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THE EXTRAVAGANCE

What's the most amazingly extravagant gift you've ever received? Or given? Maybe John 12:1-11 will help you answer. A dinner was given in Jesus' honor. No ordinary dinner. Lazarus, the once-dead-and-buried-rotting man was a living testimony to Jesus' divine power. They ate and drank together. The server was Martha, who powerfully confessed faith in Jesus in chapter 11: "**Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ,**" meaning the "Anointed One," the King that God had promised.

All three siblings believed in Jesus, who said "**I AM the Resurrection and the Life.**" At the dinner, Mary, the other sister of Lazarus, **took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.** Each time we see this Mary in the Gospels, she is at the feet of Jesus. Here we see the result of His teaching in her believing heart - with three lessons for us.

1- WORSHIP - She who had been forgiven much, loved much. Freely she had received, and now freely Mary gives all she had. Nard was an expensive imported spice. It became the fragrance of worship and filled the house, overcoming aromas of the feast. How do YOU worship? Even if you're misunderstood? All believers need to be among God's people when they gather for worship. The Holy Spirit who indwells believers also empowers your worship. Sing the words even if you can't carry a tune. Lift your hands to honor your Savior. Pray and praise. Read and meditate on God's Word. Fill God's house with the fragrance of your worship! Even if your private personal worship becomes a public spectacle. You're not there to impress others, but to worship Jesus.

2- HUMILITY - Mary meant for a moment of private devotion, expressing her love for all that Jesus is. Washing the feet of guests was the job of the lowest servant of a household. But to untie her hair in public seemed scandalous. She meant it personally, wiping excess ointment with her own hair, to savor the Savior she worshiped. It's a picture of receiving His grace, rightly kneeling at the feet of Jesus, in repentance and faith and love. That's how we should approach Him, as we acknowledge our low estate, submitting and receiving and emulating His high and holy self-giving love for us.

3- EXTRAVAGANCE - Mary's private worship became a matter of public record. Does it influence YOUR life? Consider the "expense." Judas objected. It was worth 300 days wages. Would you give to Jesus all you could earn in year? Mary did. Judas might have alluded to the admonition of Deuteronomy 15 to care for the poor. But he was the disciples' treasurer who helped himself to their funds. Like the religious leaders who were plotting Jesus' death, Judas had only an outward appearance of holiness.

The "extravagance" of Mary's gift foreshadows Jesus' gift. The eternal Son of God left His heavenly realm to become a man. It cost His very life to purchase redemption, as He paid for the sin of the world on the cross. And He gives His eternal spiritual resurrection LIFE to all who receive Him as Savior and Lord. So the life you live is now His life lived through you. God's extravagant grace poured out through you.

That's why Scripture encourages "excellence" in giving - a theme of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, an excellent companion reading to John 12. It promises "**all grace to abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.**" It challenges believers to practical worship, by trusting God's provision - not only FOR you and your needs, but THROUGH you, to help others. Jesus said we would always have the poor, so we will have many opportunities to help others. We do so because God has given to us. We pass it on. We pay it forward. We trust God to provide.

If Jesus has given you much, how can you emulate Mary's extravagant worship? Look again at her picture of personal devotion making a public difference! Worship. Humility. Expense. Extravagant. Excellent. Scripture uses all these words to describe the difference Christ makes in your life - so you can make a difference in the lives around you.

"Closed hands mean cold hearts." Give! Not only of your treasures, but also of your time and talents. Give the Gospel, the good news about Jesus paying the debt you cannot pay, giving you His life to give you new life, forever. Bundle this good news with practical help and compassion. Excel in giving!