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Extravagance

[John 11:27-12:8]

Peter Hiatt @ The Sanctuary Downtown
December 5, 2010

And now, a word from our sponsor:

[Video – Chanel No. 5 commercial]

That's a recent commercial for Chanel No. 5.

I went online and discovered that approximately 1 pound of their best stuff in this crystal bottle costs \$1850. \$1850 for water with a "pleasing aroma." It's ironic that they'd choose that song for their commercial, 'cause it does seem foolish to love like that.

Jesus said, "Whatever you do unto the least of these you do unto me."
1.1 billion people in our world live on less than a dollar a day.

It's Christmas – Jesus' birthday – and perfume commercials will be all over the TV.
What will you give Him? A pleasing aroma in a crystal container?

One day, about 25 years ago, as a brand new youth pastor at Bel Air Presbyterian Church in southern California, I took a little one-day trip south of the border. My friend Dave, my father, and I met a missionary in Tijuana who took us to a place I'll never forget: the old Tijuana City Dump.

It sat on a hillside, from which you could see San Diego. As we walked through the dump, dirty faces, covered in shame, peered from behind piles of garbage. They lived there, in old tires, cardboard, hovels made of trash. I met one woman who had just given birth to a baby under a piece of carpet slung over a rope.

They lived there, sorting through trash, just trying to survive. Some sold their children as prostitutes to Americans who would cross the border looking for a cheap thrill. I've travelled the world, and never seen such poverty as I did that day, 2 miles from California.

Over the next four years, my high school group would build homes in that dump. For about \$1000 (less than a crystal bottle of Chanel No. 5), we could build a 200-square-foot home that would house 12 people. Within four years, they renamed the old dump: "*Cuidad de Amor* – City of Love." The dump changed, but even more, the people changed. And I felt like a superhero. A superman.

Well, I remember that first day, and then driving home, I remember the indignation I felt, the sense of responsibility, and all the Bible verses on stewardship that kept running through my brain.

We were driving back to Bel Air on Interstate 5, next to Disneyland, when someone spotted the Crystal Cathedral. We decided to pull off and take a look.

They had a volunteer tour guide who took us around and showed us the organ. [organ picture]
It's extravagant. It cost over 2 million dollars back in 1982, and they've added onto it since.
She told us all about it, revealed the cost, and then she said this: "But of course, it's not our organ. It belongs to Jesus."

In an instant, I thought of the dump, and I thought of Jesus.
And I did the calculations: 1 pipe organ in Crystal Bay ... or 3,000 homes in Tijuana.
I grabbed this lady and screamed, "Jesus doesn't want a pipe organ any more than a bottle of perfume! Why wasn't this pipe organ sold for 3 million dollars and given to the poor?!"

I grabbed her and screamed ... in my mind, not reality... but I really did feel righteous indignation. Or maybe ... pride.

Hey, let's look at our Bible lesson: **John 11:37**, where we left off last time.

Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Remember, the Sanhedrin had just decided that it was "expedient" to kill Jess in order to save the nation.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany (2 miles from Jerusalem and the Sanhedrin), where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table.

Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone, she has kept it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

Wow.

Do we get Jesus at all?

A denari was a day's wage.

300 denarii in a society with a 6-day workweek is a year's wage.

What do you get paid for a year of labor?

\$20,000?

\$200,000?

Well, that's what Mary dumped on Jesus.

And she dumped it on Jesus' feet in a society where people often starved, and the standard of living was similar to the Tijuana dump. It was "pure nard," perfume from India. It would've been brought by caravan and sealed

in an alabaster flask. It was far more valuable than Chanel No. 5. Undoubtedly, it was Mary's greatest treasure, and financial security.

She poured it on Jesus.

At least once before, something like this had happened at a dinner at a Pharisee's house. It involved a prostitute. Luke records it. Matthew and Mark also record a similar story that may very well be this story. It was also 300 *denarii* and the week before Christ's death.

In all four gospels, women dump expensive perfume on Jesus. It was absolutely extravagant, and highly inappropriate. It was inappropriate for a woman to even address a man in public, and it was absolutely inappropriate to let down her hair.

But Mary lets her hair down and wipes perfume on the feet of Jesus with her hair. In Matthew and Mark, the perfume is dumped on his head. In all three gospels, Jesus says she anoints His body for burial.

A pound of nard would cover Him and her. She's out of control, soaked in perfume, as she soaks Jesus in perfume, and the house fills with the fragrance. Whatever this is, it is unconstrained. So the people must have thought, "What is she thinking?"

So what was Mary thinking?

Well, I'm pretty sure I know what she was NOT thinking:

"Gosh, I wonder if this is 10% of my annual income.

And would that be before or after taxes?

Am I being a good steward?

Will this offering be used to accomplish our goals for the fiscal year ahead?"

What was Mary thinking? Well, I'm not so sure she was thinking.

It was more like she was feeling. She was seized by the power of a great affection ... we talked about that last time. Feelings aren't illogical so much as hyper-logical... more logic than we can comprehend.

In Romans 12:1, Paul writes, "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice."

I don't know about you, but that seems highly illogical and irrational to me.

Paul writes, "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice... which is your *logikos*... logical... rational, reasonable worship."

Mary's feelings were highly logical, even if she didn't comprehend the logic.

She didn't comprehend the Good, the Good comprehended her.

She didn't know about good and evil, but she knew the good.

She knew Jesus.

She'd listened to Jesus, wept with Jesus, laughed with Jesus, and saw His glory.

She knew Jesus, for Jesus had known her.

Jesus said, "She has kept this perfume to anoint me for burial."

I don't know that Mary comprehended that meaning, but she felt that meaning.

It comprehended her.

Jesus was going to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, and Jesus is what's for dinner.

For 1000 years, God had the Israelites offer a food offering – a lamb... one in the morning, and one in the evening. (Numbers 28:8) It was “a pleasing aroma to the Lord.” To the Lord. A pleasing aroma. That phrase is used in 40-some verses throughout the Pentateuch, in describing the offering and sacrifices in the House of the Lord. Some offerings were burnt up; some were eaten as communion with God.

God rarely explains this... as if we could comprehend it.

And yet, He likes them (sacrifices)... “A pleasing aroma” ... thoroughly extravagant.

When Solomon dedicated the House, they sacrificed 22,000 bulls and 122,000 sheep among truckloads of other things. That seems utterly impractical, illogical, and wasteful to us.

And now it's Passover.

Thousands and thousands came to Jerusalem for Passover.

There would literally be a river of lamb's blood flowing from the Temple Mount down the Kidron Valley to Gehenna, and then onto the Dead Sea ... the abyss. It was utterly extravagant, and Jerusalem would be filled with the pleasing aroma of roasted lamb, broken bread, and blood red wine.

The temple – the house of the Lord – was to be continually filled with “pleasing aromas” ... incense and roast lamb... the sacrifice of Love ... the pleasing aroma.

Now, if you wonder, “Well, how much did all that ‘pleasing aroma’ cost?”

That depends.

It depends on how much a lamb is worth.

How much do you think a lamb is worth?

How about one that takes away the sins of the world?

How much?

30 pieces of silver, perhaps?

How much do you figure?

How much do you think?

Well, Mary stopped figuring. I doubt she was thinking.

But she was worshipping.

Pros Keneo (“to kiss toward”) ... she was kissing Jesus' feet with everything she had, and the fragrance filled the house. She was worshipping. That's the logic of Heaven.

In John 5:23, Jesus told the woman at the well, “I'm thirsty,” and “Worshippers... that's what the Father seeks.”

So what do you suppose Jesus is thinking? “Mary, get a grip!”

Is He embarrassed by this lack of decorum and moral sensibility? ... This extravagant love without limit?

No.

He drinks it... like living water from a fountain.

In Mark and Matthew, He says this is a beautiful thing, and wherever the Gospel is preached in all the world, this story will be told of her. She's anointing Him for His death.

She sees His glory and worships... extravagantly, freely, and without limit.

Later perhaps, she felt rather spent, exposed, and foolish.

But worshipping, she lost herself in Jesus.

We wonder what Mary was thinking?

Well, I know exactly what Judas was thinking.

He's calculating ...

\$90,000 of perfume is 90 houses that I could build.

1080 people that I would house, who would join the cause, and appear in the newsletter.

I'd save them, and I'd be a superhero.

John tells us that Judas was a thief, but I think he means more than a thief of money.

I think he stole glory.

Judas would dip into the common purse, but I'm sure he justified his expenditures.

That's convicting for pastors like me, who live off of the church's offering.

Judas stole more than money... I think he stole glory.

In other words, he felt responsible for saving his world.

So you see, he didn't dislike Jesus... he greatly admired Jesus.

Jesus had been his role model, and Jesus was the one Judas trusted 2nd most in all the world.

Jesus was incredibly useful to Judas.

Gosh, with Jesus, they'd feed the poor, heal the sick, banish the oppressors, and establish Zion, the Jewish state of Israel.

Jesus was useful to Judas: the pragmatic decision, the expedient choice... at least until now.

Until he walked into Jerusalem and talked about dying.

Jesus had been useful to Judas, and even the poor had been useful.

Jesus said, "Whatever you do unto the least of these..."

I suspect Judas used the least of these to feel better about himself.

Just like he used Jesus to feel better about himself.

Judas had so admired Jesus... he wanted to be Jesus... the Savior of Israel.

Just like the Sanhedrin thought they saved Israel.

And so they all made an expedient, prudent, and pragmatic choice: a judgment to save Israel.

And it wasn't just them. Matthew and Mark reveal all the disciples agree with Judas.

It's all of us.

We think it's our job to save people, and so we think, and so we judge...

Dumping \$100,000 on Jesus in the form of perfume or a pipe organ is just foolish.

"It's bad stewardship," we say.

So who was the faithful steward, Judas or Mary?

In Jesus' parables, the unfaithful servant is the most cautious steward – the one who buries the money in a napkin, the one who keeps the perfume in the bottle.

The unfaithful steward is the one with least faith in the outrageously generous heart of his Master.

Jesus is the heart of your Master.

And pay attention to Scripture.

Your Master isn't short of cash.

He turns water to wine and creates coins in the mouths of fish.

He's not short of cash... it's something else that He seeks.

Well, Mary saw Jesus, "From the bosom of the Father," break over her... and now she breaks over Him, like a priceless bottle of perfume, spilling the most extravagant love, freely and without limit.

She worshiped.

She gave.

Have you ever done that?

Have you ever given like that?

Every Sunday morning, right?

I hear weeping as the plate is passed...

"I give all, and I want to give more! Peter, we must get bigger offering plates!"

Now of course I'm kidding... kind of.

Giving to Jesus is to be your whole life.

So it's not simply giving to an institutional church.

Sometimes I've given 10% to church. Sometimes I've given more.

Sometimes I've felt called to give no money here, for I get paid here... so I give elsewhere.

But I don't think I've ever given like Mary.

But maybe I have... It just wasn't at church.

Actually, it was 2 miles from here... 29 years ago, down on 16th Street, at Kenworth Jewelers.

I had been circling the block in my '67 Mustang, with 220 amp coaxial speakers mounted in the back deck, and powered by a pioneer stereo connected to a power booster. The volume was turned up all the way as it blasted REO Speedwagon, and I sang, "Don't let her go..."

I'd been dating her for four years, and now I was psychin' myself up.

As I talked to Harry the Jeweler, adrenaline coursed through my veins.

My life flashed before my eyes... it wasn't just my money, it was my life.

Harry began showing me diamonds.

Diamonds are extravagant and foolish. I had no practical purpose for a diamond.

But I wanted one.

I tried to stay calm and collected in order to drive a good bargain.

Some stones were impossible for me to buy, but others were just too inexpensive.

And that was the weird thing – when Harry would quote a price too low, I wanted to scream:

"HARRY, charge me more!!!

HARRY, I want to spend more!!!

HARRY, break the bank and pour me out!!!

See, Harry, I got this girl, and she means everything to me.

Harry, she's gorgeous, and Harry, she loves me!

I never thought someone like that would love someone like me.

Harry, did you know "a diamond is forever?"

Harry, wherever she goes in this world, this day will be remembered.

Harry, I don't care about the diamond – I can't tell one from another, anyway.

She'd say yes if I gave her plastic ... she already has said yes.

Harry, it's not about the diamond, and Harry, I can't buy her love... she's already given it to me.

Harry, it's just that I want to give everything to her.

I want to bleed for her; I want to sacrifice for her.
Harry, I've seen her broken for me, and I want to break for her.
Harry, I don't have to do it... I WANT to do it. That's why I have to do it.
I'm a prisoner of love!
It's extravagant, it's foolish... is that wrong, Harry?
It's love!"

Actually, it may have been a bit wrong.
I spent all my student loan money ... your tax dollars.

You know, you can make a case that Judas was right.
Jesus is in the poor, and they appreciate food more than perfume.
But if Judas was right, it was for the wrong reason, and so he'd take from the poor even as he gave to the poor...
give them money, and take their dignity.

T.S. Elliot wrote, "The greatest evil is to do the right thing for the wrong reason."
Well if Mary did the wrong thing, it was for the right reason, and so what she did was absolute perfection. She fulfilled the whole Law with LOVE.

If you say "What good is love?" you obviously haven't met Love –
you've only used Love and crucified Love.

"What good is love?"
Love is the Good.
And this is the miracle: It spilled out of Mary and all over Jesus.
And remember, they had no Laundromats and public showers.
That means that in 6 days, when John (who wrote this Gospel) lays his head on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper,
he will smell "extravagant love."

And when the soldiers strip Jesus the following morning and argue over his seamless tunic, they'll smell it – "the testimony of extravagant love."

And when Jesus hangs on the cross, the sky grows dark, and the earth shakes... He can smell it.
He wasn't entirely alone. His body had been anointed with extravagant love.

Perhaps He is alone on your cross, in your shame, in your sin and sorrow, until you see Him there, and anoint Him with extravagant love... anoint Him with your worship and crown Him King of Glory in the temple of your heart. He really does bear your sorrows.

Well, as He – the Passover Lamb – was slaughtered ... as He took away the sins of the world ... as He made "all things new," enthroned on His cross... He smelled it.
So what is it worth ... to Him?
Far more than 300 denarii.
That perfume is worth His body broken and blood shed.

"We loved because He first loved us," wrote John.
Mary broke, for she saw Jesus broken for her.
He came to her and wept with her at Lazarus' tomb.

She saw the glory of Love, and then she saw the power of Love, as God raised Lazarus from the dead. And when Jesus came to Bethany six days before Passover, she saw the sacrifice that would open the fountain. She saw the Sacrifice of God, and she sacrificed herself... and the house was filled with the fragrance of limitless Love.

She was saved, and Jesus saved her.

He is the Savior, and she is the worshipper, but...

Judas wanted to be the savior ... the council wanted to be the savior ... we want to be the savior.

Or maybe we think we must be the savior because we don't trust that Jesus already is the Savior, for we don't believe that God already has loved us extravagantly, freely, and without limit.

John 1:9 – "Jesus enlightens all men."

John 1:29 – "Jesus takes away the sins of the world."

John 3:17 – "Jesus saves the world."

John 4:34 – "Jesus accomplishes God's work."

John 6:37 – "Jesus gives life to the world."

John 12:46 – "Jesus will draw all people to himself."

John 19:30 – "It is finished."

If I believe Scripture, it appears that there really is nothing left to save... for everything that's anything has been saved, or is being saved, because it was saved on the cross by Jesus.

And so there truly is nothing left for me to save.

There is nothing left for me to accomplish or earn.

It's like Susan's ring – when I bought it, I had nothing to earn... so it wasn't work, it was worship.

Jesus said,

"This is what you must be doing to be doing the work of God:
believe in the One Whom He has sent."

And who is the One whom He has sent?

Jesus, the Savior.

If you don't trust that He's the Savior, you'll make yourself the Savior, and betray the Savior, like Judas...

Like each of us, every time we sin.

"Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

Jesus is not short of cash.

You've seen Him turn water into wine, 5 loaves and 2 fish into a banquet.

In Matthew 17:27, He even gets His tax dollars from the mouth of fish.

But maybe He is short of faith: Faith in Grace ... His extravagant, free, and endless Love.

Faith in Grace is Heaven, and its opposite is Hell.

Faith in Grace is worship.

Heaven is worship.

Now listen.

We're called to worship Him in everything we do.

We're called to worship Him in "the last and the least," as we watch Him save "the last and the least," and even as He uses us to do so.

We're called to worship Him here, through songs, prayers, and sermons.

We serve Him our worship.

He's the Superhero, and we are His bride.

I think the modern American church has kind of forgotten that, so we look more like Judas and less like Mary.

Most believe God is all-powerful, but not all Love...

Or that God is all Love, but not all-powerful...

That God can save, but doesn't want to save, or that God wants to save, but can't save.

Most think God is a Savior like themselves: Limited in power, limited in Love...

And so they must save themselves, and they act like Judas.

Most don't trust God's judgment of extravagant, free, and endless Love.

Most can't see the Passover Lamb, who takes away the sins of the world, and they can't hear Him as He calls from His throne, "Behold, I make all things new."

But I think we can... just a little bit.

I think that's why we've been called to this time and place –

to anoint Jesus with His own extravagant Love.

And perhaps the world will smell some of it on our clothes and in our hair.

But that's not our concern.

Jesus is the Savior, and we are the worshippers.

He wants our worship. That's our calling.

This Thursday is the 3-year anniversary of The Sanctuary.

I can't tell you the number of times I've felt out of control, spent, exposed, and foolish.

And yet, that does make sense, if in fact we're broken, like Mary, and dumping all our perfume on the feet of Jesus.

You know, I often feel like we have to accomplish something, and thus worship is how we psych ourselves up for that something. But worship IS that something.

You know, sometimes I've felt like I've had to justify giving campaigns with mission projects, because worship services don't really matter.

Do you see how sick and evil that is?

For, what is this?

What is the preacher, the song leader, the building, the custodians, the pastors... even the mission projects?

What are they?

It's all perfume that together we purchase in order to pour it on the broken body of Jesus as an offering of Love.

Unless these things help you to worship ... unless these things help you see Jesus, trust Jesus, and anoint Jesus ... they're all worthless ... to Jesus.

This is a worship service. We're here to serve worship to Jesus, as He saves the world.

UNDERSTAND: If this helps you worship Him, there is no way to calculate what it's worth... to Him.

He is the Savior, and we are the worshippers.

He is the *Eschatos* Adam – the Super Man ... and we are His bride.

He's the Superhero, and this is us: Mary Jane.

[Movie Clip – Spiderman]

Now, Mary Jane knows she can't save Spider Man as he saved her.
She can't save Spider Man, but she can love him extravagantly, as he saves the world.
She can anoint the Lion of Judah with kisses as he saves the world.

When I think I have to save the world (like Spider Man or Jesus), I live like Judas.
But when I worship, I live like Mary... extravagantly, freely, and without limit.

And now, if you think that I mean I don't do anything... we don't do anything... you're terribly mistaken.
The Bride of Christ gives everything, and she is impregnated with the very life of her Groom.
It's called fruit.
People may think that's work, but not for Mary.
It's worship.

And I should tell you, it really wasn't work that turned the Tijuana dump into the *Cuidad de Amor* ("City of Love"). A construction company could've built those houses in a week, but they couldn't have changed those lives, and saved those souls.

It wasn't work... it was worship.
It was teenagers, pregnant with the life and love of Jesus.
It wasn't Judas, it was Mary.

Don't be Judas.
You're Mary.