

Extravagant Love

I. For grateful worshipers, only extravagance satisfies (vv. 1-3)

1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. **2** So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. **3** 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

1. Notice the magnitude of the gift. The gift that Mary gave Jesus six days before the Passover 2,000 years ago was an extravagance of the first order: nard from India. This ointment was worth over a year's wages. Some suspect that this ointment was, in fact, her inheritance, perhaps even her future dowry. She had learned through Lazarus' death how fragile life is and how vulnerable she was as a woman in first century Palestine. Yet she poured out this most precious possession on the feet of Jesus.

2. Notice the zeal of the giver. Mary broke all social conventions: she washed the feet of her guest (only the lowest household servant was supposed to do that), she touched a man with her hands, and she let down her hair in public.

3. Notice the motive of the giver. Mary was sitting at table with her previously deceased brother, Lazarus. Jesus had brought him back from the dead. She was profoundly grateful. How much more grateful ought we to be? Think about what Christ will do for us one day—a resurrected body like His!

II. For the phony worshipper, extravagance offends (vv. 4-6)

4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, **5** “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” **6** He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Judas made three big mistakes:

1. He was a hypocrite. John tells us that Judas didn't love the poor at all. It was all talk.
2. He was a thief. He was simply using the poor as a ruse to enrich himself. We also see that in many ways today.

Much has been written about the so-called “poverty industry.” Businesses in the poverty industry often include payday loan centers, pawn shops, rent-to-own centers, casinos, liquor stores, lotteries, tobacco stores, and credit card companies. Illegal ventures such as loansharking, drug-dealing or prostitution might also be included. The poverty industry makes roughly \$33 billion/year in the US. The worst culprits in the poverty industry are the churches and Christian ministries. They manipulate the poor in several ways, primarily through arm-twisting tactics and emotionally manipulative appeals for offerings following pseudo- miracles to try to impress people. They prey on the same hopelessness as the casinos do. Then their leaders fly extravagant airplanes and live in mansions. They make Judas look like a part-time hacker.

The ones who faithfully serve the poor are actually motivated by the reality that the poor we will always have with us. They know there is no quick fix, there is no silver bullet remedy. We are with the poor simply because they are God's creatures and they need somebody to be with them.

3. Judas' third and biggest mistake was in holding Mary's worship in contempt. If you are worshipping Jesus Christ extravagantly you will, at times, be held in contempt. Cf. David and Michal in II Samuel 6.

III. For Jesus, extravagance pleases (vv. 7-8)

7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. 8 For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

Jesus uses unusually strong language here, as He defends Mary's extravagant love:

1. For her sake (7)

She may have lost her perfume. She may have lost the alabaster container she broke. She had clearly lost the admiration of the apostle Judas. But she would never lose the experience and the memory of loving Jesus.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial." She will be saddened that I have been crucified, but she will have no regrets in our relationship, and, as the other gospels record, this will be told of her as an everlasting memorial. You know we all want to leave a legacy. We want our closest friends and family to be able honestly to say positive things about us at our funerals. Well, Mary's legacy endures as long as this planet rotates about the sun. Until Jesus comes back, the word is out: See how Mary loved Him. What else do you want said about you? What greater epitaph could be engraved upon your tombstone than this?

Don't wait to serve Him. Don't just plan to worship Him in the future. Dear friends, you may not have this opportunity next year, or next week, or tomorrow. Worship Him and serve Him now. This will be your everlasting legacy. When they place you in the grave, may your loved ones say, "My, how she loved the Lord."

2. For Jesus' sake (8)

Jesus makes clear that the window of opportunity is now. "The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

We know what the OT taught about the special status of the poor in God's eyes. There are over 400 verses in the Bible about the poor. Consider the Proverbs, for example:

Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him. Proverbs 14:31

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed. Proverbs 19:17

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. Proverbs 21:13

Jesus, then, is making a remarkable statement about Himself. He is more important than the poor. No one else but Jesus could make such a claim! We, therefore, must worship Him. And we do this by clearly demonstrating that there is none greater in the universe than He.

Discussion Questions

1. What gifts can Jesus' disciples give Him today that are similar to Mary's gift?

2. What motivated Mary's extravagant gift? What must motivate our gifts?

3. Why did Judas hold Mary's love in contempt? Why do some people despise zealous Christians today?

4. Why was Jesus so pleased with Mary's gift? How can we please Him with our gifts?

5. How is our love for Jesus reflected in our care for the poor?

Going Deeper

1. Are you holding anything back from Jesus in your devotion to Him? Why?

2. Can you identify some ways in which you can more zealously serve Him? What are those ways?