

# Thursday Evening Service

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, before we turn back to the word this evening, let's again just bow our heads together in prayer. Lord God, you know our hearts, you have examined us through and through, you go before us in all that we say and in all that we do.

And we pray that as you examine us this evening, that you would find hearts which are redeemed, those hearts which know the Lord Jesus as Saviour.

And we do pray for those again this evening who are as yet outside your kingdom. Father, that you would draw them to yourself through your word, through the testimony of Mary.

And we do pray that it would be a great time of joy for us as we consider the love that Mary had for her Saviour. Father, we pray that we would have that kind of redeemed love within us.

That we would have selfless hearts, unconditional love for the Saviour, and that that would transcend and translate into action in our lives.

[ 1 : 15 ] That we would be changed through our relationship with you daily. That the work of transformation, that sanctification would go on and on in our lives.

That we would ever draw closer to you, knowing that you see and that you know us intimately. So, Father, we pray that our worship tonight would be pleasing to you. We are mindful this evening of those who cannot be with us.

And we pray that you would be with them where they are. Whether through infirmity, through old age, through illness, or perhaps even just a lack of desire to be here.

Father, we pray that you would be with these people. That they would know your presence and your grace upon them. And that if there are people who are in the wilderness, who have chosen not to be here tonight.

Lord, that you would draw them back to yourself. And that they would too experience a time of renewal within their hearts and souls. So, Father, bless us this evening.

[ 2 : 16 ] Open your word to us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. If you'd like to turn back to the passage that we read in Mark's Gospel in chapter 14.

For a short time this evening, we'll have a look at various different things here. Love. Love.

Love is something that is all-encompassing. Love is something that is so common. And yet, how do we define what love actually is?

People have written books about it. People have written poems about it. People have written songs about it. The music industry is full of songs about love.

Love. I'm sure you wouldn't have to think very long to think of a song that talks about love. There was the late, great Whitney Houston sang about a song called The Greatest Love of All.

[ 3 : 17 ] And in that, she said, I found the greatest love of all inside of me. The greatest love of all is easy to achieve. Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all.

Love is love. Not to put Whitney down, but that's a lot of rubbish. Love isn't just a feeling. Love is not just some abstract thoughts or subjective emotion.

But love is a person. God is love, the Bible tells us in 1 John. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. The chapter before us this evening is largely about love. It's about an extravagant demonstration of love by one woman to her Savior.

But in some ways, it's quite a sad passage of Scripture, isn't it? Because initially, we see the hatred of men. We see the ugliness of the human heart painted for us here.

[ 4 : 23 ] Because according to the first couple of verses, the religious establishment, the Jews, well, they're fed up with Jesus. They don't love Jesus at all. They're sick of his preaching, and they want

rid of him.

And not only do they want rid of him, they want him dead. They were looking for some sly way, some crafty way to arrest him by stealth, it says here in the passage.

They're trying to devise a plan or a plot to get rid of Jesus. Why are they so angry? Well, they're upset because Jesus has exposed them, hasn't he?

Jesus has exposed their hypocrisy. You see, these men were claiming to be spiritual, godly, leaders of the nation.

But Jesus proves them to be nothing more than religious phonies, hypocrites. He makes a fool out of them in front of the common people, and they're not going to stand for that.

[ 5 : 24 ] And they're also angry because Jesus is hurting their business. He's having an effect on their back pocket. Because as we know, the religious leaders controlled the commerce down at the temple.

They approved who bought and who sold. They charged a fee and took a percentage for themselves. They were raking it in. So when Jesus came along and threw out the sellers and the vendors and the money changers, when he threw them out of the temple back in Mark chapter 11, they then determined in their hearts, this Jesus has got to go.

We must get rid of this man. So while this passage in some way reveals the extent of the sin within the human heart, human nature at its worst, there's also a picture of human nature at its best, isn't there?

Because what it does here is it contrasts the hatred of the enemies of Jesus with the unconditional love of one of his precious followers.

These verses paint a portrait, we could say, of extravagant love. And we're going to look at that tonight. This kind of love, the every redeemed heart, the love that we should have for our Savior if we claim him as Lord.

[ 6 : 39 ] See this love in action so that we might be motivated ourselves to express that same kind of unconditional, selfless, all-consuming love for the Savior, boundless, extravagant love for Jesus, just as this woman did.

I'm going to look at it from a number of headings. The first being the demonstration of extravagant love. Now, for many years, I was a member in Smithton Culloden Free Church and sat under the ministry of David Meredith.

So I can't just have three points. I'll have three points with a number of subheadings because that's what I'm used to. So the demonstration of extravagant love. But then we'll look at the setting, the sacrifice and the statement that was made.

So let's look at the setting for this demonstration of extravagant love. Well, these events took place in the little town of Bethany, which was located on the southern slope of the Mount of Olives, just a few miles from Jerusalem.

And Bethany was a favorite location for Jesus. Why? Because he had some very good friends there. These friends were the siblings. Their names were Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

[ 7 : 50 ] And Jesus often visited them in their home and benefited and enjoyed the hospitality that was on offer to them there. We know that from Luke's Gospel. It was also this Lazarus that died and Jesus brought back to life after four days in the tomb.

So Bethany was a special place for Jesus. Now, we're told that these events happen in the house of Simon the leper. And it would appear that this man had been healed from leprosy by Jesus and throws a feast in his honor to thank him to celebrate what he has done in his life, as we read in John chapter 12.

And it's such a natural thing, isn't it? When the Lord has done such amazing things that we would be thankful for it, like this man Simon the leper was. His heart was overflowing with gratitude and he wants to thank the Lord Jesus.

So he throws a dinner for him. We're told in John's account of this same event that Martha is there serving.

That Lazarus, who was raised from the dead, is sitting at the table with Jesus. And it's in fact Mary who performs this demonstration of extravagant love for Jesus.

[ 9 : 06 ] We're not told that in Mark, but we're told in John. This is a scene of love, isn't it? It's a scene of love. Jesus is surrounded for the most part by people who genuinely love him, who genuinely care for him.

And notice what they're doing. They're reclining at the table and they're enjoying food and one another's company together. The AV translation says that Jesus sat at meat. And I like that. You can tell by looking at me that I like that. But there they are together. They're enjoying a time of fellowship with each other. With people who he had all in common with.

And it was a good thing to do, was to spend time together around the table, enjoy food and enjoy fellowship with the Lord. There's something special, isn't there, about sitting down and having fellowship over a meal.

Some people don't like it, but Jesus did it and that's good enough for me. Fellowship is good. It's even better when food is involved. So we see the setting for this demonstration of extravagant love. [10:15] But then we see the sacrifice of this demonstration. As Jesus sits there at this meal, Mary enters the room and with her she has this alabaster jar filled with this very expensive perfume made from pure nard.

And she breaks the jar and she pours the perfume over Jesus, over his head. And then John tells us also that she anointed his feet and wiped his feet with her hair.

This is, by any stretch, an extravagant demonstration of love towards Jesus. Within this jar that Mary had, there was this substance called spikenard or just nard.

And it's a red tinted ointment that was drawn from a plant that grows in India. And it was a perfume that was used in the embalming process. It was wildly expensive.

So generally only the very wealthy could afford to have it. We're told in verse 5 that it was worth around 300 denarii.

[11:15] And that was a year's pay for the average worker. This was extravagant. Apparently last year the average wage in Scotland was £26,000.

There are obviously those of us who are well below the national average. But apparently the national average was £26,000. And that begins to put it into perspective here.

What Mary gave to the Lord. What do you own? What do you possess that is worth a year's wages to you? Would you be willing to give it up for Jesus?

This was extravagant towards the Lord. Mary enters the room. Breaks the neck of the flask. Pours some ointment on Jesus' head. The rest she pours on his feet.

Then she falls down before him and washes his feet with her hair. And John tells us that the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment. This was an extravagant display of love because it was so sacrificial.

[12:18] Because she gave this very special, valuable thing to Jesus. So we see the setting. We see the sacrifice.

Thirdly, we see the statement that there was in this demonstration of extravagant love. Why did Mary do this? Was she trying to impress the people who had gathered for the feast?

Was she trying to prove how much she loved the Lord? I think this was for the benefit of Jesus alone. When she came that day and when she broke that flask of ointment on Jesus, when she wiped his feet with her hair, she was making a statement.

In fact, she was making several statements about him. She was making a statement about her commitment to him, firstly, wasn't she? When she broke the flask, there was no going back.

The entire contents of that flask had to be used. It had to be used up in what she had come to do. Her commitment to him in that sense was unconditional.

[13:21] It was wholly complete. She's making a statement about her commitment to Jesus. But she's also making a statement about his value to her.

You see, she had probably saved her entire life to be able to purchase this flask of ointment. She was probably saving it for her own burial. But when she breaks that flask and pours its contents out over the Lord, she was saying, You mean more to me than anything I have in this world.

You mean more. But she was also making a statement about her value to herself. By this act, Mary was demonstrating that Jesus meant more to her than her own reputation.

She sacrificed her pride in order to serve him. She was saying, I love you so much that I don't care what anybody thinks about me or about this expression of extravagance towards you.

How can I say that? Well, two things, I think, prove that truth. Firstly, only prostitutes were seen in public with their hair down. But at that moment, Mary didn't care about anything else other than serving her Lord.

[ 14 : 33 ] She takes her hair down and she washes his feet with her hair. But secondly, only slaves washed the feet of others. When a person came into a home, they were offered water so that they could wash their feet.

And if the homeowner had slaves, then they would come in, servants, and they would wash the feet of the guest. Mary took the place of a servant before the Lord and she served him.

Why? Because she loved him. Not only that, she was making a statement about the value of her possessions, wasn't she? Because to Mary, nothing in the world was as valuable to her as Jesus was.

She loved him with this extravagant love, with everything that she possessed. She recognized that everything that she possessed was his anyway. She loved Jesus more than she loved her things. Is that a challenge? That's a challenge to me. Do I love Jesus more than I love my things? It was common in these days to put a few drops of perfume on the head of an honored guest when they arrived at the home.

[ 15 : 45 ] But Mary breaks the whole flask. It's not just a couple of drops. It's not just, well, I could spare a little. It's the whole lot. Why?

Because she loves him. Because he is her Lord. He is her Savior. She loves him. Do you love Jesus?

Do you love him like Mary loved him? She was also making a statement about Jesus' worthiness to be worshipped and served, wasn't she?

Why did she do it? Because she was thankful. She was thankful because Jesus was her Lord. He was her Redeemer. She was thankful because Jesus had raised her brother from the dead, taken him from the tomb.

She was overwhelmed with love for Jesus that she willingly gave up the most expensive and precious thing that she had in order to worship him in extravagance.

[ 16 : 45 ] She understood who Jesus was. She understood who Jesus was. And she understood where Jesus was going. As far as she knew, this was the last time that she would see him.

This was the last time that she had an opportunity to serve and to honor him. And she took it. She seized that opportunity. She made it count for the glory of God.

And I'm sure there's many other statements that we could take from Mary's Acts. But these certainly speak volumes to me. When was the last time that you offered the Lord an offering of extravagance?

When was the last time that you broke the bank worshipping him? When was the last time that you threw away your pride and gave him worship, honor, and praise, regardless of what people may think?

When was the last time that you selflessly served the Lord with all of your heart because you recognize who he is and what he has done? How long is it since you've placed everything that you have, everything that you are, everything that you care about before the Lord in sacrifice?

[ 18 : 10 ] We don't see an awful lot of extravagant love for Jesus in these days. There are very few people who love Jesus more than their own agenda.

There are very few people who love Jesus more than they love themselves. There are very few people who love Jesus more than their own possessions or their own comfort.

There are very few who are willing to serve him without any thought of anything in return. There are very few who are willing to sacrifice their pride and their possessions so that the Lord might be honored.

There aren't many who love him extravagantly. Look at your own life in the light of Mary's statement of faith.

Are you totally committed to Jesus in extravagant love, in extravagant worship? That's his will for us in our lives, isn't it?

[ 19 : 13 ] Romans 12. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Is Jesus more valuable to you tonight than the things that you possess in this life?

Would you be willing to give up the things that you have been blessed with in order to demonstrate your love for him? Is he worth more than your pride?

Have you reached a place where you don't really care what other people think about you as you walk with the Lord? Are you willing to suffer shame and scorn if it brings glory to his name?

[ 20 : 17 ] Because that's what the lost world needs, isn't it? The lost world needs our expressions of extravagant love for Jesus.

It needs people who are selflessly committed to him, to love him unashamedly, to live their lives in light of the salvation that they have received. Are you living a life which brings glory and honour to Jesus?

Are you living a life which shows praise and worship to your Saviour? I think it's time that the church fell head over heels in love with Jesus again.

I'm no Savage Garden fan, but they used to have a song called Truly, Madly, Deeply. Are we truly, madly, deeply in love with Jesus?

If the answer is yes, then our lives should exhibit that. Too often we love the Lord when it's convenient. We love him between 11 and 12 on a Sunday.

[ 21 : 32 ] We love him when he fits into our schedule. We love him when loving him doesn't get in the way of what we want to do, or how we want to live, or where we want to go, or what we want to accomplish in our lives.

We love him to a point, but do we love him with reckless abandon like Mary did? Do we love him with a true, extravagant love?

I speak of myself, anyway, and I'm convicted in my heart when I look at Mary.

So often we come to the means of grace and we act like God should be pleased, that we've done him a favour by turning up, that we've thrown a pound in the offering plate and we think we've given. Often we live our lives on our own schedule, according to our own rules, and yet so often we say we're living for the Lord. We fuss, we gripe, we complain, we moan about everything, and yet in the same breath profess to be living for Christ.

[ 22 : 36 ] May Mary's gift make us ashamed of our tepid, self-centred, half-hearted love for the one who has done everything for us.

I can't speak for you, but this passage does convict me, because I want to love him with that extravagance that Mary loved him. I want to love him so much that he controls all of me and everything that I possess and all that I am.

I want to love him without shame and without fear and without foolish pride getting in the way of things. I want to love him like Mary loved him. Why?

Because after all, what has he done for me? What has he done for you? What has he done for Mary? Think of the extravagance with which Jesus loves you.

Think of the extravagance with which Jesus has loved all of us. John Legend, another singer-songwriter, had a song out recently called All of Me, and it was All of Me Loves All of You.

[ 23 : 51 ] Jesus says, All of me, I have given all of myself because of my love for you. That's why Mary loved Jesus in the way that she loved him, because she recognized that he loved her with all of himself, that he gave all of himself for her.

He has given all of himself for each and every one of us, and therefore we should be willing to give all of ourselves for him. So we see the demonstration of extravagant love.

You'll be hoping the next two points aren't quite as long as that one. But secondly, we see the discouragement of extravagant love, don't we, in verses 4 and 5.

Mary's demonstration of this love is wonderful. To behold, it challenges us, it convicts us. And then we wish that these words had never been spoken.

But we need the truth that is exposed in these couple of verses. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, Why was this ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor, and they scalded her.

[ 25 : 12 ] Not everybody thinks that the Lord is worthy of such extravagant worship. Not everybody agrees with loving Jesus in such an extravagant way.

Some people believe we should be as cheap as possible with everything in life, including our dedication to Jesus. But the verses here tell us that some of those standing there, most likely the disciples, which we know from chapter 12 of John, they were saying they were indignant, they were talking indignantly, they were very displeased.

They weren't happy at all with what Mary had done to Jesus. They went so far as to say that her act of selfless love and worship was nothing more than a waste.

They said it's an absolute waste. This ointment is ruined. It's good for nothing. So much more could have been done with it. Judas and the rest, they declared the ointment should have been sold. It should have been given to the poor. And it sounds good on the face of it, doesn't it? But John tells us he didn't say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. Because he wanted to get his hands on the money that this was worth.

[ 26 : 34 ] And when Judas Iscariot says what he does about the ointment, the other 11 voices seem to echo in agreement. So in a way this is a sad scene, isn't it?

Because here is this woman, Mary, who loves Jesus more than she loves her life, her wealth, her possessions. She sacrifices her pride and her precious ointment because she wanted to worship to honor the Lord Jesus.

She worshiped him publicly, openly, sacrificially, extravagantly. She gave away all that she had to worship him. And her worship was expensive.

Her worship was extravagant. And yet this extravagant worship is misunderstood. It's misinterpreted. It's misrepresented by the Lord's disciples.

They ridicule her, try and make her feel bad for the thing that she's done. Why do they treat her that way? Could we say it's because they didn't have the same heart?

[ 27 : 38 ] They didn't have the same love for Jesus that Mary did? She was willing to give up all that she had to worship him. But they're upset by that because really what they're saying is Jesus isn't worth it.

And we still see that mentality at work, don't we? I remember speaking to somebody shortly after I was in the college and I can't remember exactly who it was. I just remember the end of the conversation.

They said, what are you up to these days? And I said, I'm training for the ministry. And they said, the ministry? I said, yeah. And they said, you're a young man. You've got your life ahead of you. What a waste. People still talk about that. If we give our lives to the Lord Jesus, they say, what a waste. He's not worth it.

And yet we say, only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Here's the fact that if we decide to give Christ extravagant expressions of our love and dedication to him, there will be people who will criticize us for it.

[ 28 : 51 ] There will be people who will not understand, who will be vocal about it. If we decide to give our resources to the Lord's cause, people will tut. If we decide to give our talents to the Lord's cause, people will shake their head.

If we give our money to the church, if the church uses its money in a particular way, even people within the church will shake their head and say, is this really worth it? What should our response be?

What was Mary's response? Well, as far as we know, she didn't make one. She just loved Jesus. She just gave him her extravagant worship.

She didn't worry about the rest. In other words, keep on loving him. Keep on giving to him. Keep on praising him.

Keep on displaying extravagant love towards him and he will get the glory. So we see the demonstration of extravagant love. We see the discouragement of extravagant love.

[ 29 : 55 ] And then we see in verses 6 to 9, the wonderful defense of extravagant love. Jesus knows what these men are thinking. Jesus knows what these men are saying.

And he comes to Mary's defense, doesn't he? And he makes several statements that affirm the truth that he willingly received Mary's gift of extravagant love.

He saw it as worthwhile. But Jesus said, leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

He's bothered by the attitude of these men surrounding him. Mary has come to Jesus with unconditional and selfless love.

She has given him the best of what she had. And they're attacking her for it. They look at the gift and they say, what a waste. And Jesus says, this is beautiful.

[ 31 : 01 ] This isn't a waste. This is a beautiful thing that she has done. She has done a beautiful thing for me.

She has done it for me. A lot of it comes down to what we do things for. If we do things for ourselves, then we will have our reward.

If we do things for others only, then we will have our reward. If we do it for the glory of God, then we will have his reward. In verse 7, he says, For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them.

But you will not always have me. Jesus wasn't saying that they shouldn't help the poor. We should certainly seek to help the poor as much as we can.

But Jesus is simply stating that Mary seized the moment. The poor would always be there, but he wouldn't. She had an opportunity, and she took that opportunity to love him and to worship him.

[ 32 : 07 ] So it is with us. Our lives are fleeting at best. And so we must learn to seize the moments that we are given by the Lord to serve him.

When the moment presents itself to witness, to give, to serve, don't waste it. Give him the extravagant love that he is due, just as Mary did.

When you have the means, when you have the opportunity to give to the Lord's work, don't waste that opportunity. Invest in the work of the Lord.

Give him all that you have, all that you are. In verse 8, there's that great, just short sentence, isn't it? She has done what she could.

There wasn't a lot that Mary could do. She couldn't prepare him a meal, there just wasn't time. She couldn't make him a garment again, there wasn't time. She couldn't take his place in Gethsemane.

[ 33 : 16 ] She couldn't take his place on Calvary. She couldn't take away the shame. She couldn't take away the rejection, the hatred, or any of the other pains that Jesus was facing or experiencing. There was a lot that she could not do.

But there was one thing that she could do. There was one thing that she had. And that was a flask of expensive perfume. She was saving it for herself.

But she chose in that moment to take what she had and to give it to the Lord. We can't do everything, but we can do something.

It's the story of the starfish, isn't it? We've all heard it. Millions of starfish lying along a beach and an old man picking them up one at a time and throwing them back into the sea. And somebody approaching him and saying, what are you doing?

Even if you spend all day here, you won't make much of a difference. You won't get a tenth of them back into the water. They're going to die anyway. And he picks down up, stoops down, picks up another and throws it into the water.

[ 34 : 27 ] He said, I made a difference to that one. We can't do everything, but we must learn to take what we do have and to use it for Jesus.

You can't evangelize the whole world, but you can tell a friend about Jesus. You can't feed every starving person in the world, but you can feed someone. You can't help everybody, but you can help someone.

You can't do it all, but you can take what you do have and you can give it to him in worship, in service. I can't preach everywhere, but I can go to the places where I am invited.

I can't give the church everything that it needs, but I can give what I have. My duty is to do what I can, to be faithful and to be obedient.

And that's what Jesus wants from all of us. That's what Jesus got from Mary. That's all he asks of us. Do what you can. Give what you've got.

[ 35 : 36 ] And that will be different for every single one of us. You can't do it all, but there are some things that you can do.

You can pray. You can witness. You can work. You can give. You can be faithful. You can read your Bible. You can support your church. You can pray for missionaries. You can help your neighbours.

You can teach a Sunday school class. You name it. There is something for everybody to do. And when we die and when we are in the presence of the Lord, don't we long to hear those words?

Well done, good and faithful servant. For he did what he could. She did what she could. We can all do something.

We can do something. That's all he wants from us. He wants us to love him as Mary loved him. He wants us to love him.

[ 36 : 32 ] He wants us to trust him. He wants us to believe in him. He doesn't want us to have all the answers. He doesn't promise to give us all of the answers, but he just wants us to come to him with all of ourselves just as he has come to us with all of himself.

Isn't there a great testimony there at the end of that passage? And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her. The disciples looked at what Mary had done and said, what a waste. Jesus looked at it and said, this is beautiful. Jesus said that because of that her story would be retold over and over and over again.

And here we are in the 21st century reading the story of Mary. Hearing about how she loved her Lord and what she did for him and how we should be motivated to do the same.

How many people have been motivated to live and to love and to give sacrificially to the Lord Jesus because of Mary? Truly I tell you, anyone who gives a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

[ 38 : 01 ] Those who honor me, I will honor, he says. Mary honored her Savior and she has been rewarded for it. Will the same be said of you when you meet your maker?

Have you done what you could? Are you doing what you can? Are you offering your Lord extravagant demonstrations of your worship?

It's a challenge to us this evening, isn't it? To look at how we are serving him, how we are loving him and then ask the question, is there room for improvement?

Could I do better? Something that I got on many of my school reports, could do better. I guess if we were honest, if we had a report from the Lord tonight that would probably say something similar, could do better.

We need to give all of ourselves to him because he has given all of himself for us. We need to examine our motives, our love, our worship.

[ 39 : 20 ] When you consider Mary and what she did, how does your own love stack up for Jesus? is it extravagant or is it lacking a little?

I'm going to close with a quote from an unknown author that said, love is extravagant in the price it is willing to pay, the time it is willing to give, the hardships it is willing to endure, and the strength it is willing to spend.

Love doesn't think in terms of how little, but always in terms of how much. love gives, love knows, and love lasts.

Amen. Let's conclude by singing again the latter half of Psalm 116 in the Sing Psalms. moreuuldo more than July 106 in the By