

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EV Free
July 14, 1996

To Fume or Perfume?
Mark 14:1-11

When you go out from a room, what kind of smell gets left behind? Are you a fumer or a perfumer? Are you a critic or an encourager? A skeptic or a soother? Do you like controversy or comfort? When you go out from church what kind of smell gets left behind? Are you an extravagant worshiper or a practical critic?

I have to confess I find myself often in the practical critic. My wife sometimes calls me Mr. Practical. My motto is never pay the full price for anything...I've found that store managers are willing to adjust the price for a good reason. I put some gutters on my roof this week and didn't like the price that was quoted so I suggested an alternative pricing structure. They went for it. I love to hear peoples stories about getting a great deal...as long as it's honest and short of stealing. What a find! Going out to eat at restaurants are nice...but it's sooo expensive and it lasts only until the next meal time, then I'm ready to go eat again. Cut flowers...man they only last a couple days. I'm attracted to things that are going to last.

Well, one sunny day in July, I must have lost my practical head. My wife and I were enjoying an afternoon browsing around in some incredibly expensive shops in Dallas, Texas. People have little else to do in Dallas so they shop in cool air conditioning. We had lots of fun watching the people that had the money to buy these items. Erin was smelling some of the very exclusive perfumes, one of her more wealthy friends, not in seminary, mentioned she loved the smell of a perfume called "Vanilla"; well this shop carried it...and the fragrance was just incredible. Almost intoxicating. The price however was equally intoxicating. Erin's birthday was coming up the end of July so one afternoon...I went over and purchased this perfume. On her birthday the surprise was complete. She opened the box and started to cry. Why? Because Mr. Practical, blew apart his budget, went against his nature and did a very impractical thing...I can't believe I paid that much for a

little bottle of perfume. It was extravagant...impractical. It was a demonstration of my love for Erin. Was it practical? No. But was it worth it? It paid off incredible dividends. My wife was convinced I had to be either crazy or madly in love with her to extravagantly demonstrate my love to her in that way. Was it worth it? You bet! In fact even though I wasn't looking for a return, I received back far more than I gave. You know what I love about that perfume? You know that after smell that is left on a shirt or sweater after you've spent an evening out together. In the morning in my closet, I can still smell lingering smells of Erin's perfume, Vanilla. It reminds me of my love for her and her love for me...that fragrance lingers on. The extravagant fragrance symbolizing an extravagant love.

What about our love relationship with God? Have you ever given to God in an extravagant way in the past...that when you remember, it fills you with a lingering odor of your love for Him and His love for you? Or, Do earthly values pull so strong that you find it difficult to ever show your love for God in an extravagant way? Do you find yourself questioning others who give extravagant gifts of money, time, lost opportunity? How a person responds to Jesus reveals that person's loyalty. To fume or perfume...that will be our question.

My purpose this morning is to encourage extravagance, Be extravagant in your love for God. Do not mistake extravagant worship as a license to live an extravagant lifestyle. I know there are many who struggle with finances that spending too much on too little. Extravagant worship is not practical but it's purposeful, it is not self-seeking, it is God honoring. Show Him your devotion by offering sacrificial tokens of our love. Many here consistently offering up extravagant expressions of worship, others of us may struggle and see this as a revealing area of true love and loyalty. I do not mean this to be one more brick of guilt on your shoulder. Love flows spontaneously from the heart. Pray that God would rekindle a new love experience for Him in your heart. God replace the cooling embers with an new excitement and love for you, help me to see the ways you work in me and through me and for me. True love cannot be contained. It will always find a means of expression. True love will find a way to squeeze it's way out. Is your love for God supreme

and incomparable above all other loves? How then is it expressed in your life? Where does that love for your God come squeezing out?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark chapter 14. The previous chapter 13 was the Olivet discourse. Jesus spoke to his disciples on the Mount of Olives about the end times and offered hope amidst that suffering. It is interesting the author of this book, choose to sandwich a discourse on tribulation suffering between two stories of devotion, dedication, and loyalty. The unnamed widow at the end of chapter 12 gave what? Her all, it wasn't worth much in earthly standards but was costly to her and an extravagant gift of worship to God. No reaction from the disciples. They would have missed it if Jesus had not pointed it out to them. Now in chapter 14 we read about a woman, unnamed here who poured out an incredibly expensive vial of perfume in worship of Jesus. Which of the two women's gifts were more extravagant? What is the disciples reaction? What would have been your reaction if you had been seated around the table at the home of Simon the (former leper?) Lets read Mark 14:1-11. (READ)

Mark choose to write thematically and not chronologically here. He begins the time sequence with the religious leaders searching for a way to get Jesus. Then inserts this story about incredibly extravagant demonstration of love an loyalty. From John's account we see that this event actually occurred the Friday before the passion week. I believe Mark places this story here, to bring a stronger contrast to the loyalties that pull on us. There are earthly pulls on us for loyalty and there are heavenly values that challenge us. When one encounters Jesus there can be no passive response. Choose your side, which way will you go? First lets look at the pull of earthly values.

Point #1 Earthly values will pull at you! Look at the pull for power. Verse 1. It is the final week, The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread was only two days away. I'm sure this was a very busy week for the priest, in getting all the preparations ready to celebrate the Passover. This week long celebration was started to help the Jews to remember by symbolism in a meal, how God delivered their ancestors from the Egyptians. To remember God's deliverance as the death angel passed over the Jewish homes that were sprinkled with the blood of a lamb.

Amidst all those celebration planning meetings, they had time for yet another meeting. This was a closed door, secret, hush-hush meeting. Not a friendly, happy meeting...this was fear driven. Voices were low. Wealthy powerful and self-preserving religious heads were drawn close together by the magnetism of common hate, common greed, and unquenchable thirst for power. Their minds have been already made up. Plotting, scheming. Ever since Jesus healed on the Sabbath in Chapter 3:6 they have been looking for a way to destroy Him. Their hatred increased when Jesus cleansed the temple and fear was solid after being embarrassed in their verbal sparring match. They sought to find a way to eliminate a threat to their power. Verse 1 "Seeking how to seize Him...by stealth" By stealth. Undetected power of destruction. Death hidden by pious smiles. Earthly powers will pull at you.

Look at verse 2. Not during the festival...lest there be a riot of the people." They were political power brokers. They played to the opinion of people. They wanted to do what they wanted, but they also knew the power of peoples opinion. Earthly powers had grabbed the throats of these men and squeezed so tight that they couldn't see God in Jesus. While the leaders were people pleasers, Jesus was a people lover. All the leaders could see was a threat to their power. The world glares at those following Christ and says your weak, you turn other cheek. Don't let the other guy get an edge, don't help him out. Hold to power at all costs, eliminate competition. You have to fight to get ahead. It is so tempting to rant and rave and demand our rights and our power. Folks, earthly power will pull at you.

Earthly possessions will pull at you. Skip down to verses 10-11. Judas Iscariot. He was one of the twelve closest disciples. Specifically chosen. He had been in on all the small group special teaching times. He was a Jesus insider...but His heart was not with God...it was with himself. It's possible for everyone around you to think your in with God and yet, not be in. Judas had advantage of all the training directly from Jesus. He'd seen the miracles, he'd listened to the debates, but his heart wasn't there. Did Jesus know it...yes. God's plan was that Jesus would be betrayed by one closest and die. This is an interesting combination of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Judas was not compelled

by God to be a traitor, but he was held responsible for submitting to Satan's moves against his heart.

For Judas, the love of money was greater than his love for Jesus. Judas like the religious leaders always kept an ear out in the market. He listened to the opinions and realized from his network that Jesus was going down. Jesus was not going to be a great earthly king real soon, he was going to suffer. He had heard about the religious leaders hit list. He knows he could be easily arrested along with Jesus. So, Judas, in verse 10 goes to the leaders. Judas was more interested in saving his own neck. Why not turn this one around says Judas...cut my losses on this loser. I can get my neck out of trouble and get some bucks for my trouble at the same time, boy am I a smart one. Off he goes to the Chief priests.

It's after hours at the temple. The guards hassle Judas trying to get in. The officials can't believe it at first, the priests admit nothing thinking Judas is a plant. Hours later after heated interrogation the chief priests can barely contain their excitement. They have the real thing. An insider traitor? This is too good to be true. They decide to step up their plan. Forget the people we are going for it. God must be behind this. Was God behind it?

Judas was pulled strongly by earthly desire for possessions. He loved himself, his possessions more than Jesus. Earthly powers will pull at you and earthly possessions will pull at you. Both are pulling you the wrong way. Sandwiched in the middle of this earthly pull is an example of a woman challenged by heavenly values. While earthly values pull at us, heavenly values challenge us.

Go back up to verse 3. Jesus is back at Bethany. Home of Simon the leper. Probably no longer a leper but one whom Jesus healed. We know from John's account of this story that Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus were all there. While they were all there reclining. Verse 3. A woman, John tells us is Mary, takes an alabaster stone flask and breaking the slender neck and seal, releases the aroma and liquid to pour on Jesus head and feet. Verse 3 this stuff was very costly. Verse 5 300 Denarius. Almost a years wage for a common laborer. 25-\$30,000 worth of pure nard. Nard was an aromatic oil that came from a rare plant root native to India. Was this not an extravagant gift? It even cost

more than the perfume I gave Erin. Extravagant gifts show our love and loyalty to God.

But...doesn't it seem like such a waste of money? Here come the practical critics. We evangelicals are taught to discern and judge and keep the truth in line. But how does \$30,000 worth of perfume spilled out on the head and feet and down into the dust of the ground fit into your value system? Just think...what you could do with 30 grand. Why we could carpet this church and still have half left over. We could set up a grocery food basket for those in need. We could send a whole group on a short term mission. We could buy a video projector and Jesus videos for all of Yaolt. We could hire a youth pastor! Wow. What great stuff we could do with 30 grand. Some of those same thoughts.

Are you ever tempted to be a practical critic when someone gets sacrificially extravagant in their giving to God? It may be time...money...devotion...loyalty...priority over you? Or does that giving inspire you. Does extravagant giving bolster your faith?

Look at verse 4. It looks like some of those disciples struggle with some of the same things I do. "Indignant. Why was this perfume wasted?...Look what we could have done with all that money. These were practical people who hated to see things go to waste. Who were they really criticizing? Jesus for not stopping the woman? They were criticizing the priority that the woman placed on showing her devotion to Jesus in a physical way. She loved Jesus very much. We cannot allow the critics to stop our extravagant worship of Jesus. The critic says, "Why do you spend soo much of your time volunteering at the church? hey you make a decent salary, why don't you get that -----that you've been wanting? I can't believe you put that much in the offering plate! Why? These sound like the pulls of earthly values.

A while back a friend of mine told me of his plan. Now this guy loves to worship God and gives extravagant gifts. Someone he knew had a urgent need. A problem that needed to be fixed. It was a very expensive problem costing thousands of dollars. We talked of the problem and his desire to help. I immediately went into my practical mode. Do you realize this person's assets are far larger than yours? Yes...Are they planning on paying it back when things are liquidated? etc. Etc. Finally, my friend said something I'll never forget. You know,

We're convinced that God wants us to do this..if they pay me back that's fine if not, that's fine too. This is for God. Mr. Practical could have squelched my friends opportunity to exercise his spiritual service of worship. Was it an extravagant gift? You bet. Will he receive more in return than the investment..Probably much more..after all most things in life that are worth anything at cannot be purchased. When God says move...then move. Be wise, be close to God...but be careful of the critics that would rob you of the pleasure of extravagant gift giving. That critic might be you!

In verse 6 Jesus begins to respond to the critic disciples. "Don't bother her, she has done a good thing. Extravagant gifts show where our true loyalty lies. True love cannot be contained. It always finds a way to come squeezing out.

Not only does true love offer extravagant gifts. True love offers timely gifts. Verse 7 "The poor you always have with me. but you do not always have Me She has done what she could anointed My body beforehand for the burial." Jesus was not saying we should not try to meet the needs of the poor. James 1:23 "This is pure and undefiled religion to visit." But, the poor have always been on earth, this was the last week for these disciples to physically show their love for Jesus. True love offers gifts that are meaningful and timely. She was at the feet of Jesus in worship. Somehow she knew or was guided by the Spirit that Jesus time on earth was short. Maybe the words of Jesus telling about his mission to come to earth and die, finally sunk in. Maybe she heard the same market gossip that Judas did. Threats caused one Judas to run scared to save his own neck. Threats of death caused another to fall at His feet in extravagant worship. True love offers timely gifts. Her gift prepared her body for burial.

Folks it's real easy for us in the church to do the work of God, minister to the people of God, address the needs of the helpless, be about the business of God...and yet we ignore the person of God. We are the fragrance of Christ. God cares for a broken heart that has spilled out in gratitude for what he has saved them from. It fills the room with an aroma of praise. When was the last time you've been around someone has given an extravagant gift of worship to God? Is it refreshing? Contagious? Faith bolstering? Ask God this week to open your eyes to

opportunities to express your love for God. It need not be expensive...only costly. What costs you little means little. Here's a quote from Robert McCheyne.

If we have been saved by Christ, we should pour out our best affections on Him. It is good to love his disciples, good to love his ministers, good to love his poor. But it is best to love him. We cannot now reach his blessed head nor anoint his holy feet. But we can fall down at his footstool and pour out our affections toward him. It was not the ointment Jesus desired, for what does the king of Glory care for a little ointment? But it is the loving heart poured out upon his feet; it is the adoration, praise, love and prayers of a believer's broken heart that Christ cares for. The new heart is the alabaster box that Jesus loves, broken and filling the room with the aroma of praise.