

Giving to Jesus, part 2 of "Who Jesus Praised"
December 8, 2013

I recently heard someone listing things that all men need. One of them was a pat on the head. He meant that all men need to hear an occasional compliment, some affirmation that we are doing a "Good job." I think that is true. And as Christians the one we most want to hear this from is Jesus. This short series is about those who Jesus praises. We're just looking at two people. Last week we looked at a Roman army officer, who had more faith than anyone else Jesus met in the nation of Israel. This week we're going to look at a woman who is praised by Jesus. We find this story in Matthew 26.

Matthew 26:6-7 (NIV) While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

I am full of questions. When I read these stories I play it through in my mind and wonder how it all came about and how it all played out. And so I have to ask, how did this come about? Surely she did not just come up behind Him and pour it on, which would startle a person. How did she know it was okay to do this? Was there a look? Did you look at her and nod yes. Did she ask if she could do this? If so, the other disciples evidently did not hear the exchange of dialogue between Jesus and her. I got lots of questions.

So the story could be much longer if we were able to learn the answers to our questions. But there are none of those answers today. We must go with what we have here.

Matthew 26:8 (NIV) When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

"Why this waste?" They were indignant. There is some anger implied in that word, but it is more than anger. Sometimes we have a sense that something isn't right, even though it isn't illegal or sinful. The disciples are saying, "That's just not right." What a waste of something valuable.

The world often feels that way about our giving to Jesus. People of the world sometimes think that we waste our efforts in serving Jesus. They resent the fact that so many resources go to our buildings. Some churches do appear to go over-the-top when it comes to spending on their buildings. Some in the world see paid church staff as a waste of money. There are those who are overpaid. The pastor building a mansion in North Carolina is a case in point. Jim and Tammy Baker of several decades ago are another example. But not all ministerial salaries are a waste. You obviously do not think so or you would find another church, or stay here, but move towards a volunteer preacher each Sunday. That is not unheard of.

We do not think that paying for missionaries to go to other countries is a waste. We don't think the printing of Bibles and other publications is a waste. But there are those who think it is a waste.

"Why this waste?" The disciples did not, likely, care too much about the poor. They didn't really care about each other all that much. They competed with each other for Jesus' attention. They all wanted to be,... even expected to be, His chief advisors when He became king. And here is this woman showing them all up with her expensive gift.

"Why this waste?" Perhaps your friends or family resent God and religion and consider it a waste of time and money - even if it isn't their time and money. They do not understand why you give to the church or to missions, especially when you give sacrificially. They encourage you to spend that money on your grandkids, your nieces and nephews, or even on yourself. They wish for more luxury for you, an easier life for yourself, and you could have that if you gave less to Jesus.

It annoys them that you are so different from them and they do not understand you. And instead of trying to understand or accept you, they try to get you to become more like them.

"Why this waste?" But is any gift to Jesus a waste? I would say not. No gift given to Jesus is a waste if it is truly given to Him and given for the right reasons. This is exactly what the woman did, as Jesus comments.

Matthew 26:9-13 (NIV) Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "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. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Jesus praises her. "She has done a beautiful thing for me." She will be remembered for this.

The text doesn't say this gift was a financial sacrifice. It doesn't say she sold all her possessions in order to buy it. She may have been rich and may not have missed the money at all. But still it was an extravagant gift.

We do not know how this event came about. We don't know what her past experience with Jesus was, if any. Maybe she was one of the ones who was healed, or her child, her parent, a friend. Did an angel tell her to do this? Did the Holy Spirit initiate this? Did she know it was for His burial? We do not know the answers to these questions.

Most likely she simply came to honor Jesus. She did not give on condition of a brass plaque with her name on it. Yet, Jesus made sure she would be remembered.

What you give to Jesus is not a waste.

Nothing is wasted which is expended upon the Lord, for Jesus deserves it. Whatever you do for Jesus, He deserves it and much, much more.

If you humbly give to honor Jesus, to thank Jesus, to praise Jesus, to support the work of Jesus, then nothing of such giving is a waste. So give, give to Jesus. Give generously. But give in the right way for it to be worthy of praise in the eyes of Jesus.

Give to him alone, not to be seen by others.

The woman gave the gift for Him alone. Others benefited by the aroma therapy, but that was not why she gave it. She sought only to honor Him with her gift.

We have to guard against the motive of trying to both honor Him and gain a good reputation for us. Our church is giving to the school, holiday sharing, cap, and homeless. We give a lot to the school, to needy students and to the staff. We are tempted to give for others to notice. We are tempted to want the school to notice, the community to notice, the parents to notice. This is all wrong. We should give to Jesus alone. Others might notice, or might not. That should not play into our giving. Let us give to Him. It is credit from Him alone that matters.

We must never give for the sake of being thought generous. That spoils the gift. Give only to Jesus. He can change anyone's opinion of us, if He pleases. But we must not give to gain the credit from others.

Never congratulate yourself after you have worked a work for Jesus. If you say unto yourself, "Well done!" you have sacrificed unto yourself. Always feel that if you had done all as it should be done it is simply what you owe Him.

We must give and let him use it as he wishes.

We don't know if the woman knew about His burial. Likely she just meant to honor Him. But God meant it for the burial. God was working out the details for the burial. Later His disciples would remember this incident and know that the death of Jesus was God's plan. At the time they knew nothing of His death.

Whatever you mean your giving to Jesus to do, God may have other plans for it. If God moved you to give, He has a reason for the gift.

When you give to the Lottie Moon offering, you may think,
"It pays a missionary salary."
"It flies a missionary family to the field, or home for furlough."
"It buys Bibles, or discipleship materials, or tracts."
But it may be buying someone out of slavery.
It may be paying for medical care.
It may be sending a child to school.

God has a thousand and one uses for it, and possibly not what you were thinking at all. He is free to use it for whatever He wants, even if it is something you were not thinking of. Believe that it will be well used by Jesus if you give it rightly, even if it is not used as you thought it would be or wanted it to be.

We gave Jack a shirt, hoping he would wear it and enjoy it. He was well-pleased with it but said he would never wear it. We were a little disappointed with that, but would not take the shirt back. It still meant much for us to give it.

Give more than just give money.

Other things honor Jesus too. Give attention to people in His name. Give forgiveness to them. Be kind to them. Show them mercy. Be a friend to them. And share the good news with them. Money is not all you can give. A penniless person still has much to give to Jesus.

We cannot give to him until we are willing to receive from him.

We must humbly receive forgiveness from Him. This is why He died and it is most important to Him. If we are not willing to accept this, then nothing else we give Him will honor Him.

Will you give Him your heart today? Will you give Him your faith? Will you choose to believe what He said about the purpose of His coming and death? Will you believe God raised Him from the dead and that He is returning one day to rule the earth? Honor Him first with your belief.