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March 26, 2007
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THE STAND
EASTER
THE EXTREME GIFT

There came the time for the crucifixion and death of the world's greatest teacher for so many. Knowing that time was at hand, Jesus of Nazareth went to the home of Simon the Leper for supper. The twelve disciples of Jesus were there to dine with him in Bethany.

While He was at table, a woman, without name unfortunately, entered the house, came to the table, found Jesus and proceeded to empty an Alabaster Jar of extremely expensive perfume on his hair and head. One can imagine this loving woman rubbing the oil into the hair of Jesus and massaging His precious head. If there ever was a pouring out of love, this was surely it.

But then the men rose up indignant at the act of this woman, and knowing the value of the perfumed oil, dared to judge the act and proclaim it a financial waste, a waste of money, even though it brought luxury and comfort to the head of the Master. Why, these judgmental twelve said, this costly ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Why waste, they said, so much precious oil on the head of one person when the benefit could have been distributed to many. No matter, again, that one person was Jesus. How, we can only wonder, can anything be done to Him and be called a waste! But these self-righteous twelve, lacking in understanding as they so often did, did just that. The lesson beautiful is that a woman acted in love and generosity and men judged and criticized.

The words of Jesus in response were so beautiful. He said to the slovenly unappreciative twelve:

“She has done a beautiful thing, a good work for me.”

The poor, Jesus reminded them, would always be there, and always in need. But there is a time to do special things for special people, and this is one of them. He reminded them they would not have Him for long and this act of extreme generosity was most appropriate. It was the right thing to do.

The Teacher told them that the pouring out of the oil was not only a beautiful act in and of itself, but it was done to prepare His body for burial. The act was literal, a luxurious giving in the present, but figurative and spiritual as well, an anointing in advance of His precious body for burial. It was for Jesus a beautiful thing, a marvelous, loving experience. The disciples missed that completely. In fact, said Jesus, the act of anointment was so significant and symbolic that it would be made a fundamental part of the Gospel. The act and its meaning would be told with the Gospel wherever it was preached! It was that important to Jesus, however unimportant it was to the disciples.

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Time and again in Scripture, women are praised, examples of love and generosity, much more so than men. This woman, she of the Alabaster Jar and the extremely valuable oil, may have given all that she had to the Lord. Or at least, the most of her valuable possessions and certainly THE BEST. She then, in love, laid her financial all on the altar, gave it lovingly, made sure it was for the benefit and pleasure of Jesus of Nazareth, massaged the oil deep into the hair and scalp of the Master and luxuriated in the meaning and fulfillment of her generosity for the rest of her life. So did Jesus. It seemed easier in those times for a woman to give her all, and harder for a man.

So many of us gives tithes and offerings at 10%, more or less. Sometimes we give goods and possessions, and sometimes time itself. But so many times, we give out of the excess, the abundance of our lives and not of the core, much less all. We may very seldom give the very best that we have or that which is worth the most. Think of those with billions giving mere millions. Or those with millions giving thousands. Such a gift may be generous, but it can not rise to the level of generosity of this woman. She gave the best she had financially, and her time to deliver the gift, and her tender expertise in pouring and massaging, and her love and making sure the Master was pleased and gratified. Nothing was too good for her Lord. Compare that with the ingrate disciples twelve. They saw one of the greatest acts of extreme generosity as waste. Maybe Jesus should have had twelve women like her for his disciples. That woman in the house of Simon the Leper was special in so, so many ways. So was the act. It was WONDERFULLY SIGNIFICANT!

So, when we give spiritually, we should give THE BEST we have. Nothing is too much or too good for God. Likewise, nothing was too good for The Son. What a pleasure it must have been for Jesus to have had a massage with expensive oil just before his death. And, to know as only He could, it was an act so spiritually symbolic, the preparation of His special body for His crucifixion and death. It is a beautiful thing to revel in the glory of an expensive gift especially when that gift is so permeated with love. The woman gave a gift of extraordinary spiritual and eternal significance.

How we should think so clearly of what we give, how we give, and to whom we give. What unspeakable joy it is to give back to God so much of what He has given to us. It can well be life's greatest satisfaction, life's greatest joy. The woman at dinner knew that. Would that all men, and all mankind, know and do what this woman did. Such gifts of love would change the world!

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