

# **I Met Jesus: Mary's Generosity**

## **John 12:1-8**

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*"Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, 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, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." (John 12:1-8)*

Mary's extravagant love provided extravagant generosity to Jesus. I hope we all were challenged last week by this extraordinary display of Mary giving this prized possession to Christ. Christ himself was moved by her expression and said that wherever the gospel is proclaimed, Mary's generosity would be told. Here we are doing it again today. A reminder that our legacy is what we give to others and the Lord, not what we keep.

### **What Impressed Jesus About Mary's Gift?**

The challenge here is to make sure we clearly understand specifically what Jesus was impressed by. We explained it last week this way:

#### **It wasn't the perfume**

This particular perfume was very rare. Imported from India. It was highly sought after. In the first century, it was just about the best thing you could ever smell. Great fragrance. But the perfume and the fragrance itself was not what got Jesus' attention.

#### **It wasn't the value of the perfume**

This is what is most often noted. The perfume was valued at somewhere around \$4,000 an ounce. All 12 ounces she had were valued at somewhere around \$50,000. Judas weighs in with his perspective. He is appalled. What a terrible waste! What was she thinking? To the person who only sees the value of things based on the monetary value, this was a mistake of vast proportion. Judas represents so many who love money. For them, anything given to Jesus and his work is always a tremendous waste. Think of all the other things that could be done with it. Jesus isn't thinking at all about the value of the perfume. It's not what he admired.

#### **It was Mary's devotion and sacrifice**

She humbles herself at his feet. She takes her hair, so personal to a woman, and wipes the ointment off Jesus' feet with her hair. The sacrifice goes even deeper. The first century Jewish culture was different than ours in that singleness was much less common and accepted. Mary dreamed of a husband and children. It meant social standing and cultural

acceptance as well as personal love and affection. This perfume was likely a part of Mary's dowry, a gift to a suitor intended to encourage marriage. This dowry was that dream. To pour the dowry was to pour the dream. Mary gave that as an offering to Jesus too. It was absolute heart devotion to Christ which produced extravagant material generosity to Him as well.

Jesus and Judas are valuing this from completely different perspectives. This leads to our important question today, **was the perfume worth more or less after she poured it out?**

Now, this is a problem for us as American Christians because we are influenced by our culture, which is solidly in agreement with Judas. Everything is assessed and valued by what it is worth materially and financially. When someone dies we often ask, "What was he worth?" Do we mean that as an image bearer of God? As a fellow human being? His or her contribution to society? Their family or their friendships? No. In our culture, you are worth what you are worth financially. Judas couldn't agree more and would later put the value of Jesus' life at 30 pieces of silver.

So let me ask again, **was the perfume worth more before or after she poured it out?**

What happens to the value of things that are given as an offering to God? What is our time worth? Time is money, right? What are our talents or gifts worth? What about your offering? Those of you who gave something today to God, what is the value of the offering now? Is it worth more or less the moment it drops in the basket?

Our Judas culture sees the answer very simply. Less. Nothing. It's a total loss to you, just like your time and talent given to God. It's a tax write-off. It was worth x dollars to you before the offering and now it is worth nothing because you have given it away. Why would you do this? You cannot buy the things the materialist values if you give money away. You cannot enjoy the security of money the materialist values if you give it away. You cannot enjoy the self-worth the materialist derives from seeing money in the bank.

Let me ask the question again, **was the perfume worth more or less after Mary poured it out?** To get at a biblical answer, let's survey the teaching of Jesus on the matter.

### **Lay up Treasure in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21)**

*"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)*

### **Treasures on earth lose value; treasures in heaven gain eternal value**

#### **Key action: we must "lay up" eternal treasure**

Jesus says there are two kind of treasure: the earthly kind and the eternal kind. The earthly kind is destroyed slowly by moth and rust or taken quickly by a thief. Today we measure wealth by investments and savings, etc. In the first century, wealth was held in metal coinage and clothing. Thieves can always take it. That's still true. Earthly treasure is precarious. If you think of the recession of the last few years and look at the stock market or home values, it's "easy come, (say it with me) easy go."

Jesus contrasts temporal wealth with eternal treasure. What is eternal treasure? Are we talking about heaven and eternal life? No. We will see that eternal treasure is God's reward to his people for the quality of their service and sacrifice for him (see Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Timothy 6:19). In particular, our material gifts to God have a value to God and to us that will not diminish and is not subject to the whims of the market or thieves. Jesus concludes by adding, *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6:21)

A final reason to lay up treasure in heaven is that it fights the little Judas we all have in us – the temptation to only assess things for their earthly monetary value. My heart follows my treasure, so by investing my treasure for what is valuable in eternity, it keeps my heart there as well. Judas' value or Jesus' value? Earth or eternity? What I do with my money reveals which valuation system I am living by. So let me ask again, **was the perfume worth more before or after it was poured out?**

### **The Foolish Rich Man (Luke 12:13-21)**

In Luke 12:13-21 we see a familiar and contemporary struggle – a family fighting over inheritance money. My extended family has had a drama like this. Maybe you can relate.

*"Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' But he said to him, 'Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?' And he said to them, 'Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'" And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."* (Luke 12:13-21)

In this parable, Jesus describes a man who is living the American dream. He has had a windfall crop; so much grain that he doesn't know what to do with it all. In our world, our company is bought out and we get a windfall. A stock we own goes through the roof. The point is that here is a man who suddenly is rich toward earth. Notice what he's thinking and what he's not thinking. He's not thinking, *What good can I do with this? Who can I help? How can I give back to God?* His only thoughts are for himself. Eat, drink, be merry. Relax. Retire. Just sit back and count my money. He's living the American dream.

But wait – there's something he doesn't see. He doesn't realize that that very night is his last. Now what happens to all that money? Does he take it with him? What is it worth now?

Jesus calls him a fool, but realize why. It's not because he was rich. The Bible never condemns the accumulation of wealth or financial success. It does condemn living for it and being foolish with it, which in this parable, is his failure to understand what real worth is. Death reveals the stupidity of his life.

Is anyone here being stupid? Is there anyone here that Jesus would point to and call a fool? Is anyone here assessing things like Judas and living so foolishly merely for the here and now? *"Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"* (Luke 12:20)

The answer to that question is, NOT his. It seems about every week there is some successful person in our culture who dies. This week it's Hall of Famer Gary Carter. Last week it was Whitney Houston. Steve Appleton of Micron Tech died in a plane crash...Etta James...Joe Paterno. Every week someone rich and famous dies. Remember I said that for whomever it is this week.

What do you think about when you hear it? I often think about what the death moment is like for someone who has lived in luxury and fame. To go from that to being face to face with God. To be ushered suddenly into an eternal destiny. Eternal life or death. Heaven or hell. To look at your life from the perspective of eternity and what could have been. As Ryle said, "Hell is truth discovered too late." How many millions must there be in eternity thinking, "*What a fool I was!*"?

Is anyone here living stupid? What do I mean? Like Judas, living for the here and now. Rich toward earth and not rich toward God.

Let me ask again, **was the perfume worth more before or after it was poured?**

### **The Eternal Value of Earthly Giving (Matthew 19:27-30)**

*"Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Matthew 19:27-30)*

This comes right after Jesus astounds the disciples by saying it is hard for a rich man to be saved. Why? It is easy for the rich to trust their riches and hard for them to trust God. Peter asks, "What about us? We've left or given everything."

What is the value of things given up for God? On earth, nothing. A waste? BUT in heaven and in eternity, *everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.*

Do you see this? What is the eternal value of everything we keep? Nothing. Why? Death separates us from every dollar and every car and every home and every jewel and every everything. But everything given and offered to God, all of these we keep. All of them are safe in heaven awaiting us. All of them are out of the reach of thieves and beyond the whims of markets and not subject to the decline of values. In fact, not only are they there, but they are returned to us with interest, a hundredfold.

Is that because we are generous? No! This is the generosity of God. He was generous to us in Christ and in the giving of him for our sins and he is generous to us for eternity in the giving of rewards far greater than anything we give.

So do you get this? What we keep here we don't really get to keep. What we give to God we keep for eternity plus God's generosity to us. So who is right? Judas or Jesus? What is the value of everything I keep? Nothing. What is the value of everything I give? Eternal. So what is the real way to be wealthy? What is real wealth? It comes from giving. Like Mary, extravagant generosity to God produces God's extravagant generosity to us forever. Do you believe this?

With that said, let's go back to Mary and ask the question, **was the perfume worth more before or after it was poured?** Getting the answer right to that question will not only determine whether you are Mary or Judas, but whether you are motivated to be rich toward eternity with the perfume resources God has given to you. May I ask you, are you laying up treasure in heaven or not? Are you rich toward God or not?

"The evidence that many of our people are not rich toward God is how little they give and how much they own." (John Piper)

Let's talk, you and I, pastor and church. We've been together a long time now. By now I trust you know that I love you and I am for you. I want each of you to be rich forever. Isn't this love's duty? How will that happen? We have to kill the little Judas in us. How do we kill him? We kill him by giving. He will scream inside, *What a waste! Use it for something else!*

Here is where Mary is so helpful. Her extravagant generosity flowed from extravagant love for Christ. She valued him and it recalculated the worth she put on perfume, money, even marriage and children. She broke the vial and poured it out.

Was it worth more before or after? Infinitely more valuable after. Nothing we give to God is ever a waste. All of it is a treasure to him and eternally a treasure to us.

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