

Giving is good for you

Mark 14:1-10

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 2 'But not during the festival,' they said, 'or the people may riot.'

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly.

6 'Leave her alone,' said Jesus. 'Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.'

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. 11 They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

An article in New Scientist (Mark Buchanen, 2009), titled "Why Money Messes With Your Mind".

It certainly messed with the people's minds in this story.

We're going to see how generosity is offensive to us and how money reveals what we are really like.

Two key questions – how much should we give and to whom should we give?

This is a beautiful story bookended by nastiness.

Verses 1-2 – the authorities looking for ways to kill Jesus

Verses 10-11 – Judas betrays Jesus

Verses 3-9 – a miniature story of worship, love and selfless generosity

The Historical Context:

The setting was tense and dangerous.

Like going to Glastonbury but with weapons! Maybe a million Jews from the diaspora plus lots of Roman soldiers, the occupiers.

Jesus was a threat and under threat.

His followers had Messianic expectations.

- Story starts with a dark subplot of murder and subterfuge.
- Ends with betrayal.
- Jesus knows about his imminent death.
- It was usual for drops of perfume to be sprinkled at a dinner.
- But this was extravagant - £25,000.
- Broken bottle (alabaster used for expensive perfumes, nard, very special) means that there was no expectation of not using it all.
- In some way the woman recognises that Jesus is the messiah and is anointing him.
- She does a stunningly beautiful, selfless, generous thing.

Reactions of people reveals a great deal

- Woman - a worshipper, expressing her love for Jesus in an extravagant way.
- The disciples - (they are meant to be the good guys) are more concerned about the budget. Thinking about waste.
- They are thinking about the poor – but only as a line item in the budget for the revolution mission.
- They rebuke her harshly, ordering, “stop this waste, we need the money”.
- Judas - reacts so badly to the unsupervised use of funds that it triggers his betrayal which reveals his greed and control issues.

Where are you when it comes to selfless generosity? Who are you like?

- Are you like this woman – so aware of Jesus’ grace to you that you are reckless, profligate even with your response?
- Are you like the disciples – concerned about need and spending commitments and being able to see results? When you do your spending plan – what comes first in your thinking? Giving or spending?
- Are you like Judas – wanting control over the money and possessions so much that it loosens your grip on what really matters and, ultimately, on your relationship with Jesus?

Money messes with your mind and your heart.

Should be a neutral medium of exchange – technically that is what it is. A way of putting value on things we want to swap – my labour for your money. My money for your food.

- Stirs up all sorts of emotions and mental strife (see the story, how are you feeling right now?)
- Acts as a surrogate friend (the hot water test)
- An addiction – driving compulsive behaviour – overwork, obsessive spending, gambling

Jesus said, *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. Matt 6:21*

- Where was this woman's treasure? Where was her heart?
- Where was Judas' treasure? Where was his heart?

Living for the dot or the line (Randy Alcorn)

At this moment we live in a dot

Beginning and an end, short time frame, everything we have, accumulate, stays within the dot. Money, pension funds, cars, houses, paintings, sports trophies, celebrity, careers.

For eternity we live in a line

We can't take our stuff with us but we can send it on ahead (Randy Alcorn).

Our generosity today reaps dividends, fruit, in eternity.

Although our generosity should be a response of amazed worship to being recipients of such grace and generosity from God, it will result in treasure in heaven.

We can't take any of this stuff in the dot with us. You've got to leave it all behind. No pockets in a shroud. Egyptian pyramids, burial chambers, gold.

Things Jesus didn't say, "Forget all that OT stuff about tithing and offering. You've worked hard, you go and enjoy it. You deserve it, it's all yours, go and do what you like with it!"

Jesus said, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Matthew 6:19-21

A.W.Tozer, *As base a thing money often is, it yet can be transmuted into everlasting treasure. It can be converted into food for the hungry and clothing for the poor; it can keep a missionary actively winning lost men to the light of the gospel and thus transmute itself into heavenly values. Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is*

given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality. "The Transmutation of Wealth," Born After Midnight, 1959 p107.

Jesus said to the rich young man, "Go, sell all your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Mathew 19:21

Whom might we meet in heaven?

- *I'm here because of the Alpha course your church ran*
- *I'm here because of the Debt Advice you gave me*
- *My family life was rescued and turned round because of the child contact centre you ran*
- *I was able to get an education and raise my family because of your giving to Tear Fund*
- *I was able to get work because the missionary surgeon you helped pay for fixed my disability*
- *I'm here because I was able to read the bible in my own language thanks to your support*
- *You and your church welcomed me into your community and helped me find my way back to God, thank you*
- *Thank you for supporting the church which taught me and my children how to follow Jesus*

Whom do you want to meet in heaven?

Question One - How much should I give?

Question Two - To whom should I give?

I'll provide a background to what I think the bible says. You need to work it out for yourself.

But if you are having a conversation with yourself along these lines:

- How much can I get away with?
- Will this affect my budget too much?
- Should I give before or after tax?
- I don't want to give to the church because
 - I don't want anyone to tell me what to do

- I don't like/trust the leadership
- I don't like what they do with the money
- I think I can deal with it better

Then compare disciples' response to the response of the worshipping woman.

On the surface – it may be about money – but really, as always, money is just an indicator to what is going on in your heart.

This reflects your discipleship and your relationship with God.

It is difficult to work out sometimes. Go to God with your bank statement, your budget and your bible and pray about it. See what he says.

This is what I think the bible teaches us.

1. Everything belongs to God - Psalm 24:1; Haggai 2:8; Deuteronomy 8:18
Change question? Not, how much should I give but how much should I keep? *SA Research. Set levels when young.*
2. Tithes – Genesis 14:18-20
Abraham gave a tenth of his plunder to the recognised representative of God.
3. Leviticus 27:30-32
Established giving as proportionate response to blessing – 10%. Agrarian culture.
4. In addition to tithe – offerings. Proportionate, linked to specific sacrifices, fund-raising events and meeting certain needs, usually temple/church. Deuteronomy 12:5-7
5. Malachi 3:10
Expectation of tithe to the temple/church
 - a. Amount representative of giving of everything, ownership acknowledgement.
 - b. Destination representative of giving to God.
6. Jesus, affirms giving and gives no new direction.
7. Paul describes the principles of generosity and proportionality in detail (2 Corinthians 9).

Obstacles to giving

If you are not giving generously – what are the obstacles?

1. We haven't experienced God's love and generous mercy to us – compare the woman in story

2. Poor organisation – spending plan.
3. Money is our surrogate friend, insecurity if we give it away. Fear.
4. It's mine. Dot and line. Control.
5. Addictions – idols control us rather than our lives being controlled by God. Needs.
6. The power of money over our lives.

Conclusion

The biblical model is giving the “tithes” - the first/best of your wealth and income to the church/temple, as representative of your giving to God and then to give “offerings” to one-off things to which he leads you.

The story in Mark 14 gives us a picture of what true worship and discipleship looks like. The woman loved Jesus with an extravagance that went as far as anointing him with £25,000 of perfume.

I'm not saying that we should all empty our deposit accounts and give away every penny today.

But I am inviting you to experience Jesus' gift of life to you in such a radical way that your response is to live a life which, in every compartment, is full of extravagant and costly worship and generosity.

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See accompanying handouts for references and quotes.