritually?

[12:27] When Jesus has delivered us and people we love from sin and death and the grave, when our children stand before us and profess faith in Jesus and hope because of who he is and what he's done for them, there's no greater joy, right?

Mary can't even comprehend the value of having her brother Lazarus back in her life. It is a throw-out-the-calculator kind of devotion and love expressed here.

She's saying thank you Jesus for all that you've done. But more than what Jesus has already done, Mary has some sense of what Jesus will do.

Jesus explains part of her motivation in verse 7, right? Jesus said leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. The Greek of this passage is really hard to pinpoint the exact meaning of.

I'm going to stick with what's clear, which is that in some way Mary connected this perfume, this pure nard, to Jesus' burial.

[13:42] I think it's not assuming too much to say Mary knows that's coming soon. She's understanding more than most of Jesus' disciples. After all, she's been sitting at his feet regularly.

listening to him. She's probably heard from her friends who we read went to the Pharisees just a few months ago after Lazarus' resurrection with news of that resurrection and they got a response that was murderous toward Jesus, right?

Mary knows that. She senses what lies ahead for Jesus even within a week. Jesus is going to die in our place.

He's going to pay the infinite penalty for our sin. He's going to endure the darkness, be buried to give us light.

Mary has had time to ponder Jesus' death in her place. I just want to encourage you. Have you done that since last week when we got to talk about Jesus' substitutionary death in our place?

[14:54] Have you taken time to ponder that? Does it stir your heart to overwhelming, extravagant thanksgiving and love and gratitude for the one who paid the debt that you never ever could have repaid and he's paid it in full?

Finally, don't forget that as we consider what could motivate such extravagant love, don't forget to contemplate the wonder, the glory of who Jesus is.

It's not just the things he does. As we encounter him here over and over in the Gospel of John, remember what John is doing because it's what Jesus has done.

He's doing things as signs that point us to the reality of who he is that show us his glory so that we might believe in him.

I just want to walk back through the last couple of chapters with you. I'm encouraging you to slow down with me for just a few minutes. I'm not going all the way back to the beginning of John. We'd be here all day. But just in the last couple chapters, just take a couple minutes to remember who Jesus has shown us he is.

[16:11] We've seen Jesus as the good shepherd who calls his sheep by name when otherwise we would wander. Who lays down his life for the sheep when otherwise his sheep would have been destroyed.

He's the good shepherd. We've seen him as the one and only way into life with God. The life we were created for. Even when we try to devise other ways in for ourselves, that he is the one in whom we find that life.

We've seen him promised to be the one who satisfies us deeply. Who in fact gives our lives true purpose and significance beyond what we could imagine so that we have something to live for. We've seen him offer ultimate lasting security because of his divine strength that holds us in every situation and never lets us go.

When we are so desperate for something like that that we can count on, when we're so fearful, when we're so anxious about what this life is going to bring, there is priceless comfort in Jesus being the divine strong hand that holds you.

[17 : 30] we've seen Jesus meet us in our grief with his precious promises, with his perhaps more precious tears that help us know the heart of our God in ways that otherwise we could only hope were true but now we see and feel and know that we're not alone, that our sorrows and our anguish are justified, that they won't last forever.

Jesus is that for us. We've seen him as the resurrection and the life, who gives us life beyond our breath here, confidence that we will never taste death because we're hidden in him, hope that this purposeful, significant life that he brings us into, we will enjoy with him forever.

Are you contemplating this? Are you marveling at who he is? Just pick a passage this afternoon. Would you do that? Sit for a few minutes in the glory of who Jesus is and what it means for you in relationship with him.

He is the pearl of great price, right? He is the living water that quenches all of our thirst. He is the treasure hidden in the field that when you find it, you would sell everything that you have in order to have him.

Settle there, ponder that. This is who he is, this is how valuable and precious he is and yet he has given himself to you for free and forever.

[19 : 17] He is yours and you are his. Sit in that. Put the calculator of measured practicality away.

All of a sudden there's not anything in the world that would be giving too much to honor him, to respond to his life giving love. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Not sure how much of Jesus' glory Mary grasps here but I suspect the precious ointment may be only the beginning of what she'll pour out at his feet as she knows him more and more.

And we really could stop there and just let our hearts respond, figure out what it looks like but let's briefly before we come to the table let Mary and Jesus give us some ideas of what it could look like.

If Jesus' love demands my soul, my life, my all, what might extravagant love for him cost me?

There's a couple of categories in this passage.

[20 : 34] I'm just giving you categories. Think specifically for yourself. Pray right now that the spirit would lead your heart in the next few minutes in line with your love for Jesus that is welling up in you as you consider who he is.

What would it look like? First let's think resources. It seems that in one night Mary pours a year's wages onto Jesus and he doesn't think she's gone too far.

The fact that it's expensive and the fact that it could have been redirected to other things and used for something else they're both highlighted here. It may well have been her family's savings their safety net their source of security that she pours out on him.

See the money is a resource. You think money likely extravagant love doesn't calculate 10% very often. It's just not on the radar.

It also represents some other resources like time doesn't it? How many of us worship Jesus with the measured practicality of yes a couple hours on Sunday morning makes sense most Sundays.

[21 : 54] What about dreaming about a whole day of Sabbath spent with Jesus? What it could look like to be with him wholeheartedly with nothing distracting you? What about considering how I invest my free time for his kingdom?

my vacation for his glory? Would I risk things that threaten my earthly security to express my heartfelt devotion to Jesus?

I hope you read the words we'll sing them in a minute. I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold riches untold anything this world affords today.

Mary must have concluded that. I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands. I'd rather be led by his nail-pierced hands even if his lead me to the same painful places.

It gets harder in my opinion. I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause. I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame.

[23 : 06] Mary has counted this cost to the cost of her reputation. Letting her hair down to touch his dirty feet with her glory, her hair.

This would have been scandalous. not to be done in public setting by a respectable woman. Measured practicality says, I'll let them know I'm a Christian, but I'll make sure they know that I'm still intelligent and a man of science.

Would you be okay if they're still skeptical on the last part? Are all of your relationships with efficient people? Would you humble yourself to relationships that won't do you any good socially or professionally?

That might even harm you in those ways? That might even cost you a promotion or the opinion of someone you care about? Y'all, I want you to think about relationships.

All relationships, especially relationships with the kinds of people Jesus loves, they're rarely efficient, but they often teach you about loving extravagantly.

[24 : 28] Are you okay with being left out, thoughtless of, even by other Christians who don't mind making their opinions known about the company you keep?

Just because Jesus is so precious to you, you're going to love that other person. One more thing it may cost you, reasonableness, now that hurts for those of us who love efficiency.

Mary surrenders everything here, right? I mean, look, she breaks the box, she pours it out, she loves deeply from the heart, but one thing she is not is reasonable.

She is not using a spreadsheet, she is not calculating ROI. In these days a dab of perfume on the forehead would have been customary and adequate to be respectful for the evening.

Mary has long since passed customary. She has long since stopped calculating what she owes Jesus. She is worshipping him with all that she has, all for Jesus, all for Jesus, all my beings, ransomed powers, all my thoughts and words and doings, all my days and all my hours.

[25 : 50] really? Really? Think of how many poor people could have been helped with the proceeds from selling that nard.

Whether he means it from his heart or not, Judas is not wrong financially, is he? He's got a point. I don't want you to be confused when Jesus defends Mary either.

He's not saying don't care about the poor. He's not slighting the poor. He's not talking down caring for them. That is a hallmark of the ministry of Jesus and a reason why they have money that they keep with them to share with others.

Jesus is contrasting here something that you should always do, care for the poor, with something Mary can only do in this way right now.

Honor Jesus by preparing his physical body for burial. He is pointing out that Mary in giving all to him has not overvalued him.

[27 : 01] You don't have to worry about that. You will never overvalue Jesus. You'll never pay too much. And wonderfully, we're in a little bit easier spot because we don't have to worry about neglecting the poor when we do.

Why? What did Jesus himself tell us? Whatever you have done to the least of these, visited them in prison or when sick, fed them, clothed them, welcomed them into your home or life, whatever you did for them, you did it to me, Jesus said.

There's no binary choice between extravagant love for Jesus and generous love for the poor, is there? We can do both at the same time, in fact.

Has your love for Jesus ever overflowed into something entirely unreasonable to those around you? Or have you proudly kept it under control, not gotten carried away?

It's within reason, carefully measured out all the time. We should pray, friends, we should pray Jesus so stir our hearts that we are extravagant.

[28 : 12] make our hearts full of your love that it would overflow beyond what we could control or count. You can pray that confidently while also repenting of our efficiency idol.

You know why you can do that? Because there's no way at the end of this that Jesus can condemn extravagant love or gratuitous generosity or unreasonable sacrifice because he's about to do exactly those things, isn't he?

This is the way God loves and so it is one way that we can reflect his image. Think about this. It's why Tim Keller calls the father of the prodigal son the prodigal God.

He's scandalously extravagant. Wouldn't you call it extravagant to give your inheritance away to a wastrel and then when he comes running home to spend much of the rest of your resources

throwing a party for him?

God is sometimes so inefficient it seems. What's he thinking? Jesus spends all this time one-on-one with sinners and others who sometimes reject him.

[29 : 27] He could be teaching hundreds at a time. He could have become incarnate in the internet age when he could be a huge influencer. It's almost like he thinks it makes sense to leave the 99 at home to chase after the one lost sheep and then celebrate like crazy when you find it.

Does he really think that makes sense? Thank goodness he does. Jesus acts like that. Jesus teaches like that. It sets a pattern in the life of God become man to show us what God is like in his extravagant love.

Such a pattern in the life of Jesus that he determines at the end of it to pay the price of his precious blood. The blood of a spotless lamb without blemish or defect.

The son of God, the pearl of great price, the prince of heaven decides to give his life to buy people like you and me back into his family.

His life for ours. No way. It is like young, vibrant Belle throwing herself into near certain death to spare the life of her aging, lunatic father.

[30 : 46] What? It's extravagant. It's unreasonable. But what beauty there is in the unreasonable sacrifice of Jesus, right?

The gratuitous generosity of our gracious God, the extravagant love of the Trinity for sinners. Aren't we so thankful?

Why don't we stop analyzing it and celebrate such love together this morning? As we do this, let it soak deep into your soul as you taste his body and his blood.

Let it really sink in deep, okay? It was on the night when Judas betrayed Jesus that he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to his disciples who still struggled to understand exactly how much he was worth and what he would give for them.

And he said, take and eat. This is my body, my very self given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

[32 : 01] And in the same way after supper he took the cup and he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it all of you.

See, this is not Southwood's table or the Presbyterian's table. It is the Lord's table. He is the only one extravagantly loving enough to give his life, to give you life, to give undeserving, hopeless people.

That's what our new members stood up here and said. We say it with them as we come here that we are hopeless save for his sovereign, extravagant mercy.

If that's your story, that that's where your hope is come and take his body and blood given for you and celebrate love like that. If that is not your story yet, if you haven't owned that publicly and been baptized, then don't come take bread and wine this morning.

Come and observe. Come and ask us to pray with you. We'd be thrilled to. But come and consider, please consider the Savior who would give his body and blood so that you would be at this table with him forever.

[33 : 27] That's how he loves you. It's how he's shown us his love. Some of you are coming this morning to eat and drink with us for the very first time. We are so excited to celebrate with you, dear young people.

What a joy. We rejoice with you that you're about to do perhaps some of you for the first time.

Something that you will get to do forever. You get to eat with Jesus.

He is giving you this so that you know there is a table like this coming forever where you eat in his presence and you're never apart from him. So start celebrating that today and you never have to stop.

Let me pray and we'll celebrate together. Jesus, what amazing love. love. You are so good to us. Don't let us miss it. Don't let us move quickly past who you are and how you love us. Stir up within us gratitude, wonder, love for you.

[34 : 38] We ask in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host).