

How Much God Values You

By Bayless Conley

It is an honor to be with you again today. And I was thinking as I was sitting there during the worship time, which I thoroughly enjoyed, about a story I heard about a country preacher. Seems that his wife was away visiting her mother and he didn't normally do it, but something struck him to just go and look through her things. And he's in the closet sort of looking through her stuff, he'd never done it before, and he found this box, this ornate box and he said what is that? He opens it up and there are three eggs in the box, and there's a wad of money there with a rubber band around it. He estimated it was eight or nine hundred dollars. And he thought what in the world?

Anyway, she gets back that afternoon from visiting her mom, they're sitting down in the kitchen enjoying supper and he says 'babe, I got a confession to make. I went through your stuff today and I found this box in the closet under some of your clothes and there were three eggs in the box.' He said 'what's that about?' She said 'well honey, every time you preach a bad sermon, I put an egg in the box.' He said 'really?' She said 'yes, I do, every bad sermon I put an egg in the box.' And he began thinking well, that's actually pretty good. I've been preaching in

our little country church for years and years, and to only have three bad sermons.

And then he said ‘well there was also this big wad of money in there. What’s that about?’ She said ‘well every time I get a dozen eggs, I sell them, and that’s where the money came from.’

Listen, I just want you to pray that I don’t put an egg in the box today. I do have something on my heart to share with you, and I want to talk to you about the last supper. But I’d like to back up and talk about the last supper before the last supper. It actually took place at the house of Simon the leper. We read about it in Mark chapter 14 verses 3 through 9. It says, “And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table a woman came having an alabaster flask, a very costly oil of Spikenard then she broke the flask and poured it on his head, but there were some who were indignant among themselves and said why was this fragrant oil wasted, for it might have been sold for more than three hundred denari and given to the poor. And they criticized her sharply. But Jesus said let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for me. For you have the poor with you always and whenever you wish, you may do them good, but me, you do not have always. She has done what she could. She’s come beforehand to anoint my body for burial. Assuredly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in all the world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

So this takes place in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper. Now Simon was a common name in Israel. We are not sure who he was other than undoubtedly he was a leper that Jesus had healed during His ministry. Also present at this meal are Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus who has been raised from the dead. And if you put the different gospels together, John had some pieces that Mark didn't have, and you find this story in the different gospels, and apparently it was Mary that took this Alabaster flask and broke it, and she actually anointed the head of Jesus and His feet, as we find from reading elsewhere.

Now Alabaster was a marble that was quarried in Egypt, and this flask itself was incredibly expensive. It was a very, very valuable item, and then it had this aromatic oil of Spikenard in it, also very expensive. In fact, we're given the value of it: three hundred denari. In one of the other gospels, it says that was equivalent to a full year's wage. It was an absolutely extravagant gift. Now imagine everything that you made working for a year, every cent you saved, all the hours you spent working and you took it all and you gave it in one offering to the Lord. Well that's what she did. The question is why. Why such extravagance? Why would Mary place such a high value on Jesus?

Well it's because Jesus had changed her life. She had sat at His feet and heard His word, and it had affected her to the depths of her soul. It had changed her. She and her sister Martha and Lazarus and Jesus, they were sort of the singles group of the New Testament. Jesus

often went to Martha's house, also in Bethany, and we find the four of them together. And just to have a friendship with Jesus would have been so valuable. And then the fact that Jesus raised her brother from the dead. Now experiencing that kind of love and profound wisdom and power often inspires extravagant generosity.

I was out golfing a couple of weeks ago with our oldest son Harrison and it was just the two of us so they put us with two strangers, and we made a foursome and you know they were nice guys, we sort of hit it off with them, we're joking around and it might have been the 8th or 9th hole and an errant shot comes and lands in front of our t-box, and these guys drive up in their cart and I recognized them. One of them was a friend of mine and the guy driving the cart, I had actually just done his wedding on Catalina Island the week before. And so they're there, they don't recognize me, I've got a hat on, and the guy's about to take his shot and I start heckling him. That's not something you do on a golf course. Very, very bad. And looked up with an angry expression and I took my hat off and I bowed, and they went Bayless! And we joked back and forth, and they went ahead and hit the shot and they went on and I told our son Harrison, I said the guy driving the cart, I just did his wedding. He married our friend Keith's daughter.

And the guys with us overheard me speaking to my son, and one of the guys looks at me, says okay you're either a photographer or you're a preacher. I said well, I'm not a photographer, I am a preacher. You got it.

And I thought what better opportunity to talk about the Lord with them right now. So I sort of launched into my testimony, how I was messed up on drugs and I got saved in a street mission, and I talk about how good Jesus had been to me, and basically shared the plan of salvation. And I ended it by saying eternity will not be long enough to say thank you. And I actually meant it with all of my heart. To say thank you to the Lord vocally. To say thank you to Him through giving, and to say thank you to Him through serving.

And you know though generosity and gratitude are the natural response to the unmerited favor that He shows us, it's not always the case. Because though it's the natural response, it's not automatic, we still have a free will. And in this story, we come to a great contrast. Judas, who was the ringleader, actually spoke out against when they sharply criticized Mary. The other gospel writers tell us that it was Judas that was doing the speaking, and he said hey, we could have sold this for a fortune! And we could have gotten all this money from selling it, and we could have helped the poor. But the Bible said he didn't say that because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and he was the one that kept their money box and he was skimming off the top. And he thought man, this whole offering, it's gone. It's all been poured out on Jesus, and I'm not going to be able to steal anything from it. And apparently it just sent Judas over the edge.

The very next thing we read in Mark 14, verse 10, says “Then Judas Iscariot, one of the 12, went to the chief priests to betray him to them and when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray him.” And of course we know he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Matthew 27 and 9, it says it was the value of him that was priced. That was all the value that Judas and the chief priests put on Jesus – 30 pieces of silver. And according to Exodus chapter 21, 30 pieces of silver was the price of a common slave.

I had a friend, he and his wife were going to have a garage sale. And so they were putting out in their driveway all these little knickknacks, and bits of furniture and he found this crystal dish or this glass dish in the house, it was in a drawer, and so he went ahead and put this little glass dish out for sale. And he’s outside at the moment, his wife is in the house doing something, and somebody’s browsing through all their stuff. And he says hey, I give you 75 cents for that glass dish. He said sold.

So he sells the dish for 75 cents. And a couple of days later, his wife says honey, I can’t find my crystal dish. Have you seen it? He says well I sold it in the yard sale. She said what?! How much did you sell it for? He sheepishly said 75 cents. She said it was worth hundreds of dollars! Apparently had been in her family for a long, long time, it was a

very rare valuable piece of crystal and he had grossly undervalued it. Needless to say, he was in the doghouse for a few days after that.

But when it says that they gave the 30 pieces of silver to Judas, the Greek language it says literally they weighed out to him, meaning they weighed out on scale. So if you just picture, here's this scale and clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, 30 small pieces of silver. On the other side of the scale, the one who created all the silver and all the gold. The one who created the planet that the silver and the gold were in. The one who created the solar system that the planet was in. The one who created the galaxy that the solar system was in. The one who created the universe that the galaxy was in. And on the other side, clink, clink, clink, 30 small pieces of silver.

Now Judas, like Mary, had listened to Jesus teach. He was there when the waves lay down and the wind hushed at His word. He saw Jesus walk on the water. Judas saw the sick healed. He saw the dead raised. He participated in the healing ministry himself when Jesus sent him and the other disciples out. When the loaves and the fish multiplied – that miracle took place at the hands of Judas and the other disciples as they distributed the food to the multitude. And yet, he placed almost no value on Jesus whatsoever.

What a contrast. We have Mary, who's extravagantly generous, and Judas, places almost no value at all. And I think it just shows us when it comes to Christ, it's basically all in, or not in at all. Jesus said the one

that doesn't gather with me, scatters abroad. He leaves no middle room there. No grey areas, and that's not to say that we don't grow. Yes, we go from faith to faith, from glory to glory. We're being conformed into His image. But the idea is this: God is just looking for a heart that is all His, He shows Himself strong in the behalf of those whose hearts are totally His.

And I think the question becomes how much do we value Jesus? It's important to consider. Are we like Mary? Do we give and do we serve with joy? Or are we more like Judas – reluctant, even resentful when it comes to giving the Lord our time, our treasure or our talent. And you know our hearts and our giving, they aren't connected. Jesus said where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. But the most important valuation is not the one that we place on the Lord, but it's the value that He has placed upon us.

And in this story in Mark, we move next to the Passover meal, or what we refer to as the last supper. The Passover meal was both a picture of the past, and a prophecy of the future. It was a picture of the past, it was a way for Israel to remember how God had redeemed them and delivered them from cruel Egyptian bondage, something they never could have done on their own. It took an intervention from God, and as they partook in that Passover meal, they remembered back to Egypt when they were there and God worked miracles. And then the final miracle, every family killed the lamb and then they took the blood of that

lamb and put it over the door of their home. And when that angel of death came through the land of Egypt and killed the firstborn, it had to pass over every home where there was blood on the door, and that's where the term Passover comes from. And so God brought them out of the land of Egypt.

But it's also a prophecy pointing to Jesus. 1st Corinthians 5 and 7, says "for indeed Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us." It all pointed as a type and a shadow to Christ and what He would do for humanity. And it goes on in verse 22 of Mark 14: "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said take, eat, this is my body. Then He took the cup and when He'd given thanks, He gave it to them and they all drank it, and He said to them, this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many."

You know Jesus appeared to the Apostle Paul and he writes about in 1st Corinthians 11 and the Lord actually talked to Paul about this Passover meal. He says "as often as you do it, do it in remembrance of me." He didn't say often, but as often as you do it, do it and remember what I've accomplished for you. He said this bread is my body that's broken for you. Referring to what we read in Isaiah chapter 53, that by His stripes we were healed. Jesus took the crown of thorns on His head, and the first thing that happened when man sinned in the garden, was that the earth began to produce thorns. It was a sign of the curse that had come upon humanity, that had come upon the world, and by Jesus

taking that crown of thorns, He was symbolizing that He was taking our curse upon Himself. His back was laid open with that Roman whip and the scripture declares by His stripes we are healed. And then He said the cup represents my blood. It liberates us from the bondage of sin.

I was reading recently about some of the early travelers that came across the prairie – those that migrated west looking for a new life. And they would come with their wagons and everything that they owned, and the one thing they were most afraid of was prairie fires. Sometimes the wind would whip up, lightning maybe would start a fire, or maybe a bit of glass that some previous traveler had thrown out a broken bottle and the sun glinting off that and the heat would light the prairie grass on fire. And there were these ferocious winds would come and literally would make a wall of fire that the wind would blow and it would travel so quickly, you couldn't outrun it. And they dreaded prairie fires. And many, many of those early pilgrims lost their lives, lost everything they owned due to prairie fires.

And I read this story, there was one small group and they're traveling, and they see smoke in the distance. And sure enough, there's a prairie fire coming their way. The wind is blowing strongly, directly at them, and then they see this wall of fire coming and there's no way to outrun it. And one of them with the presence of mind went away behind them and lit the prairie grass behind them on fire. And so now they're standing in the middle. There's a wall of fire raging towards them and

behind them there's a wall of fire going away from them. And then what they did, once that fire behind them went far enough, they pulled the wagons and everything on that burnt over ground, and they were there and a little girl's holding onto her daddy's legs, saying daddy are we going to die? Is the fire going to kill us? He said no honey, we're safe. The fire can't come where it's already burned.

My friend, I cling to the blood soaked cross of Jesus Christ because the fire of God's wrath has already burned there and it is the only safe place. He has already judged sin at that cross and Christ has poured out His blood. And when I put my faith in His precious shed blood, I am safe. You are safe. It is an amazing thing, and when we partake of that Passover meal, we remember that we're saved from sin and from the eternal consequences of sin. And Jesus said this is the new covenant in my blood.

The Old Testament word for covenant, it's a Hebrew word berith. It means to cut where blood flows. And when they would have a covenant, each party, they would kill an animal normally and shed its blood, and then one party would say okay, I'll do this for you and you do this for me. I'll provide this for you, you provide that for me. If you get in trouble, I'll come help you. If I'm in trouble, you come help me. And they would lay down the terms of the covenant.

But in the New Testament, the word used by Jesus here is a Greek word – diatheke. It's not the same. It literally means an unequal

covenant. It's a covenant where one party does all of the giving, and the other party does all of the receiving. One party provides everything and on the other side, they just humbly receive.

My friend, Christ has done it all. He shed His precious blood, He's provided salvation, He's provided peace. He's opened the way for us to spend an eternity with God. Our part is to humbly receive. And if you're watching right now, wherever you might be, if you've never opened your heart to Jesus Christ, I want to encourage you He is there with you, He loves you and He will not turn you away.

Now I have sort of a postscript I'd like to add to this story. As it goes on, they finished the Passover meal, and still in Mark 14 and verse 25, Jesus said "assuredly I say to you I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of olives." Jesus had faith in a coming kingdom. He spoke of drinking this fruit of the vine new in the kingdom of God. The Bible says "eye hasn't seen, ear hasn't heard, nor entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him."

So Jesus knew there was a coming kingdom. Thank you. But He also knew what was directly coming in front of Him. He knew that in His immediate future, there was suffering, there would be ridicule, there would be torture, there would be a terrible death on a cross. And He also knew His disciples. He knew that shortly one would betray Him, one

would deny Him, one would doubt Him, and all of them would forsake Him and run away. He knew that was coming. And what does Jesus do? He chooses to sing. He knew what lay in front of Him and they sang a hymn.

My friend, sometimes when you feel the least like worshipping God, it's the most important time to worship God. And at the Passover meal, it was traditional to sing what is referred to as the great hallel. They would sing Psalm 113 through Psalm 118. At the commencement, they would sing Psalm 113 through 115. At the end, they would sing Psalm 115 through 118. Now the last words that they would have sung, the last words that Jesus and His disciples would have sung after that Passover meal, were oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good. For His mercy endures forever.

Let that be our declaration that we expect to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, even during this difficult time that we're all going through. My friend, He is good. He's the Lord who does not change and He's already provided everything for us. I pray that you turn on your expector and anticipate to see the goodness of God in your family, in your life, in our church, in the world. In fact, I'm convinced that the precious fruit of the earth is ripening, and I believe that we're going to see a global harvest of souls. God is doing things, my friend. He is good and He loves you.