

Are You an Extravagant Lover or a Practical Atheist?

John 12:1-8

March 21, 2010

Have you ever wanted to be extravagant with someone you love? Extravagant gifts can make an impression on a person for whom we have strong feelings. That's not to say that simple can't work, too. But sometimes what is called for is a lavish gesture that communicates the overwhelming nature of your love.

If any of you are looking for such a gift for the one you love, perhaps a new cell phone is just the ticket. The Nokia Royal cell phone is platinum and is encrusted with 8.2 carats of diamonds. It sells for just \$47,850.

For you gentlemen who may be looking for something a bit more personal, Imperial Majesty, a signature perfume by Clive Christian, is the most expensive in the international market of perfumes. It is priced at \$215,000 for 16.9 ounces.

This is the kind of extravagance that we find in the story of Mary's anointing of Jesus. One of my favorite storytellers, Max Lucado, pictures it this way.

"Now is the right time," she told herself.

It wasn't an act of impulse. She'd carried that large vial of perfume from her house to Simon's. It wasn't a spontaneous gesture. But it was an extravagant one. The perfume was worth a year's wages. Maybe the only thing of value she had. It wasn't a logical thing to do, but since when has love been led by logic?

[It was Jesus' love that had healed Simon and raised her brother from the dead.]

And now someone needs to show the same to the giver of such love. So Mary did.

The fragrance rushed through the room. "wherever you go," the gesture spoke, "breathe the aroma and remember one who cares."

Mary's gesture of love for her Savior is one that we long to emulate. In our deepest hearts we want to show Jesus how much we care for Him and how much we appreciate the gift that he gives us through His death and resurrection.

However, too often the words of Paul ring in our ears.

I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. (Romans 7:18-20)

What is it that Jesus wants from us in this 21st Century? Is it more anointing? Of course not. He's not even here for us to pour perfume onto. What Jesus wants is for us to turn our lives over to Him completely. He wants us to allow Him to transform us into people of joy...people who are so overwhelmed by grace and forgiveness that people around us long for what we have – a relationship with Jesus.

Therein lies the rub. While 72% of Christians claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, less than 1/3 believe that relationship is supposed to make a difference in how they live their lives. As Dr. Martin Luther King put it, “We must remember that it's possible to affirm the existence of God with your lips and to deny the existence of God with your life. The most dangerous form of atheism is not theoretical atheism but practical atheism.”

The hard question that I put to you today is this, “Are you an extravagant lover of your Lord, or are you a practical atheist?” Do you live your life in such a way that people around you can see the risky extreme way you live your life for Christ? Or do you live so that the only way someone might know you are a Christian is if they happened to see you in church on Sunday?

Mary's act was an act of faith. She believed who Jesus proclaimed to be and she lived out that faith in her actions. Unfortunately, without Jesus right in front of us, it becomes more of a challenge to live Mary's example. Instead we live for what *is* in front of us. Unfortunately, for us and for Christ, our secular way of living doesn't just affect ourselves – it has more widespread implications. When we worry too much about what other people would say if we acted passionately toward our Christ, others don't see the internal conversation taking place in our hearts, they only see inaction. That inaction is communicated to the world as lack of faith or disbelief.

Disbelief is an obstacle for nonbelievers and believers. Nonbelievers simply do not see any reason to put their hope and faith in Jesus. Conversely, many believers acknowledge Jesus with words but spend every waking moment denying Him with their lifestyle. The hypocrisy of these so-called believers feeds the unbelief of those desperately seeking the truth.

- In what ways do you conform your life to the world around you?
- What would it take for you to live a life that is different from the lives of the unbelievers around you?
- How would you have to live your life so that others would have to say Jesus is real?
- A people in our life and family tell we love Jesus by the way we treat those who we say we love?

You and I need to re-appropriate the reality of the incarnate Jesus in our daily lives. Theology that fails to be embodied in daily life is not theology rightly understood. Is Christ simply a moral or philosophical teacher, or is He your Savior with whom you have a living relationship? The answer to that question is most important, because one can be ignored...the other cannot.

As we approach the highest, holiest week of the Christian year, I challenge you to consider the forgiveness and grace that comes to you through the person of Jesus Christ. Then answer this one question: How will you respond? With indifference? Or with daily acts that proclaim to Him, “wherever you go, breathe the aroma and remember one who cares.”