

INTRODUCTION

I've shared some church bulletin bloopers in the past, but churches just keep making mistakes with their announcements. Here are some actual statements that appeared in church bulletins.

1. The outreach committee has enlisted 25 visitors to make calls on people who are not afflicted with any church
2. The Church Council Retreat will be hell May 10 and 11.
3. The Low Self-Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 to 8:30p.m. Please use the back door.
4. Weight Watchers will meet at 7 p.m. Please use large double door at the side entrance.
5. All women are invited to the Women's luncheon. Polly Phillips will give the medication.
6. We extend a worm welcome to all who have come today.
7. The choir invites any member of the congregation who enjoys sinning to join the choir.
8. Today's Sermon: "How Much Can a Man Drink?" with music presented from a full choir.
9. Next Sunday is the family hayride and bonfire at the Fowlers' house. Bring your own hot dogs and guns.
10. Our departing Pastor will preach his farewell message after which the choir will sing "Break Forth Into Joy."

We've been studying the Gospel According to Mark for the past two years. Mark has sixteen chapters and the final six chapters are devoted to events that occurred in the week leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus. In chapter thirteen Jesus spoke about the future events surrounding His glorious second coming. When we come to chapter fourteen, we pick up the narrative that will lead us to a cross and an empty tomb. In the previous chapters, Jesus has been involved in an ongoing verbal debate with the Jewish leaders. There was a great deal of conflict as they tried unsuccessfully to get Jesus to incriminate Himself by saying the wrong thing.

Mark 14:1-11. Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 'But not during the Feast,' they said, 'or the people may riot.' While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly. 'Leave her alone,' said Jesus. 'Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.' Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

There is an account of a woman anointing Jesus with perfume in all four Gospel records. All the scholars agree the account we just read in Mark 14 is the same one we read in Matthew 26 and John 12. These all take place in Bethany a few days before the crucifixion. There is another account of a woman anointing Jesus in Luke 7 that is different from this one. It took place earlier in the ministry of Jesus in Galilee at the home of a Pharisee.

So, when you combine the three accounts in Mark, Matthew, and John you can learn more details about what took place that evening. This is a story of a woman who performed an extravagant act of worship, and Jesus said, "What she has done is a beautiful thing to me." So I want to share five truths with you about "The Beauty of Extravagant Worship."

1. WORSHIP IS A PERSONAL ACT OF LOVE

We can worship the Lord with others, or we can worship the Lord individually. Since this message is about worship, let me give you my simple definition of worship. Worship is an expression of adoration to God. That expression can take many forms. The Hebrew word for worship is *sagad*, which means to bow down; that's an expression of humility and adoration. The Greek word for worship is *proskuneo*, which literally means, "to kiss toward." It's like throwing a kiss to someone. There are many ways to express your adoration to God.

In John's account, we discover several more details about who was present at the meal. "Jesus arrived at Bethany...Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served...then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair." (John 12:1-3)

Forget the picture of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of Jesus and His disciples sitting at a table for the Last Supper, European style. Meals were enjoyed while the men were reclining on their left elbow, using their right hand, the clean hand, to eat and drink.

I like to imagine what might have taken place that evening. Just think about the people at the meal. Maybe the artist formerly known as Simon the Leper said, "I was a hopeless leper until the Master touched me and made me clean again. Simon says this is the Messiah!" Simon Peter says, "I was a poor fisherman when Jesus chose me—He even gave me my nickname, Rocky. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Matthew says, "I was a former IRS agent for Rome when the Master called me. I left my successful career and I've been following the King. Now I have a new life recording what Jesus does and what He says." But then Lazarus speaks up and says, "That's nothing, guys. I was stone cold dead for four days when the Master called my name—and here I am alive! He's the author of life!"

Of course, Martha was serving. That was her way of worshipping. Martha was one of those women who had a subscription to *Better Homes and Gardens and Southern Israel Living*. In Luke 10 we read about Jesus visiting Mary and Martha in their home. Martha was in the kitchen banging the pots and pans wanting Mary to join her, but that wasn't Mary's gift. She was content to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him talk.

So Mary begins to wonder what she can do to show her love for Jesus. She slips out and goes to

her house around the corner in the tiny village of Bethany. She uncovers her most prized possession: an alabaster container of spikenard, an expensive perfume. Some scholars have suggested it was her dowry she had been saving for marriage. She grabs the jar made of thin, translucent stone, alabaster and returns to the dinner. She returns and boldly approaches Jesus. Women in this culture were to stay in the background. She boldly approaches Jesus and pours out the perfume on Him as an act of personal worship. No words are recorded, but from the look Mary gives Jesus she surely was saying something like, "I recognize that you are God in the flesh. Thank you for changing my life. This is my offering of worship for you." Matthew and Mark tell us Mary anointed Jesus' head, and John said she poured it on Jesus' feet. So which was it, head or feet? Both. It's easy to imagine that Mary started pouring the expensive perfume on Jesus head, and some of it remained, which she poured on His feet. There was so much excess perfume that she took her hair and wiped His feet. What a beautiful picture of worship. Matt Redman wrote such songs as "Blessed be Your Name" and "The Heart of Worship." He knows a little about worship, and in his book *The Unquenchable Worshipper*, he writes: "It was the worship of a woman who didn't know the rules—an unpredictable, untamed heart on a quest to see Jesus glorified...People in love do lots of crazy things." (*The Unquenchable Worshipper*) There are many different ways to worship, but worship is primarily a personal act of love. Have you done what you can?

2. WORSHIP INVOLVES A COSTLY ACT OF SURRENDER

Worship is not coming to God to GET something; it is coming into the presence of God to surrender something. The perfume Mary poured out on Jesus was very expensive. But when you truly love someone, you never think about how much it costs to show your love.

I heard about a man who stopped by a perfume counter in a department store to buy some perfume for his girlfriend's birthday. The sales lady showed him a bottle of perfume that cost \$100. He said, "Can you show me something a little cheaper?" So she showed him a bottle that cost \$50. He said, "I'm still looking for something a little cheaper." The sales lady patiently produced a \$35 bottle of perfume. But the man shook his head and said, "Do you have anything cheaper?" So she brought out a tiny bottle of perfume that only cost \$15. The man said, "Yeah, we're getting close now. But can you show me something even cheaper?" The sales lady smiled and said, "I sure can," and she handed him a mirror.

Matthew's account confirms this was very expensive perfume. He wrote, "While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table." (Matthew 26:6-7) We know from the criticism that is to follow that that this rare perfume was worth a year's wages. Just add up the amount you make in one year, and that's the value of that perfume. And Mary didn't just pour out a few drops, she broke the jar—she gave it all.

In the Old Testament King David wanted to buy a threshing floor from Araunah the Jebusite in order to build an altar to the Lord. Araunah said, "No, my Lord, I'll give you the land for free, plus all the oxen and the oxen yokes for wood. Take whatever you want – there's no charge for the King." But in 2 Samuel 24:24 David made a powerful statement about worship. He said,

"No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing."

When you worship you are giving something to the Lord. You're giving Him your time, your effort, your service, your love, and even your financial resources. Those are all expressions of worship.

3. WORSHIP IS OFTEN A CRITICIZED ACT OF SACRIFICE

You might have thought at everyone at the dinner would have applauded such an extravagant act of worship, but just the opposite happened. But when Mary poured out the costly perfume on Jesus, there were people present who criticized her. They said the perfume could have been sold and the money used to help the poor. This was a smokescreen. John gives us some insight into this criticism—and he identifies the chief critic: "But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it." (John 12:4-6)

Those who pour out their love to Jesus are still criticized today. When the world looks at what we do, they say, "What a waste!" As people are driving by right now and they see these hundreds of cars parked in our lots some of them are thinking, "What a waste!" Why are these people giving up their Sunday to sing songs and to study an ancient out-of-date book? They just don't get it. They think worship is a waste of your time, a waste of your money, and a waste of your energy. But worship is never a waste.

A woman took a crafts class on how to make wax figurines. The teacher was a local artist who had exacting standards and seldom passed out praise. The teacher constantly criticized this woman's efforts, no matter how good the wax figures looked. The woman tried harder each week, but still the criticism increased. On the last night of the class the woman brought her final project, an apple, and placed it in front of the demanding teacher. The teacher immediately began criticizing the color, shape, and texture of the wax apple. When she finally finished the woman picked up the apple and took a big bite out of it. It was a real apple. Not everyone recognizes real worship, but Jesus does!

When you give your all to the Lord, not everyone will be happy. I recall a man who attended the same church I attended when God called me to preach. He was a respected local businessman. I had even done some work for him selling Dale Carnegie courses. And I had listened to Dale Carnegie's motivational theories. One of his famous quotes was, "People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing." This businessman took me under his wing and mentored me before we even knew what mentoring was. On the Sunday I surrendered to the Lord to become a preacher, everyone was very excited for me, except this man. I could tell he was disappointed. I remember he said to me, "David are you SURE you want to give your life to being a preacher? You could really be a success in business, you know." He didn't come right out and say it, but he was thinking, "What a waste." Well, that was 46 years ago, and I know I'm doing exactly what God wants me to do and I'm still having FUN doing it!

4. WORSHIP IS ALWAYS A PROPHETIC ACT OF RECOGNITION

When Mary poured the perfume on Jesus it was more than just an act of worship. She was also anointing His body for His burial that would take place in a couple of days.

"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me... She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." (Mark 14:6, 8) During the previous weeks Jesus predicted several times He was going to Jerusalem where He would be handed over to the Romans and He would be tortured and crucified and would come back from the grave. But all of this death-talk just went over the heads of the disciples. They were still arguing about who was going to sit on the right hand and left hand of Jesus when He sat on His throne. Out of all the people there, Mary got it. She knew Jesus was going to die.

In a sense, our worship today is a prophetic recognition. We aren't here to remember or mourn a dead religious founder. We are worshipping a living Savior. And every time we worship Jesus, we are announcing to the world that we recognize He is alive and that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We believe that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord— so we do it now! And we do it by faith, not by sight.

There is a certain sense of timing that goes along with extravagant worship. If Mary hadn't poured the perfume on Jesus at this time, she would have missed the window of opportunity. The Bible tells us that on the first Easter morning, some other women make their way to the tomb in the early morning hours. They are carrying spices to anoint the corpse of Jesus. He had been buried so quickly they didn't have time the day He died. But when they arrived, the tomb was empty. They never got to anoint His body—but Mary had!

There's an important lesson there for us: Never miss the opportunity to worship. You never know when will be the last chance to worship God. This lesson also applies to showing love and appreciation to people as well. Never miss an opportunity to tell someone you love him or her, because you never know when you'll have another chance.

5. WORSHIP CAN BE AN HONORED ACT OF INSPIRATION

The disciples said, "What a waste!" Jesus said, "What an investment!" They said, "What a foolish thing!" Jesus said, "What a beautiful thing!" The disciples could only see the cost, but Jesus could see the value. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (Mark 14:9)

I love the fact that Jesus KNEW the gospel would be preached throughout the world. Today we're over 6,000 miles from where this took place in Bethany, and it's 2,000 years later—but we are STILL fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus. Today, we are telling this story in Mary's memory. Mary's act of loving worship has immortalized her. Do you want to build a life that lasts? Then get at the feet of Jesus and worship Him with all your heart.

If you had walked up to someone in the Roman Empire in the first half of the first Century and asked them, "Who will have a greater impact on the future? Nero or Mary?" No doubt they would have said, "Nero, of course!" But today we name our daughters Mary and we name our dogs Nero!

CONCLUSION

There's one final lesson I take away from this beautiful act of worship. Worship isn't about coming to get something from God; it's all about giving Him something. When you bless the Lord, you can't help but be blessed in return.

Did you notice what happened when Mary poured out the perfume? John writes that the fragrance filled the house. And when Mary wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair, that fragrance that was on Jesus was now on her. What she had poured out on Jesus came back to her as a blessing. For the rest of the night and the next day wherever Mary went she carried with her the fragrance of worship. People might have said, "My, you smell lovely" And she would have been reminded of being with Jesus. Even today, you can usually tell when you're around someone who has poured out his or her life to Jesus. There's a certain spiritual fragrance about them. There is a beautiful perfume that accompanies their life. Paul wrote, "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." (2 Corinthians 2:15)

Remember, what you give to Jesus always comes back to bless you. (Sniff) Say, what's that you're wearing? Is it the fragrance of worship?

Would you be willing to pray this prayer of worship and surrender today? "God, please break open and pour out every drop of who I am. I give it all to You. My pride. My assumptions. My rights. I surrender them all to You so that I might know You and love You. Let the only thing that remains of me be a sacrifice to You and may your fragrance be a beautiful blessing to all who are near."

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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