

Extravagant Worship

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Text: Mark 14¹

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Series: The Passion of the Christ

Introduction: Open your Bible this morning to **Mark 14**. We are looking at the great sacrifice of worship from Mary, the sister of Lazarus. She gave a great gift to the Savior. She was broken because of His coming death, and we read about how she broke a costly and extravagant alabaster box of fragrance and poured it out on Christ's head and feet. The title of the message is "Extravagant Worship".

Picture from Katie—Building Garage in Spain

I have on my wall a picture that Katie made me when she was much younger. It's not the Mona Lisa. But it is a picture of us together when we were in Spain and we built a garage next to our home. Why is this precious? Because it Katie had "done what she could". It is a simple expression of pure, innocent love. It's all she had to give me, and she gave all she had. It is precious. That's the worship that is precious to Christ. Our pure, simple extravagant, innocent love for Him.

Today we are in Mark 14 talking about giving all we have to God in extravagant worship.

Proposition: You may not have much, but what ever you have, give it to God. God delights in your simple, innocent, extravagant worship.

Not Everyone Wanted to Worship Jesus

In fact, Mark's Gospel tells us that the Jewish religious leaders had wanted to kill Jesus for some time. Murder was in their heart since early in Jesus' ministry, in Mark 3, when Jesus healed the man's withered hand on the Sabbath (3:6). Their desire for Jesus' execution dramatically intensified when He cleansed the Temple the second time.²

After cleansing the Temple (Mk 11) and telling of its destruction (Mk 13), Jesus goes back to Bethany where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus live. According to the text it's two days before Passover when a confrontation takes place.

Let's read the text. **Mark 14:1a** (ESV), "It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread". In the Jewish way of thinking, this would be sometime on Wednesday, because Passover would begin on Friday night.

Jesus, the True Passover Lamb

Now Jesus died on the Passover, which was Friday. He was crucified on the Passover at the same time that all of the lambs were being slain on the Passover. What perfect timing! The true Lamb, the Paschal Lamb, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" was slain on the very

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

² Hughes, R. K. (1989). *Mark : Jesus, servant and savior*. Preaching the Word (Mk 14:1). Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books.

day when lambs were slain in commemoration of Passover.

Jesus' Time on Earth is Nearing an End

Though the leaders want to kill Jesus, the people love Him. Jesus has a meal in Bethany. According to John's account, He's just raised Lazarus from the dead, and He's eating at Simon the leper's house. Mary and Martha and Lazarus are all there along with all of the disciples. People are buzzing around outside the home because they all want to see Lazarus just as much or more than they wanted to see Jesus. John tells us in the parallel passage that the resurrected Lazarus is reclining at dinner with Jesus and the rest of the disciples. Martha is serving them.

No doubt the meal went well. Imagine the conversation about the Temple, questions about the Olivet Discourse, and questions to Lazarus—"Lazarus, what did you see on the other side? What is it like to come back to life?"³

As they were reclining, they witnessed an amazing event which they would never forget:

Mark 14:3 (ESV), "And while He was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head."

John adds, "she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (John 12:3, NIV).

Proposition: Jesus wants our worship. He wants all we have. You may not have much, but give Him what you have.

Transition: But be warned, if you start worshipping and serving Christ, you do not do so in a vacuum. Christ is not popular in this world, and if you start worshipping Him, you will very likely be hated and misunderstood like He was. In fact, Jesus said in **Mt 10:22**, "you will be hated by all for my name's sake". **2Ti 3:12**, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

I. The Conflict of our worship [vs. 1-2, 4].

In verses 1 and 2, we have a Plot to Kill Jesus

Mark 14:1-2, "It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread 2 And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth [trickery] and kill him, 2 for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

So, this amazing, selfless act of worship is sandwiched by great conflict. We see the blood thirsty enemies of Jesus in verses 1-2 desirous of killing Jesus, but John tells us something else in the 12th chapter. John tells us they not only want to kill Jesus, but also Lazarus, whom Jesus had just raised from the dead.

John 12:9-11, "When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there [at Simon

³ Ibid.

the leper's house], they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 **So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well,** 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.”

Who were these Leaders in Israel that wanted to put Jesus to Death?

Here were the religious leaders among the Jewish people:

- **The chief priests** were the chief administrators of the ceremonial worship, the chief administrators of the sacrifices within the temple that pointed to Jesus Christ. \
- **The scribes** were those who were trained in the Word of God, who studied the Word of God and understood—at least intellectually—the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah and they were conspiring together to have that one Jesus who was affirmed as the Messiah by many miracles.

These leaders knew the Word, but they were not believers—they were not born again.

How many pastors today are not born again? Jesus says in Matthew 7, that a great multitude of pastors and teachers will be brought before Him on judgment day and found without Christ. You can know those false teachers who are not born again because...

- They will have a man-centered ministry based on entertainment, and not on the Word of God.
- They will borrow from the world for their sermons instead of basking in Christ's power to convert a soul.
- They will entertain the goats instead of feeding the sheep. They will redesign doctrine unto people's damnation.
- They will bring in converts for their own prestige and not for the Kingdom of Christ.

Applications

- (1) **Worship is never neutral.** There is a war going on at all times. If your worship becomes radical, and you get an uncompromising heart and thirst for holiness, and get serious with God in your prayer life, and you start saying no to Satan on any areas of disobedience or idolatry in your life, then be prepared for a fight. If you start praying and having devotions privately and with your family. If you start evangelizing—be prepared.

When you start getting serious for God, your phone will ring off the hook. The news will seem more interesting to you. Your favorite sports teams might even start winning again. And if none of that works, Satan might give you a raise and make you comfortable and successful so that you will forget God.

Satan hates Christ, and he hates everyone that worships Christ. Do you worship Christ?

If so, Satan is your enemy.

- He's the prince of the power of the air.
- He's the spirit that works in the children of disobedience.
- He's the god of this world that's blinded the minds of those who know not Christ.

If you worship Christ, you cannot love this world. You cannot serve both God and

mammon. God rejects the worship of a double minded, conflicted heart.

Say with Joshua, “choose this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (**Joshua 24:15**).

Listen to Elijah in **1Kings 18:21**, “How long will you [hesitate] between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.”

Perhaps you are here, and you realize you are without Christ. You realize now is the time. You’re going to have to invest time considering your soul. Perhaps you need to start now. It may take all night for you to break through. You’ve waited and put God off. You’ve spent hours in front of the Television, hours laughing at movies, days and nights and years doing what you want. But you won’t give God one sleepless night in prayer and deal with your own soul. You’ll spend time and money on the latest clothes, but you won’t spend time seeking God for your own ever-living soul. **Better for you to have one sleepless night on earth than to have millions in Hell.**

A Christian is one who can never again be neutral. If you belong to Christ, you will experience the enemies of God as our Lord did. Your worship will not be popular in this world.

(2) **Your worship demonstrates your allegiance.** Those who are in Christ are enemies of the world, and those who are not in Christ are enemies of God. None of us can serve God and this world at the same time. We see in this passage the hatred of Christ and the worship of Christ contrasted. In this passage we see...

- There is nothing that will stop the *enemies* of Christ from crucifying Him.
- There is nothing that will stop the *friends* of Christ from adoring Him.

(3) **True worship can bring contempt and make people uncomfortable.** This woman is going to demonstrate extravagant worship to Christ, and she’s not only going to be despised by Jesus archenemy, Judas Iscariot, but it says in **verse 5**, that even several of the Lord’s disciples “scolded her” for being so extravagant. They thought it was a waste!

II. The Cost of our worship [vs. 3].

Mary did a remarkable thing! She gave all she had! This alabaster box was likely a family heirloom. But what is the most precious thing you own and have compared to the beauty of Christ?

The poet said,

“Only one life, only what's done for Christ will last... and when I am dying how glad I will be if the lamp of my life has been burned out for thee”.

Are you burning out for Jesus? Are you giving all? Mary did.

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

Mark 14:3, “And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head”.

John 12:2 says, “Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him.”

I love Mary’s lack of inhibition when it came to giving the Lord her worship. We are told immediately of this historic and profound act of worship for Jesus. This is an act of worship that is supremely costly,

A. **Our worship by nature is *costly*.** Worship is ascribing value to someone or something. It is literally “worth – ship”. Worship therefore demands that we be giving and sacrificial or it is not worship. I can’t say I worship something if I never think about it—if I don’t have a religious zeal for it.

Question: Why was Mary’s worship so extravagant and costly?

1. Mary was in the presence of two walking miracles.

(1.) Jesus had just raised **Lazarus** from the dead.

And so we have the ex-dead man seated with Jesus eating at dinner. John tells us that it was Mary of Bethany who anointed Jesus (Jn. 12:3), so **Simon was *possibly the father of the family*** of Mary, Martha and Lazarus .⁴

(2.) It’s very likely that **Simon** the leper is the father of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

Now Simon was a leper and undoubtedly, although the Bible doesn’t say it, Simon had been cured from his leprosy otherwise he would not have been back eating in his house. He wouldn’t have even had a house. He would have been in a leper colony. Remember the laws in Israel prohibited lepers from living among the general population. And it’s very likely that Simon’s leprosy had been cured by Christ since there was no other cure in existence.⁵

So Mary’s brother is an ex-dead man, and her probable father is an ex-leper. When a person sees the power and beauty of Christ, there is no offering that is too costly

The Family Heirloom

So Mary is overflowing with love and adoration for Jesus. She knows He’s going to die and rise again. She sees not so much his humanity but that she’s standing in the presence of God. So she looks for the most expensive thing she has. She finds the family heirloom, an alabaster box of precious ointment.

What’s so Special about the Alabaster Box?

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition* (4th ed.) (Mk 14:1–11). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

⁵ MacArthur, John. *Commentary on Mark: Mk 14:1-11*. Chicago, Ill., USA: Moody Press.

Alabaster was translucent, probably white like glass. So Mary found this very costly family heirloom of costly perfume of pure nard the text tells us. The perfume nard was extracted from the roots of the spikenard plant, found in the Himalayan Mountains in Nepal and India and China a long way from Palestine. The manufacturing of it and transportation of it to Israel would have been outrageous. And to top it off, normally the perfume was mixed with olive oil, pure olive oil so it could be used as an ointment. And it's important to note that it was so beautiful a fragrance, that it was sometimes used as an ointment to put on the bodies of those who had died in preparation for burial.

What Would You Give to God?

You don't give God something that doesn't cost you anything. David said, "I will not give the Lord that which cost me nothing." It's commented later that it is worth 300 denarii, which is more than a year's wages for a common laborer.

Explanation: A legionnaire in the Roman armies would make 300 denarii in a year. That was a soldier's wage. And so this was, perhaps, for someone who was of a little less status more than a year's wages. And so the disciples are more than a little annoyed.

B. Worship is not concerned or *captivated by self***.**

Mary fell at Jesus' feet. She didn't care who was watching. It was if no one else was in the house when Mary went to Jesus' feet—like no one was even there. You say, "Wasn't she embarrassed?"

Mark 14:12 says, she "poured it over his head".

John 12:3 gives us even more tender details of Mary's worship. Let's look at John 12:3, "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."

In shocking disregard for Jewish tradition, she knelt down at His feet and let down her hair to wipe the Lord's feet. No Jewish woman ever let her hair down in front of men⁶—but she wasn't in the presence of just a man. She was in the presence of God in human flesh. And so she took her hair and began to wipe the Lord's feet.

She was on the floor like a servant wiping Christ's feet with her hair, I mean that's very embarrassing. There wasn't anybody there in her mind. She was worshipping in the very presence of God in human flesh. It didn't matter who said what, she could have cared less.

C. Worship is *consuming***.** Mary's act is almost compulsive. She must do something. It's in the middle of dinner. It's so expensive. There are guests. She doesn't care. She is possessed by the Spirit of God and moved to give her Lord and God all that she has. How can she express it? She is so consumed that she doesn't care about what is convenient or proper. This kind of worship is not popular. People find it dangerous.

⁶ MacArthur, Ibid.

III. The Complaint against our worship [vs. 4-5].

What a Waste!

Mark 14:4-5, “There were some [*that is, of Jesus’ disciples*] who said to themselves indignantly, “Why was the ointment **wasted** like that? **5** For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And **they scolded her.**”

So several of the disciples looked at this act of worship as an act of waste. Truly all had pure motives except one. John tells us about Judas’ motives.

A. Judas’ Hypocrisy

Look over at **John 12:4-6**, “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, with calculator in hand, a man who knew the price of everything and the value of nothing, instantly calculated the waste (in terms of today’s economy, \$25,000 to \$30,000).⁷

Denarii

Explanation: How much is three hundred denarii? One denarii is a day’s wage for a laborer, so this is almost one year’s wages. In today’s money, it would be around \$30K.

Besides, there were people in need of food and clothing in Jerusalem at that very instant. As it was customary to give gifts on the evening of Passover to the poor, it would have made a remarkable gift. But now it was gone, sinfully wasted! All that was left was the evaporating aroma, so “they rebuked her harshly.”⁸

Application: Those who don’t know Christ see worship as a total waste! Why would you want to take your Sundays and worship with God’s people? That’s most people’s day off! What a waste!

B. The Disciples’ Lethargy.

The disciples said that Mary had wasted \$30K on Jesus and “they scolded her”.

(**Mark 14:4-5**, “There were some [*that is, of Jesus’ disciples*] who said to themselves indignantly, “Why was the ointment **wasted** like that? **5** For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And **they scolded her.**”).

When you start putting the power of the Spirit to the test in people, it makes people uncomfortable. When you start proclaiming the true power and presence of God that can raise people from the dead, and you see extravagant worship, it makes people uncomfortable.

⁷ Hughes, *Ibid.*, 146.

⁸ *Ibid.*

There are many roads into hell, but no roads out of hell. Mary realized she was delivered! She saw Jesus as her Sacrifice and her King. Her joy was so powerful, but serious sacrifice makes unbelievers, and even some believers *uncomfortable*.

People are fine if you stress how God meets our needs and heals us. Sometimes we go to God for healing. Other times we go to God for our needs. That's fine, but we need to go to God for God!

Never More Equipment, Never LESS Power - Ravenhill

Leonard Ravenhill said, "The modern church never had more equipment than she has now, but she never had LESS power."

Mary Worshipped because She Knew the Power of Deliverance

Mary anointed Jesus because she knew He was dying for her! She was grateful.

Mary was looking at her ex-dead brother and her ex-leper father. But she knew that Jesus would also do something greater than Heal her Leper Father and Raise her Dead brother to Life! Jesus came to deliver Mary from her sins! And there was absolutely nothing that was too expensive or too extravagant to give to her Lord and her God.

Listen, if the Holy Spirit lives in you, then the Holy Spirit can deliver you from sin. If Christ has died for you then you can die to sin! If Holy Spirit can't deliver you from your own sin, then you've got to ask whether or not the Holy Spirit lives in you or not. Now if the Spirit lives in you and leads you then there is absolutely nothing too costly to give to Him. Mary knew the **power** and presence of Christ. She was captivated by the power of Christ that had raised her dead brother and had raised her spiritually. She knew the **POWER** of Christ.

Paul said in **1Thess. 1:5**, "our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

Are you captivated by Christ? What is it that carries us beyond all the temptations of this world into spiritual victory? It is a baptism of pleasure in Christ. It is a baptism of holiness. A baptism of joy for sins forgiven.

Do you have a powerful compulsion to worship God in extravagant ways? God doesn't want half of your heart—He wants all your heart.

- Some one here may go to the mission field. And you will hear—what a waste. Why leave your family and culture?
- Others will ask why you spend so much time in prayer or in evangelism or with the Lord's people. "Why is it that it seems every time the doors are open you are there?" Aren't there more worthy things?
- Service for Christ seems like such a waste to people. That's always the complaint. **"I mean you just went to worship God Sunday morning, and now you**

want to go again? And you want to go to a prayer meeting too? Isn't that extreme?" It is if you don't know the beauty of Christ! Saints, be ready for complaints from the lost. And even more, be ready for complaints from believers.

IV. The Commendation of our worship [vs. 6-9].

Explanation: Every king in Israel was anointed before his coronation, and this was Christ's anointing. But notice Christ is not anointed by a *prophet* but by a *woman*. And this was far more than a coronation—it was even more a symbolic preparation of Christ's body for burial. Christ would be the suffering substitute for Mary. She knew this.

A. Consider how Jesus views our worship.

Mark 14:6, "But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me." We get another good look at Jesus' opinion in **verse 8**, "She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial".

Those things done from simple, real love for Christ become His treasure. In **1 Cor. 13**, Paul says, we can have an amazing ability to *articulate* and have *all spiritual gifts*, but if we have not love, we profit nothing. Worship without love for Christ is futile. But simple love from your heart in worship is Christ's treasure.

Picture from Katie—Building Garage in Spain

Example: I have on my wall a picture that Katie made me when she was much younger. It's not the Mona Lisa. But it is a picture of us together when we were in Spain and we built a garage next to our home. Why is this precious? Because it Katie had "done what she could". It is a simple expression of pure, innocent love. It's all she had to give me, and she gave all she had. It is precious. That's the worship that is precious to Christ. Your pure, simple extravagant, innocent love for Him.

Jesus has a lot of strange things in his treasury: widows' pennies, cups of water, broken alabaster vases, and all of our simple attempts to love Him. Has he anything of yours? Give what you have. Do you feel the impulse to do something beautiful for God?⁹

B. Consider how Jesus remembers our worship.

Mark 14:7-9, "But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 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. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. 9 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."

Listen those who remember and understand the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ will be remembered, just as Mary is remembered where ever the Gospel is preached!

⁹ Hughes, *ibid.*

Forever Christ will remember us!

Perhaps you might ask the question, “Well, what about the woman? Does she really understand these things?” Does she understand that she’s anointing Him for His burial? Does she really believe this?

Well, let me direct your attention back just a little bit in the book of Mark to **Mark 8:31**. Look at what Jesus does here: “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.” Here He clearly, openly, and publicly taught His coming death, burial and resurrection, Jesus plainly taught that this would be the case. **Mark 8:32** says this plainly: “He was stating the matter plainly”—*so much so that Peter took the Lord aside and began to rebuke Him!*

This woman knew that her king must die; she had understood the gospel. She anointed Christ for His death and for His coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords at His resurrection. That was why, wherever the gospel was preached in the whole world, her extravagant worship and sacrifice would be remembered.¹⁰

Conclusion: How will you be remembered when you leave this vapor of a life? How will you be remembered when you leave this shell of a body, whether because of age or illness or as a youngster because of an accident? How will you be remembered? Will you be remembered as someone who extravagantly worshipped Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection?

The Lord says something very hopeful for all of us about Mary. He says, “She has done what she could” (**verse 8**).

Proposition: You may not have much, but what ever you have, give it to God. God delights in your simple, innocent, extravagant worship. Give what you have, whatever it is, to God!

¹⁰ Carson, Ibid.