

The Abundant Life | Extravagant Generosity

Rob Rogers November 27, 2022

Introduction

There is a battle going on inside each of us — every moment — every day. It is a battle of...

Grace vs. Greed
Release vs. Control
Faith vs. Doubt
Belief vs. Unbelief
Trust vs. Suspicion
Abundance vs. Scarcity

Week 1... In the lesson on the lilies and the ravens in Luke 12... Jesus exposes the erroneous belief that if you have more provision... if you have more money... you'll be less worried and anxious about your life. But what Jesus teaches us is that **the abundant life is not about treasure — it's about trust!**

Week 2... Bill Spencer, the Executive Dir. of the Narrow Gate Foundation gave us a fantastic word on the abundant life of Jesus — only coming through total, unrestrained surrender of life to God — not just bits and pieces of your life — ***but all of life.***

Week 3... We talked about what it means to trust God with the tithe... that giving back to God 10% of what God has entrusted to us. It not only tears down the idolatry of money in our own hearts... but trusting God with the tangible, ***trains our hearts to trust Him with the intangibles of life.***

Week 4... We talked about the story of Cain & Abel. Abel, at great cost to himself, brought the firstborn of His flock to God, and offered a faith-stretching sacrifice because He knew that our God is a God of abundance — God that longs to provide, that longs to bless His people. And Able ***chose to trust Him with his primary source wealth and provision*** — not the scraps and leftovers like Cain had done.

Today... we're going to look at a story out of John 12...

John 12:1-6

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they gave a dinner for Him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with Him at table. ³ Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

In John's account, he tells us in hindsight that Judas would take money for himself out of the offering box... or the money bag.

How many of you WANT to be selfish? Stingy? Greedy?

INTERESTING: Every human being on planet earth is born selfish. You know that when we were born... some of us were large babies... some of us were small babies... some came late, some came early... some of us boys, some of us girls.

But ALL OF US were born with a self-centeredness that is insatiable. It is a black hole. It's never satisfied, never fulfilled, always demanding more.

Have you noticed that you don't have to teach your little children to be greedy? You don't have to train them to throw a fit when they don't get their way — or to fight over a toy they don't want to share. It's just in them. It's in us.

How many of you WANT to be generous?

- You might not know how to get there... or what to change... but you genuinely want to be a generous person.

When you and I are born — we're born selfish. **When we're born again, we're given a heart that LONGS to be generous.** The challenge becomes — how? How do I move toward becoming a generous person?

If we're honest, sometimes we're generous and other times... not so much. We never *arrive at generosity*. We're always wrestling with generosity and self-centeredness — which is why the scripture commands us to **constantly renew our minds...** and today, I want us to renew our minds by looking into the details of this story in John 12

**AN EXTRAVAGANT GIFT
A REVEALING OBJECTION
THE REWARD OF GENEROSITY**

An Extravagant Gift

We talked about Luke's account of this story a few months back — this is what the passage and context tell us about Mary's gift to Jesus.

It was extravagant — it was so extravagant that the whole room, according to Mark's gospel, erupted in protest. It says they "scolded" her... which means they were all bellowing with anger. Why?

- The gift could have been sold for 300 Denarii, a year's wages
 - Last week we talked about Abel's offering stretched him... bringing the firstborn of his flock to the Lord. Look at Mary, how stretching would it be for you to bring a year's salary to God?

But what's more likely about this gift is it was likely the most valuable item owned by this family: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Mark's gospel tells us that was in an alabaster box — which means it was likely an heirloom — the financial security of that family.

If there was a famine, military invasion, or some kind of disaster — this box could have seen their whole family through. She breaks the whole box open... and they erupt in protest!

And she breaks it open on His feet — she bows at his feet, breaks the alabaster box open, pours out her most prized possession on Him, and uses her hair to clean His feet.

The bystanders are thinking, where is your sense of decency, or reasonability.

Mark 14:5-6

...they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to Me.

Jesus is telling everyone in the room that what she has done is perfectly reasonable.

Mary is saying... “In my response to you, Jesus, all that You are, all that you’ve done — I respond to You without condition. I give You my need for financial security, for provision, for social acceptance and reputation — all my wealth, all my life, every breath of my lungs and beat of my heart — I relinquish every right, I relinquish all claim to any worldly possession, and I surrender unconditionally to you. There is nothing you cannot ask of me. Nothing.”

But here’s how many Christians approach Jesus today, “Jesus, I’ll follow you as long as it doesn’t cost me too much. As long as it’s not too expensive. As long as things are going well for me, I’ll follow you. But if they turn south, I’m outta here.” It’s conditional.

But Mary is saying, “Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold. Take my will and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine. Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.”¹

We sing about it — she lived it.

Why is Judas so unhappy about it?

A Revealing Objection

John 12:4-5

But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”

Have you ever heard a statement like that before? Have you ever said a statement like that before? Do you realize now where that statement originated? When we say, we think it’s okay. But when Judas says it, you can feel the self-righteousness.

What Judas is doing, and what we do is we take the perceived extravagance of other people who have more than we do — and we call it “wasteful.”

- That house is too big, they should sell it and give the money to the poor.
- That car is too nice, they should sell it and give it to the poor.

In the moments that you’re tempted to look at someone else and point at what you think someone else should or shouldn’t be doing with their resources — **in that moment, you’re following Judas, not Jesus.**

¹ “Take My Life, and Let It Be.” Lyrics, Frances Ridley Havergal, 1874. (Public domain)

The reality is – you have no idea if that person generous or not! You have no idea what they're giving away, how generous they are. But as long as you assume that you do, you're inviting the judgment of God into your own life.

Matthew 7:1-2

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

- You're saying, "They should sell their house and give the money to the poor." Do realize what metric you just imposed on yourself? Now God's looking at you, "If you really cared about the poor, you'd sell YOUR house and give it to the poor."

John 12:6

He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and **having charge of the moneybag** he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Judas didn't care about the poor! He was stealing money for himself out of the offerings that people gave.

Who put Judas in charge of the money?

- It was Jesus.

When Jesus put Judas in charge of the money, did he know that Judas was a thief? Two years earlier He said, I chose all twelve of you and one of you is a devil... so he knew something was up with Judas.

You need to understand, Jesus put Judas in charge of the money not by mistake, not so he would fail, but to give him an opportunity to succeed.

- And God will test us in our obedience to Him with whatever it is He entrusts to us. God will give us opportunity to learn and grow in how we manage and steward what He has entrusted to us.
 - What has God entrusted to you, and how are you trusting Him with it?
 - Is it surrendered to God – the way Mary's whole life was surrendered to God? Or does your surrender and submission to God come with strings attached? "God I'll serve you as long as...."
 - "Is there a limit to what God can ask of you?"
 - If your answer is, "Yes, there are limits to what God can ask of me..." 1. That's honest. And you can't grow in your faith if you can't get honest about where your faith currently is. So, that's honest. 2. If there are strings attached to your surrender to God, or obedience to God – then *you will not know or experience the abundance of God.*

Submission without conditions is the only pathway to an abundant life.

The Reward of Generosity

When Mary brought an alabaster box to Jesus... she didn't come to get a reward. She just wanted to give.

But why so much? Why so extravagant? It's in the story....

John 12:2

So they gave a dinner for Him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with Him at table.

What happened two months before this dinner? Lazarus died! Jesus spoke to the tomb, “Lazarus, come forth.” Mary and Martha’s brother came walking out of the grave.

**Extravagant, sacrificial generosity is born out of a grateful heart.
Grateful people are generous people.
God always rewards His people that are generous.**

What was Mary’s reward...?

Mark 14:9

And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

2,000 years later, her extravagant generosity is still an example to people all around the world.

But Mary didn’t give the gift in order to get a reward.

Biblical Generosity is when you give without any expectation of receiving anything in return. No strings attached. It’s giving because you get to — not because you have to!

EXAMPLES:

1. King David gave what today would be the equivalent of \$21 billion for the building of God’s temple.
2. Solomon, as the newly appointed King, was supposed to sacrifice one bull as an offering to God. You know how many he offered? 1,000.
 - o That night God came to Solomon and said, “Ask anything of Me.” Solomon asks for wisdom. Solomon was extravagantly generous, with no strings attached. And God rewarded him with a blank check.
3. The Widow in Luke 21...

Luke 21:2

...and He saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ And He said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

- o I would guess, it took more trust in God to offer those two coins than it did for David’s \$21 billion in gold. Or Solomon’s 1,000 bulls.
4. On a remote hill, Abraham offered up his promised Son to God. He didn’t even withhold his own son — and God provided a substitute.
 5. Not far away from that hill 2,000 years later, God offered up His one and only Son, so that we might be saved, adopted in, accepted, forgiven, made new.

**God is the most extravagant giver.
He is far more generous than we often believe.
When we’re generous — we become like Him.**

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek him.

The word **reward** means not just to give what is due —but to **give FAR MORE** than what is due. ***God owes nothing to you and me. Yet He’s already given us everything we could ever need in the person of Jesus Christ. And He’s still pouring out blessings for more than we deserve.***

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss: When we are born, we’re born selfish. When we’re born again, we’re given a heart that longs to be generous.
2. How do I move toward becoming a generous person?
3. What has God entrusted to you, and how are you trusting Him with it?
4. Jesus made Judas treasurer, knowing that he was “a devil.” Why would He do that?
5. Biblical generosity is giving without any expectation of receiving anything in return. How does this compare with your heart’s motives in giving?
6. Do you *believe* that God rewards those who seek Him? Why or why not.

NOTES