

Extravagant Love for Christ

Text: Mark 14:1-9 (See also Matt. 26:6-13; John 12:1-8)

Introduction:

1. Context: Just prior to the Passover and the crucifixion (Vs. 1-2). Mary's act of devotion is sandwiched between the evil plotting of the religious leaders (Vs. 1-2) and the betrayal of Judas (Vs. 10-11). William Macdonald puts it this way, "As a jeweller places a diamond against black velvet, the Holy Spirit and his human writer Mark skilfully highlight the radiance of a woman's love for our Lord between the dark plotting of the religious hierarchy and that of Judas." Between the dark hatred of the religious leaders and that of Judas, shines the light of Mary's love and devotion for her Christ.
2. Location: Christ is at Bethany, a village close to Jerusalem, behind the Mount of Olives. From John's account it appears Christ is again at the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus as it is noted that Lazarus is seated at the table and Martha is serving.
3. Mary is noted in Scripture for her spirit of devotion to Christ (Luke 10:39) and this touching account reveals her deep love for her Saviour and the depth of her faith.
4. How much do we really love our Saviour? Mary's example will serve as a challenge to us.

I. The Demonstration of Her Love (Vs. 3)

A. The Preciousness of her Gift (Vs. 3a)

1. The container – Alabaster box
 - a. "So named from the town of Alabastron, in Middle Egypt, where there were quarries of this fine-grained, pink-coloured gypsum. It was made into containers for holding perfumes and other precious articles." (D. Cloud)
 - b. "A vessel or vial made of semitransparent stone which was so arranged and sealed up that the neck of the vial had to be broken to get at the contents." (Lenski)
 - c. "The cruse was a long-necked flask with no handles used for preserving precious perfumes or fragrant oils." (Hiebert)
2. The contents – ointment of spikenard
 - a. Its Volume – John notes it was "a pound of ointment" which equates to around 12 ounces or 354 ml.
 - b. Its Value – 'spikenard' was a fragrant ointment/perfume made from a plant in India. This plant grows in the Himalaya Mountains at a great elevation. (D. Cloud)
 - i. Described by Mark as "very precious" and by Matthew as "very costly".

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- ii. In monetary terms it was worth over 300 pence. One penny represented a day's wage (Matt. 20:2) so this was almost a year's wages.
- iii. Illustration: David's words to Araunah the Jebusite –
*"...Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: **neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing.** So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver."* (2. Sam. 24:24)
- iv. Challenge: The sad reality today is that most of us want a convenient, cheap Christianity that involves little to no sacrifice of our time or treasure.
- v. Ann Judson: "A little while and we are in eternity; before we find ourselves there, let us do much for Christ."

B. The Pouring out of her Gift (Vs. 3b)

- 1. The consecration of the vessel. The precious fragrance could not be enjoyed without the breaking of the vessel. The broken vessel reminds us of two truths:
 - a. The forthcoming death of Christ where His body would be broken and His sinless blood poured out as a fragrant sacrifice to the Father for our sins. From his bleeding wounds, streamed forth the pure perfume of salvation. Ephesians 5:2 says, "...as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." The Father saw "the travail of his (Christ's) soul" on the cross and was "satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11).
 - b. The principle of brokenness which is essential to our usefulness for Christ. God is in the business of using broken things. When we die to self and are broken, the sweet perfume of the life of Christ can be released through our lives.
- 2. The consecration of the contents. The gift was completely poured out upon the head and feet (Jn. 12:3) of the Saviour.
 - a. The pouring of some oil on the head was a customary treatment of an honoured guest (Ps. 23:5; Lk. 7:46) but the anointing of the feet was unusual and therefore a special act of humility and devotion. John 12:3 "...and anointed the feet of Jesus, and **wiped his feet with her hair...**"
 - b. She gave it all. "The question is not how much have I done or given, but could I have done or given more?" (Maclaren) Have you ever come to a place in your Christian life where you have consciously given all to Christ?

C. The Perfuming from her Gift (John 12:3)

- 1. "...the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." (Jn. 12:3)

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2. While the literal fragrance of Mary's gift has long gone, the spiritual fragrance of her loving act remains to this day. True acts of sacrifice to Christ are like sweet perfume to Him.

II. The Disdain of Her Love (Vs. 4-5)

Opposition came from an unexpected source! Don't be surprised if your sacrifice for the Lord attracts criticism of the most hurtful kind.

A. The Originator of the Criticism (John 12:4-6)

This was opposition from the covetous (Judas). "Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." (Jn. 12:4-6)

1. Seems Judas was the source of the opposition. Never underestimate the influence of one tongue to spread a sour and ungodly attitude!
2. Judas was motivated by covetousness. Sometimes arguments are put forward that sound plausible and spiritual on the surface but they simply veil an evil motive.
3. Judas was a false professor (unsaved). Sometimes opposition comes from professing Christians who are actually lost and are viewing things from the perspective of the natural man.

B. The Repeaters of the Criticism (Vs. 4-5)

This was opposition from the carnal. "But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor." (Matt. 26:8-9)

1. Their Carnal Response (4a)
 - a. The inward response of their hearts. The word 'indignation' means "Anger or extreme anger, mingled with contempt, disgust or abhorrence." (Webster) It "means to be indignant, feel a violent irritation." Also translated "much displeased" and "sore displeased". (Strong's) "They bristled with indignation against her." (Wuest)
 - b. The outward response of their lips. The word 'murmured' means to snort with anger, to groan against, to blame. (Strong's) The word was used of the snorting of horses. Their inward anger and displeasure found expression in verbal murmuring.
2. Their Carnal Rebuke (Vs. 4b-5)

Maclaren writes, "The disciples chimed in with the objection, not because they were superior to Mary in wisdom, but because they were inferior in consecration."

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- a. They questioned its purpose – “...*To what **purpose** is this waste?*” (Matt. 26:8) The disciples were deeply loyal to Christ but they still had a lot of maturing to do. Sometimes people criticize your service for God because they don’t understand your motive.
- b. They considered it as a waste – “*Why was this **waste** of the ointment made?*” What a sad commentary on the shallowness of the love of the disciples. Our perspective on giving to the Lord is a spiritual thermometer that reveals much about the temperature of our hearts.
- c. They believed it could be better used (Vs. 5) – Be careful before you take on the role of being a financial advisor over the giving of others! Their argument “gave plausibility to the criticism” (Hiebert). Such criticism often comes hidden under a cloak of fake spirituality.
- d. Some Christians seem to make it their ministry to go around like walking fire extinguishers squirting carnal coldness at every flame of passion and devotion for Christ they see. Sometimes it comes from the most unexpected sources! A parent, a child, a senior saint who should know better, a fellow church member.
- e. The disciples were guilty of the sin of quenching the Spirit – “Quench not the Spirit.” (1 Thess. 5:19)
- f. Challenge: Be a flame fanner rather than a flame extinguisher!

III. The Defence of Her Love (Vs. 6-9)

Christ steps in and defends Mary, commending her sacrificial act of love. He commended:

A. The Quality of her gift (Vs. 6)

1. Christ places His stamp of approval upon Mary’s actions.
2. ‘good’ = “means goodness on the outside as it strikes the eye, a beautiful, pleasing goodness.” (Wuest) “It possessed true moral beauty.” (Swete)
3. What really matters in the Christian life is that we have the approval of Christ; that we are pleasing to Him.
4. Note: Mary did not defend herself. “We learn from her that it is not always necessary to defend ourselves – our good actions speak for themselves, and the only thing essential is that Jesus approves them.” (Lenski)

B. The Opportunity for her gift (Vs. 7)

1. Giving to the poor was a good thing but it did not reflect discernment of the hour.
2. We may be involved in many “good” things but we need to ask ourselves if they are “the best things”.

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C. The Ability of her gift (Vs. 8a)

1. God is not interested in whether you have as great abilities or talents as others. What pleases Him is when we give Him what we have.
2. We need to stop focusing on what we can't do and don't have and rather seek to use what God has already entrusted to us.

D. The Sensitivity of her gift (Vs. 8b)

1. This gives us a window into the depth of Mary's faith. Her anointing of Christ was motivated by an understanding of His impending death. The shadow of the cross hung over His life.
2. Mary had taken time to sit at the feet of Christ and to draw close to His heart. The heart that dwells on Calvary will be a giving heart.

E. The Longevity of her gift (Vs. 9)

1. The giving of our temporary, material things leads to eternal fruit.
2. Mary would be forever remembered for this act; her story being permanently attached to the Gospel record by Christ. "Heaven is interested in many things of which the world gives little notice" (Butler) Alexander Maclaren asks the searching question, "**Jesus Christ has a great many strange things in His treasure house – widows' mites, cups of water, Mary's broken vase – has He anything of yours?**"
3. What will you be remembered for? Will we be remembered for devotion and dedication to Christ? Will you have any treasures in heaven?

Conclusion:

1. How is your love for the Saviour? Does that love find expression in sacrificial giving?
2. How do you respond to the devotion of others? Are you a fanner or extinguisher of the flame of consecration?
3. Are we living for the approval of Christ or the praise of men?