

1. What is the motivation of my possessing?
 Jesus indicates a predetermined action. Do not store up or lay up earthly treasure. How do we approach possessions? Is it to store up, accumulate, to hoard and hang on or do our possessions become another way for us to serve God and God's Kingdom? Do we give freely not only in our tithing and giving but to others? Do we see our homes as places of hospitality or our castle? Do we see our possessions as things to be shared to bring joy to others? Do we see our resources as resources to be used for God's kingdom? What is my motivation for possessing?

2. What is my perspective on my possessions?
 Do I have an eternal view of things? Do I admit that all that I have and all that I possess falls into the categories of moth, rust and stealing?

3. What is my greatest love? Jesus says you cannot serve both God and money. You and I think we can, but we can't. We will either be a servant to money or to God.

Yesterday I attended the funeral service for a mother of one our members. It was obvious by the time we got to the church that this woman and her husband had been pillars in the church. People stood during the service and spoke of their devotion not only to the Lord, but also to the church. They had served in so many ways. They had started Sunday School classes. They had visited the sick and dying. They had welcomed the guest. For 45 years this couple had been a vital part of God's work. In her final days, the wife before she passed had been moved to hospice. She knew her life was coming to an end. She did something amazing in that final week. The tellers at the church who counted the offerings every week told the pastor this story. As they opened the envelope to count the checks in the previous week they noticed something written on the envelope of this wonderful Christian woman. In her final week of life she had written her check to the church. On the envelope was written this phrase "Final Tithe Check." She knew her time for death was coming, but she would be faithful unto death. Even in that final week she would not love possession more than the Kingdom of God. She gave throughout her life

and she gave until the end.

There is nothing wrong with our possessions, unless they become our gods. We must give them up.

Mary, in that final week before Jesus death, took her most valuable possession. She took the possession that meant for her security. She took the possession that was her future and her identity and she offered it all. She gave it up.

What possession have you made a god? What possession do you see as your security, instead of the security you find in Christ? What possession is your identity more than your identity in Christ? Our treasures follows our hearts, do we love Jesus more? If so, then when it comes to treasure we can give it up for the sake of Christ.



Give It Up - Treasure

John 12:1-12



Often wonder what it was like in that home in Bethany, just a few days before that final week of Jesus. John tells us that Jesus and His disciples had come to a home in Bethany. Although it does not say, we assume it was the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. In this setting, Jesus is more than prophet. In this setting, Jesus is more than Messiah. In this setting, Jesus is friend. Jesus was a friend to Lazarus, Martha and Mary. This is not the first time we find them together. There are other visits to Bethany and time spent with this family. Jesus was a friend. I think of how Jesus said to His disciples, "I no longer call you servant but friend." Moses is described as a friend of God. Jesus refers to us as friend. Here were three people in particular where Jesus was maybe foremost... friend. Jesus had been there before and cared for by Martha and Mary. This trip John puts in context with the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

If you remember the story, Lazarus had become deathly ill. Martha and Mary had sent for Jesus and Jesus was aware of Lazarus' illness, but we know that Jesus tarried and did not go. In fact, we are told that Jesus waited for Lazarus to die before He began the journey to Bethany. When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus is dead and buried. The mourning has already begun. Martha and Mary are grieving and they also react just like we react when God does not act on our timetable. Jesus where have you been? Jesus if you had been here our brother would not have died. You can hear that combination of faith and yet sorrow. You can hear those words of faith and yet frustration. Don't we know the feeling of faith and sorrow? Don't we know the feeling of faith and yet, great frustration with God or at least with God's timing? Martha and Mary know those feelings. Yet, even in their sorrow they muster their faith and say but we know that

even now God will give you whatever you ask.

Wow! That is faith. In the midst of sorrow, frustration and grief they say to Jesus even now, even with Lazarus in the grave, all things are possible with God. That is faith.

Jesus approaches the burial place and in that moment we are told that Jesus wept. That shortest of verses reminds us of the fullness of Jesus' humanity. Jesus was not some disinterested person. No, Jesus was fully involved, fully immersed in humanity. In the face of a friend's death... Jesus wept.

However, the weeping would end in celebration. For Jesus went to the mouth of cave and called out and Lazarus come forth. Then the miracle, Lazarus the man who was dead came walking out of the tomb with all of his old grave clothes still wrapped around him.

I share that with you because that gives us the setting of the evening in Bethany. What is the conversation like? There is Lazarus who was dead only days before sitting there eating, laughing and enjoying the company of friends. Fully returned to life. There is Jesus, the friend who is heading for His own death. He is only days away from that final week that will end on the cross and then being placed in the borrowed tomb. In Jesus' case, there will be no friend to rescue Him. Jesus will have to place His faith only in the power of God the father to raise Him from the dead.

I cannot imagine the conversation. How do you say thank you to someone who has called you back from death to life? How do you? Jesus' friends decided to give a dinner in Jesus' honor. That seems like the least you can do. So, there they are, together, these friends reclining at the table. Jesus and His disciples are there and Lazarus is there. It is

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as John keeps repeating it so we can get it. Lazarus is alive.

Then, there is this incredible moment. When Mary enters the room. It is a room where normally the women would not enter and stay. She enters the room filled with men and does something quite incredible. She takes that jar of perfume and she pours it upon Jesus' feet and then wipes His feet with her hair. We are told that the smell of perfume permeated the room. That was not the only thing that filled the room.

There was indignation. Judas speaks up and he may have spoke for more than just himself. Sometimes the most negative person reveals what others were thinking. What a waste is his response. What a waste to let this expensive perfume be poured out. It could have been sold and used for something useful. It could have cared for the poor. Of course, John tells us that Judas did not care for the poor but was trying to line his own pocket.

Others, I think, remained silent. This gesture brings all of the laughter and conversation to a standstill. They did not know what to say. The moment between Jesus and Mary is very intimate. The pouring of perfume upon Jesus' feet and the wiping of His feet with her hair. All of this is done in front of others. I am sure there are those who would have objected to such a moment between Jesus and any woman. When a similar anointing is mentioned by the one who is the sinful woman there is great objection.

Then, the statement that hangs in the air like the perfume. She is anointing me for my burial. You will always have the poor, but you will not always have me. Like the perfume that permeates the house, so this statement of Jesus hangs heavy in the air. No one seems to comment. No one seems to know how to respond. They want to ignore it and act as though He has not said it.

This story is shocking in so many ways. There is the obvious reminder that Lazarus who was dead is now alive. That is shocking. Second, Mary's act is shocking. Judas' character is revealed. He would be the betrayer. There is a devil among them. Then, Jesus words are also shocking. The perfume is for His burial.

This passage also says something to us about treasure. I know there are many other passages we could turn to today, to talk about the importance of noting letting our treasure, possessions, obsessions

become our god. There are many events in Jesus' life that remind us to not put things above God.

There is the rich young ruler who could not give up his fortune and follow Jesus and we are told turned and walked away sadly. There is the story of the man who was bragging about building bigger barns and having more and more and then retiring and taking it easy only for Jesus to say this man does not realize the frailty of life and sometimes the unexpected moment of death. Jesus says of this man, "you fool, tonight your soul will be required of you, then who will have all that you have amassed." Just a reminder that all that we possess one day will not be our possession.

Even in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urges us to not value that which rots, rusts and decays but to have heavenly treasure. We are to value that which cannot waste away. Jesus reminds us that where our treasure is there is our heart.

All of these examples, but maybe this one moment with Jesus is the most personal. This is such a personal story of one giving up treasure to honor and show love toward Jesus.

Mary's perfume was more than just perfume; it probably was her most treasured possession. John speaks of it as pure nard and an expensive perfume. Judas comments that it is worth a year's wage. If that were so, then he is speaking of the value being of what a worker would earn for a year. There are of course people who spend on a car, a ring, a boat, clothes and other things that will pass away the amount that many in our nation make in a year of work.

In the U.S., the median household income is 51,000 dollars. In the world the number is more like 18,000. Whatever number we use it was an expensive possession.

If we look at Mary's possession of the perfume we can say three things about it. It represented her most expensive possession. If this was worth one year's wage, then it was probably her most expensive possession.

Think of our treasure items. What is our most expensive possession? For most of us it is our home. For some, there might be something else we own that is very valuable. Whatever it might be, we know how we feel about the thing that we own that is very expensive.

It may have been her security. There are some who suggest that this perfume was also Mary's security for the future. In a world where women were known by their connection to men, your identity was tied to being in your father's house, or husband's house or in this case your brother's house, the possibility of having nothing could happen very quickly. The sisters had already experienced it. Lazarus had died. What was going through their minds when Lazarus died? Is it more than just loss of a loved one, or are they concerned about what their future might be? This perfume may have represented to Mary her security for the future.

Think of our treasure where we find security. It might be in our abilities or our connections with others, or our money, or savings, investments. We, like Mary, have our treasures that are connected to our perceived security.

Another way to think about this perfume is that it very well may have been her dowry. There are several scholars who suggest that this perfume was being saved as a dowry for when Mary might have a husband. In that case, it would represent her future and her identity.

Think of how our possessions represent our future and our identity. Much of what we possess we possess to express our identity. Whether it is the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the house we live in, the toys we own. So much of our treasure is about identity.

This perfume was more than just perfume it was Mary's most valuable possession, her security, future and identity. Yet, she poured it out upon the feet of Jesus. She humbled herself and gave it up out of thanksgiving, devotion and love.

Mary gave up her treasure because of love. We are told that this was a dinner in honor of Jesus. We know that Mary had a great devotion to Jesus. In another setting, she is found sitting at Jesus feet listening to his teaching. Here we see this great act of love and her treasure does not measure against her love for Jesus.

Here is the truth we struggle with the most. We hold onto our treasure and we worship it because we

many time love it more than we love Jesus. The only way we can give up the love of treasure in this world is to learn to love God and God's Kingdom more. Mary loved and so she could let go of her treasure.

When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment. Jesus responded to love God with all you heart, soul, strength and mind. To love God more... is the key to not loving our treasure more than God.

The key of course is to learn to love God more. This just does not just happen. Mary has been learning to love Jesus more. Over time as she was in His presence her love and devotion grew to the place she would pour out her most valuable possession in love and devotion.

Mary loved Jesus more because she had a perspective that others did not. It is almost as though Mary has been the only one listening. Jesus had told others about His death and resurrection. Others had argued with Jesus about His words and God's plan. You don't find that argument from Mary. Mary takes Jesus at His word and as Jesus says she prepares Him for his burial. There is a perspective of God's grand plan that others seem to be missing.

We can give up our treasure as our god when we have the right perspective. When we realize that life is more than what we possess. When we realize that we are more than what we possess. When we realize that others are more than what they possess we can keep treasure in the proper perspective.

Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not store up treasure where moth and rust destroy and a thief steals, but store up treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and a thief cannot steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.

So what are we to learn from Mary's example? Is it wrong to possess and own? Of course not. Is it wrong to want a nice home, clothes, or cars? Not necessarily. Here is what is wrong. It is wrong to love it more than Jesus.

Here are three questions to ask:

WE CAN GIVE UP OUR TREASURE AS OUR GOD WHEN WE HAVE THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE. WHEN WE REALIZE THAT LIFE IS MORE THAN WHAT WE POSSESS. WHEN WE REALIZE THAT WE ARE MORE THAN WHAT WE POSSESS. WHEN WE REALIZE THAT OTHERS ARE MORE THAN WHAT THEY POSSESS WE CAN KEEP TREASURE IN THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE.