

***MONEY, GREED & GOOD SENSE Part I***  
**Malachi 3:8-12; Mark 14:1-9**

**Read Mark 14:1-9**

**Intro:** When gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, California in 1848 the prospect of getting rich quick afflicted people across the nation and throughout the world with what became known as "gold fever", as some 85,000 people came to Northern California in just a matter of months.

Many of those same people gave their lives in pursuit of wealth. It's believed that one out of every five prospectors lost their lives within the first six months of arriving in California. The gold rush even ruined the life of John Sutter on whose land the gold was found. Squatters came in and claimed his land as the government, probably seeing taxes and other benefits dancing by, turned a blind eye. Sutter, who had at one time been on his way to becoming the wealthiest man in California eventually died broke and broken in Lititz, PA, still trying to get compensation from Congress for his losses.

Human nature is greedy. Get rich quick schemes bring people running in droves. If the PowerBall hits a certain amount people you'd never expect to crowd in to buy tickets – even though the chance of hitting the jackpot is insanely slim. Greed causes typically thoughtful people not to think at all.

I read a *SMITHSONIAN* article years ago about two men who made hundreds of thousands of dollars in a scheme that defrauded some of the biggest and wealthiest men of the day. It was the 1870s and their scheme was simple. Salt a few acres of wilderness in Wyoming with raw diamonds they had purchased in London for a couple thousand dollars, and you'll have investors with dollar signs in their eyes eating out of your hand. It worked. By the time the fraud was discovered the schemers had taken the money and run.

Money can make people think and do strange things. Most of us have experienced the lure of the possibility of getting rich quick. Think about it; how much of our moral and social issues are taken up with money? I just talked about PowerBall, but think about how gambling, which used to be unthought-of of anywhere except Las Vegas or exotic locations in the Mediterranean or Caribbean, but has become an industry in most states. I remember a middle of the night layover in Las Vegas where, as I tried to sleep, I was assailed by the sounds of slot machines, and every other jingly jangly money machine and the hundreds of people playing them. All night long! In the terminals of McCarran International Airport!

We've often talked about how our use of money and our giving to God is a spiritual issue. Today I want to look at how it is also a moral issue. This message is part one of a three part series that kind of runs from one right into another.

Let's start logically . . .

**What should our spending priorities be?**

- Look at this passage. It's a beautiful scene. A woman comes while Jesus is at a dinner, and pours a very expensive perfume all over him. The perfume was the best of the best. Pure nard was a rare and precious spice imported from northern India. It is described as "pure", meaning it had no additives. A pound of nard would have been a tremendously extravagant purchase. It was the Chanel of the day. It could be she had it for a special occasion or gift. More likely, she purchased it just for this event. Its value of 300 denarii represents one year's wage for a day laborer, which is the equivalent of a minimum wage worker today. Assuming a minimum wage of \$8.55, three hundred denarii would be equivalent to about \$17,000 today. Think about it! She pours \$17,000 out of an alabaster bottle in a couple of minutes, simply in an effort to cherish and honor Jesus.
- If you were there, what would you have thought? Well, some who were there were pretty indignant. John records this same event in his Gospel in chapter 12 and the woman is Mary the sister of Lazarus whom Jesus had just, days before, raised from the dead. Do you think she had something to be grateful to Jesus for?
- John identifies the indignant person as Judas. The original language used to describe his objection shows that he "objected vehemently," saying, *Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?* John 12:5a. The implication is that he was really saying, "Since it was worth so much, it could have done so much good." The problem is, Judas wasn't objecting on moral grounds. He was objecting out of selfishness, because he was a thief. He wasn't above embezzling money from the common purse Jesus and disciples drew from. So, he looked at this and saw a lost opportunity – for himself.

- It could be that some of the other disciples also murmured agreement with Judas, because, after all, it was a good moral argument, right? Wrong! Jesus rebukes Judas and anyone else who thought the same with a swift “Leave her alone!” This beautiful act of extravagance was a blessing to him as he prepared for the days to come – after all it was only a couple days before Good Friday.
- Let’s bring it to us. What should our spending priorities be – especially in ministry? After all, church spending can bring up some murmuring. Often it’s a lot more justified than that of Judas – and sometimes . . . not. How should funds be used? We need to be very careful that we don’t use scripture to improperly justify our own preferences and passions in the areas of ministry spending. Like, I could make a real impact on bikers if I could just have a Harley Fatboy.
- Our Mark 14 passage addresses the issue of the practicality of expenditure versus the honor and worship of Jesus, as if the two were mutually exclusive. Here we see Jesus saying that this very extravagant expenditure was very much a thing of beauty and worship. He calls beautiful what the indignant bystanders considered to be wasteful, and what they considered to be wrong, an act of worship. We need to make sure we consider all the angles.
- Now consider this (Read Mark 10:17-21)
- Why does Jesus tell this man to go and sell everything he has and give it to the poor, but when confronted in chapter 14 on the very thing he taught in chapter 10, tells the disciples that they were wrong? It doesn’t seem as though he’s practicing what he preaches. In fact, he’s allowing this woman to spend \$17,000 on him in what looks to be a very impulsive act. What’s going on? Well, we’ve got to realize the purpose of each event.
- First, I love Jesus’s response when the young man responds to his answer. In verse 21 it says, *Jesus looked at him and loved him*. That’s what is beautiful about everything Jesus teaches – it comes from love. And knowing what gripped the man’s soul, Jesus then breaks it to him kindly that if he wants to be saved, he’s going to need to switch alliances. Jesus has been clear in his teaching. In his Sermon on the Mount he said, *No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.* Matthew 6:24. Serving God would be giving all he has to the poor. Being saved means putting your money where your mouth is. Being saved means being all in and the young man obviously was not ready to do that.
- In that case of Mary we see a woman who was already saved. In fact, she may have REALLY been saved. Some people think she was Mary Magdalene from whom Jesus had driven seven demons in Luke 8:2. Others say she was the woman, caught in adultery and condemned to death by stoning in John 8. And, as I said earlier, and as I believe, most think she was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. I’d like to think that this Mary was the same woman in all three cases. No matter what, in any and all cases, she had been saved from much. She had truly changed alliances and she was all in for her Savior. Anointing Jesus with \$17,000 worth of precious perfume was a profound act of worship and dedication.
- A couple weeks ago Notre Dame Cathedral was tragically and extensively damaged by fire. It was a huge loss – such a beautiful and ornate building, forever marred. One of the things I have enjoyed in my travels, especially in Europe, has been the beautiful churches you find there. Still, many, including myself, have asked if such extravagance is good stewardship? I’m not sure what the answer is, but could it be the people who built those buildings were just like the woman who anointed Jesus with pure nard? I would suspect they were. It was an act of worship.
- Of course there can be abuses, and that’s where the debate begins. When extravagance is pursued at the expense of ministry to the poor or other crucial ministries, there is a problem. Nevertheless, Mary’s gift is something we should imitate today.
- Fifty years ago this year, the little country BIC congregation at Chestnut Grove, determined that, to be more effective in ministering in this area, it was prudent to move several miles to this location on the edge of Ashland. Then, within a year, that little group built a simple steel structure on this property. In the meantime, Ashland grew out around this property. A few years back, we determined that it was good stewardship to update this space, which we did. Was it a waste? Certainly not. It was an act of worship. But it will be a waste if we leave this space on Sunday mornings and forget this crucial fact: *we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* Ephesians 2:10. Just sayin. So..

### **Is it passion or is it priority or is it both?**

- Many of us have ministry passions that we would like to see funded, and when we feel that something is under-funded, but something else we might not have a passion for, is fully funded, well then, we feel the church has misplaced priorities. All the while, the person who has a passion for the ministry area that *is* fully funded, is convinced the church has the right priorities. The question is, are God's priorities being honored? It's important that, as a church, we determine together the heart of God. I feel we do that well at ABC – let's continue with that.
- The Malachi passage Karen read earlier indicates that God says give. Yes, give. Not give if or give because, but give. What we bring to the Master is an act of worship and not an act of obligation. Mary came to Jesus and anointed him in an act of gratefulness, dedication and worship. It was all about Jesus. All of that could not have been further from Judas's mind. His ministry priority was only a ruse to cover his selfishness and greed.
- It's interesting that the word Judas uses for "waste" here in our text when he says "*Why this waste of perfume?*" Mark 14:4b is, in the Greek, the same word used by Jesus to refer to Judas as "*one doomed to destruction*", in his High Priestly Prayer. In that prayer, on the night before he died on the Cross, Jesus is praying for his disciples and says, *While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.* John 17:12. Even while he was accusing Mary of being a waster, Judas was, himself, wasting away. He wasted his God-given opportunities and eventually wasted his life. What a contrast between Mary the worshiper and Judas the waster! Which one are you?
- That's all we have time for this week. We'll pick up on the next installment in two weeks. Amen.