

May 10, 2009 AM

**GENEROSITY FOR JESUS;
BREAKING YOUR ALABASTOR**

Mark 1:1-9

“Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.² There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.³ Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.⁴ But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said,⁵ ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’⁶ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.⁷ But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.⁸ For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.’”

(John 12:1-8)

Generosity will always expose the heart of those who are generous and those who are not. Let me ask you a question, “Are you a generous person?” As we close our study in Mark, I pray we will get it. Jesus is always blessing a life broken and poured out on Jesus. Nothing displays our heart for God or for ourselves like giving. Jesus blessed Mary, and Judas was upset over her gift.

I. The enemy of generosity: Selfishness.

A. Every one of us is born with a selfish nature.

1. Among our first words is “mine.”
2. Selfishness promotes self, protects self, and provides for self.
3. Who is capable of our promotion, protection and provision? God!
4. Selfishness struggles to take the place of God.

B. Selfishness is a stronghold in our lives.

1. There is always an excuse that sounds legitimate.
2. Judas said she should have sold it (the oil) and gave the money to the poor.
3. That even sounds spiritual.
4. Judas is trying to cover over his own selfish motives.

***NOTE** Judas was expecting Jesus to bring in a kingdom and he was looking for his place in the kingdom. The disciples were fussing over who is the greatest. Judas was serving God; not for what he could contribute to the kingdom, but for what the kingdom could contribute to him. Mary worshiped the Lord with extravagance because her focus was clearly upon Jesus and not upon her herself.

5. The Bible says Judas was a thief.
6. Guess who was the treasurer? Judas!
7. Jesus knew who Judas was and gave him responsibility in the area of his weakness so he could get the victory.

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. 10:13)

***NOTE** When you don't return God's tithes it is the same thing as when we pass the offering plate around and when it came to you, you took money out of it. Who would do that? When you don't return God's tithe the prophet says you are robbing God! Literally you are embezzling from God. That's worse. To embezzle means you had a right to touch the money and you not only took what was not yours, you violated a trust!

At Spring Celebration Paulette lost \$20; a child found it and returned it. He overcame the enemy of selfishness.

II. The extravaganza of generosity.

A. The value of this gift would cost a year's salary.

1. How much money impresses God?
 - A thousand dollars?
 - A hundred thousand?
 - A million dollars?
2. God is not impressed with any amount of money. His gates are pearls and streets are gold.

“For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, ⁴ imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. ⁵ And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” (2 Cor. 8:3-5)

3. God wants you to give yourself.
4. But remember your wallet goes with you.

B. Three kinds of giving taught in scripture.

1. Returning God's tithe.
2. Offerings to God.
3. Sacrificial giving.

***NOTE** Most people who attend church according to surveys never reach the first level of giving. Only about 5% give 10% or more of their gross income. But every person who gets to the first level gets to the second level. Why? Because when you obey God the curse is removed, the devourer is turned away and the windows of heaven are open and God allows you to be a channel for His blessings to flow through. His promise is if we reach the first level, He will pour out such a blessing upon us that we will not be able to contain it.

Mary went to the greatest level. She did not realize the significance of her gift until Jesus defended her. “This is for my burial.” She was the only one who got to anoint Jesus' body. On that Easter Sunday what were the women coming to Jesus' tomb to do? They were too late; it had already been done! What blessings are you missing because of selfishness?

C. Mary's gift was because of her. "...very costly oil..."

1. This was valued at a year's salary (300 denarius).
2. It is interesting that every time this Mary is seen in scripture, she was "at Jesus' feet."
 - Hearing Jesus teach. (Luke 10:38-42)
 - Broken in sorrow over the death of Lazarus. (John 11:32)
 - In worship. (our text)
3. She had kept on protecting this. It was all she had of any earthly value.

III. The reward of generosity.

***"Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."
(Mark 14:9)***

A. Why didn't giving this cause Mary pain?

1. Her brother had been resurrected two months earlier.
2. Perhaps this was for a death in their family.
3. At any rate, her perspective on earthly things had changed.
4. I believe she was heavenly minded.
5. Did you know you have been raised from the dead? The Bible says you were dead in trespasses of sin.

B. Generosity is born out of a grateful heart.

1. She did not do it for a reward.
2. But God is a rewarder.

***"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."
(Hebrews 11:6)***

3. The word "rewarder" is used only here in all of the Bible.

4. Rewarder is actually two Greek words that are, “to pay wages due,” and “to give extravagantly above.”
5. God is a person who gives what’s due and then extravagantly beyond it.
6. God is a rewarder; it’s His nature and character. He cannot, not reward those who are broken and poured out upon him.
7. God rewards generosity.

C. Generosity in giving to God blesses others also.

“...And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil...” (John 12:3)

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24)

1. That offering given so long ago is still blessing us today.
2. Our faithfulness encourages others.
3. I think of Barnabas in Acts who sold property to meet the needs in the church and others followed suit.

NOTE** I have been in services when a need was known and a man stood up and said, “Bro. Charles, I will give \$2500 on the need,” then another gave \$1000 and another and another, and in a half-hour the need was committed to be met. Paul called the gift the Philippians’ sent to him ***“a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” (Phil. 4:18)

D. Generosity is perplexing to some. Judas asked, “Why was this fragrant oil sold and the money given to the poor?”

1. It amazes me that many, even some in the church think that extravagance for Jesus and the kingdom of God is a waste.
2. They protest and even make it sound spiritual.
3. The waste here is not Mary’s anointing of Jesus, but Judas’ life.

- He wasted opportunity.
 - He wasted his life.
 - He wasted his soul.
4. Mary's offering was not for sale; it was for sharing!
 5. Judas cared nothing for the poor. He had a greedy heart with nothing for Jesus.

***NOTE** Judas' resentment moved the focus in the room from Jesus and on to himself in an attempt to make himself out to be what he was not. That's the way of hypocrisy. Judas was not in love with Jesus but rather what was in the bag...money! He was a thief. He had his hand in Jesus' bag stealing from Jesus.

Question: Would you take money out of the offering place today when it is passed? No! but if you withhold what is God's, isn't it the same thing? The prophet Malachi asked, ***"Will a man rob God? ... How, they asked? In tithes and offerings!"***

6. What if Mary would have hoarded her offering?
7. What a waste to miss the opportunity to be a blessing to the Lord.
8. Contrast Mary in Judas who only in a few days sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.
9. Jesus said, "Let her alone, she has done a good work for me."
10. Jesus said as long as the world stands, her story will be told. That's how pleasing it was to Jesus.

IV. The application.

A. Do what you can do.

"She has done what she can do."

1. That's why Jesus said she had a great testimony.
2. Martha had all the domestic skills.
3. She might have longed to be a cook like her sister.

4. I believe she saw Jesus, she saw her brother, and remembered Jesus was going to die.
5. She might have remembered the one thing she had, she broke it, and used it to anoint Jesus.

B. Do what you can do, but do that much.

1. If it would have been possible for her to have done more but she refused to do it, this story would not have God's blessing upon it.
2. God does not judge on the basis of what we have done but on the basis of what we could have done.
3. Jesus blessed her because she did all she could do.
4. Because she acted she had the honor of anointing Jesus' body for his death.

C. The measure of faithfulness is not what someone else has done.

1. All Moses had was a rod, but he delivered a nation. He did what he could do.
2. All David had was a slingshot. But he did what he could and slew a giant.
3. You say, "I don't have much!" Most of don't. The widow did not have much but she gave her all and Jesus said she was the greatest giver at church that day.
 - Regardless of criticism, do what you can do.
 - Regardless of the cost, do what you can do.
4. Do what you can do while you can. "*Do your giving while you're living and you'll be knowing where it's going.*"
5. Opportunities may be gone shortly.

***NOTE** The widow of the gospels was the poorest of the poor, but she did what she could. Joseph of Aramathea was the richest of the rich, but he did what he

could. They both gave to the Lord Jesus something that was precious to themselves.

“So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s,³⁰ who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.’” (Mark 10:29-30)

Long before we ever thought of giving to God, God gave to us! He broke His own alabaster box and poured it out on you. His offering was precious to Him. It costs Him something dear. He gave Jesus that we might be forgiven and have eternal life.

Love is always expressed in giving something that is precious to us. Some called what Jesus did a waste but those of us who have received Him know He is our life. Isaiah said, ***“It pleased God to bruise Him.” (Isa. 53:10)***

Jim Elliott said, *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose!”*