

# MARY OF BETHANY

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## I. WHOLEHEARTED LOVE FOR GOD

<sup>37</sup> *Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment."* (Mt. 22:37-38)

- A. Loving God with all our heart is the first commandment because it is the ***first priority*** in God's heart. He desires that we would consciously cultivate a response to Him of wholehearted love.
- B. Loving God with all of our heart is the great commandment because it is ***the one that encompasses all else***. It is the one that steadily takes over every area of our lives, from our thought life, our words, relationships, to the way we spend time and money. If we truly give ourselves to loving Him entirely, we will in time love our neighbor as ourselves and be given to extravagant service, yet with a heart burning in the sustaining fire of intimacy.
- C. The only way to fulfill the Great Commandment is to *fall in love*. Love is the only way into such extravagance. ***The command demands a holy lovesickness***, a fierce passion for God. And we know that *with every command God gives is the inherent promise of His grace to fulfill it*. He was not only commanding, but prophesying: "You ***shall*** love the Lord your God..."
- D. Cultivating a responsive heart of extravagant devotion to Jesus takes time and deliberate effort. ***Love does not grow automatically*** but rather it automatically diminishes unless intentionally cultivated. A responsive heart to God, renewed in freshness and tenderness, is precious and rare, to be guarded with great care and renewed day by day.
- E. ***Satan's first priority*** against the Church is to lead us astray from cultivating the ability to be responsive to God with wholehearted love and extravagant devotion. If Satan leads us astray from the purity of devotion to Jesus then our service and love for others will eventually fail.

***I am afraid, lest as the serpent (Satan) deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Cor 11:3, NAS)***

## II. THE WHOLEHEARTED NATURE OF LOVE

- A. ***The Father gave everything to us in His only Son:*** The Father gave of His *only*, the Son of His love, the only begotten. He drew out of the bowels of His eternal being and spared not that which He held most precious, most costly, most beloved. In the giving of His only Son, He gave *all* without reserve (Rom. 8:32; Jn. 3:16).
- B. ***The Son gave everything to us in His own life, death and resurrection:*** Christ, the Son, poured Himself out in love unto me, giving Himself up for me utterly, not just in the giving of His physical life unto death, but in the free offering of all of His excellencies, His beauties, His preciousness and His own righteousness, indeed the essence of all that He is, He has entrusted to me, giving me His Holy Spirit (Gal. 1:4, 2:20; Eph. 5:25; Tit. 2:14).
- C. Bernard of Clairvaux stated, "It is true that the creature loves less because she is less. But *if she loves with her whole being, nothing is lacking where everything is given.*"  
***Greater love has no one than in the laying down of the whole of his life for another. Jn. 15:13***

## III. THE EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION OF MARY OF BETHANY: WASTING HER LIFE

<sup>3</sup> *Being in Bethany at the house of Simon...as He sat at the table, a woman (Mary of Bethany; Jn. 12:3) came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. She broke the flask and poured it on His head. 4 Some were indignant...and said, "Why was this...oil wasted? 5 It might have been sold for...300 denarii and given to the poor." They criticized her sharply. 6 Jesus said, "Let her alone...She has done a good work for Me...9 Wherever this gospel is preached...what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her."* (Mk. 14:3-9)

- A. The life of Mary of Bethany serves as a shining portrait to all throughout history as one immersed in the first commandment, one rooted in the identity of being a lover of God, one who offered her entirety unto the Lord, without reservation. Scripture gives three glimpses into her life and her heart: one as she sat at the feet of Jesus and heard His word amidst the criticism of her older sister (Luke 10:38-42), two as she waited in faith and love at the death of her brother Lazarus before the resurrection Jesus performed (John 11:28-35), and lastly, in the week preceding Jesus' crucifixion as she poured out her costly perfume over Jesus as an act of extravagant love (Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8).
- B. This final scene opens on a Saturday night at a dinner held at Simon the Lepers house. Between 17 and 30 people have gathered to this event in honor of Jesus. Martha is characteristically serving. Jesus has said repeatedly that He is going to die and yet the apostles are still distant and disconnected from this. Mary, however, having heard Him refer to His impending death, wants to respond in love. She seems to be the only one who grasps the significance of what is going on besides Jesus' mother. It is interesting that Jesus chooses Bethany as His place of rest. Jesus wants to be with this family, not Nicodemus the renowned teacher of Israel, not Joseph of Aramethea, etc. He wants to be with this family, especially Mary.
- C. Mary Anoints Jesus
  1. As all are gathered around and conversation is being carried along, Mary bursts in the room carrying her most valuable possession, a flask of spikenard containing the wealth of ***her entire inheritance, of worth of \$40,000 in our day***. It was her very future, contained in a bottle, kept for her dowry, now brought to the place where Jesus sat.
  2. Without a word, Mary breaks the flask and dumps it entirely over Jesus' head. Silence and shock fill the room. And then as the fragrance begins to abound, the silence turns to stirring and discomfort until several speak out in anger at the waste that has just been committed. With a heart marked by the sort of boldness and focus that only flow from love, ***Mary is unmoved by the words of the men***. She doesn't care. She falls down on her knees and begins to use her hair, getting it wet, washing Jesus' feet.
  3. Mary was purposefully anointing Jesus for His burial and Jesus immediately perceived it.
  4. Mary poured out her entire inheritance over Jesus, her whole future. Had it been double or triple in worth, she would have still emptied it all. There was no price high enough, and ***the only offering worthy enough was her entire inheritance***.

D. Indignant Leaders

***But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, “Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they criticized her sharply. (Mk 14:4-5)***

***But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? (Mt 26:8)***

1. The charge of the indignant leaders was “Why this waste?!” In other words, “Why such excessive and pointless loss?” They recognized the unnecessary part of Mary’s choice but failed to see that ***it was this voluntary element of love that moved the heart of Jesus.***
2. The response of the disciples revealed and exposed their hearts. Here sat the God-Man, Jesus, the King of kings that would soon offer His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. There was no gift worthy enough for such a Man. Yet Mary’s offering was despised in its extravagance and called “wasted.”
3. They were not confused, they were upset at her. The spirit of extravagant devotion will disrupt the social equilibrium of the house of God. If you become excessive in your love for Jesus, you will be sharply criticized.
4. Mary is all the while silent; ***she is living before the audience of One.*** She is not trying to draw attention to herself but is being moved by the Holy Spirit. She was lost in God and had no concept of being seen as extravagant. She had no knowledge that this act would be forever recorded. She was impassioned.  
***“If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised.” Song. 8:7***
5. In her heart was the beating motivation, ***“I have one window of time to offer this gift. He has said that He is going to die in a few days. It is now or never. This is my window. This is my time to pour over Him my devotion, to honor Him and to declare His worth.”***

E. Jesus Vindicates Mary

***<sup>7</sup> But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. <sup>8</sup> For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.” (Jn 12:1-8)***

1. Finally Jesus speaks and His words come with a cutting silencing to the indignation of His disciples. He vindicates Mary with a demand that these men leave her alone in their charges and He commends her love in pouring out her inheritance, ***calling it a “good work” because it flowed out of profuse love.***
2. Jesus will vindicate the lifestyle that cultivates a heart that is responsive to God in love. Mary’s act of devotion is remembered through all history.

***Wherever this gospel is preached...what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her.” (Mk. 14:9)***

3. Jesus used the most significant responsibility of serving the poor, the very highest responsibility on the list of the early church, and declared that touching His heart is even *more important* (Is. 61:1; Matt 11; Gal. 2:10). If we serve the poor without first touching Jesus, we end up connecting the poor to ourselves rather than to Jesus.

## IV. LOVING GOD EXTRAVAGANTLY EVERYDAY

- A. ***Rare acts of devotion, as revealed in this portrait of profuse devotion, come from cultivating a spirit of radical devotion as a lifestyle.*** The extravagance revealed in public on rare occasions can only come out of an entire life of secret extravagance unto God.
- B. Wholehearted living does not occur somewhere far ahead in the future when we are finally godly and circumstances are such as to bring about our greatest display of meekness. Nor does it happen in only the “spiritual” parts of our lives as we would often divide it.
- C. The only window we know we have is right now and that window encompasses both the “spiritual” and the “common” parts of life—for all are holy to the Lord if offered in love.
- D. We can love Him fully and extravagantly, giving Him everything in this very moment, in these current set of circumstances and in this present season of life. When this moment meets the next moment and we again give Him all that we are with a heart overcome in love, in our words, our thoughts, our time, our finances, etc., then we begin to cultivate true wholehearted living.

## V. JOY UNSPEAKABLE IS FOUND IN LOVE UNRESTRAINED

***These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full...Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. Jn. 15:11- 13***

- A. This is where all the joy is found—the secret of the kingdom, the treasure of the saint. When one is fully in love with God, wholly given to Him, emptied of all, withholding nothing, truly and entirely, then begins the grandness of joy unspeakable, then begins the entrance of eternal pleasures.
- B. It is the final fraction that holds the fullness of enjoyment, the last portion that imparts the brightness of living in the light. The Scripture makes it clear that wholehearted love for God is the highest and greatest way to live. And this fullness is found, this brightness is experienced, not in general *seasons* of life but in moments, not in *years* but in seconds—small snatches and flashes of wholehearted living.
- C. In loving Him *entirely*, with a heart filled with extravagant love and tenderized in responsive devotion, we begin to taste the glory of living in the light, the wonder of walking in the realm of the “wholly other than,” the place where Jesus described as “joy made full.”

