

Call to Obedience #402  
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA  
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## **Extravagance**

**by Reimar Schultze**

Let us begin with one of the most powerful Bible stories on extravagance.

*Now when Jesus was in Bethany... There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor (Matthew 26:6-9).*

One of the things modern Christians are not famous for is the spirit of extravagance—except, of course, when it comes to themselves. When the average Christian buys a new car, he may well testify: the Lord gave me a good deal, I brought the salesman down \$1000. Friend, this testimony may sound good to your brothers, but bringing somebody down and yourself up always lacks the stamp of divinity. Would it not make a better Christian impression on the salesman to give him the better part of the deal? He also needs bread for his children. God rewards the generous. For He said, *...and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again (Matthew 7:2).*

So, stinginess toward others and extravagance toward ourselves has become so much a part of our Christian culture that, in our blindness, we have not realized what we were doing all these years when we said, “The Lord has given us a good deal.” We have lived by the carnal nature under the principle: “It is more blessed to receive than to give,” rather than by, *It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35)*. If we want to be the salt of the earth, this trend must be reversed. Are you getting this? Love and give. The gospel is: *For God so loved the world that he gave... (John 3:16)*.

### **Extravagance, a Forgotten Attribute of God**

When a person becomes a Christian, he is soon introduced to three of the most prominent attributes of God: Omnipotence (all-powerful), Omnipresence (present everywhere) and Omniscience (all-knowing). Indeed, these attributes impress us, but they do not touch our hearts because they do not describe the

character of God, which is love. God's love is giving and His giving is always extravagant. So, all of God's children who are walking with Him are as extravagant as their Father.

So, in the creation story we find not only a display of God's omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience, but also a brilliant display of His extravagance. He created a temporary universe, yet He filled it with the image of His character, His love and benevolence. From this we see that God does nothing cheaply, halfway or thoughtlessly. He could have been economical and just have created the sun. But He created the moon and the stars also. Extravagance! He created thousands of marine species, living out their splendid glory unseen by man. Then consider the many brilliant species of birds, and the diversity between a hummingbird, the stork and the eagle. Extravagance! Consider the variety of land creatures, of plants and of insects. Consider the abundance and individuality of streams, lakes, forests, plains and mountains. Consider the pleasures we experience through our senses: the capacity of the eye to take in and create images in the brain, the thousands of sounds and rhythms we are capable of hearing and the delights the tongue can taste. God is a God of extravagance.

Leaving now the place of nature, ponder the extravagance of God's redemption: His marvelous plan of atonement; His generous mercies forgiving and forgiving again; and the giving of His best, His own Son, on Calvary's tree. Extravagance! Not only does He forgive us, but He also cleanses us. Not only does He cleanse us, but He renews us. Not only does He renew us, but He resides in us. Not only does He reside in us, but He communicates with us. Not only does He communicate with us, but He empowers us. Not only does He empower us, but He keeps us. Not only does He keep us, but He will present us *faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy* (Jude 1:24). Extravagance!

He does not only do what He must do, but He does exceedingly, *...abundantly above all that we ask or think...* (Ephesians 3:20). He does not only give us a King, but a kingdom; not only a place in heaven, but streets of pure gold to walk upon after our arrival there. He created angels not only for our protection, but to minister to us. So, you see extravagance in His creation and you see extravagance in His redemption. With this exorbitant generosity of our Lord toward us, how do we look to others, quibbling over a few dollars, or refusing to give to church unless we get tax credit?

May God have mercy on us, lest we perish. May we all be extensions of His extravagance. This is why Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that if someone wants you to go one mile with him, you should offer to go two.

Now then, it is exactly this characteristic of extravagance in the woman at Bethany that so impressed our Lord that He wants her story told as a memorial of her in all the world (Matthew 26:12-13). In essence, it all boils down to this, whenever you remember HIM in holy communion, remember HER for her extravagance!

### **The Extravagance of Mary**

Let us ponder three responses to Mary's conduct:

- Jesus said, *...she hath wrought a good work upon me* (Matthew 26:10);
- The disciples said with indignation, *...To what purpose is this waste?* (v.8);
- Judas asked the religious leaders: *What will ye give me and I will deliver him (Jesus) unto you?... (v.15).*

Consider these three attitudes: commendation, judgment and betrayal. All of these attitudes were displayed by religious people, and are all found in the church today.

The woman poured costly ointment on Jesus' head. No one was prepared for this generosity but Jesus, and no one commended it but Jesus. Yet, the disciples should have known that since Elijah was worthy of the last meal of a widow (1 Kings 17:7-15), how much more should Jesus be worthy of this gift. Oh, consider the value of it: a year's worth of salary! Perhaps it was her inheritance or her life insurance policy. Whatever it was, that ointment lost all its monetary value in a moment of time. Whatever dreams it contained were abandoned at the sight of Jesus. Yes, the intimacy the woman felt and sought with Jesus caused her to give the best to Him. Extravagance!

Jesus was pleased because this kind of giving was entirely in the character of God. As God is always extravagant toward us, so must we be extravagant; and our extravagance must begin with those closest to Jesus, and it must then reach even to those farthest from Him. The Bible says, *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the*

*household of faith* (Galatians 6:10). And we also have, ...*Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you* (Luke 6:27).

The disciples questioned the stewardship of the woman. Their complaint was “too much for the one and too little for the many.” *For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.* Yes, such is the arithmetic of the carnal heart. The disciples, even though they were with Jesus every day, did not know the value of the man sent from God! Oh, what a difference between the heart of God and the heart of man without God.

How many church boards pride themselves on their big missions programs and their fancy buildings, while they ignore the most precious ones in their midst. This is what makes Jesus indignant. He said, the woman *hath wrought a good work upon me, For ye have the poor always with you...* (Matthew 26:10-11). What was “waste” to the disciples, was stewardship to God. You do no evil by pouring it on any man sent from God.

Oh, my friend, take away that cold, rational, measured, analytical, calculated concept of stewardship of today’s church committees. Christ has no part in it and it lacks His anointing because it is out of character with His being. My friend, how often do you see spiritual greatness? When you see it, you cannot give “too much” and displease the Master. But be prepared for some to become indignant like Judas, who betrayed Jesus and left Him altogether.

Extravagance is at the heart of love. Take it out of your marriage, and the romance is gone. Take it out of the church, and the anointing stops. Take it out of your heart toward your enemies, and you violate the law of God. Extravagance? Yes! There should never be a place nor a deed without it. God is extravagant, and so are His children.

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