

John 12:4-8 “Judas, Leave Mary Alone”

JOH 12:1-8 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 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 to what was put into it. 7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

This section of Scripture is one of stark contrasts. We've got Mary the worshipper who honors Christ and places Him in the first position, and Judas, the thief and betrayer, who alludes to Mary's extravagant gesture as a waste on the Savior and then points them to the poor and away from Christ.

As A.W. Pink so aptly points out, "at the very time Satan was [prodding] the heart of Judas to do the worst against Christ, the Holy Spirit mightily moved the heart of Mary to pour out her love for Him. Mary's devotion has given her a place in the hearts of all who have received the Gospel; Judas by his act of [dishonesty] went to his own place -- the Pit."

It's amazing that two people who have spent time with Jesus Christ, could come away with such differing views of this One who has not only claimed to be the Savior, the One sent from the Father, but who proved it with power and love.

In six short days Jesus will be placed on a cross to die for the penalty of our sins, and Mary had some understanding of this as she anointed Christ with this precious oil. But let's take a moment to look at Judas' response to this act of worship.

JOH 12:4-5 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."

Now on the surface this seems to be a noble gesture by Judas. After all who can argue that helping the poor is a bad thing? It's like a lot of politicians in Washington who use the "children" as a tool to foster their own agenda.

"We need millions of dollars more to help the children in the inner cities get a better education. And if you won't give us the money you are an enemy of the children."

How do you logically argue with such an emotional appeal to a segment of our population who are innocent and in need, as the children?

By the way, I saw a report on T.V. the other day which was dealing with a similar issue where certain politicians were trying to make their case that the federal government needed to increase the amount of money per child in the public school system.

And they wanted to increase it from something like 10,000 dollars per child per year to 15,000 dollars per child. And the argument has always been among some politicians that the way we solve our education woes is to direct more money at it. Interestingly enough, one of the public schools in question in this debate is in the same neighborhood where a parochial school is located.

They've done test scores and followed up with the amount of students coming out of this parochial school who do overwhelmingly better in going on to higher paying jobs compared to the public school in that same area. But instead of needing 10,000 dollars per child per year, as does this public school, this particular parochial school only spends 3,000 dollars per child.

These same politicians who want an increase in public school funds won't allow poor parents to opt out of the public school system with vouchers so they can put their children in similar private schools.

The point is that you can make an emotional appeal for your argument, but the bottom line is that the argument often times is not based on the reality that you're really interested in helping people, but rather are interested in lining your own pocket or the pockets of others in promoting your own vested political interests.

This is Judas. He comes off like some guy who only wants the best for people, primarily poor people in this case. And by the way, he wasn't the only one who evidently objected to this extravagant show of honoring Christ by Mary.

MAT 26:8-9 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. 9 "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

Apparently, Judas was not the only one who raised this question, or so it would seem. The reality is that John points out that Judas was the instigator of this notion, and unfortunately the rest of the disciples were swayed by his argument, John included.

We find a similar phenomenon in the church today. Many decisions are made, and many doctrines are created, not because they are biblical, but because they are expedient, and very well-meaning people go along with it in spite of the fact that it may not be biblical, because it tugs on their heart strings.

I don't mean to suggest that Christians shouldn't be sensitive and emotional, but to lead with this, as we exclude sound biblical reasoning, is to place ourselves in danger of dishonoring Christ. And so, there needs to be a balance with the Scriptures as the final authority.

But Judas' argument seems to carry some weight. From a logical standpoint if they were to have sold the perfume they could have gotten a year's worth of wages from it, according to Judas.

How he comes up with such a figure on the spur of the moment has to make one wonder. He was either very astute as to the fair market value of such items, or he had known she had this costly perfume and had already gotten an estimate prior to this with the intent of stealing it and selling it for himself.

We're not told, but in light of him being proven to be a thief I don't think it's out of bounds to suggest such an explanation. But a year's worth of wages is an awful lot of money. A better translation of this passage says, "why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"

A denarius was the daily wage given to most working people of that day. The parable of the vineyards points this out.

MAT 20:1-2 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard.

2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

Three hundred denarii would be the equivalent of a years wage taking into consideration that Jewish laborers were not allowed to work on Sabbaths and holy days.

Judas had it all figured out, but then he goes on to give a pious reason for why this ointment was being wasted. He says that this money could have been given to the poor.

Wait a minute. What about Jesus? His disciples, for the most part had homes, businesses, families with property, but Jesus had nothing.

MAT 8:20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

You talk about poor. Jesus had to rely on the goodness and generosity of people who were willing to support Him in His ministry; some of whom are named in Luke's gospel.

LUK 8:1-3 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

So, for Judas to suggest that this money could have been given to the poor while overlooking the very One who had no place to lay His head, and who by the way was the resurrection and the life, was outrageously disingenuous.

But we know why Judas said this. And here, after the fact, the apostle John records this incident in which he evidently agreed with Judas initially, until finding out later what Judas really was.

JOH 12:6 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 to what was put into it.

It is amazing that none of the disciples knew that Judas was a thief. None of them suspected that he would ever do anything to harm Christ. I mean on the night Jesus was betrayed our Lord made it clear that one of them in that very room would betray Him.

MAT 26:21-22 And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." 22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?"

They all looked to themselves, not Judas, which tells us that Judas was very good; not in a moral way but as an actor. And it might boggle our minds as to how he could have fooled the rest of the disciples.

But I'll tell you something, I worked with a man whom I viewed not only as a friend but as a fellow Christian. In fact, we worked in Christian radio together. He was actively involved in his church and for all intents and purposes seemed to be a godly man who talked the talk and walked the walk.

But apparently, he was having some marital problems. He and his wife came to us and we counseled with them. Some months later they moved to Louisiana and eventually ended up back in upstate New York.

We had kept in contact with them and on one occasion we got a phone call from the wife who was in tears. She had explained how he left her and ended up marrying some other woman.

But what I found fascinating was what she told me about this man who finally admitted that the reason he left her was because he finally got tired of playing the game. He told her, and I quote her now; he said, "I should have gotten an academy award." He was never a Christian but only played one as he used Christians to advance his career in sales.

Here was a woman who lived with this man for a number of years and was fooled. I knew this man and had fellowship with him and was fooled. Only God knows the heart of a person and evidently the rest of the disciples in our text were also fooled into thinking that Judas was a godly man who followed Jesus because he believed in Him.

And so, they apparently never suspected that such a man would be stealing right under their noses out of the treasury box or bag, though it is possible that maybe some of them suspected something.

We know that Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver which was the equivalent of half a year's wages. We also know that he finally admitted that he betrayed an innocent man and gave the money back to the Jewish leaders who in turn would not put blood

money into their treasury, so they bought the potter's field with it, which by the way was in fulfillment of prophecy.

MAT 27:7-10 So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. 8 That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, 10 and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

But what is interesting is that Judas quite possibly bought his own field prior to this which may have been equated with the potter's field. And yet, A.W. Pink has a theory that the field Judas bought was purchased prior to him betraying Christ and could not have been purchased with the money he got from the Jewish leaders since he threw that back to them.

ACT 1:18-19 (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. 19 Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

It's true that the potter's field which the chief priests purchased with the money Judas gave back to them came to be known as the field of blood, but as Pink suggests Judas used his own money to buy a field where he went just after he gave the blood money back and hanged himself on his own property because of the guilt he felt by betraying Christ.

In Pink's thinking, both pieces of property came to be known as the field of blood for completely different reasons. One purchased by the chief priests because of blood money which betrayed an innocent man, and the other purchased by Judas who spilled his own blood and which also came to be known as a field of blood.

If this is true then it begs the question, where did Judas get the money to buy such a field? Luke seems to answer this question by saying in ACT 1:18 (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field;)

The wickedness, Pink believes is being spoken of here, is the wickedness of stealing from the treasury box. Interesting concept, but it changes nothing, though it may add to his guilt if true. Judas was a thief. And yet, though the rest of the disciples seemed to be fooled by this there was one person who was not.

And that is Jesus who knew the heart of Judas the whole time. Jesus knew Judas was stealing and yet He says nothing to him that we know of. And of course Jesus knew Judas' heart when it came to the matter of betraying Him, though He would not make that accusation until a few days later at the last supper with His disciples.

And the reason Jesus knew all of this is because it was all part of the plan to redeem sinful men, the very plan which had taken place with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the counsels of heaven from eternity past.

It was this plan Peter spoke of as he described how the Savior was chosen by the Father for this mission of reconciliation.

1PE 1:18-20 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 ***He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.***

And now this chosen One, chosen before the creation of the world, was going to fulfill His plan which He reveals now to Judas and the rest of the disciples.

JOH 12:7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

The day of Christ's burial assumes He would have to die. Again, this is something the disciples did not fully grasp, and yet Mary was prompted in her spirit to anoint Jesus in such a way as to honor the Lord and in the process proclaimed His death. Matthew records Jesus' words as He further explains what Mary was doing.

MAT 26:10-13 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Jesus was being prepared for burial as in six days He would be placed on a cross to die for sinful man. And while Judas was

calling this a waste, thus shaming Mary, Jesus calls it a beautiful thing and honors Mary in the process.

This is an amazing thing to consider. The one person in all of history who will always be associated with Christ's betrayal is Judas, and yet how many people know that the one person in all of history who is forever recorded in the Scriptures as the one who anointed Christ before His death is Mary?

And yet Jesus Himself wants Mary to be identified with His death in such a way that her name is a testimony to His plan of salvation. That's precisely what Jesus says in Mat.26:13. "Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

This is amazing. Jesus wants the memory of Mary to be remembered when it comes to His death. And what this means is that even a small, but very significant act of love and worship is noticed and acknowledged by the King of kings and Lord of lords.

We have a tendency to think that unless we are doing great and mighty acts for Jesus that He doesn't take notice and yet everything we do in Christ and for His sake is noticed by our risen Lord and appreciated in such a way where even if we don't get our names written in Scripture we know they are written in the Lamb's book of life and we will be rewarded in heaven in His very presence.

These disciples had been with Jesus for over three years and yet it takes a woman who is introduced to the Lord in the last year of His life who must instruct the others as to what Jesus is about to do.

We don't readily see this in the English but in the original Greek language verse seven is an address to a singular person as He said, (implying), [you, Judas] "leave her alone", whereas verse eight begins with the word *you* which in the Greek is in the plural.

In other words Jesus is singularly rebuking Judas for his chastising Mary and inciting the rest of the disciples to follow suit. Here in verse eight Jesus now addresses all of the disciples.

JOH 12:8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Judas comes off as some pious person with his insistence that the money should have gone to the poor when in fact his reason for

doing such a thing was to give himself an opportunity to steal the money.

And so, Jesus doesn't deny that the poor are not a legitimate ministry for God's people as we reach out to them, but in light of what Mary has done in anointing the Son of God for His ministry to reconcile us back to the Father, the poor pale in comparison to this one time unique event in all of history.

And this is the point Jesus was making about Mary. Just as when Martha complained that Mary was not helping with the kitchen duties and Jesus said that Mary had chosen the better thing, so too here, Mary had chosen the better thing in honoring Christ.

Mary knew that she would not have Him very much longer and she wanted to give her best to Him in light of that. This is what Jesus means when He says, "you will not always have Me."

He was speaking of His physical presence as it related to His first coming into this world to die for our sins. He didn't mean that He would not continue to be with us after His death and resurrection.

We know that He is. This is the primary reason that He has given us His Spirit who now indwells every believer in this world. The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Christ.

ROM 8:9-11 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

It is Christ Himself, through the Spirit of God, who is with us and in us and so we can't say that in one sense we no longer have Jesus with us. But for Mary and the rest of the disciples they enjoyed a unique relationship with Jesus in the flesh, and His flesh is about to be put into the grave.

There would never be a time again in history where this would take place, though we will certainly one day enjoy the fellowship of the resurrected Christ face to face.

The poor we will always have with us and therefore we need to consider those people as we minister to them, but simply meeting

the needs of the poor should not be the motivating factor for ministering to them.

The motivating factor should be serving Christ as we love Him above all and show that appreciation as we reach out to the less fortunate. This is the point Jesus made in Matthew.

MAT 25:34-40 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

But to only meet the physical needs of anyone is only half the picture. We also need to meet the spiritual needs of those willing to listen.

JOH 6:35 Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

May we meet the needs of the whole person, both physically and spiritually. We can feed them with bread and feed them with the bread from heaven who gives life eternal. And whatever you do, do as unto the Lord.