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**Series: The Gospel of John**  
**Message: A Fully Devoted Follower**

**Transcribed Message**  
**April 26, 2026**  
**John 12:1-8**

I did a Google search this past week of the most expensive perfumes that are available worldwide. This is what it said. Something called Moriel Paris Le Monde, you can buy for \$1.5 million a bottle. It's known as the most expensive. It is encased in an 18- karat gold bottle with diamonds. Something called Schumach is a little bit less expensive. Only \$1.29 million for this bottle, also set with pearls and gold and diamonds. Something called DKNY sells only for a million because it's called the million dollar fragrance. Opera Prima sells for a mere \$235,000 a bottle. Something called Clive Christian Imperial Majesty for a mere \$215,000. And then the cheapest of all, Parfum by Gianna is a mere \$89,000. Now you may wonder, what in the world is he telling us that for?

Well, first of all, if I smell any of these perfumes, I want to talk to you about the gap that we have in our new building down here to the south. No, it really is about what we're looking at in this passage this morning, isn't it? Because we're going to look at something this morning that by any measure, I'm sure all of us hearing these incredible extravagant prices for a mere bottle of perfume would say, that's crazy, that is extravagant. Well, we get to look at something extravagant this morning in John chapter 12 and this incident that's put before us, and it reminds us that there is a biblical precedence for extravagance at times.

In John 12:1-8, this is what we want to see this morning, worship. Worship can be extravagant. Worship probably should be extravagant, right? It's the act of ascribing great value and worth to someone or something in a way that involves your whole person. If we've never thought of worship as being extravagant, I hope we see it a little bit differently as a result of our study this morning.

Quick review for where we are in the gospel of John. In this context, Jesus' public ministry has ended. We come to John chapter 12 and the public ministry has ended. You remember the last sign that was given in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter, Jesus calling Lazarus out of the grave,

and then the last public discourse takes place in that same setting and Jesus declares to those who had come to be a part of that event, I am the resurrection and the life. So, the seventh and the last sign in John's gospel is given, and then the last discourse is given as well.

The second thing is this event that we look at this morning in this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, this is recorded in all the gospels in some form. It's in Matthew 26, it's in Mark 14, it's in Luke 7, and it's in John 12. The incident and the account in Luke 7 is different, probably a second anointing. There are just too many variables to suggest that they're one and the same, but the point is simply this, this is a big deal. There really are not that many incidents in the life of our Lord that all of the gospels record in unison, but this is one of them, and this one I think speaks to the significance of it in the eyes of our Lord.

And then you just are going to see the contrast regarding the expediency of Caiaphas, and I would also probably add to that Judas, and that is so clear in this passage. Caiaphas in chapter 11, totally driven by expediency, totally driven by self-centeredness, totally driven by what was going to be in his best interest, without any concern, without any regard for anybody else other than himself and what he wanted for himself. And then you have this amazing display of worship and love and extravagance on the part of Mary, and I think we will see that so clearly. So, let's look at it in that way. The extravagant act of love, and it's really, I think, the extravagant act not just of love, but the extravagant act of worship as well.

The setting is given to us in the first two verses, so we read again, verse 1: Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So, they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. I would suggest to you that what we have in this initial description of the setting is the most momentous week in history. I think you could say that this week that we enter into, or nearly enter into, is the most momentous week in human history. I guess you could say, well, what about creation? Yeah, yeah, creation was a big deal, wasn't it? It brought everything into existence. You could say, well, what about when Jesus came for the first time to earth? And obviously the gospel writers are all telling us when the Son of God came to earth. There are other things that you could point to, but there isn't any week like this week. There isn't any week that will culminate in the way this week will culminate, and it will have the

impact that this week will have, so I think we can rightly say this is the most momentous week, and the gospel witness bears that out. This is John chapter 12. John gives a half of his gospel. He's going to go from chapter 12, in effect, all the way to chapter 21, just to talk about one week in the life of our Lord. Matthew's going to give two-fifths of his gospel to one week. Mark is going to give three-fifths of his gospel to one week, and Luke is going to give over a third of his gospel to one week. That's what we have said all along. These are not biographies. These are accounts that focus on the most momentous week in the life of our Lord and in all of humanity.

Secondly, we're back in Bethany. You remember last week when we were in chapter 11 and verse 54, after word came that the Sanhedrin had issued a warrant for his arrest and wanted to kill him, Jesus left Jerusalem, and he went to a place called Ephraim. We aren't really sure where that is, but the best guesses are that it was about 15 miles to the north and east of Jerusalem. So, Jesus makes his way. Once he hears that his life is in danger and the time is not yet, remember, he makes his way up to Ephraim. What John doesn't tell us is on his way back down to Bethany from Ephraim, he stops in Jericho and he has time with a guy named Zacchaeus. Remember Zacchaeus? Come on down. I'm going to your house today. And it was also in this same incident in Jericho that he heals the man called Bartimaeus of his blindness. So, these are the things that John doesn't tell us, but we know from the other accounts. So here we come and Jesus is now back in Bethany.

Thirdly, we're one week before the final Passover. We're one week before the final Passover. The one who raised Lazarus from the dead is himself getting ready to present himself as the Passover lamb. He is just one week away from the cross. This is in effect the Saturday before the triumphal entry, which we'll see next in this gospel.

And then lastly, it's a resurrection celebration. Now that should have a familiar ring. It's a resurrection celebration. We call our resurrection Easter Sunday a resurrection service, a resurrection celebration service, don't we? Well, we've never been to a celebration or a party like this one because at this party we have, of course, the celebration of the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

If you look at the first verse again. John just loves to slip things in and kind of put them there without a whole lot of notice. He says, Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany where Lazarus was. He just throws that, yeah, Lazarus, remember Lazarus. Lazarus was dead in chapter 11. Lazarus spent four days in the tomb in chapter 11. And oh yeah, by the way, Lazarus is here at this party, which evidently was, of course, given for him. Matthew and Mark tell us that this party, this celebration was taking place at the home of Simon the leper. Obviously, he wasn't a leper anymore, so Jesus must have healed him as well. And this is interesting, but there's no way to prove it. Some people believe that Simon the leper was the father of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. So maybe they were all having the celebration party as a family. At any event, they were at the home of Simon the leper.

But what everybody remembered from this occasion, they didn't talk about the fact that Lazarus had died and now he was back and he was at a party with us. Of course it was in his honor, but he was there. Nobody talked about that. Nobody talked about the fact that Simon had been stricken with leprosy and now he's healed. They're not talking about that. They're talking about Mary's amazing and extravagant anointing of Jesus. That's what they remembered. And I'm just going to put this out there, that this was an incredibly extravagant thing that Mary did. On every level there are things about this that we're going to see that are in some respects shocking. And either this was a totally inappropriate thing that she did, or it was a beautifully appropriate thing that she did. And I think we will know which one of those it is as we go through this passage.

So, let's look at the anointing. And before we look at that in verse 3, just go back again to verse 2 and see there that John says, so they gave a dinner for him there, for Lazarus. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. You know what is interesting? Mary and Martha, in the way that they're put forward in the Gospels, always stay in character. They always stay in character. Every time they're mentioned, either one of them, they're always mentioned doing what they're known for, what they're kind of famous for. And as I said last week, I think we should appreciate both. I think the reality is you have to have people with the gift of serving. They're not eating at this resurrection celebration service if Martha isn't serving. And by the way, the verb there is in the imperfect, which means she just continuously was

serving. The whole night long she's serving, right? And we have people like that. We have a lot of people like that here at Covenant. No church could exist without the gift of serving. And so those of you that have the gift of serving, we commend you and we appreciate you, and we are grateful because this is a vital gift to the body of Christ. And certainly, that's Martha's place, and we'll see what Mary is known for as well.

But look at now the anointing in verse 3, and I just want to read the verse and then speak to the expense that's involved. Many therefore.... (note the therefore; what is it there for? It's there because of the fact this is a celebration of this incredible, amazing, unbelievable event that Mary and Martha have their brother back. He died. He was in the grave for four days, and Jesus brings him back to life.) Therefore, Mary 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. Now the expense of this can't be missed.

And you say, rightfully so, how expensive was this? Well drop down to verse 5, and there we see that this bottle of perfume could have been sold for 300 denarii. Now remember a denarii is one day's wage. So, if you just think in terms of a calendar year, 300 days would basically be a one-year salary. You take out the Sabbaths, you take out the special days that they would not have worked, and the reality was they worked six days a week, so this is saying to us that Mary took something that was the equivalent of one year's salary. Now if you're in high school and you're college and you're going to school and you're working, that number might be \$10,000 for the year. And if you just graduated and you're just getting into the workforce, maybe that number is 40,000 or 50,000 or whatever that is. But you just think for a moment, this is the point. You just think for a moment what your annual salary is, because that's what Mary's doing. She is taking one year of her salary. This is, in effect, her life savings perhaps. This is like her 401k, but it's a year's salary that she's giving regarding this act.

Now the reason it's so expensive is the origin of this oil which came from India, the Himalayas. To extract this oil from this plant, to transport it all the way back to Jerusalem, to Israel, would have been an incredibly involved process, so that added to the expense.

The fact that the quantity of it's a pound, which in Roman measurement would have been 11 or 12 ounces of ointment. Oil that was going to be used to anoint Jesus.

And then of course just the fact that it mentions that it is pure. It's pure nard. It hasn't been diluted at all. And so, what you have here is Mary in this incredibly extravagant, amazing display of her love and worship of our Lord is doing this. Let's look at the act itself.

It was extravagant, but it was not impetuous. You know that Mary planned this out. She thought this through. When this opportunity was there, she knew what she was going to do. So, it was extravagant, but it wasn't impetuous.

And I want to just have us see what she did in two different ways. And the first one is, this is the actions of a servant. This is the actions of a servant. John underscores the fact in his gospel that Mary anointed Jesus' feet. Now Matthew tells us, without contradiction, that Mary anointed Jesus' head. The picture is simply that Mary anointed Jesus' head and she anointed His feet. It was like she was anointing His body. There's enough oil, obviously, for all of this, and she begins by, John says, washing or anointing His feet.

Now, obviously, the act of foot washing underscores the actions of a servant. We'll see when we get to John 13, when Jesus washes the feet of His disciples. The servant who was assigned the foot washing duties was the lowest of all the servants. So even within the realm of being a servant, there were categories. The lowest of the servants was the one who, when the guests came into your home, got the task of washing their feet. And that's what Mary is showing to us here.

There is a lot of cultural stuff in this passage and in this story that really is just beyond our reach. I mean, there's so many things going on here that we don't normally connect to because of just the distance of time and culture and all of that. But just consider for a moment that in this culture in the first century, they lived in a dusty, dry, hot climate. They did not practice bodily hygiene the way we do today, right? They didn't have the abundance of water. They didn't shower and bathe every day. There is a sense in which this gathering, like every other gathering in that time period, would have been challenging on some level just because of the amount of people in a room just coming in from a dusty, hot walk over to wherever they went, right?

They're not sitting around a table and sitting on chairs. They're sitting on the floor. They're lounging on the floor. They have a pillow. Their head is up towards the floor where the

food is. I had a missionary friend that served for many, many years in Morocco. On one occasion, he invited me over to his place and his wife. Bonnie and I weren't even married yet at that point. And I went over and he had set up this Middle Eastern dinner, and we were on the floor and the food was on a mat in the middle and all the guests were around this mat. Now, we weren't lounging with a pillow with our feet out to the side, but that's what they would have done. So, Jesus's feet would have been very accessible in terms of just the practice of what's going on here. But all that just speaks to what was happening and how Mary went about doing this.

But here is what is either totally inappropriate or beautifully appropriate because then we read that she wiped his feet with her hair. Now, that just seems strange to us. I mean, that's not something that we have ever seen. We've never practiced that. We can't even quite connect with what that is even about. But to do that, Mary had to let down her hair. It was not acceptable for a Jewish woman to have her hair unbound in public in the presence of men who were not her husband. What Mary is doing here is culturally very inappropriate. You have to stop and ask, what is going on? Why does Mary unbind her hair and take her hair and wipe the feet of Jesus? The only woman who had unbound hair in public around men who were not her husband were immoral women.

What it says to us is this second point. This is certainly an act of a servant, but what else is going on here? I think secondly, it's the actions of a worshiper. It's the actions of a worshiper. Mary is so overcome in love and gratitude for Jesus that she simply does not care what people think about her as she expresses that love and that gratitude for Jesus. She doesn't care. It may not be culturally appropriate for me to do this. I don't care. I want to express not only my act of service to my Savior, but I want to also pour out a heart of worship towards him. I want to express basically my total sense of humility before him.

Now, behind her actions are what? What Mary knew. And what did Mary know? Well, Mary knew, I think, that Jesus was, in fact, very close to presenting himself as the Lamb of God. I think Mary is maybe the only one who understood what was going on in this time frame and in this sequence. It's not that Jesus hadn't tried to tell people what was going on, right? I mean, he had been very clear. Just listen to what he said in Mark chapter 10 and verse 32. These are the

words of our Lord. And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and to the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him, and they will spit on him, and they will flog him and kill him. And three days later, he will rise. That's before any of this happened, and that isn't the only time Jesus said stuff like that, right? Jesus frequently gave to those who were his followers teaching about why he had come to earth and what was going to happen to him. And what did they hear? They didn't hear it. They didn't want to hear it. It was more than they wanted to process, but Mary did. She heard it. She understood it. This extravagant act of love is also an extravagant act of worship because Mary, I believe, knows what's coming.

Now, the question, of course, that needs to be asked is how? How did Mary know that when nobody else did? How is it that the disciples can hear Jesus say this repeatedly, and they never make the connection, it seems? And I think the answer is Mary knew because of the chief way we know Mary. How is it that we know Mary? Where was Mary every time the Gospels speak of her in relationship to Jesus? She was in a place of learning, wasn't she? She was sitting at his feet. She was listening to her Lord. Every time we see Mary in the presence of the Lord, she's sitting there. She's listening. She's learning. She's taking in what he said. She's sitting at his feet.

It reminds me of the fact that a lot of people say, I wish I knew the Bible better. I just wish I knew the Bible better. I wish I knew biblical doctrine better. I wish I knew the flow of God's word and the storyline, all of that. Do you mean that? Do we mean that when we say that? Or do we just say that? Because if we mean it, we can, can't we? We can. We can learn it. We have God's word. We can discipline ourselves to read it. We can study it. We can be in small group together. There are all kinds of ways for us to answer that question. How did Mary know? Mary knew because she sat at the feet of Jesus. How did Mary know? Because she listened when Jesus talked. How did Mary know? She loved her Lord. She wanted to worship him.

Now, of course, with every act of extravagant worship, there are always those who are critical, aren't there? So, look at the objection in verses four through six. We began with the words of Judas in verses four and five. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, he who was about to betray him said, why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? Judas said it. We won't go to the other gospels, but the other gospels tell us that the other disciples were thinking it. There were a lot of people that were indignant at this act of worship and service that Mary performed. Everywhere Mary walked around this house, her hair was like a diffuser, wasn't it? The whole place was filled with the smell of this perfume, this ointment. And it was a reminder to them of this extravagant act that Mary had performed. And so, Judas simply says what a lot of other people are thinking.

And then when you look and you just step back, it's not an unreasonable argument, is it? It's not an unreasonable argument to say, my goodness, did she really need to give an entire year's salary to do this? I mean, a one-month salary wouldn't have been sufficient? Okay, two months. I mean, you seriously had to give your whole 401k in this one act of service? So, we look at that and we go, it's not an unreasonable objection, is it? And certainly in light of what the cost of it is, it seems extravagant. At the end of verse three, as I just said, the whole house is filled with the fragrance of this perfume.

This revelation in the words of Judas that he gives to us there, why was this sold? Why wasn't this kept? Or why wasn't this sold and given to the poor? You realize this is the only place in the Gospels to this point that we have any indication at all who Judas is. Up until this point, he's just one of the disciples. There was nothing that would have distinguished him from any of the other disciples. This is the first time the Gospel writers give us an insight into the heart of Judas, and it is in this statement. He's interested and his character, of course, is revealed secondly.

Look at verse six. He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. It's the word *kleptos*, kleptomaniac. He was a thief, and having charge of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. He was simply someone who was dipping in the money bag. The Gospel writers tell us that there were oftentimes women who supported Jesus, evidently women who had means and influence, and they would give to Jesus and the

disciples that they had money for food and whatever other needs that they had. Judas evidently regularly was borrowing and not putting back what he borrowed from that account. It takes us back to what Jesus said in John 10. I am the good shepherd, but there are also those who are hired hands, and they don't care at all for the sheep. So here we have Judas who, in this instance, is complaining about the loss of income coming into the money bag, and you know what he's going to do next? He's going to turn right around and find another way to bring that money into the money bag, and he's going to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. He's going to turn right around and find another way to bring that money into the money bag and he's going to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Look at the rebuke then in verses 7 and 8. Jesus said, leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. That's the picture that we're to get out of this act of worship. There is a preparation for the day of burial. What could it possibly mean when Jesus says, leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. She has just poured it out. She has just poured it on his head and poured it on his feet. How do you keep what you give away?

Is there a way to keep what you give away? Absolutely there is. Remember that wonderful line that Jim Elliott, who used a previous reference but he really brought it to the forefront and made it famous. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Isn't that great? He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Mary gave it all away but she got to keep it at the same time. It's the very thing that underscores Paul's statement, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and everything else gets added unto you. It's all about eternal investment, isn't it? It's living life with an open hand. It really gives to us a picture of what the Christian life is to be about.

The greatest hindrance. I've often said the greatest hindrance to a generous extravagant spirit is not lack of means. The greatest threat to generosity is covetousness. Mary shows us the exact opposite of covetousness. The world says to us, grab all that you can. Hold on to it with all your might because this is what really matters. This is what really counts. This is what you want to give your life to. And Mary shows us the exact opposite in her example.

Now look at the parallels. I want to go back to Matthew chapter 26 in Matthew's account and verse 11. This is how this unfolds. For you always, Jesus says, have the poor with you but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. And we're doing it today. A couple thousand years later, we're talking about Mary's incredible extravagant act of service and worship.

When Jesus says, the poor you always have with you. He's not saying don't worry about the poor. He's not giving us an excuse to be stingy and not to be compassionate. He's simply saying, I'm here now. I'm not always going to be here. But while I'm here, you need to take the opportunity just as Mary has done. And so, he commends her for that.

The church's mission is not the elimination of poverty. Jesus said the poor are always going to be here. We have an obligation. We should care. We should be compassionate. We should give. We should be engaged in those kinds of ministries. But the calling of the church is not liberation theology and lifting the oppressed and getting the oppressor off of them. That's a wonderful thing to realize. But that's not the mission of the church. The mission of the church is the cross. The mission of the church is the gospel. The mission of the church is liberation from sin.

Beasley Murray made this amazing statement. Jesus is the only King to enter Jerusalem anointed to die. Jesus is the only King to enter Jerusalem anointed to die. Worship is ascribing great worth and great value to someone. In this case, to Jesus with all our being.

So, what do we take away? Let's be extravagant. Let's be extravagant in our love for Jesus. Let's give generously. Let's serve sacrificially. Let's love unconditionally. Let's forgive freely. Let's welcome the lost. Let's be this fragrance for Christ that Mary exemplifies. This wonderful verse in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 3 speaks of a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. That's what Mary exemplifies here. A simple and pure and sincere devotion to Christ. A single preoccupation with Christ. That's the call of God on our life, isn't it? No divided loyalty, but loyalty to Him and to Him alone. No double-mindedness. No trying to live with one foot in the world and one foot in the church, or one foot in the world and one foot in our Christian life.

That doesn't work. God has called us to single-mindedness. He's called us to pure and simple devotion to Christ.

And that begins with my understanding of the gospel, right? It begins with my understanding of this glorious gospel. It begins with understanding what Mary understood. That Jesus was the Son of God. That He came to this earth to die for our sins. That He rose again. And if we will believe that, if we'll believe that we've sinned and fallen short of God's glory, and we believe that what Jesus did was all that needed to be done, God gives us the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank you for this amazing story, this amazing picture of this extravagant devotion, this heart of service, this heart of worship, this generous spirit. Lord, help us to see your calling on our life is to live the same way, to open our hands wide, to open our hearts wide, to love each other unconditionally, to forgive each other freely. Father, to walk in the truth of your Word and the light of your Word. Give us that passion, give us that desire, give us that sincere and pure devotion to Christ. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.