

LOVE WITHOUT BOUNDS

Scripture: John 12:1-8

Six days before Passover - an important Jewish holiday that remembers the Israelites Exodus from slavery in Egypt - Jesus visited his dear friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at their home in Bethany, a small village located about two miles east of Jerusalem, near the Mount of Olives. They were sisters and a brother. And their home served as a place of rest for Jesus when He was in the area. Their relationship with Jesus was deeply personal. Lazarus is best known for being raised from the dead by Jesus. After falling ill, his sisters had sent word to Jesus. But He was delayed. And by the time He arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. He went to Lazarus' tomb and *wept*. That's the shortest verse in the Bible. Two words. "*Jesus wept.*" Despite the sisters' grief, Jesus assured them He was "*the resurrection and the life.*" (John 11:25) And then with absolute authority **commanded** Lazarus in a loud voice, "*Lazarus, come out! The dead man came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth was around his face. And Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'*" (John 11:43-44) That moment was one of the most powerful miracles in Jesus' ministry, outside of His own resurrection from His grave! It demonstrated He *did* have complete power over death. It was predicting His own resurrection.

And now, Lazarus, once dead, was reclining at table with Jesus. The table was low, surrounded by cushions. The scent of warm bread, roasted herbs, and olive oil was in the air. Reclining and leaning on one's side, propped up on an elbow, Roman style, was the custom for dining. The woven fabric was cool and comforting. Voices rose and fell in laughter and conversation — familiar, unhurried among disciples, friends, and strangers who were sharing in that intimate occasion. But aside from the hum of the gathering, there was a definite atmosphere of calm as Jesus sat and listened while Martha, ever the servant, was preparing the meal. Her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to His teaching. Frustrated, Martha asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her! But He gently reminded her Mary had chosen "*the better part.*" Martha's heart for service was sincere. But she needed to learn that closeness with Jesus was more important than being busy for Him.

Then, Mary in an act of pure devotion, poured out a jar of expensive perfume onto Jesus' feet worth what someone would earn in a year. Let's put that into a modern perspective. In the United States, a year's wages today for a full-time worker is around \$60,000 to \$70,000. However, it can be higher. Or it can be lower, depending on the profession and location. So, the cost of that alabaster jar of pure nard that Mary smoothed onto Jesus' feet would be about \$60,000 to \$70,000. However, the actual price of nard today can cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars per ounce for authentic, high-quality oil which is native to the Himalayan regions of India and Nepal. She then wiped His feet with her hair in solid devotion that neither asked for permission nor expected repayment. She felt completely free of judgment or fear. She only wanted to give, uplift and adore her Lord with boundless love offered Him without hesitation. Without envy. Without resentment. And in its purest form, **Love Without Bounds** is not limited. It's an act of kindness between friends, families, partners. Even strangers. It's like a flame that burns brighter when shared. And love without bounds is a gift. It's the question and the answer. It asks for nothing, but to be. Love without bounds is endless. It has no distance. Has no time. And ignores circumstances.

So, today, we're looking at Mary's extravagant love. Judas' criticism. And Jesus' response. A story that invites you to think about your own devotion to Jesus. Mary's act was bold. It was selfless. And the perfume she used, pure nard, was very expensive. Yet she did not hesitate. Her love for Jesus knew no bounds. And her actions showed her thankfulness for all Jesus had done, especially in raising her brother Lazarus from the dead. That kind of love is a challenge. How often have you held back in how you express your love and gratitude toward God? Here, Mary is teaching us that devotion is not something you keep inside. It's pouring your heart out in response to God's endless grace. Pouring your heart out about having a heartfelt relationship with God. Recognizing His goodness. Allowing it to shape your life and your actions. It's an invitation to be open and honest with God by having a deep sense of gratitude and a desire to live within His will.

But Judas Iscariot's response to what Mary did was very different! He questioned why the perfume wasn't sold? Why wasn't the money given to the poor? On the surface, that might sound reasonable. After all, helping the poor is what being called a follower of Jesus is all about. Yet, John's Gospel reveals Judas' hypocrisy. His concern wasn't for the poor. It was for him! It's a reminder that criticism often hides deeper motives. When you see acts of devotion you don't understand, are you quick to judge? Can you pause to see the sincerity and beauty in what others are doing? Judas Iscariot served as treasurer for Jesus and His disciples which meant he was

responsible for managing the group's money. That would have included donations and funds used for their needs. And when Judas criticized Mary, *"He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself with what was put into it."* (John 12:6, NIV) Despite his closeness to Jesus and the disciples, Judas's misuse of the money bag revealed his underlying greed and eventual betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. It was significant! Though not extravagant. It was roughly the price of a slave, (Exodus 21:32) which today could be a few thousand dollars, depending on the value of silver at the time. But the symbolic meaning of the 30 pieces of silver given to Judas for Jesus meant the betrayal of someone priceless for a sum that showed the greed of Judas and the tragic nature of his choice.

And Jesus responded to that moment by defending Mary's actions. He said, *"Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial."* Saying that, Jesus acknowledged the meaning of what Mary did. She anointed Him, not only as a guest of honor, but as One who would soon face death and burial. Jesus' words, *"You will always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me,"* was not a dismissal of the poor. It was a recognition of the meaning of that moment. Mary seized that moment to show her love while Jesus was still alive. And what she did invites all of us to live with that same sense of urgency in expressing our love and faith

. Mary's story asks: How can you demonstrate Love Without Bounds in your own life? Ask yourself, *"Am I showing boundless love for Jesus in my own life?"* meaning offering Him your wholehearted loyalty. Not holding anything back. Responding to His boundless love, just as Mary did when she poured out her costly perfume onto His feet. Now I know a lot of people don't like suggestions being given to them. But here are some ways you can express that kind of love. Plan to spend *unrushed* time in prayer and studying your Bible. Practice sitting alone. Just listen in silence, allowing His Holy Spirit to guide and renew you. Set some moments aside in your day just to be with God. Not asking for anything. Just enjoying His presence.

And find time to serve others! Especially those in need. Give generously your time, your resources, and your talents, without expecting anything in return or being recognized for it. Care for the marginalized - those sitting alone on the edge of life. Show them, Christ is concerned for the least of them, and the lost. Even when it's difficult or inconvenient to follow God's lead, step out in faith! And when He calls you to love others, to forgive, or to take a bold stand for truth, *do it!* Put His will above all your worldly desires by demonstrating trust in His plans.

And just as Mary poured out her expensive perfume, you can pour out blessings to others. Support ministries, missionaries, or those in need without hesitation. Share not just from your abundance. Share even when it requires personal sacrifice. Be faithful in your worship. Worship with gratitude and enthusiasm, whether in a church, or alone. Develop a heart of thanksgiving by recognizing every moment is a gift from God. And when you love others deeply, you demonstrate God's love by freely forgiving and extending mercy. Listen without judgment. Show kindness to those who are difficult to love. Build genuine, selfless relationships that reflect God's unconditional love. And if you are living love without bounds, it means you're *not* holding back — you're giving Him your time, your resources, your affection, and your devotion. It's a daily offering of yourself, saying, *"Jesus, You are worth everything I have and everything I am."* And may you, like Mary, respond to the overwhelming love of God with a heart that has you pouring out all you have in Love Without Bounds. And may your life be an offering, glorifying the One who gave everything for you. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the boundless love You pour out daily upon us — a love that knows no limits, no end. You have shown us the depth of Your love through the gift of Your Son, Jesus. Teach us to love, as You love. Break down the walls that keep us from loving others fully, so we may see them through Your eyes. Help us to forgive as we have been forgiven. Help us to give without expecting anything in return. And when we grow weary, remind us, it's your love that sustains us. When fear tries to hold us back, it's your love that casts fear out! And when we struggle to love, surround us with the truth that we are cherished and worthy in Your eyes. We give You our hearts, Lord — every fear, every joy, every longing. May we rest in Your embrace and be part of Your endless love to the world. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.