

Heart Check: Extravagant Love | December 3, 2023

Read Teaching Text | John 12:1-11 | Extravagant Love

- **Big Point:** Extravagant expressions of love pour out of us when we love someone or something passionately.
 - o I recently went to a football game. It's not uncommon to see full grown men dressed in ridiculous costumes and body paint to yell and dance and cheer their team on. In fact, it feels quite natural to do that when you're passionate about the team, and you're also surrounded by other passionate fans! And I get a kick out of it!! Yet we struggle to show passion towards Jesus? How come?

CONTEXT for John 12 – Almost 50% of John's Gospel is given to Jesus' last week on earth. Compare that to Mark at 40%, Matthew at 33%, and Luke at 25%. John slows it right down for us! (**David Guzik Study Guide, John 12**)

- Hostility towards Jesus is rising by this time, especially in the region of Bethany. Multiple death threats have already been made towards Jesus. Then Jesus and the disciples head back *into the tension* in order to display God's power by resurrecting Lazarus from the dead in John 11.
 - o After Lazarus comes back to life, many Jews believed in Jesus. He was dead for 4 days already, by the way! This intensified the hostility, and a plot began to form for how to kill Jesus *after* the Passover.
 - o Jesus returns to the town of Bethany, which is approximately 3 kilometers outside of Jerusalem. He arrives six days before Passover. And what is Jesus doing the week leading up to his death?!
 - o Jesus is attending a banquet that was being held in his honor. We presume that this banquet was being put on as a way of expressing gratitude and appreciation towards Jesus for the miraculous work of raising Lazarus from the dead.

A question you might be asking: Is Mary the same woman from Matthew 26 + Mark 14? Each of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) contain a story of Jesus being anointed by a woman with perfume. Luke's account is naturally distinct, as it happens much earlier in Jesus' ministry (Luke 7:36-50). But Matthew, Mark and John are very similar, yet Christians have come to different conclusions on whether or not these are the same events.

I would lean towards saying YES, these three instances are the same. Ultimately it doesn't really matter. Jesus could have been anointed with perfume multiple times and the point would remain the same. **In my opinion**, however, I think that John is giving us the name of the woman who was not named in Matthew or Mark's Gospel accounts; **Mary of Bethany**.

The Who, Where, When, What, Why of the story:

- **Who is involved?** A woman from Bethany, likely Mary in all three instances (Matthew, Mark and John).
- **Where did it happen?** Simon the Leper's house (*some find it confusing because John indicates that Martha was serving the meal, so the assumption is that they must be at Martha's house, whereas Matthew and Mark clearly state they are at Simon's house. However, John doesn't actually specify where the meal took place, only that it was in Bethany, and Mary, Martha and Lazarus were there*).
- **When did it happen?** Another apparent discrepancy is that Matthew + Mark tell us that this meal happened *two days* before Passover, while John mentions that Jesus arrived in Bethany *six days* before Passover. Again, there is no need for these to be separate events, as John is telling us when Jesus arrived in Bethany, and Matthew + Mark are telling us when the banquet took place (i.e. four days *after* Jesus arrived, 2 days *before* Passover).
- **What happened?** Jesus was anointed with expensive perfume. Was Jesus' head anointed (as recorded in Matthew + Mark), or his feet (as recorded in John)? Again, this could have been separate instances! But I think it is likely that they are the same, and the answer is that Mary anointed BOTH his head (as was custom) as well as his feet (as a sign of extravagant devotion to Jesus, which John is trying to highlight).
- **Why did it happen?** Here is where we clearly see it doesn't actually matter all that much, although it is interesting to explore. The emphasis behind these anointing accounts in all Gospels (including Luke 7, which we have left out entirely because this one clearly seems to be a separate event significantly earlier in Jesus' ministry) are the same: **That Jesus is WORTHY of our extravagant worship, love and devotion!**

NOTE: For the purpose of this message, I'm going to assume that Matthew, Mark, and John are talking about the same event and the same woman; Mary of Bethany. Again, even if they were separate events the point remains the same and the applications are all transferable!

Understanding John's Emphasis | Mary's Expression of Devotion

*Then Mary took **about a pint of pure nard**, an expensive perfume; 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*

- John specifically points out the extravagant, and indeed scandalous love that Mary displayed for Jesus. In the days of Jesus, it would not be out of place to anoint an honored guest with oil or perfume at a banquet. Typically it would have been a smaller, appropriate amount of fragrant oil on their forehead at the start of the night. A bowl of water would have been provided for the feet to be washed. (**David Guzik Study Guide, John 12**)
- **Notice John's Emphasis:** He wants us to notice that Mary WASHED HIS FEET with perfume (likely in addition to anointing his head), thus going above and beyond customary norms in her expression of love and devotion for Jesus. This was extravagant, and controversial.

*"...her action... would have been **quite disturbing**... the wiping of his feet with her hair. Jewish women did not let down their hair in public. **This is an expression of devotion that would have come across as extremely improper**... as indeed it would in most cultures. There is no indication of why Mary did this act. The most obvious possibility was her sheer gratitude for what Jesus had done for her brother and the revelation it brought to her of Jesus' identity, power, authority and grace. John's focus on her anointing Jesus' feet points to Mary's great humility. As she has come to realize a bit more of the one who has been a friend to her and her brother and sister, her faith deepens and she recognizes her unworthiness."* **IVP Commentary on John**

Question: Have you ever been around someone that is so passionate for Jesus that it's convicting to just be around them? **That's who Mary is to this group at the banquet for two reasons: The Metric + Manner of her devotion.**

- First, the metric that she used to express her love for Jesus was **about a pint of pure nard**. Her offering was excessive, costing **about a year's wages**. This is what got the disciples all riled up.
 - o **Mark 14:4**, "Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly."
 - o **They rebuked her for having the wrong metric!** "Too much, Mary! Don't you know anything about prudence? Jesus won't approve of your wild metrics!" Turns out – **THEY WERE WRONG!**
 - o **Gods metrics are often much different than ours!** Our metrics are all messed up – we think "too much" or "too little", and how often we get it wrong. Not just wrong, often completely opposite!
 - o **"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.'"** **Mark 12:41-44**
 - Expressing extravagant love and devotion to God isn't measured by the quantity of what we give, but by quality of our heart while giving!
 - You don't need to be wealthy to love extravagantly. **Be it a year's wages of perfume, or two copper coins, the heart can give extravagantly according to God's metrics!**
- Second, the manner in which she expresses love for Jesus by **washing his feet with her hair**. Mary's humility and utter disregard for what anyone but Jesus thought of her in this moment is breathtaking!
 - o It reminds me of the story when David dances before the Lord with *all his might*, wearing fine linen and the priestly Ephod instead of his royal robes (2 Sam. 6:14, 1 Chronicles 15:27).
 - o David was criticized harshly for his actions, yet responded by saying, "I celebrated before the Lord... I will become even more undignified than this..." (2 Sam. 6:21-22).

- Indeed, this is true! Just read the Psalms. The Bible contains the most ‘undignified’, wildly honest prayers, laments and praises written to God by David! **Undignified, yet BEAUTIFUL!**

And that's what Mary's expression of love was... undignified, yet beautiful. Question: When was the last time you worshipped **Him** like that? When you entered into a worship and it wasn't about song selection, or talent, or what other people thought about you. Where it was just love, poured out on Jesus.

We might well ask in response to this, “How can we become more like Mary?” And this would be an appropriate question, for as we can see, she was the one in the room that Jesus commended!

Meaning the other disciples got this one wrong!

- “**Leave her alone,**” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.” John 12:7-8
 - “Of all the people in the room that day, Mary was the only one who recognized Jesus for what He was worth. **He's worth everything.** She recognized the beauty of who was in the room and embraced that moment well.” Josh Fraser
- “**Leave her alone...** Why are you bothering her? **She has done a beautiful thing to me.** The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. **She did what she could.** She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Mark 14:6-9
 - “**She has done a beautiful thing to me.**” What the others called wasteful, Jesus calls BEAUTIFUL.
 - “... you can help them any time you want.” Jesus wasn't against the poor! **They missed the moment!**
 - “**She did what she could.**” ...so much grace in that line! Mary responded (as she could) to the moment.
 - “...in memory of her.” Is this to idolize Mary? No. Jesus is the point of this passage. It was left in here as an example to US, that we might do the same! Jesus is worthy of it all. “**He's worth everything.**”

What did Mary see that others missed in that moment? THE GOSPEL!

- “**She did what she could.** She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.” Mark 14:8
- We don't get a clear indication of how Mary knew this, only it was revealed to her somehow. Mary saw Jesus for who he was – the Savior of the world! Messiah! The Passover Lamb! The Resurrection & The Life. No wonder she acted the way she did! When we see Jesus as He is, pouring out our life becomes the **reasonable response!**

“People [like John the Baptist or Mary of Bethany] who are wholehearted only seem extreme to us if we lack the revelation they have. World-class musicians do not consider their practice regimen extreme because they have a revelation of what is possible when they play their instrument. Olympic athletes do not think it is strange to carefully order every moment of their lives and deny themselves because they have been captivated by the possibilities of competition. When people love something, they consider what others find extreme the only reasonable response. If you find John's [or Mary's], life extreme, it is only because you do not yet have the revelation of God he had. Johns life does not primarily expose our lack of discipline; it confronts our lack of revelation and our lack of desire.”

Samuel Whitefield, book titled *Will you choose the Wilderness?*

We love because He first loved us – extravagant love BEGAN with Jesus!

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16
- For **Christ's love compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that **those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them** and was raised again... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 21
- Like the indignant disciples, we may think that Mary was being impulsive, yet her response was simply reasonable. She was devoted to Jesus, and saw Him for who he was!

Big Point: Extravagant expressions of love pour out when we love someone or something passionately.

In conclusion: “How can we become more like Mary?”

- How can we love more extravagantly this Christmas Season? That is what Christmas is all about after all, isn't it?
- Don't we want to do something beautiful for Jesus, the one who gave it all for us?
- How can we pour out our lives for Him? The one who shall return with robes of white, and make all things new.

Mary: The Disciple at Jesus' Feet

- We get three clear examples of this amazing woman of faith, Mary of Bethany, in the Gospels. And did you know that in all three instances, Mary is at the feet of Jesus.
 - o Interestingly, Mary is always juxtaposed to someone else when she is referenced in Scripture!
1. **Luke 10:38-42** (at the feet of Jesus receiving – *Martha is busy*)
 2. **John 11:31-37** (at the feet of Jesus mourning – *others are scoffing*)
 3. **John 12:3-8** (at the feet of Jesus worshipping – *disciples are indifferent and enraged*)

And what can we learn from this? That disciples like Mary aren't born, they're made. They're formed! That extravagant love and devotion to Messiah Jesus isn't just something we "do" ... it's something we CULTIVATE!

- How do we cultivate extravagant love? Where are we formed into such vessels? AT HIS FEET!
- We look at disciples like Mary and ask, how did she get there? The truth is, Mary was always there at His feet. It makes me wonder – where was her jar of oil... when she sat at Jesus' feet earlier, listening to his teaching and treasuring it in her heart. Was it in the room with her that day – just waiting to be poured out eventually? Where was her oil when Lazarus died? She didn't pour it out on him at the time of his burial – and she didn't need to!
- But when the time came – she poured it out! Mary was responded to that moment well – because Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Savior of the World, is **WORTH IT ALL!**
 - o **Get Desperate** – ask the Holy Spirit to REVEAL Jesus to you!

Ways To Grow in Loving Extravagantly:

1. Establish a personal quiet time (Abide in Christ)! *Your life in Christ is like precious oil – store it up!!*
2. Give something away – look for opportunities to be GENEROUS!
3. Lay something down for Jesus – David Wilkerson, Founder of T.C. gave up his 2 hours of television.
4. Start a Gratitude & Worship journal. Write out your blessings, and thank God for who he is!
5. Consider and pray about the Christmas offering!
6. Pour out your life for others by serving them extravagantly!
 - a. Volunteer at Church – sacrifice your time, gifts and energy.
 - b. Serve in the community!
 - c. Practice Hospitality!
7. Come to the next SetFree or Empower.
8. Say YES to Baptism!
9. Start each day with a 'YES' to Jesus – look for opportunities in your day, BIG or SMALL to joyfully obey Jesus.
10. SPREAD THE GOSPEL – ask God for opportunities to love, serve and disciple others to Jesus!

Jim Elliot: "*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*"

Is Jesus worth it all? Let's love Him Extravagantly!