

**MONEY, GREED & GOOD SENSE Part III****Acts 4:32-35, etc.**

**Intro:** My sister sent out the standing invite to all her siblings for the annual sibling Christmas dinner at her house, which is December 7 this year. It seemed she was working pretty far ahead, but then again, it'll be here before we know it. December is Christmas month. What is even closer is June which is known as the wedding month. An article in Business Insider from April of 2018 the average American wedding costs \$33,000. I read another article in USA Today from about 6 months later that the average American wedding costs about \$25,500. Whatever the average is, it is still astronomically high. According to that USA Today article, the cheapest state to get married in is Mississippi where the average wedding costs a mere \$15,600. The most expensive weddings are in Hawaii where the average is about \$39,000. And here in good old Ohio, we are at #34 with about \$22,000.

Kathy and I paid about \$500 to get married in 1980 but we cheated on that price a bit. Her mother bought the flowers Kathy and her attendants carried; her sister made her wedding dress out of satin given to her and her sisters by an aunt; my sisters made sandwiches for the reception to add to the mixed nuts and party mints I had bought; and my sister Carolyn couldn't have it that there would be no flowers other than bouquets so she used my dad's roses, and roamed the gardens and fields and provided beautiful flower arrangements on the tables where the close to 200 people sat. And the cake? Well, bakers charge thousands of dollars for cakes these days. I paid for our cake by painting my aunt's kitchen. She was a wedding cake baker and that was her price for a wedding cake for her favorite nephew.

The cool thing was my brother helped me. He wasn't the one getting married, but he helped me pay for my wedding cake by helping paint that kitchen. He did that a lot for me. He helped and never expected anything in return. He wouldn't have thought of it. He is just naturally generous. Some would have expected payment but that was not his perspective.

I want to wrap up this series on money, greed and good sense by talking about perspectives. We've looked at it from the perspective of Mary who anointed Jesus with fabulously expensive perfume out of very deep gratitude. We also looked at it from the perspective of Judas who was so deeply offended at Mary's extravagance but not out of anything more than greed and selfishness. We also saw the crestfallen response of the rich young man who came to Jesus seeking the way to eternal life. He wasn't willing to give up his riches to do it though. And we looked at the perspective of Paul who taught that contentment was the remedy to greed. And we have looked at Moses's admonition both this week and last week, where he warns the people of Israel, and us too, that we must not forget from where all blessings come.

The truth is, perspective governs our lives. How we live our lives is determined by how we view God in relationship to our lives. Do we have a vision for the kingdom of God? It's evident in how we view and utilize our resources. Are we like Judas and greedy or like Mary who was wildly extravagant? One attitude is selfishly oriented and the other outwardly oriented. One is "Me! Me! Me!" And the other is "What can I do for the kingdom?" One has self in first place and the other has God in first place.

**This struggle of perspectives is what is making or breaking the Church today.**

- A selfish perspective is what is driving church attendance to historic lows. In this county, which is pretty religious and relatively conservative, church attendance is probably between 15% and 20% on any given Sunday. Our first response when we hear of church attendance dropping is to blame culture. It's "those" people who have lost their way. It's "those" people who won't come to us.
- Too often though, the problem isn't them, it's us – and by us, I mean the Church. We have lost sight of what the church is really all about. We have developed an "*us vs. them*" mentality. I know this because I'm just as guilty of it as anyone. We expect "them", whoever "they" are, to come to us on our terms, rather than us doing what it takes to connect with them. We are the ones, as the Church who have stopped functioning the way the Church was meant to function. On your bulletin cover there is the quote by Erwin McManus who slaps us up the side of the head with, "*We somehow think that the Church is here for us; we forget that we are the Church, and we are here for the world.*" The truth is, when the Church is functioning as the Biblically functioning "called out ones" it was meant to be, it is the hope of the world! ABC, WE are the hope of the world
- As the Church, our giving has a huge impact. Over the past couple weeks I've pointed out how, as Christ Followers, all we have is actually God's. So that means that how we use God's money is a spiritual dynamic and how we use God's money has an impact on others, whether positive or negative. So . . .

## What is your vision?

- It sounds like a no-brainer, but we need to have a vision to be a Biblically functioning church. Our vision needs to be for life transformation in our community? How does that vision transfer to our giving? How does it affect our spending habits so that we can obey God by providing the resources required for effective ministry?
- What it takes is a God sized vision. It's the kind of vision that is only possible by the power of God unleashed in the lives of his people. Mary had that vision and Judas did not. She was extravagant and he was greedy. The rich young ruler, on the other hand, had a vision that was blocked by his possessions. He trusted them over the command to go and give them to the poor.
- What is your vision? Is it extravagant or is it greedy? What is blocking your view of the plans God has for his Church? Do you want to make a transformational difference in our community? Check your vision. And also...

## Look to the example of the early Church

- The same people who hid from the authorities on Good Friday were infused with resurrection power a little over 50 days later when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. Peter, who denied he even knew Jesus on Maundy Thursday, preached such a powerful message that 3000 people were converted and baptized on the spot and thousands more followed in the days and months following. At the end of Acts 2 you can read about how the young Church had a unity and vision that made them an unstoppable force. It's because they were of one heart and mind, *They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.* Acts 2:45. At the beginning of Acts 3 we read how Peter and John were accosted by a lame man who was begging at the temple as they went for prayer. Peter's response was "*Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.*" Acts 3:6. And the man walked – he was healed in Jesus's name. Peter trusted and the man was healed.
- Instead of rejoicing in the healing, the religious leaders took Peter and John to task for not only talking about Jesus, but healing in his name. And they hauled them in for questioning. The result was amazement at the boldness of the two men. It says, *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.* Acts 4:13. Instead of the God sized vision of the Christ Followers, the religious leaders were blinded by their own puny ambition and selfishness.
- Later, at the end of chapter 4 we, again, see the unity of the Church as they shared together and contributed to the cause unselfishly. Listen, *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.* Acts 4:32-35.
- This is what happened as the Church was unified. That's what I call Common Sen\$e. May it be said of us too.

## The Future is bright for the People of God

- Some would paint a bleak picture of the ministry of the Church especially in light of its funding. Several years ago we were at a dinner sponsored by Everence which provides financial services to churches in the Anabaptist tradition. One of the speakers referred to a study that pointed to trends that would indicate that resourcing of the church would decline to a mere fraction of what it is now. There were several reasons for this that included less income and also less incentive for future generations to give. The implication was that they simply don't see the need. It's a vision problem.
- The truth is, it's not about the money or the amount. God can accomplish whatever he wants and needs to accomplish without our giving. So why all this emphasis on giving then? It's a matter of perspective and giving is an indicator.
- It is an indicator of a heart issue. We say on a regular basis here at ABC that giving is an act of worship. In worship we respond not only in our praise and adoration but by bringing our tithe into the storehouse. To put

it into the vernacular, it means to put our money where our mouth is. When we do that we can prove the statistics wrong and give more instead of less. And, as we know from experience, WE CANNOT OUT-GIVE GOD!

**Conclusion:** So as I wrap up this series, it's important that we have a simple and common sense plan to give faithfully, extravagantly, and consistently like Mary who anointed Jesus and the fledgling Church which gave selflessly. This is difficult when the temptation is toward lack of trust like the rich young ruler or out and out greed like Judas. Our plan needs to begin with prayer. Paul told the Corinthians to be thoughtful and prayerful in their giving. Listen, *Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.* 1 Corinthians 16:1-3. Pray about what you will give and then determine an amount in keeping with your income. This is thoughtful and consistent giving and it is what God blesses.

Next, if you haven't already, gain a new perspective by living contentedly. This is hearkening back to Paul's teaching to the Philippians and to Timothy that Godliness with contentment is great gain. This is difficult in a world where the temptation is always before us in every TV ad, and on every billboard and even Facebook posts to have "more" and "newer" and "better", but it can and must be done. And the peace that comes with that perspective is huge.

And the next one is tough for me because I've been in debt all my life – we need to get out of debt. (YES, I'M PREACHING TO ME TOO!) When our resources are not tied up in debt, we can do so much more for the Kingdom. ABC is a picture of this truth. What we can do when we are debt free is so much more than when we are saddled with obligations. It's very freeing. Let's work toward this with our personal finances too.

Money is a reality. It can be a bane or a blessing. Let's make it a blessing.

Greed is a reality. It is never a blessing – flee from it.

Good sense with what is actually God's is his desire for us. What's in your wallet? Is it God's? Does it need a change in perspective? Amen.