

GRACE FOR THE JOURNEY—EXTRAVAGANCE
Matthew 26:6-13

Grace For The Journey Message Series
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This morning as we continue to focus on our spiritual journey in Jesus we will look at a wonderful story found in the 26th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel. We actually witness here a sharp contrast with people in how they react and respond to Jesus.

We witness this woman so filled with love and gratitude that she proceeded to anoint Jesus with expensive ointment. In contrast we witness the response and reaction of the disciple Judas who ends up betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

In the case of this woman she came to Jesus with a jar of very costly ointment and poured it on his head; she wanted to give Jesus a gift; she wanted to demonstrate her gratitude for Jesus' love and forgiveness for her. Just think of how powerful this unselfish act of sacrifice was.

Yet some disciples—most specifically Judas—was really appalled by what he saw; he grumbles about this waste of time and money. Why didn't this woman sell the ointment and give the money to the poor? More honestly why didn't she sell this ointment and give the money to him so he could better manage it (hoard it for himself and his own use).

Yet Jesus hears this grumbling and is not pleased. He says, *"Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

Immediately in the following verses we then witness Judas going to the chief priests and asking, *"What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?"* It says that they offered Judas 30 pieces of silver to carry out this deceitful act. *"From then on,"* it says, *(Judas) watched for an opportunity to hand him over."*

Therefore in this passage we have a very sharp contrast between individuals in how to respond to Jesus. We have two very different attitudes, behaviors, belief systems at work. As we study these verses I believe each one of us can measure and evaluate our own selves in comparison to these contrasts; we can see where we fit.

On the one hand we have this woman who has obviously had a very deep and profound religious experience; she has been touched by the love and power of Jesus and has been profoundly changed. Whatever her lifestyle was previously she had now been born anew; she now wants to pour out and share her life as an offering on behalf of Jesus.

Judas, on the other hand, is primarily preoccupied with the balance sheet and bottom line. He perhaps was the business manager of the disciples and all he could think about was money. As the days and months went by Judas appears to have become even more consumed with money; he was even willing to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. He was so close to Jesus—yet how far he drifted away from him.

George Gallop in his book, *“People Of Religion,”* probes some of the various religious attitudes of people. What he found in his research is that at least one out of every three Americans has had some kind of dramatic, life-changing religious experience; that at least one-third of all Americans have had a right-brained, life-transforming experience of God.

One of the reasons, Gallop then concludes, that mainline churches like the Lutheran church are often declining, while many dynamic evangelical churches are growing, is that in mainline churches most individuals often feel as if they are unable to talk about their spiritual experiences—people will surely think they are strange; unbalanced; some religious fanatic. How can a person like this woman demonstrate her love for Jesus if she is surrounded by people like Judas?

This is why we at Messiah are seeking to provide an atmosphere that is open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. We want our worship to focus on God’s presence in us. We want our children, youth and adult activities to help people experience the love of Jesus in a personal way. Our mission is to help people know and experience Jesus so they want to pass it on to others.

Judas and this woman, therefore, have very different mindsets. For instance she understands that Jesus has come to save her and all of the world from their sins; she believes then that her life is meant to be an offering poured out on behalf of God; she wants to spend every moment giving of herself; she wants to shine forth the extravagance of her worship and love. Nothing in her experience is too good and wonderful for God.

Judas on the other hand has an opposite mindset. His basic value in life has to do with money and material things; everything has a cash value (including people) and that is where meaning is found. Spread sheets, net worth, income levels, job success demonstrate reality. When you boil it down to its essence the core meaning of life is found in economics and worldly labels.

Therefore when Judas watches this beautiful demonstration of love by this woman—instead of being moved he is totally offended; it just does not fit his mindset. This woman is wasting money; it costs way too much. Everything for him is measured in terms of money; even Jesus’ life can be betrayed for the price of a common slave—30 pieces of silver.

Joel Barker, well-known futurist, says that Charles Darwin believed that competition was the dynamic that moved the world. The whole world, said Darwin, is competition. Therefore when Darwin wrote his *“Origins Of The Species,”* he focused on the survival of the fittest—competition. This paradigm, even though it is totally wrong, has greatly impacted our society.

Barker however says that evidence is very strong that about 90% of the world lives primarily in cooperation; cooperation is the major dynamic, not competition. Today many scientists have rejected Darwin's conclusions. They believe that cooperation is the basic stuff of life; in fact in the basic cells of the body cooperation is the dominant factor. It is amazing how old mindsets have often influenced our thinking.

My friends, what do you think is the basic mindset of most Americans today; what is your basic understanding of life? Are you more like this woman or are you more like Judas? I think if you read many of the major magazines today like *Forbes* and *Fortune*; if you listen to much of the political wrangling and debate; if you listen to social media and talk shows about how life is not fair and how they deserve more—you will find very quickly that the values of Judas are very alive and well. Our society is totally preoccupied with money, success, protecting me and my assets; putting down those who may have fallen short, are struggling or who may have had some failures in this competitive world.

Lewis Lapham in his book *"Money And Class In America"* says that most Americans have the mindset of the doubling principle. He says that most of us believe deep down in our core that if we only had twice as much as we have now, then life would indeed be sweet; then everything would come up roses. We don't want everything; just double what we have now.

It doesn't matter so much what we already have—whether we earn \$30,000 a year or \$2 million a year, double that amount sounds about right. Because this principle is so deeply entrenched, what it means is that many today feel they are truly deprived; they just do not have enough.

Thus they go through life with a kind of low grade fever of discontent. That is so often our mindset; we believe life is not fair; we were dealt a poor hand. We complain about others who have more; we rail about taxes and the cost of everything; we are mad when others have benefits we don't have; we put down others who are different from us.

If Lapham is right that means that an outpouring of love, generosity and worship such as this woman demonstrates would be soundly condemned—even by us. If we are so upset already that others are favored, it makes no sense at all to be generous. Surely, I believe, it is much easier for most of us to identify with Judas than it is to be sympathetic to this woman; to be extravagant in our attitudes about others; to be sharing and welcoming of others who are poor; of different ethnicity; of different cultural backgrounds—to do that for some is surely a dangerous precedent.

Yet what needs to change is not better "luck" for me; rather our mindset and our basic understanding of life. And that, my friends, can only be changed by the good news of Christ; by the overwhelming sacrifice and love of Jesus. Once our head and our heart have been changed, then worship and serving suddenly become a joy; then extravagance becomes commonplace.

What are some extravagant and generous ways you and I can share our life of worship? Sharing of land for assisted living/memory care; worship and church activities that celebrate God's love and invites everyone freely; generously serving those who are poor; welcoming and getting to know those of different ethnicity and cultural backgrounds; anonymously paying for a stranger's

meal, coffee, groceries; advocating for and helping those who don't have the education, support and the privilege we have been blessed with; and the list goes on and on.

My friends, what each one of us needs most of all is not more favor and attention for us. What we really need is a personal relationship with Jesus and a life transforming faith in him. Two contrasting figures in the 26 Chapter of Matthew—the woman and Judas. Which of these is your model; which does our church at Messiah model? Who do you think truly captured the essence of the Gospel? Who do you think lived a life of worship? Who do you think we should emulate?

These are very critical questions for each of us to think about today and everyday.