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An Extravagant Service John 12:1-11

Intro: With our entrance into **ch12**, we are launching into a study of the most momentous week in all of world history. At the end of ch11 we see Jesus leaving the area of Jerusalem for the city of Ephraim because the religious authorities were plotting to kill Him but His hour had not yet come. Now, He has returned to Bethany on His way back up to Jerusalem where He was to be crucified. No other week is quite like this week, not even the other important weeks of biblical history. The week of creation is obviously an important week. The 1st week of Jesus' earthly ministry is also important and John is careful to highlight it in the opening chapters of his Gospel.

But, neither of these weeks compare to the block of seven awe-inspiring days with which each of the Gospel writers conclude their books. Nearly ½ of John is given to the narrative of the events of this week and what follows. Nearly 2/5 of Mark, 1/3 of Matthew and 1/4 of Luke focuses on this week and they are right to do so. All of this literature covers a mere 7 days of the entire life of Jesus Christ. But, the events of this week were the result of His steadfast determination to go up to Jerusalem, to die for the sin of the world and give His life as a ransom for His people.

1-3- Knowing what this momentous week contains, we're not surprised to discover that it begins with a supper given for Jesus in Bethany where Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, anoints Jesus with the costly oil of spikenard. She did this, as Jesus will point out in **vs7**, "for the day of My burial," a burial that was still 6 days away. But this was the moment at which Jesus was symbolically set apart for burial by the only one who really understood what was about to happen, just as He would similarly be set apart as God's great Passover Lamb on Palm Sunday.

From Matthew and Mark we learn this gathering was held at the house of Simon the leper, a man Jesus had most likely healed from leprosy. The supper was probably a celebration for the raising of Lazarus, sort of a "thank you" supper as it were; and as such, it was a courageous thing for the friends of Jesus to do. Remember, the Sanhedrin had just given an order that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they should report it to the

authorities. Failing to do so would make them accessories to His “crime.” Still Jesus’ friends held this supper and held it openly. At least we know that it put Lazarus in some danger (10-11).

What seems to have stuck out in everyone’s mind concerning this supper tho, wasn’t the presence of Lazarus or even the bravery of Jesus’ friends. What the disciples remembered of this dinner and wrote about long afterward was the public, spontaneous, humbling, extravagant, sacrificial and unembarrassed act of Mary anointing Jesus’ feet.

In our first study of ch11, we looked at some of the characteristics of the family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus and we will revisit this topic today somewhat. But before we make any personal applications from the actions of this family, let’s take a minute and answer the “what” and “why” of vs3. What was Mary was doing here and why did she do it?

It seems that in the middle of the supper, Mary entered the room and knelt down at the feet of Jesus, breaks open a large container of very expensive perfume and pours it all out on His feet. Of course, this was too much liquid for His feet to absorb so Mary began to wipe up the excess with her hair. This was an extravagant act of worship on the Lord’s behalf because John points out that the perfume was worth a year’s wages for a day laborer.

Her act was doubly extravagant for Jewish women in that culture never let down their hair in public; it was looked upon as a mark of loose morals. This was also an act of utter humility since Mary took the lowliest place possible. To attend to a guest’s feet was the task of the lowest slave in the household. Mary didn’t stop to calculate cultural norms or public opinion before she acted. She humbled herself and laid her glory at His feet. Her heart went out to Jesus and she expressed her feeling towards Him and His subsequent sacrifice in this beautiful and touching way.

That brings us to the why. We know she was saving this perfume for His burial but why didn’t she wait to use it then? In one way, she was showing her devotion to Jesus before it was too late. She was, in one sense, “giving the roses” while Jesus was still alive while in another sense; she was symbolically embalming His body for burial. This point is critical because it sets Mary apart from every other follower of Jesus during this time.

Mary knew that Jesus was about to die. He was about to give His life for us on the cross and Mary knew it. What's so marvelous about this statement is the fact that Mary was apparently the only one who knew! Jesus had tried to tell the others. Hours before on the way to Jerusalem He'd communicated this clearly to the disciples ([Mark 10:33-34](#)). But it all went right over their heads, as we'll see from their discussion with Jesus in the Upper Room ([ch13-14](#)) and from their despondent, almost unbelieving reaction to His crucifixion. Only Mary understood. She had understood for some time. Now she broke her box of perfume over Jesus in order to show Him that she understood.

How did Mary understand these things when the others, particularly the disciples, failed to? We touched on this at the beginning of [ch11](#) but it bears repeating here. The answer is: by often being in the place where we find her now: at the feet of Jesus, anointing Him and wiping His feet with her hair. This is where we always find her! Mary is found 3 different times in the 4 Gospels and in each case, she's at Jesus' feet worshiping Him and learning from Him.

How does this apply to us? Well, if you've been a Christian for any length of time and find that you still don't know a lot about spiritual things, could it be because you've not spent much time at the feet of Jesus? Do you want to learn? Do you want to grow strong in the knowledge of God's will and ways? Then you must learn from Jesus.

But what does this mean? What does this look like? It's true, you can't physically sit at Jesus' feet and learn from Him today but you can do the same thing by studying the Bible. The Hebrew idiom, sitting at one's feet just meant to learn from that person. It was the place of a child learning from a parent, or a pupil learning from his rabbi. Today we do the same thing by studying the Book Jesus gave us; the one in which we find Him. Do you study the Bible? Really study it? Many people would like to know it, but they won't discipline themselves for the necessary work. They'll say, "I wish I could just take the information from your brain and put it in mine." But biblical truth doesn't get into our hearts and minds through osmosis, data transfers and certainly not by wishing. Now, not everyone will become a Bible teacher but; if we're going to learn anything about Jesus, then the words about Jesus are essential and we must study them – regularly and systematically. We should all mimic Mary in this important characteristic.

4-8- There's another way we should be like Mary - in her love, even to the point of extravagance. This is where we get close to the true motivation of this wonderful act. It's not adequate to say that Mary did this just to show that she knew Jesus was about to die. Jesus knew this anyway and she knew that He knew. No, she did all this for a much simpler and sublime reason – to show that she loved Him, to show that she understood that sorrow He was facing. Mary wanted to identify with Jesus in His sorrow just as He had identified with her in her sorrow and in her joy.

Was she successful? Of course! She had sat at Jesus' feet, had looked into His eyes and seen His sorrow. She said to herself, "What can I do to show that I love Him and that I understand what He's doing for us?" She'd thought of her most precious possession, her ointment. She said, "I'll give Him that." She had given it, and Jesus had understood (as He always does). In replying to Judas it is as though Jesus was saying, "Stop annoying the woman, for she alone of all of you has understood what I am about to do and loves me for doing it."

Right here, John presents a great contrast in attitudes towards Jesus: Mary and her unselfish love; Judas and his self-centered greed. Judas had a sharp sense of financial values – but *no sense* of what God valued. He thought this was too much love and devotion to show to Jesus. These are the first recorded words of Judas in the Gospels and they're a nit-picking complaint! Mary's first words are a trusting confession (**11:32b**). In his greed, Judas eventually sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver (about 120 denarii). Mary's offering to Jesus was worth 2½ times that amount. Judas kept the bag and pilfered from it. Mary broke her box so that all might be given to Jesus. Judas tried to turn attention from Jesus. Mary sought to turn attention to Jesus.

When we see this comparison up close, we must ask ourselves, "Who do I resemble the most?" Remember, Mary gave her most valued possession. Your most valued possession will be different (at least I hope so). It could be a comfortable home, a bank account, family relations or a host of different things. Whatever it is, the question still stands: Would you give it for Jesus? Notice I didn't say "Have you..." Sadly, in our current "Christian" culture, this question is often twisted into a justification for all kinds of opulence and luxury. The idea that's promoted is: nothing's too good for Jesus but in the

twisting, they also like to apply it to those who claim to serve Him. We should note that this was done directly for Jesus, not for any of the disciples. We should also note that it was poured out in a single act. This wasn't a gift that could be held onto and sold off later when no one was looking.

Could you use your most prized possession to serve Jesus, or to show how much you love Him? Would you let your children go off into Christian work, leaving the standard of life you've created for them? Would you be willing to leave everything to go yourself, if God should so call you to it? Would you be able to use your substance to send others? "But I would be throwing away everything I've worked for." In a sense, you would. That's the way the world will look at it. But, on the other hand, you will be investing in great spiritual dividends with God. Blessings like this bestowed on Jesus out of love always return again bless those who give them as well as many of those around them.

That's exactly what happened here with Mary. She had broken her box, giving her all, then; she stooped to wipe Jesus' feet with her hair. From her perspective, that was the end of the story. But John says, "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil." How did the house become filled with the odor? well, if Mary also began to help serve and if the perfume was now in her hair, then the odor would have spread from her to the whole house. The end result being her gift to Jesus, given with no thought of herself; became the means by which she shared the blessing. How many souls will be saved because the people of Grace Chapel gave to the Lord's work? A tithe of our regular offerings goes to mission works in the Philippines, Pakistan, the Jewish population of Brooklyn as well as all these gift boxes for operation Christmas Child that will circle the globe and spread the Gospel to willing young hearts and their families this year and every year we participate in it. The complete harvest will not be known this side of glory.

Are you a blessing to other people? When they see you does it make them think of Jesus? If your life seems dry and unprofitable, then do what Mary did. Get down on your knees before Jesus. Give Him your all. Pour out your life before Him. If you try to hoard your life and substance, you won't be a blessing to others and you'll lose those things in the end. But, if you give Jesus your life (His prized possession), then you'll be blessed yourself and will inevitably become a blessing to all those around you. The closer the

relationship with Jesus, the more of a blessing you will be.

Jesus immediately came to Mary's defense. Judas' criticism came from a mercenary spirit and not from a desire to help the poor. Jesus knew this and would have nothing to do with the criticism brought against Mary. The principle to be drawn from vs8 is simply this: opportunity is to be seized while it is there. The poor will always be around but Jesus would not be. He won't live to an old age but will be taken from them soon. The time for actions of devotion towards Jesus was much shorter than those at the table realized. I believe the same thing is true for us today. Don't delay living for Jesus by thinking that you'll have plenty of time for that later. Later may never come and we are certainly not guaranteed it. Jesus welcomed Mary's timely devotion and He will welcome yours as well.

Mary loved Jesus and gave her all, but so did Martha. She didn't give her ointment – she probably had none to give.

Martha doesn't seem to be the kind of person who treasured perfume – or kept it for a special occasion. Martha didn't value perfume but she did value something: hard work! This can be seen in every scriptural context that we find her. What is Martha doing in our text? She's working! She's dealing in perspiration rather than perfume. But, more importantly, she's serving Jesus and she's not complaining about it as she had done once before. In serving the Lord, it's not so much what is done that's important but that it's done for Jesus and done by those whose hearts are fully surrendered to Him.

9-11 - Last week we heard Caiaphas say that it was “expedient for us that one man should die for the people” (11:50).

Now the rulers realize that one will not do. Jesus is not enough. Now it is “Lazarus...also.” Later, it will be Stephen and James and Peter and many other martyrs. Such is the consequence of trying to cover up evidence of a truth. Its as if the truth were an artesian well. You can try to hide it as a tiny stream. But sooner or later the water will come bubbling through, carrying dirt with it. The efforts to cover it up, no matter how great, will be wasted. The evidence for the truth of Jesus' teaching and His power to change lives are undestroyable and inescapable. What's the evidence?

Believers are! Thus, the witness of Christianity should be equally undestroyable and inescapable. Are you evidence of the claims of Jesus Christ? Does your life prove His teaching as Lazarus' did? How so?

1) Lazarus became an irresistible attraction. “Well yeah, Jesus just raised him from the dead!” Granted, none of us have been brought back from death to physical life by Jesus but we were all once dead spiritually. The Bible teaches this when it says that we “were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Being dead, we were beyond any hope of recovery, just like Lazarus. Then Jesus came and called us and we were made alive and rose up at the sound of His voice to follow Him. This is the case of all who are Christians. This is what it means to be a Christian. It means to have been made alive by Jesus. Consequently, we can also be an attraction by which others find Jesus. Of course, it’s not us who are attractive, it’s Jesus within us. So, He must be in us if He is to attract others to Himself through us.

2) Lazarus was with Jesus. It’s almost as if Lazarus had determined: I will help others to see Jesus to the degree that I spend time with Him. How does that work? Those who spend time with Jesus become like Jesus, which is good because Jesus is the true attraction. Our first duty as Christians is not to win souls but to become like Jesus. Our job is to live for Jesus in our daily responsibilities so that the people we come into contact with might see God’s salvation in action. The secret to becoming like Jesus is being with Jesus.

Because of his time with Jesus, Lazarus became a threat to some unbelievers. He was a political threat to the Sadducees simply by his association with Jesus. The primary interest of the chief priests was in maintaining their positions of power – the status quo. But Lazarus was also a threat to their theology. The Sadducees didn’t believe in a life after death or the resurrection. Yet, here was a man who disproved everything they believed in by his very presence. They were in danger of losing both their political power and the influence of their teaching. There was only one course of action for them: since they refused to believe on Jesus, they had to eliminate Lazarus also.

As bad as that may sound, there is another side to Lazarus’ story. Yes he was a threat to some unbelievers and he was put into great danger because of it. At the same time, he was a great blessing to many others because it was through the testimony of his life and his courageous witness of Jesus that many came to saving faith in the Messiah!

The lives of these three friends of Jesus should serve as examples that we

can follow and if we will apply these same principles to our own lives, I believe we will all see many others come to know Jesus as their Savior. Do we want that to be the testimony of our lives? Are we willing to pay the price? 😊