

Extraordinary Love, Extravagant Display

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[0 : 0 0] and his death and his resurrection. And we finished up now with Mark chapter 13, which I told you was the hardest section in the gospel of Mark to understand, ending last week with Jesus' command to stay awake, to live all of our lives in light of the fact that Jesus is coming back.

We turn now, picking up again with the action of Holy Week, and we are moving from Tuesday to Wednesday. And I want you to remember, as I've reminded you already this morning, of the summary that Jesus gave back in Mark chapter 12 of the summary of the law, that it's to love God and to love neighbor. And in fact, that's what we're going to dig into this morning. We're going to see a picture of love for God, and we're going to examine our own love for him. We'll see a picture of love, and we'll examine our love. And so with that, I invite you to turn with me now to Mark chapter 14.

You can turn with me in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is a light to our feet and a lamp to our path, which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go. And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 1. It was now two days before the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread, and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him. For they said, not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people. Verse 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. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, why was the ointment wasted like that?

For this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor. And they scolded her. Verse 6. But Jesus said, leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 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. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for burial. 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. Verse 10. Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard of it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for your word and for the time of our Lord Jesus on earth, that you tell us about it. And we ask that you would do that again this morning, that you would make it come alive to us in our hearts and our minds, that we would see Jesus' glory and his beauty, and that we'd examine our own hearts as to whether we are able to see that glory and beauty, whether it flows out into our lives. We thank you that your grace is enough, and so we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[3 : 4 2] In the last year or so, I've learned a new phrase that I was not aware of. Apparently, it's been around since the 1970s, which is older than me, but it's come to my attention only very recently, and maybe it's come to yours as well. It's this term known as love bombing. When you love bomb, it's a pejorative term, by the way. It's not a good thing. It's when you make this overwhelming display, this inappropriate display of affection and love to someone at the very beginning of a romantic relationship. It's too much, too fast. And so this happened recently. The rapper Kanye West was dating this actress named Julia Fox, and he surprised her at one point after dinner by taking her to this hotel suite, which was full of brand new clothes that he was giving to her. And so the New York Post asked, is Kanye West love bombing this woman? Is he using these extravagant displays of affection to manipulate her in a way that's inappropriate at the beginning of a

relationship? We could say in this story that those who are having dinner with Jesus are afraid of something similar, that there is some sort of love bombing going on here as well, that this display that this woman makes is inappropriate to the occasion. It is gross. It is embarrassing what she does. Of course, it's not romantic what she's doing, but it's over the top nonetheless. We find in verse 3 that Jesus is staying at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. Now, if you've been with us, you'll remember that

Bethany is Jesus' place that he is staying during Holy Week. And so I've told you before that he's commuting into Jerusalem every day and then commuting back to where he's staying. He doesn't stay in the center of Jerusalem at a penthouse hotel. No, he's hanging out in a city that's in the suburbs.

While he's there, he's in the house of Simon the leper. We're not told who Simon the leper is, but it's guessed. It's assumed that this must be someone that Jesus had healed at some point.

If he was still suffering from leprosy, it would be unusual for them to have the dinner there. And so our best guess is that Simon has been healed and he's now giving a party for Jesus, perhaps as a way of saying thanks. Jesus has had this full day of teaching that we looked at on Tuesday.

That was much of chapters, the end of chapter 11, all of chapter 12 and 13. And so it makes sense that he's drawing back for a minute on Wednesday having this meal. None of that is unusual. What is unusual, though, is that this woman enters with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard. This is, again, verse 3, very costly. She takes it, she breaks it, and she pours all of it out on Jesus' head. And so we can imagine the scene here. There's some surprise, there's some shock about what's happening, not just the display of wealth, but perhaps just how awkward this is to happen in the middle of dinner. And we don't just have to imagine it in our minds. We can also sense and think about the smell that would have filled the room. What would happen if you take an entire bottle of perfume and just break it out? Well, of course, it's going to be overwhelming and powerful and potent. And so this is a all-century experience, a full-century experience for those who are with [7 : 06] Jesus. It shouldn't surprise us, then, what we see in verses 4 and 5, that there is incredible shock. Not just shock over what might be seen as a social faux pas, something that's inappropriate to the moment. But even more than that, the amount of money that has just been wasted, at least in their minds, poured out onto Jesus, never to be used again. We find just how scandalous this is in verse 5, when we're told this is 300 denarii. Now, if you're using an ESV Bible, you'll have a footnote that says, a denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. So this is almost a year's worth of income that's just being poured out in one event. In other words, this woman has taken a bottle of ointment of perfume that's worth tens of thousands of dollars. Tens of thousands of dollars and spent it all in one go. One action, she just pours this out. Some people think maybe this was a family heirloom that had been passed on from generation to generation. Others say it may have been her life savings, her family savings, was contained in this small bottle. Regardless, it is shocking, right, at first glance. We can understand why those who are at the dinner are scandalized by what this woman does.

She has taken so much money, tens of thousands of dollars, and just, we might say, flushed it down the toilet. It's all gone. It could have been used for something much better. In fact, that's what they point out. There are some there who say, verse 4, why was the ointment wasted like this? For this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor. And so it seems as if this woman has fit the description. She's met part of the definition for love bombing. She has done something awkward and inappropriate that will be talked about for years.

Except for this. Love bombing, it's not just about something being too much. It's about it being too soon for the wrong reasons and the wrong person.

It's not that it's too much just by itself. It's too much for the wrong reasons and to the wrong person. In other words, if Kanye West had been married to Julia Fox, no one would have said he was doing something inappropriate. If he was married to her, it would have made sense, right? The level of relationship would meet the level of expression that's being poured out here. And so the question behind this really is not, is this too much money? The question behind the question, the foundational issue is this, is Jesus worth it? Is Jesus worth it? And the verdict is laid out here by those who are around. They're saying, no, he is not. And yet Jesus comes here and he corrects them. No, this is appropriate.

[10 : 42] I am worth it. Into verse five. It's not just that they're upset, they're scolding her. And so Jesus comes to her defense. Verse six, leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a

beautiful thing to me. 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. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for burial. No, this is actually appropriate to the occasion. Almost a year's worth of wages, tens of thousands of dollars makes sense in this situation. What she has poured out is fitting to the place and the time. The amount of money that she has spent is worth the person who is here in front of you. Jesus is worth it.

Verse seven, by the way, he says, you know what? You're concerned about the poor. You can care for them every day of the week. There's an implicit criticism here. Oh, you're concerned about the poor. Don't worry about this woman's alabaster jar. What about your alabaster jar?

That's what you should take into consideration. Don't condemn her for what she has done. You want to criticize others in their actions. Let's look at you and your actions. And so Jesus here is using a simple principle, and it's this extraordinary love leads to an extravagant display. Extraordinary love leads to an extravagant display. It makes sense. In fact, we know this in other areas of life. Let's say that a man and a woman love each other very much, and they've come to the point of their relationship where the man decides, I'm going to ask this woman to marry me. Well, what is he going to do? He is going to buy a rock that's worth thousands of dollars.

And for some reason, this makes sense in our minds, right? Why would you buy a rock worth thousands of dollars? I can find a cheaper rock for you. I have them in my backyard.

[13:22] We can talk after the service. No, we don't question it because it is appropriate to the love that's being expressed. There is no greater thing you can say to another human being than, I want to spend the rest of my life with you, right?

So the extravagant display makes sense because of an extraordinary love. Imagine then that this man goes out and he buys this ring and he gets down on one knee before this woman and she responds to him, not with yes or no, but with how much did you spend on that ring?

And he says, let's say he spent \$3,000, right? Some of you think that's too much. Some of you think that's too little. Let's say he spent \$3,000 and imagine this woman responds to him. Don't you know that the S&P 500 between 1992 and 2021 had an average return of 9.89%? And if we were to take that and expect that to continue out and you took that money and you invested it, then in 30 years, it would be \$50,800. What would you think of that woman?

Something is off, right? She probably does not love this man. She doesn't understand that an extravagant display and an extraordinary love go together. Let's reverse the situation. You talk to a man and he's getting ready to propose and he says, you know what? I think it's ridiculous to spend thousands of dollars on a rock. I have rocks in my backyard. I'm going to grab one of those.

What do we know about that man? He's a man who's never loved a woman, right? That man has a hard heart. Women, would you marry that man? No, of course not. The disciples here have a PhD, a doctorate in missing the point. Okay? Is it wrong to save and invest money? No, it's good. It's necessary.

[15:28] Is it wrong to give money to the poor? No, it's good. It's necessary. It's commanded. And they are tone deaf to the moment. They cannot read the room. The problem is not that these folks care for the poor.

It's a wonderful thing to care for the poor. The problem is that they cannot see Jesus. The problem is not that they care for the poor. The problem is that they don't see Jesus. Why?

Because they do not have an extraordinary love. And this woman does. They do not have an extraordinary love, but she does. The problem is not the amount of money she spent. The problem was the hard hearts in the rest of the room. Brothers and sisters, love does not operate in the realm of efficiency.

Love does not operate in the realm of efficiency. A great love, an extravagant love will always be shocking and offensive to those with hard hearts. A great love and an extravagant love will always be shocking to those with hard hearts. A man giving a ring, if you confronted him, you asked him, why would you spend thousands of dollars on this? What would be the right response?

You don't understand. This is the woman I'm going to marry. What would we say to those with Jesus? You don't understand. This is the Savior.

[17:14] And so he is worth it. Do we care for the poor or do we show love? False choice. We're able to do both. Now, as much as we might laugh at tone deaf disciples and misguided fiancés, this passage points back to us. Are you willing to break an alabaster jar for Jesus?

Are you willing to break an alabaster jar for Jesus? Where is your love? How great is your love? Now, we all know no matter how stingy or cheap or frugal someone is, there is always something you spend too much money on. And if you came back to me and said, well, I know this one person and that's not true.

All of their money is in the bank. They've saved every penny. You know what I'm going to say? Yes, you've proven my point. They have spent every penny on security, control, and power.

Whatever we are willing to be extravagant about reveals our love. Whatever we are willing to be extravagant about shows and reveals our love.

[18 : 54] And so as we're talking about an extraordinary love and an extravagant display, one of the questions this passage raises is what does an extravagant display look like?

What does it look like for us to break an alabaster jar for Jesus? It is certainly something that involves more than money, but it cannot mean less than money.

Especially in this passage. We would abuse and misuse this passage to miss the point that the scandal is caused by the cost. That is what reveals this woman's love for Christ.

In your life, does Jesus get the leftovers? Does he get the leftovers of your time and your talent and your treasure?

It's a story that's meant to make us search our hearts. Verse 8, the statement that Jesus gives about her, he says this, She has done what she could.

[20 : 11] Have you done what you can? Have you, are you willing to give too much to Jesus?

Now there's lots of different directions we could go with this passage.

One of them would be the classic avenue of shame. I could say, oh, you're not willing to break an alabaster jar? Well, shame on you. You're a bad Christian. Shame on you. And that's useless.

That's powerless, right? Shame is not a helpful motivator. Not only is it not a helpful motivator, what we learn in the Bible is we actually can't change our hearts. And so the problem when we come up against passages like this is we say, yes, we must change.

We need a greater heart for God. We want the extraordinary love that we see from this woman. We want to be the type of people who break alabaster jars. And we cannot change ourselves.

[21 : 22] And so how do we have, how do we gain an extraordinary love? Of course, the first answer is that you can't. You cannot change your own heart.

You cannot give yourself an extraordinary love. But the second answer is that God can. God is the one who changes the hearts of men.

So you see this quote on page seven of your worship guide from Richard Sibbes who says this, Be under the means whereby God's spirit will work. How do you change?

How do you grow in your love for Christ? How do you have that great love? Well, you need to put yourself in the place where God's spirit can be at work and the fire of his word can melt your heart from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh.

Place yourself in the arena in which God is at work. And so I'm going to give you guys a variety of ways that this happens. First of all, and this is the same I said last week, come and be in worship.

[22 : 30] When the church gathers, gather with her. You may have seen this quote on the very first page of your worship guide for the call to worship. It says, worship isn't just something we do.

It's where God does something to us. Worship is the heart of discipleship because it is the gymnasium in which God retrains our hearts. In other words, right now, you are at the gym of the heart.

You want your body to change? You go to a gym with weights, right? You want your heart to change. You come to God's gym.

The worship where he reshapes you as a person. And what do we do? We sing here. What does it tell us about singing on page two? It's a means for bringing a worshiper's soul out of the ordinary and mechanical into passion and activity.

When we sing, we are not just expressing what's in our hearts. We are shaping what's there as well. We are using the tool that God has given us to rise up our emotions and our affections for him.

[23 : 37] The other thing we do in worship is that we reverse engineer our hearts. Remember that we've talked before about Jesus' statement that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And so on the one hand, that's a diagnostic, right? We've talked before about the thermostat and the thermometer. The thermometer tells you what the temperature is. You can look at where your

treasure is as a thermometer and say, oh, that's where my heart is.

That's what I love. But you can also use your treasure as the thermostat. You can use it to turn your love up and down. You can think about it this way.

In your worship guide quote on page six, it talks about if you buy stock in Nike, suddenly your heart will be fascinated by Nike. I can give you a more personal example.

This past week, we had the banking crisis, right? What did I decide to do? Stocks are on sale. So I bought a few shares in Bank of America.

[24 : 39] It went down. I'm assuming it's going to go up. What happened after I bought those shares? I am so interested in Bank of America. I'm more interested in Bank of America than I've ever been.

And I'm so involved in their success at this point. I even opened up the stock app on my computer so I could check it from time to time and I could urge it on. Go up. Go up. Right?

Fan it into flame. When we invest, we're making a decision where our hearts are going to reside. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Do you want more love for Christ? Do you want to have an extraordinary love? Then put your treasure there and let your heart follow.

This woman didn't need to hear a sermon to do this, right? She was overwhelmed with love for Christ. That's not necessarily us. But God gives us means and ways to grow our love for him.

[25 : 52] All of those, though, are secondary answers because I've been leading us along to the primary answer. What is it more than anything else that grows our love for Jesus?

Well, we get that answer in a similar story in Luke chapter 7. We have another woman, a sinful woman, who also comes in. In this story, she wipes Jesus' feet with her hair.

She also has an alabaster flask. And in that story, people are also scandalized by what she does. And Jesus confronts them head on. And he ends with this indicting statement.

As the host who's a Pharisee objects, In other words, your heart is cold towards Christ if and when you do not think your sin is that bad.

The more highly you think of yourself, the less you will think of Jesus. Why do you lack love?

[27 : 09] Because you don't believe you're a sinner. The more we look and see the depth of depravity in our lives, the more we are coming back to Jesus to repent of our sins, and we see his grace that forgives us and restores us, the more we will love him.

It is as we see our sin and Jesus there that is greater than all of it, that our love will grow and increase and overflow.

That is more than anything what will give us an extraordinary love. In fact, I'm going to invite you to turn again. Page four in your worship guide.

Charles Spurgeon says this very thing. Pardon breeds love in the soul. The more a man is forgiven, the more he loves. Where great sin has been blotted out, there comes to be great love.

Christian, do you believe that God has blotted out great sin in your life? If you do, when you do, your love for him will be great as well.

[28 : 27] That will stir your affections more than anything else. And so we see the extravagance of love, an extravagant display more than anywhere else in the love of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus does not pour out merely tens of thousands of dollars. He does not just pour out almost a year's worth of wages.

No, what does Jesus do? He comes and he pours out his entire life. He is willing to die an excruciating death on the cross, receiving the punishment that is ours, and instead giving us the righteousness that is his.

It is when we see that our love for Christ grows more and more. In other words, we pour it all out for Jesus because Jesus has already poured it all out for us.

His sacrifice leads to our sacrifice. It is not guilt or shame that will motivate us, but seeing our Lord and Savior. In fact, that's what we have already sung together.

[29 : 44] Hast thou heard him, seen him, known him? Captivated by his beauty, worthy tribute haste to bring. Let his peerless worth constrain thee. Crown him now unrivaled king.

And the order there is important. Captivated by his beauty first. Worthy tribute haste to bring second. By the way, I haven't talked about Judas at all, and I'm simply going to say this.

There's a movie montage going on here, a contrast in opposites. Remember I warned you at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark that as we go along in the story, we're going to see three camps

divide into two.

Either we're opposed to Jesus, or we're pouring ourselves out for him. This woman gives all she has. Judas betrays Jesus for money.

Which camp will you be in? Because there are only two. Embrace the Savior or reject him.

[30 : 57] On August 31st, 1997, some of you, just because I've said that date, know what I'm about to say. There was the death of Diana, Princess of Wales.

And what did the people of the United Kingdom do in response? There was a spontaneous outpouring of love and affection. You'll see this on the back of your worship guide, that they gave over \$40 million in flowers.

Why? Why such an extravagant display? Because they had an extraordinary love. She was beloved for being a woman of the people.

They loved her because she loved them. Brothers and sisters, how much more of our Lord Jesus. He is not merely an earthly princess. He is the heavenly king. Someone so much greater than Diana, Princess of Wales, is here.

[32 : 14] Will you break open an alabaster jar for him? Hast thou heard him, seen him, known him? Is not thine a captured heart?

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that Jesus poured it all out for us. We ask that you would change our hearts, that you would grow them, that we would pour it all out for him as well.

We ask these things in his mighty name. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Amen.