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Bridgeway Church
Worship #5
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Sermon Summary #5

The Pleasures of Praise, or Unashamed, Extravagant Affection for the Son of God 2 Samuel 6:16-23

Nothing will stir up and agitate the emotions of Christian men and women as much as a discussion of the role of emotions in Christian men and women. Is it bad for a Christian to feel good? Or is it good to feel bad? Or are feelings, whether good or bad, irrelevant to the one who believes in Jesus? Are our emotions as Christian men and women something to enjoy or avoid? Are they a source of delight or a sign of danger, or in some sense both?

These are extremely important questions, but today our focus is on emotions or feelings or affections in worship and the degree to which they are visibly and audibly expressed in our corporate praise of God. Sadly, too many Christians tend to gravitate to one end of the spectrum or the other. Some focus almost entirely on feelings and judge the success or failure of a Sunday service based on how high their emotions were elevated. Other believers focus almost entirely on facts and consider feelings to be altogether irrelevant. Some hanker after the mountain-top experience of emotional ecstasy while others simply want to be informed of some new and insightful theological truth. They usually end up attending either the First United Church of Christian Feeling or the Orthodox Assembly of Christian Fact.

The result, all too often, is that one church bears a striking resemblance to a Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus while another is more like a Sunday visit to the county morgue! It seems that we are confronted with a choice between the frenzy of unbridled chaos, on the one hand, and the rigidity of immovable concrete on the other.

So what does the Bible have to say about our affections, our deepest and most intense desires, and the feelings that characterize and accompany them?

The Engagement of the Heart

In an earlier message in this series on worship I directed your attention to what Jesus said in his rebuke of the religious leaders of his day:

“You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (Matt. 15:7-9).

There is a lot here, but I want you to see that genuine, God-honoring worship includes as an essential element the coming alive of feelings and affections for God. When affections or feelings for God are absent, worship is dead. But what kind of affections? I would include here such things as joy, gladness, fear, awe, reverence, trembling, gratitude, love, exultation, delight, humility, brokenness, contrition over sin, heart-warming satisfaction, and a fervent, white-hot passion or zeal for God. Consider these biblical texts:

“But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you” (Ps. 5:11).

“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you” (Ps. 9:1-2a).

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (Ps. 32:11).

“My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips . . . for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy” (Ps. 63:5,7).

“But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy! Sing to God, sing praises to his name” (Ps. 68:3-4a).

These are but a handful of dozens of similar texts where the engagement of the whole soul in joyful, glad-hearted enjoyment of God is described.

There are texts such as Psalm 5:7 that speak of reverential fear in our worship:

“But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you” (Ps. 5:7; the psalmist clearly felt no inconsistency in speaking of his “fear” of the God whose “love” for him is “steadfast”).

There is a consistent emphasis on gratitude in the psalms:

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name” (Ps. 100:4; see Ps. 103:1-5).

Love is also often the focus in worship:

“Love the Lord, all you his saints!” (Ps. 31:23a).

Passion and hunger for God are essential in worship:

“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps. 63:1).

If the reality of God and his saving grace for us in Jesus Christ is displayed and explained and understood and we do not feel in our hearts things such as gratitude and joy and love and hunger for more and longing and hope and fear of offending this great and gracious God, then we can go through all the motions of which the body is capable and sing to the heights of musical excellence and still not worship God in a way that truly honors him.

I realize that this scares some people. They are terrified of emotionalism. But let’s be clear: emotionalism is the artificial manipulation of heightened feelings for the sake of the feelings themselves. What I’m advocating is the awakening and intensification of heart-felt affections by means of biblical truth for the sake of God’s glory. Here is how John Piper put it:

“Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full of artificial admirers. On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship” (*Desiring God*, 65).

We must be careful neither to manufacture feelings when they aren’t really there nor suppress them when they are awakened. So let me go on record once again about the relationship between biblical truth and heart-felt affections:

- For emotional heat to be holy, it must be the product of theological light.
- Spiritual feelings must arise as the fruit of our perception of spiritual realities.
- High and noble thoughts about God are inseparably linked to deep and pleasurable feelings for God.
- Worship is neither a mind trip nor an emotional binge. It is a biblical blend of our highest and most noble thoughts about God and our deepest and most passionate desires for God.

So we must never be afraid to enjoy God! The primary problem today is that far too many professing Christians enjoy everything in life except God. But listen to the psalmists once again:

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11).

“How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights” (Ps. 36:7-8).

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4).

“Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting” (Ps. 147:1).

Two Examples of Unashamed Extravagant Affection for God

Let’s turn our attention away from principles and look more closely at two very personal examples of actual people whose affection for God was so unashamed and extravagant that they risked incurring the ridicule and disdain of others who thought they had crossed over the boundaries of what was proper and sophisticated and reasonable.

The first is **David**, King of Israel. His story is found in 2 Samuel 6 and also in 1 Chronicles 13-15. Both Saul and Jonathan had died and David had been installed as king. One of the first things he did was to take steps to have the Ark of the Covenant brought back to its rightful place in Jerusalem. The Ark, as you know, was the place where God’s glorious presence was manifested. The first attempt to bring it to Jerusalem was a disaster. God had given very specific instructions that no one was to touch the Ark or he would die. But as Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the cart on which the Ark had been placed, the oxen pulling the cart stumbled and it teetered. Uzzah instinctively put out his hand to steady the Ark and was instantly struck down by God and died.

David was terrified by this and decided it would be unwise to continue the journey: “How can the ark of the Lord come to me?” he asked (2 Sam. 6:9b). So he diverted the ark to the house of Obed-edom and the ark remained there three months. David later returned and brought the ark to Jerusalem. He ordered every available musician to make use of every imaginable instrument, together with singers, to celebrate the return of the ark to Jerusalem. David himself put on a linen ephod and was dancing and leaping wildly and joyfully as the ark came into the city. Then we read this:

“As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. . . . But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said [with extreme, biting sarcasm], ‘How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants’ female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!’ (2 Sam. 6:16, 20b).

Why was Michal so upset at the behavior of her husband? Two reasons appear obvious. For one thing, he had violated her sense of regal dignity. It is one thing for a common man or common woman to dance in public, but a “king” has no business making a scene of that sort. The image she wanted to project as the wife of the king had been undermined. As far as Michal was concerned, ***social sophistication was far more important than honoring God with passionate praise***. The custom of the day said that dignitaries like David don’t do things like this. “For heaven’s sake, David; you have an image to uphold. Get hold of yourself!”

The second reason is found in Michal’s mention of the “female servants” (v. 20). David couldn’t have cared less about who was there to see him. All he cared about was God. But Michal couldn’t have cared less about God. All she cared about were the people present and what they thought about her husband. David was oblivious to his surroundings. He had no regard for his reputation, especially should it get in the way of his expressing his love and joy and gratitude to God. Look at David’s response to her:

“And David said to Michal, ‘It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord – and I will celebrate before the Lord’ (2 Sam. 6:21).

And then, as if to make his point even more forceful, he effectively said to Michal: “Woman, you haven’t seen anything yet! You think I acted in a disgraceful and socially inappropriate manner. Well, watch this!” Or perhaps we should let David speak for himself:

“I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor.’ And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death” (2 Sam. 6:22-23).

It’s as if David says, “Michal, do you actually think I give a hoot in _____ what other people think? I couldn’t care less. I care about what God thinks. I care about honoring him not only with my heart and soul and mind but with my body as well. And if people are offended by that, that’s their problem. But I would argue that in fact the servant girls were blessed to see their king so much in love with God that he threw caution to the wind and rejoiced unashamedly and extravagantly!”

I love the comment of Charles Spurgeon as he reflected on David’s display of joy and affection: “For our part, we are touched to the heart by a little sacred excess, and when godly men in their joy overleap the narrow bounds of decorum, we do not, like Michal, Saul’s daughter, eye them with a sneering heart” (*Treasury of David*, 1:2, p. 85).

Now let’s look at another expression of heart-felt praise, this time from a female.

Jesus and the disciples found themselves in Bethany, a village two miles east of Jerusalem; in the home of Simon, a man whom Jesus had healed of leprosy. There were no fewer than fifteen men present: the 12 disciples, Jesus, Simon, and Lazarus; together with two women: **Mary** and her sister Martha. We are told in Mark 14 that Mary,

“came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, ‘Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.’ And they scolded her. But Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her’” (Mark 14:3-9).

Mary’s action, as described in v. 3, wasn’t unusual or unexpected. Anointing people was a common thing in those days. Jesus himself was incredulous, and perhaps a bit offended, when Simon the Pharisee, failed to anoint him (Luke 7:46; cf. Psalms 23:5 and 141:5). What was unusual about Mary, indeed scandalous, was ***the incalculable cost, the expense, the sheer financial extravagance of her devotion and love.***

The alabaster flask was a vial made of fine-grained gypsum from which the perfume was extracted by snapping off the long thin neck. Again, John identifies the content of the flask as “very expensive ointment”, nard to be specific (John 12). Her gift amounted to 300 denarii, the equivalent of a year’s wage for a working man! ***A full year’s salary!***

The reaction of the disciples was predictable. For a moment everyone must have sat in stunned silence, in utter disbelief of what they had just witnessed. “Did I just see what I think I saw?” they no doubt queried in their minds. Then they spoke out in angry denunciation (see vv. 4-5). In the first place, the perfume didn’t belong to them! It was Mary’s, and she was perfectly free to do with it whatever she pleased. So where do they get off taking her to task? There’s no reason to think the disciples were motivated by greed or materialism. Nothing in their behavior indicated they wanted the money for themselves. They simply failed to realize the redemptive significance of what was taking place and the fact that the cross was just around the corner.

Their concern for the poor was actually sincere and genuine. In any other context it would have been perfectly appropriate. In fact, it was customary on the evening of Passover to take up an offering for the poor of one’s community. This may well be what prompted their anger over what Mary had done.

We need to ask ourselves a question: ***“Is there a lid on the perfume of our passion? Or are we willing, like Mary, to break the bottle of our pride, of our very lives, and pour out our love and adoration and praise?”*** Most of us have

been accused, often falsely, of any number of things. But rarely, and sadly, have I met someone who is consistently charged with being an extravagant lover of Jesus. I'm grieved by this, but no one has ever accused me, at least to my face, of "wasting" my time and money and energy on Jesus.

The objection is quick in coming: "But if I do, what will others think? What will they say?" When we give ourselves wholly to Jesus people will always misunderstand. *Spiritual extravagance almost always leads to criticism.* Even your friends will misjudge you and your family will take offense. Worst of all, churchgoers may ask you to leave! We expect the world to mock us. The values of our society are so warped that we should never be surprised by its disdain. But all too often even Christians and church leaders will deem as wasteful and excessive our worship of Jesus.

Let's not forget that those who took issue with Mary included Peter and John and Matthew and Andrew and James, among others. I suspect that even Simon and Lazarus had their doubts about what she did. People who "like" Jesus and "respect" him, who even sing songs about him, will often be the first to scold you for the uninhibited and extravagant display of your deep delight in the friend of sinners.

For many in the church, anything above and beyond the minimum is too much. To exceed the traditional, to cross the boundaries of what they deem socially appropriate and proper, will be deemed as waste. Jesus calls it *beautiful* (v. 6).

True love never calculates. Genuine worship is never measured. Authentic affection never asks, "How little can I give and still meet the accepted standards of decency?" True, heartfelt adoration never asks, "What is the minimum I can get by with and not be thought of by others as holding back?" The heart of true worship is unfamiliar with the word "enough" and utterly oblivious to what is deemed fitting by others. The disciples thought Mary had gone way overboard and had wasted this precious perfume. "Mary, be reasonable," they said to themselves. "Where is your sense of proportion?"

I'm convinced that if Mary felt anything at this moment it was that she had given too little. Perhaps she felt tempted to apologize for the perfume, not because it was so expensive but because it was so cheap when compared with the infinite value of the one whom she anointed. Imagine a conversation that could easily have passed between Mary and Peter:

P: "300 denarii! Mary, are you sure you want to do this? I mean, really!"

M: "Oh my, Peter. You're right. I can't believe I was so stupid and calloused and unthinking. What's the matter with me? I hope you and the others will find the grace to forgive me."

P: "That's O.K., Mary. Don't be too hard on yourself. Surely you haven't forgotten how many times I messed up in the last three years. If I only had a denarius for every time I stuck my foot in my mouth!"

M: "Thanks, Peter."

P: "Think nothing of it! We all make mistakes. Remember, it's all part of growing up spiritually. Maturity only comes with time. Every once in a while we all miscalculate and tend to go overboard."

M: "*Overboard?* What do you mean?"

P: "What do you mean 'what do I mean'? I mean overboard. After all, 300 denarii is a staggering sum of money."

M: "*Staggering?* You mean pathetic and paltry, don't you?"

P: "No, Mary. I mean staggering, as in way, way, way too much."

M: "Peter, I don't know how to say this without offending you, but we're on different planets! Yes, I'm embarrassed by what I did, but not because 300 denarii is so much but because it's such a small sum of money in comparison with the incomparable worth of Jesus."

Christians have often been accused of lacking common sense, and rightly so. But there is at least one occasion when so-called “common sense” is “nonsense”, and that is when the Christian expresses his/her love for Jesus. There is a vast difference between the economics of common sense and the economics of love, and each has its place. Common sense follows the dictates of wisdom. Love is energized by the passions of the heart.

I can hear the protests of those whose common sense told them that Mary had violated what was proper and prudent: “She’s out of control! She has no sense of proportion. She’s so undignified! Mary, what’s the matter with you. We have a reputation to uphold. An image to protect. A position to maintain.” Such is their judgment because all they see is Mary. All they see is the wasted perfume. All they see is disorder. ***All Mary sees is Jesus.***

What do you see when you worship? Other worshippers? Words projected on a screen? A worship leader? A hymn book? An orchestra or guitar player or drummer? A dancer? Someone raising their hands or prostrate on the ground? You watch, as you wonder how much longer can this possibly last? As long as you remain a spectator of people rather than a participant, extravagant worship will never make sense. Common sense will always prevail over passion. It will always strike you as such a waste: of time, of energy, of your reputation. Those who found fault with Mary stood aloof to watch rather than to worship and thus mistook her beautiful act of adoration for waste. Mary didn’t stand aloof but drew near. All she saw was Jesus. And what she did felt so inadequate, so paltry, so minimal.

Even after getting a proper grip on what Mary had done, misunderstanding persists. You can hear it in the typical response: “Wow, Mary sacrificed a lot to worship Jesus.” No! Think carefully about this:

Mary saw Jesus as one whose beauty and worth were so infinitely more satisfying than all rival pleasures that nothing she gave up to gain him felt like a sacrifice.

A sacrifice is some price we pay, some hardship we endure to gain something else. For example, I may sacrifice the joy of ice cream for the benefit of losing weight. Or I may give up or sacrifice \$9 to see a good movie. I hope the weight loss and the movie make worthwhile the sacrifice I made to get them. My point is that in every sacrifice there is a sense of loss, of something paid or forfeited or given up.

But not with Mary! ***What she gained in knowing and enjoying and loving Jesus transformed into a great joy what might otherwise be thought of as a painful sacrifice.*** She *gladly* endured the rebuke of the disciples. She *joyfully* humbled herself in public. She *happily* gave away a year’s wage. Why? Because in doing so she gained the joy of enjoying God and in this way exalted him above all earthly treasure!

Once you see Jesus as Mary saw him, you will never ask: “How much money will it cost me?”

Once you have tasted the sweetness of the savior, as Mary did, you will never ask: “What will people think?”

Once you have experienced and known and enjoyed Jesus, as Mary did, you will never ask: “Will I die as a martyr? Will I lose the respect of others? What physical comforts will I forfeit?”

Ask yourself this: “If I were to describe the depth and intensity of my devotion to Jesus, what words would I use?” Would you employ words like *exuberant, demonstrative, passionate, extravagant*? Or would your devotion to the Son of God be more accurately described as *measured, calculated, restrained, and guarded*?

I think I know the answer to that question when it comes to David in the OT and Mary in the NT. But what about you and me?