

Extravagant Worship (John 12:1-8)

Introduction

Good morning everyone! Before I begin, I would like to thank Ps Toh Nee and Ps Lily for trusting me with the pulpit to share God's word to you today. The message is titled, "Extravagant Worship" based on the scripture passages from John 12:1-8. Let me read the scripture passage to you.

¹ Therefore, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they made Him a dinner there, and Martha was serving; and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. ³ Mary then took a pound of very expensive perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, the one who intended to betray Him, said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the proceeds given to poor people?" ⁶ Now he said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he kept the money box, he used to steal from what was put into it. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. ⁸ For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." ~ John 12:1-8 (NASB)

Let us bow in prayer.

<prayer>

Dear Abba Father, please open the eyes of our hearts to see You, open our minds to understand Your word and give us a teachable spirit to apply Your teachings into our daily lives. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Let us begin.

This year's Mother's Day was a little special to me. I was down with COVID-19 and had to stay at home over the weekend. My family does not celebrate Mother's Day. Quite interestingly, my son, Kai, who is now in Japan for an overseas exchange program, texted me "Happy Mother's Day" in the morning of Mother's Day. Then, he asked if I wanted anything. I jokingly replied that I wanted a croissant for breakfast. Half an hour later, someone rang my door.

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To my surprise, I received 4 sets of breakfast that were delivered to my doorstep. My son made a GRAB order. He wanted to shower me with an extravagant breakfast spread to show me how much he loves and appreciates me as his mother. I was very touched by his gesture that came all the way from Japan. That breakfast spread must have cost him quite a bit of money. Just like any of us, we will willingly waste our time and our money on someone or something that we value or consider worthy for the cause. For my son, he wasted his money to bless me with an extravagant breakfast spread. Similarly, Mary wasted away an expensive perfume to honour Jesus extravagantly before the guest.

What motivated Mary to lavish such extravagant worship on Jesus? To answer this question, let us get to know Mary by observing her through the Synoptic Gospels.

Observe Mary Through The Synoptic Gospel

There are a few Marys in the bible. We have Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:27), Mary Magdalene whom Jesus cast out seven demons from her (Luke 8:2), Mary, the mother of James and Joseph (Mark 15:40) and Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12). Today, we are observing this Mary who is known as the **Mary of Bethany**. She has an older sister named **Martha** and also a brother named **Lazarus**. Mary is a **simple character with no first hand dramatic experience over her personal life journey**. Much like many people during that era, she is **likely a faithful follower of Jesus in all His rallies**.

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Though Mary has a simple life, the four gospel books consist of 3 different biblical narratives with her in it. Surprisingly, in each of the accounts, she is found to be at the feet of Jesus. Let us examine each one of them.

First Biblical Narratives: At the Feet of Jesus, Listening Attentively to His Teaching (Luke 10:38-42)

The first biblical narrative is from Luke 10:38-42 where Mary is at the feet of Jesus, listening attentively to His teaching.

³⁸ Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.³⁹ **And she had a sister called Mary, who was also seated at the Lord's feet, and was listening to His word.** ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do the serving by myself? Then tell her to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things;⁴² but only one thing is necessary; **for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.**" ~ Luke 10:38-42 (NASB)

In this first narrative, Martha was busy serving the guests in her home. In the midst of her busyness, she complained to Jesus that her sister Mary did not give her a helping hand. Mary was too preoccupied with Jesus. **She was found seated at the feet of Jesus, listening attentively to His teaching.**

Honestly, there is nothing wrong about Martha who diligently serves with a good intent. **Martha's only problem is, she missed out on one important thing while busy serving. That one thing is a continued focus on Jesus.**

I would like to address those who are serving in church ministries. Most church ministries are desperately in need of help. Due to the lack of manpower, the available and committed ones tend to double up with many more responsibilities that pushes many ministry volunteers to be like Martha. Just a warning to you. If you discover that you are frustrated and grumbling a lot over the ministry that you are serving, you might have missed that one thing too. Please remember that Jesus must constantly be the center of our focus when we serve in a ministry. **Be like Mary, who found the better part by putting first things first, focusing her time on Jesus and listening to His word.**

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Second Biblical Narratives: At the Feet of Jesus with her Heart Filled with Sorrow and Pain (John 11:1-46)

Let's move on to the second narrative from John 11:1-46 where Mary is at the feet of Jesus while her heart is filled with sorrow and pain.

Lazarus, Mary's brother, passed away after falling very sick. Then, Jesus and his disciples made their way to Bethany to meet with his family. When Mary was informed by Martha that Jesus was coming and calling for her, she quickly left everybody who was there to comfort her and went immediately to meet Him. Her swift action reveals her great desire to obey Jesus' calling. At the same time, I personally felt that she saw Jesus as her Great Comforter who could console her over the death of her brother.

Let's take a look at the scripture passage below that continues the narrative.

³² So when Mary came to the place where Jesus was, she saw Him and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."³³ Therefore when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled,³⁴ and He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."³⁵ Jesus wept. ~ John 11:32-35 (NASB)

Once again, Mary is at the feet of Jesus. For this time, she came before His feet in pain and sorrow over the passing of her brother Lazarus. Similarly for us, **when our hearts are filled with pain and sorrow, come to Jesus to receive comfort.**

As the story continues, our Lord Jesus was deeply moved by the sorrow of both Mary and those around her that He wept. With Jesus as our Great Comforter, Mary's sorrow was short lived. Jesus subsequently performed a miracle, raising her brother back to life. **The resurrection of Lazarus must have sealed the faith in Mary's heart that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, worthy of her worship and adoration.**

Third Biblical Narratives: At the Feet of Jesus, Offering Extravagant Worship (John 12:1-7)

Therefore, this led to the third narratives where Mary offered extravagant worship at the feet of Jesus. Let us read John 12:1-3 together.

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¹ Therefore, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they made Him a dinner there, and Martha was serving; and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. ³ Mary then took a pound of very expensive perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ~ ~ John 12:1-3 (NASB)

Some commentaries suggested that **Mary's extravagant act of worship was not spontaneous. She had planned it in advance, inside the secret chambers of her heart.** No one was informed about her premeditated plans to honour Jesus. It is not like some of us who prefer to boast over what we intended to do for God in order to gain attention and glory.

In her premeditated plans, she selected the very best perfume of pure nard that cost her 300 denarii, which according to some bible translation is equivalent to more than a year's wage. What blew my mind is, **she considered such an expensive perfume worthy to be used ONLY for Jesus' feet!** Will you in your right mind pour perfume or something precious that costs more than a year's wage on someone's feet? That is extravagantly wasteful based on our human understanding.

If that is not enough, **she let down her hair to wipe Jesus' feet.** During that era, Jewish women never unbound their hair in public. Her action seems to exhibit sexual component or signify a woman of loose morals. But, that is not Mary's exact intent. **Her sole intent is to demonstrate her humility and reverence to Jesus by using her hair to wipe His feet, showing her act of servanthood and submission.**

At this juncture, let me digress and share with you the definition of worship.

The Greek word for "worship" (G4352) is "proskuneo". It means

1. to kiss the hand to (towards) one, in token of reverence
2. among the Orientals, esp. the Persians, to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence
3. in the NT by kneeling or prostration to do homage (to one) or make obeisance, whether in order to express respect or to make supplication

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- a. used of homage shown to men and beings of superior rank
 - i. to the Jewish high priests
 - ii. to God
 - iii. to Christ
 - iv. to heavenly beings
 - v. to demons

(meaning to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand); to fawn or crouch to, i.e. (literally or figuratively) prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore):—worship.

Does the definition of worship sound like what Mary did? Her moving act was done to express her extravagant worship to our Lord. Her desire is to lavish all her love on our Lord.

Another point to note. This perfume of pure nard is quite strong. Since she poured quite a substantial amount at the feet of Jesus, her fragrance of worship permeated the entire house with its scent.

Mary's extravagant display of worship succinctly conveys to us that our Lord deserves the best of the very best.

(Closing paragraph)

From observing these 3 bible narratives, I discovered **the constant moments of close communion with God will brew our heart to offer up extravagant worship to the Lord.**

This sums up our observation of Mary of Bethany. Indeed, Mary valued Jesus alot. Sadly, not everyone is like her.

The Contrast Between Judas and Mary

In this next segment, let us read John 12:4-8 together and observe the contrast between Judas and Mary.

⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, the one who intended to betray Him, said, ⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the proceeds given to poor people?” ⁶ Now he said this, not because he cared

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about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he kept the money box, he used to steal from what was put into it. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial." ⁸ For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." ~ John 12:4-8 (NASB)

From reading this scripture passage, I would like to highlight 2 major contrasts between these two characters.

Positional Status

Firstly, let us look at the positional status of Judas and Mary.

Judas

Judas was **handpicked by Jesus to be His 12 apostles**. As an apostle, Judas was **part of Jesus' inner circle** who spent a lot of time, day and night with Him. Judas was likely present at every Jesus' teaching rallies and was given many private teaching sessions under Jesus' direct tutelage. He **witnessed Jesus's great spiritual exploit in casting out demons and healing the sick**. In fact, Jesus has sent him out with the rest of the apostles with spiritual authority to do likewise, preaching the good news, casting out demons and healing the sick. You can see that in **Mark 6:7-13**.

If you look at Judas' positional status through the lens of the current era, he is **equivalent to one holding high spiritual leadership positions in churches**, and as one highly regarded with respect and honour by many people in the Christian circle.

Mary

Now, let's turn our eyes and look at Mary. What positional status does she have? **Mary of Bethany is a simple character**. She is a daughter in a family of three siblings. Her positional status is **a simple follower of Jesus, just like many of us**. If you compare Judas and Mary, their difference in positional status is miles apart!

Comparison

Unfortunately, **our outward appearances and our title often deceive us**. Judas successfully hid the darkness of his heart from everyone. Even in this era, there are people like Judas who have a high level religious facade but have been hiding their secret sin. Recently, there were well-known and highly regarded Christian

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powerhouse leaders from the USA whose secret sins were brought to light. That led to a breakup in trust and unity in many churches.

Does our positional status determine our spiritual level of maturity? Sometimes it does and sometimes, it does not. Honestly, I believe a number of you are far more spiritually mature than me or are walking closer to Jesus than me. Our God is sovereign God. He **(God) gave positional status to different people for a purpose beyond our understanding.** Therefore, please do not be jealous over why certain people, whom you felt inferior compared with you, are given higher spiritual positions above you. Let us put aside our position as the main driving force in our love for Jesus. **Be like Mary who loves Jesus wholeheartedly regardless of her status or position.**

The Value of Money

Next, let us look at the value of money through the action of Judas and Mary. Let us read John 12:4-6 together again.

⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, the one who intended to betray Him, said, ⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the proceeds given to poor people?” ⁶ Now he said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he kept the money box, he used to steal from what was put into it. ~ John 12:4-6 (NASB)

This scripture passage painted a bad picture of Judas. Though he is a treasurer for Jesus’ ministry, he could not resist the temptation of stealing the money. He indirectly criticised Mary for wasting the perfume away and portrayed himself magnanimously, suggesting the perfume which is worth more than a year’s wage should be donated to aid the poor. If I can read in-between the lines, I believe Judas hopes to steal the money for personal gains.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ~ Matthew 6:21 (NASB)

Judas treasured money above Jesus. He subsequently betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. **Mary treasured Jesus above earthly wealth.** Ignoring the consequence of criticism, she willingly poured a year’s wage of perfume at the feet of Jesus. Can you see how each of them valued Jesus differently?

While Mary is consumed with the desire to worship, Judas is consumed with a desire for earthly wealth.

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(Closing paragraph)

From observing the contrast between Judas and Mary, I discovered that **we should all love God wholeheartedly regardless of your status or position. Secondly, extravagant worship is costly. Are you ready to give it all for Jesus?**

How Can We Offer Extravagant Worship to God?

So far, I hope you have learnt in today's message about Mary offering extravagant worship to God. If you noticed, Mary's extravagant worship to God has nothing to do with music and songs. The matter lies in the attitude of her heart.

When I was a younger Christian, I read this passage and I asked myself how to offer such extravagant worship to God just like Mary. Extravagant worship is costly. If I gave 1 year of my salary to God, I would die of starvation! Let me share with you how I fulfil this desire of my heart.

In 1996, I heard God calling me to full time ministry. He affirmed it with a bible verse from 1 Corinthians 2:9. It was in 2000 that I finally entered full time ministry to be a worship minister. Then, I was earning very well in Standard Chartered Bank as a Cybersecurity officer. To let this go and answer God's calling means a 65% pay cut. I told God that I will work 2 years in the church. In doing so, I could finally fulfil my heart's desire to pour out extravagant worship to Him just like Mary did. In working 2 years, I would have given more than a year's wage that I earn in Standard Chartered Bank. **Instalment is a fantastic idea to offer our extravagant worship to God.**

Let me digress. Would you like to guess if I resign after 2 years of full time ministry? Let me continue the story. After working two years, I tendered my resignation. Sad to say, God did not allow me to leave. I have been working as a full time worship minister for 24 years. Till now, my pay is less than what I had once earned in Standard Chartered Bank.

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ~ Romans 12:1 (NASB)

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God has called me fully to His service. I cannot disobey Him.

Let us come back to the topic. May I ask you this question. **What is your extravagant worship to the Lord?** It could be

- 1. To give a one-time amount to Bless your church**
- 2. To give 1 year of your time to serve God in church**
- 3. To serve in a ministry for a year**

These are just some suggestions. God loves a cheerful giver. Ultimately, you need to give cheerfully and not feel obligated to give. The giving must come out of your desire to lavish all your love on our Lord.

Conclusion

May I invite the worship team to come on stage.

Today, we have learned about **Extravagant Worship from John 12:1-8** and

- 1. Observe Mary Through The Synoptic Gospel**
- 2. The Contrast Between Judas and Mary**
- 3. How Can We Offer Extravagant Worship to God?**

One of the ways to pour out extravagant worship to God is to come humbly to the front and bow at the feet of Jesus. As the worship team leads us, offer your extravagant worship to Him now. Come, taste and see God's goodness just like Mary had. He is worthy of our worship.