

50 Days Ablaze! Sermon Series 2
Third Mission Response – April 30, 2006
Mark 14:1-9
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“Give” Sermon: “Extravagant Giving”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Absurd...bizarre...costly...crazy...expensive...fantastic...grandiose...lavish, preposterous, reckless, ridiculous, outpouring, overflowing, unconstrained, unreserved, luxurious, plush, posh, thorough, limitless, radical, nonsensical, out and out outrageous – And just plain...

- Uncommon
- Uncompromising
- Unconventional
- And totally unusual

I just wanted to make sure that I covered all the bases...

These are words that are synonyms of a word that we have heard before, and that is extravagant. In fact, you may even say that that list of synonyms that I just gave you was a bit extravagant, but I know how important it is to understand; and understanding what **extravagance** is all about is what I am going for today.

We are going to take a look at a narrative today where...there is a town called Bethany outside of Jerusalem. And there is Jesus sharing a meal with a man that some would call Simon the Leper...and there is this woman that suddenly enters the scene, but she is given no name...and there is this bottle of perfume that seems to be the center of attention and conflict in the middle of this small narrative of Mark 14.

Who would have thought that extravagant perfume would cause such a commotion? Who would have thought that an extravagant bottle of perfume would challenge and convict and change so many both in that small room and, hopefully, in this room of worship and praise in which we sit right now?

But is it really about the extravagant perfume, or is there more to see and understand about an extravagant gift? To see that difference we need to turn again to Mark 14:1-9. You can find that on page “____” of your pew Bibles.

As we read this section I think that we will see that maybe it’s really not about the extravagant perfume...**but about giving in an extravagant way...**

[Read Mark 14:1-3]

It was around midweek of a time that we have just recently left...Holy Week. Jesus has ridden into the city to the acclaim of the crowds and the grumbling of the leaders of the city. There is a feast that all are preparing for and all have come to Jerusalem for: the Passover – and the mood is celebrative and festive-like – although there is, this year, a lot of expectation and watching and waiting to see what this Messiah named Jesus will do.

Yet, you know as well as I do that the mood of the city changes quickly. The chief priests and the teachers are plotting with all that they have to kill Jesus for a couple of reasons:

- They are threatened by Jesus
- They are envious of Jesus

The crowds faithfully follow Him...The people actually listen to Him...the sick are healed and forgiven by Him...the dead are raised by Him...the teachers and the priests want such attention...they want such power...they want such prestige...they want the admiration of the people again...and they don't want to submit to Him, so they plot to kill Him.

And so, right outside these doors of this room the moves are being made so that by Friday Jesus will be dead and the leaders will back in control, but here in this small room—surrounded by His devoted disciples and a man called Simon the Leper (who must be cured, for he is sitting here with them not exiled outside the city)—a woman breaks into the meal.

This woman bears that famous jar of perfume, and in this action she is about to give to Jesus we can learn some amazing things about what it means to give in an extravagant way.

I. Maybe it's not about the perfume, but about the extravagant gift of love she gives without...CONFORMING TO THE CROWD.

In this context where it seems that there is so much anger and so much trouble brewing and so much misunderstanding floating around...this unnamed woman gives without **conforming to the crowd**.

She is a breath of fresh air in comparison to the betrayal and the denial and desertion that will happen later. She is an uninvited guest that just appears and without words gives an extravagant gift. Fear doesn't stop her. The threats of the leaders don't faze her. This meal probably restricted to men doesn't hinder her. She breaks in and gives to her Lord this extravagant gift of love.

She must have learned this boldness from Jesus. Remember His ministry. He loved and led and labored to reach the lost for the most part against the grain of the established system and against every preconceived notion, all the while He was fulfilling every prophecy and showing His power as Messiah and Lord.

And there is something I believe He wants to teach and show us as well. He asks us to love and give in an extravagant way without conforming to the crowds of this world.

Remember again that our Lord Jesus loved and gave of Himself in sacrifice constantly without conforming to the crowds...this woman gave an extravagant gift of love to Jesus without conforming to the crowds...do we give to our Lord in an extravagant way without conforming to the crowds and the pressures and the faithless of this world? This unnamed woman challenges me to see my Lord and the opportunities He gives me to love Him in a brand new way without conforming to the crowds.

But it still seems to be about this perfume...

Look again and see that the perfume is mentioned...take a look at verses 4 and 5 of Mark 14...

[read verses]

Again the perfume is mentioned, but...

II. Maybe it's not about the perfume, but about the extravagant gift of love she gives without...COUNTING THE COST.

This perfume has some distinguishing characteristics about it (remember back to the previous verses):

- It comes in an alabaster jar—only the most worthwhile of keepsakes are kept in alabaster.
- It was a very expensive perfume. Mark would later tell us that the comments of the people there reveal that the perfume is worth a year's wages and so it is considered to be VERY expensive. Can you imagine laboring for a year—just for a jar of perfume? Now because of its worth, it is speculated that this may have been some sort of family heirloom handed down from generations past—it was to be kept, admired, and maybe, maybe only used on those special occasions.
- It was made of pure nard—called spikenard a plant of value in India—an expensive import from another country, not easily obtained.
- She breaks the jar as she uses it. Some would say that she needed to do that in order to get out the precious contents, but it can also show the totality of the sacrifice—no jar kept for a souvenir—no leftovers from this sacrifice—nothing is to be kept back.
- And the entirety of the jar is emptied. She doesn't just use part or partially cover—she drenches Jesus with this gift of love. In picture it reminds me of the anointing of Aaron displayed in Psalm 133:2:

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes...

When Aaron was anointed for the service of priest, so much oil was used to show that the totality of the person was given to the service of God—and in this woman's gift of love, the totality of the gift was used to drench Jesus.

. . . All important attributes and things to remember and consider, but allow me to point one thing out...the monetary description comes last. In other words it is the least important thing in the account, yet also notice that it is the first thing that is held up by the people as they get upset at the woman.

See the contrast in this gift. This woman gives this extravagant gift without getting it appraised first...she gives it without considering the tax advantages...she gives it seemingly without comparing it to other things of value she has also to give. No percentage of the tithe considered...no calculator is used.

She gives without considering the cost...she pours forth without counting the cost. That reminds me of another in Isaiah 53:12...

Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great, and He will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out His life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

Jesus poured out His life unto death for all sinners. He took their punishment and gave them His peace. He gave without counting the cost...

Remember a song that we have sung...

Lord you are more precious than silver, Lord you are more costly than gold, Lord you are more beautiful than diamonds...and nothing I desire compares with you.

He gave without counting the cost...and here in this time...this unnamed woman challenges you and me to give in such a way to our Savior and His people.

And yet this perfume stirs up those present...and it's not the smell that does it. Take a look at verses 6-8...

[read verses]

She gets rebuked by those present because of this perfume...but...

III. Maybe it's not about the perfume, but about the extravagant gift of love she gives without...CONCERN FOR CRITICISM.

The people there are “strongly offended” by this act. The word here used for strongly offended is the same used by Mark to show the offense when:

- Jesus rebukes the disciples when they try to keep the children away from Him [Mark 10:13-16].
- And when the other disciples rebuke James and John for asking Jesus if they sit on His right and left in the kingdom of heaven. [Mark 10:35-45].

Strongly offended are those at this meal. And the supposed basis for this offense lies in the waste of this perfume. This precious resource could have been sold and the money could have been given to the poor.

Just by this very assertion the people who rebuke this woman may not realize it but they have in so doing demeaned and devalued two very important things here:

- The gift
- The receiver

They are saying: Jesus you are worth a lot. We have seen you heal and do miracles, teach, mention the cross and the like, but Jesus I don't know if you are worth this gift. This should have gone somewhere else. Look at all the other people this could have helped.

See the world has never had a problem with religion...as long as it is in moderation. Just a little here...just a little on Sunday...just a certain percentage...just as long as it doesn't take over...

And all the while, we seem to have no real problem with too much...

Sex...power...money...influence...but when there is too much Christ and too much of His influence...and too much of His love, look out...then I lose too much of me...*exactly*.

"Why are you bothering her?" asks Jesus. *"This woman has done what she could."*

Just like the woman that drops two small mites in the temple treasury—all she had—and exceeds all donations that day...

This unnamed woman does it this day for Jesus' burial. Jesus isn't saying the poor are unimportant...but in the context, Jesus is only with them for a while. This woman understands Jesus in a way that I envy and in a way that I want. She understands the context...she sees His sacrifice...she is overwhelmed by the worth of Jesus and what He is about to do and go through for her and all people and so she gives...*extravagantly without concern for the criticism*.

So finally they and we see that it's not about the perfume...take a look at verse 9...

[read verse]

IV. **She gives without CASHING IN ON THE CREDIT**

Jesus says that wherever this Gospel is preached, what the woman has done will be spoken of and remembered. But notice that even now Jesus doesn't reveal her name. No credit is given to her...just an emphasis on the act because this gift of extravagant love was prompted and given freely because of the message of the Gospel...this is just a part of the overall message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for all people...

Please understand...Jesus and what He did on the cross is a gift that some would say is...

Absurd...bizarre...costly...crazy...expensive...fantastic...grandiose...lavish, preposterous, reckless, ridiculous, outpouring, overflowing, unconstrained, unreserved, luxurious, plush, posh, thorough, limitless, radical, nonsensical, out and out outrageous – and just plain...

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Yet, this is the most extravagant gift of love for all people: forgiveness of all sins and the gift of eternal life for those who would believe. Inspired by that extravagant gift of Jesus, I want to challenge you today to give an extravagant gift like this unnamed woman. Give it without conforming to the crowd, without counting the cost, without concern for criticism, and without cashing in on the credit. Give as to the Lord...because it's really all about **Christ and His cross**. That's extravagant giving.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.