

Generosity #2
Uncovering the Heart
John 12:1-8
10/9/16

- Author W.A. Criswell tells of an ambitious young man who told his pastor he'd promised God a tithe of his income. They prayed for God to bless his career. At that time he was making \$40.00 per week and tithing \$4.00.
 - o In a few years his income increased and he was tithing \$500.00 per week. He called on the pastor to see if he could be released from his tithing promise, it was too costly now.
 - o The pastor replied, "I don't see how you can be released from your promise, but we can ask God to reduce your income to \$40.00 a week, then you'd have no problem tithing \$4.00."
- Last week, we started a new series entitled simply "Generosity" as a follow-up to the Package of Salvation series and our Faith Promise weekend. Speaking of Faith Promise, I wanted to share an update. Currently, we have received pledges totaling over \$7,600 – more than our goal!! Again, if you have not made a faith promise, feel free to do so. Just because we have met our goal, we should still give what God has laid on our hearts. ☺
 - o So, last week, we saw that the Bible has lots to say about money, possessions and generosity – 2,300 verses of things to say! Because of that, the devil is working overtime to twist what God has to say.
 - o John Bevere wrote this very thing when he wrote, "The most important doctrines of scripture are the one's the Devil tries the hardest to pervert."
 - o So, because the heart of God is generosity and he wants his followers to be generous, there's the devil trying to get us to do something different. Yet, generosity is a test of what you really love.
 - o So, the fact is that true generosity will grow in us if we are truly striving to be like Christ. Through generosity, we learn that your gift leaves you hand, but it never leaves your life and that generosity is always rewarded because blessing is a by-product of generosity. That's kind of our review from last week.
- This morning, I want to start with a proposal. Here it is: "It is impossible to be too generous." What do you think? Do you agree or disagree? Are there some exceptions to this?
 - o Overall, I believe this is what those 2,300 verses of the Bible are trying to get through to us. Yet, some people do not believe this or even take offense to that. You can tell by the way they respond to someone else's generosity.

- So, let's look at some of those verses to see if this proposal is true. Let's start with a story of extravagant generosity and the response someone had toward this generosity. The story is found in ***John 12:1-8***. We looked at this story a few weeks ago, but it has several good lessons in it for us.
 - o This morning, God is going to teach us a lesson which will show us the difference between generosity and selfishness.
- Immediately we see two opposite characters in this story with two very different hearts.
 - o The first character is Mary, a personal friend of Jesus. Mary's heart is filled with extraordinary generosity. You can tell with her gift that she believed you can never be too generous.
 - o The second character is Judas. Judas's heart is filled with selfishness which is anti-generosity.
- The truth is, when we look at these two, most of us fall somewhere in between them. If there was a spectrum where one end was Mary and her extravagant generosity and Judas and his selfishness, we would be somewhere along that that spectrum.
 - o We're certainly not as selfish as Judas. But, probably most of us are not as generous as Mary.
 - o Judas and Mary are like polar extremes and extremes aren't necessarily good. Most of us are more balanced. Isn't that how we should be?
 - o Let's take a moment and look at these polar extremes.
- First, there's Mary's extravagant generosity. Her gift was worth about a year's salary. Can you imagine going to the bank & getting that much money, then pouring it out on someone's feet?
 - o The obvious question is "why?" We're going to have a 30 second LIFE group. Ask your neighbor why Mary chose to be so generous that day?
 - o Someone shout out why.
 - o That's my opinion – LOVE! Nothing else could have that kind of motivation toward such extreme generosity. Oh, pride will make you give a little when someone is looking. But that kind of sacrifice can only be LOVE.
- Now, let's look at Judas' Selfishness. He was sitting there and saw what Mary did. The room was filled with the sweet fragrance of what Mary just did and everyone was watching in silence.
 - o Until Judas spoke up. Did you notice how Judas just got all up into Mary's business all of a sudden? He probably hadn't said "Boo" to Mary before while she was serving food and helping around the house to make their stay comfortable. Now, he has to say something.
 - o Now, I'm a bit more assertive, so it's probably good that Mary did not respond like me...I would have probably turned to Judas and said, "Hey

what's it to you anyway, dude?"

- I mean, really! Why would anyone care how overly generous another person is with their possessions?

- Go ahead and ask your neighbor why they think anyone would care how generous someone else is with their money.
 - Someone shout out why...

- I think that very often, someone cares about how generous another person is when they're guilty of their own selfishness. Mary's bright light shining on him made him look bad. Scripture tells us that those who live in darkness don't like the light.

Mary's gift was this bright light that was painful to Judas' dark, selfish heart.

- Verse 6 even tells that he didn't care about the poor, but he was a thief who in charge of the common money for Jesus and the disciples and he sometimes pocketed some here and there for himself.
- So, Judas was disguising his own selfish motives. He didn't care about the poor. He just had his hand in the cookie jar, and this amazing display of generosity made him look and feel bad. Maybe he was afraid that someone was catching on to his actions and wanted to deflect and show how concerned he was for the poor. No one was buying it, Judas, especially Jesus!

- Pastor Robert Morris wrote a book about generosity entitled *The Blessed Life*. In fact, much of the material for this sermon comes from his work.

- In the book, he shared a personal story and conversation between he and another pastor. He writes this, "I was riding with another pastor by the home of a man who was a committed Christian who was very wealthy. I commented about how the man was so generous. The pastor friend said, "Well, he ought to sell that thing and give the money to the poor."
- Morris responded, "Well, you live in a pretty nice home yourself. Why don't you sell it and give it to the poor. The truth is you don't really care for the poor, you're just jealous of God's blessing over this brother."
- I bet Pastor Morris lost a friend that day because most people do not like to be called out quite that bluntly, especially about money!

- But, false spirituality is just as alive today as it was that day in Judas' heart. We try to disguise the condition of our own hearts and point to our own spirituality with things like...

- "He really could have done a lot of good with the money he spent on that vehicle." Or..."She has no business spending that much money on clothes." Maybe some of that is true. Yet, shouldn't we be more interested in the condition of our own hearts rather than jumping to judgement about others?
- They are just like what Judas said, "She really could have done a lot of good with that money instead of wasting it like that on worship."

- We know what Judas' real problem was – he wanted that money in the money box so he could take it out. The modern name for the money box Judas carried is the offering box. The money box is where offerings were placed, to finance the ministry of Jesus.
 - o But Judas had the audacity to take the \$ out of there. At some level, Judas believed that Jesus was the Messiah, otherwise, why would he have followed Jesus? Yet, he was stealing from the Messiah! Sounds OUTRAGIOUS doesn't it?
 - o But then, God's word tells us that if we do not tithe, we are robbing God. That hurts, right?
- Is it possible that just as Judas robbed the Lord by taking out of the offering box, we have been guilty of robbing Him by failing to put into the offering box what is rightfully His?
 - o That may sound harsh, but we must ask ourselves why is this story here for all to see? Why do we have the two polar opposite characters to read about?
 - o I think God wants us to ask ourselves which one of these we are more like. The selfish Judas or the generous Mary?
- Selfishness tries to get the focus off of the selfish one and onto the “extravagance” of others. Selfishness drives by nice houses and criticizes other people’s blessings. Selfishness always looks after self by pointing at someone else.
 - o That’s not who God wants his people to be! He wants us to have the heart of Mary, the heart that is most like his own heart.
 - o And so, he places stories like this in his Word.
- Another thing that God does to show us our true heart is to test us. This testing further proves our proposal of extravagant generosity because it shows that selfishness will never pass the trust test.
 - o Did you know that there is only one place where God allows you to test Him, and that is actually in the area of money? It’s that verse that we always quote when we talk about tithing in Malachi 3:10. Where he tells us to tithe. He says, “Test me and see if I will not throw open the windows of heaven to bless you. We can test God over and over in this.
 - o But He will give us the trust test us over and over as well in the area of money. The trust test shows where we place our trust.
- That is exactly what Jesus was doing with Judas. Now we all know that Judas’ problem area was money, and he was one of Jesus’ disciples.
 - o Did you notice where Jesus assigned him to serve? On the finance committee! He was in charge of the group’s money!
 - o Now why would Jesus do this? Even if Judas was good with accounting,

Jesus knew he had an issue. Matthew, the former tax collector, would have been able to do the job. Judas' signature sin was greed and selfishness which led to actually stealing from others, yet Jesus assigned the job to Judas.

- Why? Because here's an important principle about Jesus – His main concern is NEVER STUFF, it's ALWAYS PEOPLE. He wanted Judas to learn to trust in him, not in the money. He wanted Judas to learn to say no to his greed and his selfishness every time he added money into the offering box because it would grow Judas's character and commitment. Jesus didn't care about those few dollars; He cared about Judas.
 - o And, that's why He will always test you in your areas of weakness. He wants to work through you in those areas so that you grow and don't continue to succumb to them
 - o Jesus is really not worried about you messing things up so badly that he can't fix it. He can fix anything we mess up.
 - o He's ONLY concerned about you growing and maturing in Him. He wants you to trust him so that you won't continue to fall on your face in front of your weaknesses.
- Now listen – money is a BIG test for ALL of us. There are varying degrees, obviously, of our desire and weakness for money, but it is one potential weakness that is common for pretty much everyone.
 - o Because of that potential, God uses it really as a foundational test onto which all other responsibilities in God's Kingdom rests. See, the second aspect of the trust test is to see if we can be trusted.
 - o *Luke 16:10-12* tells us this when it says, “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities.¹¹ And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?¹² And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?
- Do you hear Jesus' heart? He wants people who put their trust in him, over everything else because nothing else is more trustworthy than Him and if we get that then we are trustworthy! And so, he says, “*I'm not going to give you responsibilities in the Kingdom of God if you can't even handle your checkbook.*”
 - o You see, God is all about testing His children, so He can promote them to do greater things. One of the foundational and best tests is the money test. It tests your heart and your trust real quick.
 - o Until you pass this one, you won't be able to move on to greater things.
- But don't worry, God is so committed to you passing the test that He allows make-ups. In fact, He'll keep giving you the money test as many times as you fail it.

- Maybe you know some people who are ALWAYS in a money test. Why? They keep failing the test!
 - It's like a story that I heard that shared the similarities between a doctor and preacher. When you go to a doctor for your annual check-up, he or she will often begin to poke, prod, and press various places, all the while asking, "Does this hurt? How about this?" If you cry out in pain, one of two things has happened. Either the doctor has pushed too hard, without the right sensitivity. Or, more likely, there's something wrong, and the doctor will say, "We'd better do some more tests. It's not supposed to hurt there!"
 - So it is when pastors preach on financial responsibility, and certain members cry out in discomfort, criticizing the message and the messenger. Either the pastor has pushed too hard. Or perhaps there's something wrong. In that case, I say, "My friend, we're in need of the Great Physician because it's not supposed to hurt there."
 - Believe me, I'm not trying to push too hard. But, if the money tests that God is putting you through or if a message about generosity is hurting, then it just might be time for some real heart examination, because when we are placing our trust in the right things, it's not supposed to hurt.
- The next proof of our proposal that it is impossible to be too generous is that God wants all of his children to be extravagant givers.
 - How do we know this? There are two reasons first, he wants us to be like Him and we already know he gave extravagantly, everything he had to us.
 - And second, because of the numerous examples He left us in His word. Like I said earlier – those 2,300 verses. We looked at several last week.
- And, just like the story of Mary's extravagant gift there are others, lots of others.
 - In the Old Testament, King David gave an offering for the Temple. In today's value, that offering would be \$21 Billion - Look at it
 - David's son Solomon is another example of an extravagant giver. In fact, it is because of his giving that God blessed him. See, Solomon was supposed to sacrifice a bull to the Lord. Instead, he went above and beyond and sacrificed 1,000 bulls.
 - So, that night God came to him, "*Ask anything, and I'll give it to you.*" Why did God give Solomon that leverage? Because Solomon had demonstrated that his heart was generous, not selfish. So, God knew He could trust Solomon with a blank check. And, God was right because Solomon didn't ask for anything that would benefit himself. He asked for wisdom in order to benefit the people.
- Then there's the example of generosity that rivals David & Solomon's. It's found in *Luke 21:1 – 4* which says, *While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box.² Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins. "I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "this poor widow has given more*

than all the rest of them. ⁴For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”

- This gift was as extravagant as David's \$21 billion. How is that? Because 2 cents is HUGE when it's all you have.
- Mother Teresa once said, “If you give what you do not need, it isn't giving.”
- Then, there's the story that we should remember and share all the time. It's the one where God himself offered his only Son.
 - Though He was perfect, he died for liars, thieves, prostitutes, drug addicts, and every sin you have ever committed. God gave the ultimate act of selfless sacrifice for us to have life. There is no more generous giver than God!
- Finally, to prove the proposal that it is impossible to be too generous, we find that God always has a purpose for generosity.
 - Often times, we do things because we want to be obedient and we want to be like Christ and those are good enough reasons to do things.
 - But, we must also know this – God always has a purpose. Even when we don't see it, there is a purpose.
- In the story of Mary's extravagant gift, Jesus said that she was doing it in preparation for his burial in verse 7. No one understood what he was talking about. But, Jesus knew what was coming.
 - See, when Jesus' body was taken from the cross, it was just before the beginning of the Sabbath. Because of this there was no time to anoint His body which was the proper preparation for burial.
 - That's why the ladies were coming to His tomb on Sunday morning – to do what they could not do on Friday evening when Sabbath was starting. So, Mary was the only person on Earth who received the privilege of anointing Jesus' body for burial.
 - You see, there is a purpose for every gift, even when it doesn't make sense to us or others. God uses each gift.
 - I don't know about you, but that encourages me to give when I know that God has a purpose for it. What purpose might God have in mind for the gift he has been wanting you to give?
- To conclude this morning, I spoke of the book called *The Blessed Life* by Robert Morris. In this book, he says there is a ladder of giving we can all climb:
 1. Tithes – giving 10% of your income to the Lord through the work of the local church
 2. Offerings – giving above the tithe
 3. Extravagant Offerings – giving far above the tithe, like Mary did.
- Most believers never even get to the first rung faithfully. But those who do, usually go to the second rung. That was evident during our Faith Promise

weekend.

- Why is it easier to get to the second than the first? Because you decide to trust God enough to climb to the first rung, you begin to see God working and you begin to see the 2,300 verses about money in the Bible come to life.
- God truly does open the windows of heaven over you and you learn the job of giving more so that it doesn't become an obligation, it is an honor and a blessing, knowing that it is for the higher purpose of God.
- Generosity doesn't happen overnight. It happens over time. We might think, "Well, I'll be an extravagant giver when I have an extravagant income." Yet, that isn't God's point, is it? And, the fact is that no you won't. If you don't start with the little, you will never start with the much.
 - Two men of extravagant income knew this. J.D. Rockefeller said, "I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week."
 - And, J.L. Kraft, head of the Kraft Cheese Corporation, who had given approximately 25% of his enormous income to Christian causes for many years, said, "The only investment I ever made which has paid consistently increasing dividends is the money I have given to the Lord."
- Few reach that place of extravagant giving where, like Mary, they have given more than what anyone would expect, because they never started at the first rung. Next week, we might look more at those rungs of giving.
 - I definitely wouldn't say that I have reached the rung of extravagant giving. But, I want to inch closer and closer to it.
 - And, over years of giving, I do know this – I have seen how the Lord provides when we give. There have certainly been times when I will admit that I have given with a begrudging spirit, sometimes even kicking and screaming and questioning. In his mercy, the Lord gives me the opportunity to see that he had a purpose and that he wasn't going to take without giving back in some way.
- It is impossible to be too generous simply because it is impossible to trust God too much. Do you trust him? Where are you on the trust spectrum? If you want your trust to grow to Mary like proportions, we need to start giving and inching up that ladder. Truly our giving tells us more about our hearts than just about anything else. When you uncover your heart – what's there?
 - God won't let us out give him. He will always use it for his purpose and cause when we give to him. Test and see. Open your heart to see new levels of trust and growth.