

In God We Trust

“The Aroma of Love”

November 4th, 2018

Introduction

The picture on the screen is the backside of the Almighty Dollar and there is an entire code language for money. Cold, hard, cash. Bucks, clams, smackers, greenbacks, dead presidents. I realize Benjamin Franklin is not a president so we just call \$100 bills the Benjamins. Fat stacks of Benjamins are always nice. Some prefer Roman numerals like C-notes, a K, a grand. Fives and tens are sometimes called nickels and dimes, “two bits” are slang for a quarter, and then you have slang for slang. Cheddar is slang for cheese which is slang for money. Lettuce is slang for cabbage which is slang for money. People go crazy for money. They lie for money, cheat for money, even kill for money. I remember going to the bank with a friend one time who withdrew some money and just smelled it, “Mmmm, I love the smell of money”. I was like “dude, are you OK”? By the way, do you know why money smells?

I read an article one time in the Wall Street Journal where they did an extensive research project on the smell of money. The method involved putting new and used U.S. currency in an airtight container with charcoal to absorb the scent for analysis. The study went on to show that the scent of money is primarily the smell of cotton and linen with trace chemicals from the printing ink and the coating and sealers used to finish the manufacturing. The metals from the machines, the smell of steel, and the shrink wrap used to package and deliver the money to the banks, all give it its unique scent. However, when they analyzed “used” currency, they detected in addition an abundant smell of leather and animal-derived compounds found in body oils or secretions. The article also added and I quote, “scientists found much more evidence of fecal matter and bacteria than they had initially expected.” Mmmm...this is the smell of money.

People put their trust in this stuff...and that’s why it’s crazy to me that plastered all over our national currency in addition to major amounts of bacteria are these four little words, this short phrase hidden in plain sight: “In God We Trust”. Every day millions and millions and millions of people transact with these paper bills and coins that are branded with these four words. The irony being that most people DON’T trust God with their money. They trust their investments. They trust their impulses. They trust their work ethic. They trust themselves. But “In God We Trust” is nothing more than a slogan.

Do you trust God with your money OR do you have trust issues? You know anyone with trust issues? They can’t commit. They are fearful and skeptical. And sometimes for good reason. They have people in their life that are unfaithful and unloving. Some experience rejection or disappointment. But why don’t people trust God? I would argue that most people don’t trust him because they don’t know him. Trust is built in relationship and when you don’t know God, you can have all kinds of crazy ideas about him. But when you get to know him, you realize he is filled with radical love for you, that he is trustworthy and faithful, infinitely good, and all powerful. When you have experienced the kind of love and faithfulness that only God can bring, then “In God We Trust” will be more than a slogan. It will be your life.

I want to share a story this morning about a woman named Mary. The Mary in this story has a brother named Lazarus and a sister named Martha and in Mark 14:3-9 she is at Simon the Leper’s house in Bethany along with Jesus, her siblings, and the twelve disciples. The city of Bethany was not far from Jerusalem and hundreds of thousands of travelers from around Israel were descending on this area for the Passover. Soon Jesus will be crucified and we wonder if perhaps this gathering is a final chance to spend time with the people he loves. Let’s read.

The Story

“3While Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.” The parallel passage in John 12 says the woman was Mary and she not only poured it on his head but also on his feet, wiping them with her hair and filling the entire house with the fragrance, the aroma of the perfume. The story continues in verse four, *“4But some were indignantly remarking to one another, “Why has this perfume been wasted? 5“For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor. And they were scolding her.”*

We spoke earlier about the smell of money but here we have the smell of perfume, the aroma of love and devotion and all the disciples can say is, “what a waste of money”. Jesus said, *6“Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. 7“For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. 8“She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial” 9“Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”* In God We Trust. In Jesus, Mary Trusts. But why? Why does she trust him so much? Because she knows how much he loves her. When we say that someone has trust issues, I’m convinced that what we are really saying is they have love issues.

Halloween

On Halloween night, my wife and I sat by our small portable fire pit on the driveway with our neighbors and enjoyed watching our four kids head out to go trick-or-treating. By the way, what a cool tradition where you can go up to just about any door in the neighborhood and be greeted with a smiling face and candy. This is like every child’s fantasy and for my 3-year old, Halloween got REAL this year. I mean last year, she kind of putted around to a few houses. Oh... not this year! This year, she was trucking up and down driveways, getting candy, running to the next house, and she came home with monster stash of candy. Check this out! OK?

Now...you would think that a child who has just been given an insane amount of candy, more candy than she will be able to eat this year, more candy than she has ever seen, you would think that child would be quite willing to share, to trust her father with a 100-grand bar perhaps, maybe a Kit-Kat or a Butterfinger but after this picture was taken, I kid you not, the candy was gathered and accumulated between the couch and the ottoman and my daughter turned into Gollum or something, “My precioussss”. I said, Grace, can daddy have some of your candy? Man, she wasn’t having it. I said, honey, daddy just wants a little bit of candy, can you give me a piece of candy. She handed me one of those nasty little fruit chews, the tiniest piece of candy she had. Then I said this, “Grace you know your daddy loves you. Do you love your daddy?” I know, I know...it was manipulative, don’t judge me but something kind of snapped inside of her and she loosened up for a moment and she stopped guarding the candy and I said, “Grace do you love your daddy”. “Yes” she said and she handed me a Snickers bar (now I would have preferred a Butterfinger but that’s beside the point). But she realized I wasn’t going to grab all her candy and throw it in the garbage, I wasn’t going to send her to her room. She realized I loved her and it was safe to trust me and while that may seem like a silly illustration, the fact is that Grace is learning to trust her father and when love and trust are formed, sacrifice can be made more freely.

Why Did Mary Do It?

If you know anything about Mary’s story, you would know that one chapter earlier in John 11, her brother Lazarus became very ill and they watched their only brother pass away from an

awful sickness. They buried him. They had the funeral and they grieved. A few days later Jesus came with his disciples and he wept with Mary, he comforted Mary and then out of his great love and because of his great power and because he was faithful to his word, Jesus went over to the tomb and he raised Lazarus from the dead. Why did Mary anoint Jesus? Because she trusted him and she loved him.

I get the sense in the story that as Jesus and the guests are preparing to enter Jerusalem the next day and as Martha is up serving coffee and dessert and as Lazarus is reclining at the table and everyone is laughing, I get the sense that Mary isn't laughing. The Spirit is speaking to her and somewhere in the conversation her heart is full and she wonders if Jesus will not be with them much longer. The Passover could be a time of great danger for him and mean possible death. And so, she excuses herself from the table.

We aren't sure if Mary fully understands what God is asking her to do but we know from the rest of the Gospels that Mary was the sister that spent most of her time at Jesus' feet, watching him, learning from him and seeing his love in action. She knew how to discern his voice, and she knew he could be trusted and the Bible says she came into the room holding something. It was an alabaster jar of expensive perfume imported from Northern India. How expensive? Verse 5 says it could have been sold for 300 denarii or the modern equivalent of \$25,000+. How fragrant was this perfume? Fragrant enough that the aroma would fill the room for days and cover even the smell of death and in front of all the guests, she opens the bottle and does something quite unexpected.

She breaks the jar and begins to pour this perfume, the whole bottle of it onto Jesus. She pours it on his head and feet and then she commits a social taboo and let's down her hair. This wasn't acceptable in ancient culture, for a woman was only to loosen her hair in the presence of her husband but she does it and then she begins wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair and I imagine that after the gasps you could have heard a pin drop. What would possess her to do such an unexpected thing? Why did she do it?

Because she loved him and she knew it was something that needed to be done. This spontaneous, unrestrained, uninhibited, lavish, excessive and radical expression of love didn't care who was there or what they thought and it didn't matter the amount or value of the perfume or anything else. Do you know why? Because she trusted him completely. In an earlier story in the Gospels Jesus confronted a rich young ruler and said, "sell everything you have and give to the poor and then come follow me". I can imagine most of us saying "no, he's being figurative here", "no, that wouldn't be responsible", "no, not everything". But Jesus said "everything". See, when God tells you to do something with your money or possessions, it doesn't mean everyone needs to do it, but it does mean YOU need to do it, He has his purposes in mind. God asked me one time to give away my car. Another time he asked me to write someone a check for \$500 but most of the time it's the small acts of generosity that he asks the most of me. The disciples didn't understand the purpose. We might not either but Jesus clarified her actions, ***8***"*she has anointed My body for the burial.*" You didn't see the purpose in the gift. You are only thinking with rational, earthly, worldly wisdom but I'm telling her to do something for a far greater purpose.

What then is wise? Is it wise to sell everything you own and give to the poor? Maybe. Is it wise to break a \$25,000 vial of perfume and pour it on Jesus? Maybe. Is it wise to give away one of your cars? Is it wise to write a thousand dollar check to a homeless man or woman? Is it wise to cash out some investments and give generously? It is if God is telling you to do it. See, the wisest thing you can do is not to study the stock market, not to read stacks of investment books,

not to take out a Roth IRA, although there is nothing wrong with any of that but the WISEST thing you can do is learn to hear the voice of God and then do whatever he asks you to do with his money. But like I said earlier, “most people don’t trust him because they don’t know him”. They don’t sit at his feet like Mary did. They don’t understand that God is full of radical love for his children, he is completely trustworthy and faithful, infinitely good, and all powerful. True wisdom is trusting in Him. Sometimes God tells us to do things and we may never know why. Do you trust him?

Extreme Love

There is a show that I used to watch on TV called “Extreme Home Makeover”. It was an awesome show and it seemed like every episode left me in tears. What made the show so wildly popular wasn’t necessarily what they did, but how they did it. They didn’t just come in and make a few minor repairs on the house, slap on a fresh coat of paint and call it a day. No, they often tore down the entire house and put in its place a brand new one, spacious, beautifully designed and customized for each family. Part of what makes the show fun to watch was the extravagance of the gift. They made dreams come true. They spared no expense. They did things for these families that they could never have dreamed of doing themselves. It was the “extreme” part of the show that made it so wildly popular.

When you read the New Testament, you see this same kind of extreme love. You find Christians doing the unaffordable. Just days or weeks after the first church was launched in Jerusalem, you read these remarkable words. *“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.”* Their love was extreme. In fact, when you want to know what the deepest love looks like in the Bible Jesus said, “greater love has no one than this, that they lay down their life for their friends.” Love and the trust that comes from it causes people to do extreme things.

Conclusion

(Josh comes forward)

You know, I wonder if when the soldiers arrested Jesus they smelled the perfume? I wonder if when the Pharisees ripped out his beard and spat on his face, I wonder if when they approached Christ, and came up to him to mock him, I wonder if they smelled the aroma of Mary’s love? I wonder if as Jesus was kneeling on the ground, as he was being flogged by Roman soldiers, if perhaps on his feet, they smelled the aroma of trust. I wonder if as they placed the crown of thorns on his head and the nails in his hands and feet and as he bled on that cross for all of humanity, the lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world, the sins of Mary, I wonder if mixed with the blood there was an aroma, a smell of perfume. Finally, I wonder if standing at the foot of the cross as the wind began to blow, I wonder if Mary still had the smell of that same perfume in her hair, the hair she used to wipe her Savior’s feet.

What is \$25,000 of perfume really worth, when you’ve watched someone raise your brother from the dead? What is \$25,000 of perfume really worth, when Jesus is willing to give his life for you? The aroma of love.

What aroma will you leave behind? The smell of money, the aroma of selfishness, the smell of worldly wisdom or the aroma of trust, the aroma of love. The mark of a Christian is love. If you don’t trust God with your money, it might not be because you have trust issues, it might be because you don’t understand his love. You can trust Him. He loves you. He is faithful. He is good. He is powerful and if he tells you to do it, then break open the perfume bottles this week. Our love has limits, but God’s has none. And if when you look to God, you don’t see a loving faithful Father, then you are serving the wrong God. It’s the reason Paul prays for his church in

Ephesians 3:17-19, *“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*

You say, what’s the next step? I’m not sure. For some, you have trust issues with God, no, you have love issues, and you need to come forward and meet him at the altar to talk with him. He loves you, he is faithful, he is trustworthy, he is good and he is powerful and I don’t know what happened in your relationship with him but Jesus is the evidence of his incredible love for you. For some, today is the day you begin a new relationship with him and surrender your life to Him once and for all. Today. You’ve been on the fringe but today you are going all in, break the jar, make the commitment. For many, the next step is one of listening...what is God asking you to do with the resources you’ve been given, your money? Just listen...the wisest thing you can do when it comes to your money is to learn to hear the voice of God and then do whatever he asks you to do. God may tell you to do something small but he might challenge you to make a big move. You can give away a car. You can downsize your home to free yourself up to give more. You can adopt a child. You can pay off someone else’s debt and redeem someone else. You can take \$1000 or \$5000 or \$50,000 and go above and beyond if God is telling you to do it. Listen...

Prayer...