

{1}. **Matthew 26:6-13** **Extravagant Love** {2}.

A. Introduction

1. Backyard toys

- a. when I was young, the most common kind of swing set, apart from those in the school playgrounds, was a rubber tire, hung by a single rope from the branch of a tree
- b. things have come a long way from those days {3}. In an article written in 2005 Charles Colson noted that doting parents – and grandparents – could equip a back yard with the following playthings for their children:
 - (A) The “Atherton Castle” which comes with a two-story, seven-foot-square “fort,” and a ten-foot bridge that connects to another five-level fort with a “crazy bar” climb — all for only \$54,600.
 - (B) If that price seems steep, there's a “pirate's haunt” for only \$35,000.
 - (C) Or if you choose to spend more, you could pick the \$166,000 “Napa Valley Chalet,” complete with cedar-shingle roofs, electricity, plumbing, and footbridge.
- c. These are some examples of one kind of extravagant love.

2. With the Queen and other royalty in Toronto this week-end, considering the many royal family residences, it is perhaps appropriate to mention Solomon, who after building the temple, the palace and other public buildings, then as recorded in 1 Kings 7:7-8, ‘He made the hall of the throne where he was to judge, the hall of judgment, and it was panelled with cedar from floor to floor. His house where he was to live, the other court inward from the hall, was of the same workmanship. He also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh’s daughter, whom Solomon had married.’ – this, too, is a kind of extravagant love

3. Oswald Golter was a missionary in China in the 1940's {4}.

- a. After ten years service he was returning home. His ship stopped in India, and while waiting for a boat home he found a group of refugees living in a warehouse on the pier. Unwanted by anyone else the refugees were stranded there.
- b. Golter went to visit them and as it was Christmastime wished them a merry Christmas and asked them what they would like for Christmas.

- c. 'We're not Christians,' they said. 'We don't believe in Christmas.'
- d. 'I know,' said the missionary, 'but what do you want for Christmas?' They described some German pastries they were particularly fond of, and so Oswald Golter cashed in his ticket home, used the money to buy baskets and baskets of the pastries, took them to the refugees, and wished them a merry Christmas.
- e. When he later told the story, a student said, 'But sir, why did you do that for them? They weren't Christians. They don't even believe in Jesus.'
- f. 'I know,' Golter replied, 'but I do!'
- g. that is quite a different kind of extravagant love

4. Our story today is a story of such extravagant love

- a. it is the love of Mary for the wandering rabbi, Jesus, in the last week before His crucifixion, probably on either the Tuesday or Wednesday evening of that passion week
- b. as we look at the event again, I shall paraphrase and combine the 3 records of Matthew, Mark 14 and John 12

B. Mary's Act of Extravagant Love (Mt 26:6-7, Mk 14:3, Jn 12:2-3)

- 1. Now while Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, they made Him a supper there, with Martha serving, and Lazarus one of those reclining at the table with Him. Then Mary came to Him with an alabaster flask filled with a pound of costly anointing-oil of pure nard, and broke the neck of the flask, and poured it over His head, and anointed his feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

2. Extravagant Love – the Cost

- a. alabaster was a translucent onyx limestone formed over time by the dripping of water in caves, and was used as the name of articles carved out of this material
- b. flasks, for holding precious oils and perfumes, were made with a very narrow neck so that the contents would not evaporate and could be taken out a drop a time
- c. such a flask would itself be worth something; but the contents of this particular flask, even more so!
- d. nard, a somewhat thick liquid, was made from the spiked-shaped flowers of the nard-grass found in

India and Arabia

- e. such a gift was fit for a king: Cambyses, a ruler of Persia, son of Cyrus, sent such a flask to the king of Ethiopia, along with a gold chain, purple robe and palm wine
- f. the Roman historian, Pliny, says the price for such nard could be as much as 400 pence for a pound, so the Bible's figure of 300 pence is well within that lime
- g. pause for a moment: 300 pence would be a working man's wages for a full year; think what that would be for you
- h. how, then could this woman, Mary, have afforded to own such an article?
- i. some surmise that she, her sister and brother were rich: certainly they were able to entertain Jesus in his travels, as recorded in Luke 10: 38ff – but later, in this narrative, Jesus says concerning her, '[She has done what she could](#)' with the connotation being that, like the widow who put the two small coins in the offering box, she gave her all
- j. I have a suggestion for you to consider: from those verses we read from the Song of the Marriage of Solomon, you will gather that perfume was used by the newlyweds in the celebration of their marriage: perhaps, like the hope chest in which young girls accumulate things for their wedding, this had been saved by Mary for her future wedding
- k. whatever its source, in any event, the alabaster flask of anointing-oil of nard is sacrificed
- l. and, at great cost, it is given in an act of extravagant love

3. Extravagant Love – the Devotion

- a. it was customary for a honoured guest to be anointed with oil, but this would only be with a few drops of oil or so
- b. Mary didn't just pour a drop or two from the flask
 - (A) no, she broke off the neck so that no mere drop could come out, but the entire contents
 - (B) the word that Jesus uses in verse 12, '[poured out](#)' is interesting, for its usual meaning is '[throw, cast, fling](#)'
 - (C) it conveys the idea of a lavish pouring, of shaking out every last drop
- c. Mary didn't just go away and leave it at that
 - (A) and it was not just on Jesus' head as might be the case for any customary anointing of the guest
 - (B) but also upon his feet – a mark of deepest humility in carrying out what was the task for the lowest

servant

(C) and then completed the task in the lowliest possible way, removing the excess with her own hair
d. the devotion of this extravagant love is shown by the way in which Mary gave not only the precious anointing-oil, but also her own self

C. The Crowd's Antagonism (Mt 26:8-9, Mk 14:4-5, Jn 12:4-6)

1. Some of those present, including the disciples, were indignant at this, murmuring to one another, 'To what purpose is all this waste?' And Judas Iscariot, the disciple who intended to betray him, acting as their spokesman, said 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred pence, and the money given to poor people?' Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.

2. The Differences in their Motivation

- a. some of those present may have honestly felt this sense of indignation: one at least, the mercenary Judas, was not at all honest in his remarks
- b. this was a time of great expectation: Jesus would go to Jerusalem and would sit upon the Messianic throne; the Romans would be driven out of the land of promise and the kingdom of God would come to earth; righteousness and justice would prevail, and joy would fill everyone's heart
- c. the disciples argue who would be the first among them in the rule of this new kingdom; James and John had their mother ask Jesus if they could sit on His left and right hand
- d. some may have voiced this fine-sounding indignation as part of that attempt to gain favour with the coming king

3. The Similarity in their Blindness

- a. but the kingdom that was to be ushered in in a few short days was a spiritual kingdom, and, despite all that Jesus had spoken to them
- b. they just didn't see it
- c. to them, this was mere useless waste
- d. this included the disciples
- e. when five young men were slain by the Auca Indians, many thought – in and out of the church – what

a waste! ... but from that event countless others have been stirred to go out to serve Jesus Christ in missions

- f. Bill Borden at the age of 25 in 1912 gave away a fortune (over \$40 million by today's standards) to go to the Moslems in China; 5 months later he died of cerebral meningitis in Cairo on the way to the field; 'what a waste!' people said. A graduate of Yale with many honours. Yet, although he never reached China, his life inspired many students of both Yale and Princeton universities to go as missionaries; and the news of his dedication reached the very people in China that he had planned to minister. In the flyleaf of his Bible, Bill had written in his college days, 'No reserves, No retreats' to which he had added in Egypt 'No regrets.'^{5}.
- g. if you give yourself wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ you will open yourself to criticism from the blind, even within the church; but, like Mary, you can look forward to ...

D. Jesus' Acknowledgement

1. The Crowd's Antagonism Rebuked (Mt 26:10-11, Mk 14:6-7, Jn 12:7-8)

- a. But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Leave her be; why do you bother her? For she has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me.'
- b. Blind to the Beauty of the Act
 - (A) she had done a good deed to Me – Oh! the depth of meaning in those few words
 - (B) the word 'good' in this verse is not the ethically good, or the morally good, or such; rather it is that which is fine, gracious, heroic or noble; it was a beautiful deed
 - (C) and the beauty of the act, though it was good in itself, was particularly because it was done to Jesus Christ
 - (D) the disciples had walked with Jesus for over 3 years, they had heard his teaching, lived in His company, and sometimes they forgot what John later related 'and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.'
 - (E) the criticism of Jews and Muslims is that we worship Jesus as though he were God — they are right, or at least, they should be — Jesus is God, God the Son, Eternal, the Second Person of the One Triune God
 - (F) Deuteronomy 6:5 says, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul

and with all your might.'

(G) and Jesus deserves our extravagant love

c. Blind to the Meaning of the Act

(A) yes, we serve our Lord when we serve the poor, the needy, the afflicted; all those to whom He came into the world to minister

(B) but these were the few last precious days in which God the Son would be present in this world as the man Christ Jesus, in His incarnate form

(C) so Jesus spoke, and thus

2. Mary's Act Explained and Commended (Mt 26:12-13, Mk 14:8-9)

a. 'She has done what she could, for when she poured this anointing-oil on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken in memory of her.'

b. She has Expended to limit of her Means

(A) we have already commented that, like the widow with the two small coins, Mary did all possible

(B) Not like Peter did she seek to avert Jesus from his destiny of the cross

(C) Not like the disciples who had heard many times Jesus pronouncement of what was approaching, Mary had listened and marked and remembered

(D) She gave her perfume, yes; she gave her attention, yes; she gave her love and honour

(E) 'if it must be as you say, that You Lord Jesus must die that we might have life, then let me give to you my honour and devotion while you are still with us'

c. She has Honoured My Mission

(A) the condition that is necessary for the gospel to be the gospel, the good news

(B) the necessary act if it is to be the saviour of life unto life as is intended

(C) is that the one who hears the gospel, must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that by faith in His finished work on the cross our sin can be forgiven

d. so as this gospel message goes forth, so will go with it the memory of the simple faith of Mary

(A) it will go into all the world

(B) and it will go for all time

(C) by the time that John wrote his gospel, at least some 30 years later⁽⁶⁾, this prophecy of Christ

had already come to pass; in John 11, to clarify which Mary and Bethany is spoken of, he qualifies her as the one having anointed Jesus, as being a well-known fact; only in the next chapter does he relate that specific narrative

(D) and it comes to us today, in a special way on this Communion Sunday, as a reminder to us to be ready to give our extravagant love to our Saviour – giving much more than might be expected, but never, ever, even close to the love that we owe to Him!

E. Conclusion – Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879) was the Daughter of an Anglican minister. Havergal college, a private school for girls in Toronto, was named in her honour. She wrote many poems and hymns, among them this verse from 'Take My Life and Let It Be'

Take my love – my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store;
Take myself – and I will be
Ever only, all for Thee,
Ever only, all for Thee.

1. Let, this O Lord Jesus, be our heart-felt prayer this day!

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. I am indebted to Rev. Greg Allen, pastor of Bethany Bible Church of Portland, OR., for the idea found in his sermon, ‘Extravagant Devotion, Kerux sermons #25286.
3. *Castles in the Air (and Backyard)* by Charles Colson – Kerux illustrations #29186
4. *Standing on the Promises or Sitting on the Premises* by James W. Moore – Kerux illustrations #17438
5. *It wasn’t a Waste* by Dick Bohrer, Moody Monthly – Kerux illustrations 1775
6. Internal considerations – the specific inclusions and exclusions – of John’s Gospel suggest to me that it was not written until after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70^{AD}.